

The Road to Lyric Martyrdom: Reading the Poetry of Wang Zhaoming (1883-1944)

Zhiyi YANG

Goethe-Universität, Frankfurt am Main

In contrast to the current revisionist tendency in literary scholarship to read the poetry of Wang Jingwei (also known as Wang Zhaoming, 1883-1944) as revelation, this article instead explores the functions that Wang's poetry played on the different stages of his political career and examines the various poetic personae that it constructed for public display. Wang's lyricism represents a vision of alternative literary modernity in succession of the tradition, even though its ideological claim of restoration disguised renovation and discontinuity. Wang's literary nationalism, a consequence of the "National Essence" movement, represented the Nationalist Party's cultural policy. The irony of history was attained when Wang's poetry became prophecy and his persona came true.

On November 10, 1944, Wang Zhaoming 汪兆銘 (1883-1944), better known as Wang Jingwei 汪精衛, leader of the collaborationist regime in Japanese-occupied China, died of an old gunshot wound in Nagoya, Japan. Heavy Allied shelling on the hospital foretold Japan's downfall and Wang's own trial by history on the charge of treason. He would be seen as a man who fell from being a founder of Republican China to become the arch-traitor of the nation. Perhaps in anticipation of a posthumous controversy, Wang declared that his collection of classical-style verses alone would be his testament – implying that he believed his poetry to contain his truest portrait.¹ An editorial committee consisting of his loyal associates duly

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¹ See Jin Xiongbai 金雄白, *Wang Zhengquan de kaichang yu shouchang* 汪政權的開場與收場 (Hong Kong: Chunqiu zazhishe, 1959-65), 5: 124; Lin Kuo 林闊, *Wang Jingwei quanzhuan* 汪精衛全傳 (Beijing: Zhongguo wenshi chubanshe, 2001), p. 750. In 1964, however, a copy of Wang's alleged testament was sent to Jin Xiongbai in Hong Kong (see *Wang Zhengquan de kaichang yu shouchang*, ch. 205). It is known as "Wang Jingwei guoshi yishu" 汪精衛國事遺書, and scholars have cited it with different degrees of belief in its authenticity.

compiled and published his poetry anthology *Shuangzhaolou shici gao* 雙照樓詩詞藁 (Poetry on the Double-Shining Tower) in 1945, just before Japan's surrender.² In these poems, Wang consistently portrays himself as a martyr and a romantic figure who was ready to sacrifice not just his life, but even his posthumous reputation, for the salvation of the nation – a persona embodied by his penname Jingwei 精衛, the namesake of a mythological bird who hoped to fill the ocean with pebbles carried in its beak.³

This paper will be the first serious attempt in English-language scholarship to examine Wang's achievement as a poet and intellectual rather than simply a disgraced political figure. On the Chinese mainland and in Taiwan alike, the discrepancy between Wang's official historiographic image and his poetic persona raises interesting questions about the efficacy of words to transmit truth, the ideological forces that drive the writing of history, and the choices a reader must make when faced with conflicting narratives. The polemical stakes on Wang's legacy as a "traitor" or a "martyr" are high, with both sides equally determined to condemn or praise. The argument for Wang as a martyr is most notably offered by a few scholars who are moved by Wang's poetry and are galvanized by a sense of opposition to the dominant political criticisms. A highly sympathetic reading is evident in the recently republished *Shuangzhaolou shici gao*, edited and commented by Wang Mengchuan 汪夢川 (Nankai University, Tianjin) and prefaced by Yü Ying-shih 余英時 and Yeh Chia-ying 葉嘉瑩, two eminent scholars in English and Chinese academic circles.⁴ Yeh contributes a quatrain on Wang that plays upon Wang's penname and laments that he would forever be a "wronged bird" (*yuanqin* 冤禽; SZL, p. 31). Wang Mengchuan goes further still and praises Wang as a "hero of the nation" (*guoshi* 國士; SZL, pp. 380-81). And, despite his professional caution as a historian, Yü Ying-shih also cites Wang's poems, such as "Night Onboard" (*Zhouye* 舟夜, SZL, p. 281), which I will later translate and discuss, as proof of his patriotic motives for collaboration (SZL, pp. 8-9). Since Wang's poetry has not yet been published openly in post-1949 mainland China, Yü's preface has been shared mainly online, interpreted by bloggers and commentators as an effort to "reverse the verdict" (*fan'an* 翻案) on Wang.

Taking issue with recent revisionist Chinese scholarship, I argue that equating Wang's poetic persona with the historical person risks error. To avoid the loaded political or poetic emotional values associated with the name Jingwei, I choose to use Wang's proper name: Zhaoming. The zealous praise of him as a "hero of the nation"

² Published under the general title of *Wang Jingwei xiansheng ji* 汪精衛先生集 (n.p.: Wang Zhuxi yixun biancuan weiyuanhui 汪主席遺訓編纂委員會, 1945).

³ According to *Shanhaijing* 山海經 3.65, Nüwa 女娃, Emperor Yan's 炎帝 youngest daughter, once played in the East Sea and drowned. Her spirit transformed into the *jingwei* bird (with a speckled head, white beak, and red feet), which tirelessly holds in its beak pebbles from the Western Mountain to fill up the East Sea. See Yuan Ke 袁珂, *Shanhaijing jiaozhu* 山海經校注 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1980), p. 92.

⁴ Hong Kong: Tiandi tushu, 2012; this edition will hereafter be cited as SZL.

seems to follow the exegetical tradition of *shi yan zhi* 詩言志, which views poetry as the articulation of the poet's mind. Readers, especially Chinese readers, tend to attach the poetic voice to the historical figure and view his poetry as the expression of moral historical truth. As a result, this longstanding reading practice ignores a large part of Wang's poetry and only focuses on a small fraction of it that suggests psychological explanations for his collaboration. It also encourages a scholarly obsession of decoding Wang's messages in the texts, while neglecting the ways in which these poems can be, and have been, used for a variety of purposes.

Wang's poetry, I argue, reveals as much as it conceals. It expresses the style in which Wang wanted himself to be commemorated, which may or may not correspond to the realities of his situation. Historical scholarship in the last few decades has provided evidence for seeing Wang's and his comrades' efforts as something "between collaboration and resistance,"⁵ and Wang's personal motives as a mixture of idealism, pragmatism, and ambition.⁶ Given the complexity of this issue and the amount of literature already available, this paper does not attempt to detect Wang's "true" motives in his poetry. I instead focus on three interrelated issues to reexamine Wang as a poet and intellectual. First, I consider the changing functions of Wang's poetry during different stages of his political career; altered sometimes for his own agenda, and sometimes for the objectives of those who actively preserved, published, circulated, and translated his poetry. Second, through close reading, I examine the diverse self-images in Wang's poetry. Each entails a different understanding of time, destiny, and his own cultural identity; together, they create a powerful poetic persona who was, at the same time, a classical literatus and a modern statesman. The "private"

⁵ See Liu Jie, "Wang Jingwei and the 'Nanjing Nationalist Government': Between Collaboration and Resistance," trans. Konrad Lawson, in *Toward a History beyond Borders: Contentious Issues in Sino-Japanese Relations*, eds. Daqing Yang et al. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2012), pp. 205-39. See also Gerald E. Bunker, *The Peace Conspiracy: Wang Ching-wei and the China War, 1937-1941* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972); John Hunter Boyle, *China and Japan at War 1937-1945: The Politics of Collaboration* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1972); Xu Yuming 許育銘, *Wang Zhaoming yu Guomin zhengfu* 汪兆銘與國民政府 (Taipei: Sanmin shuju, 1999); Wang Kewen 王克文, "Wang Jingwei and the Policy Origins of the 'Peace Movement,' 1932-1937," in *Chinese Collaboration with Japan, 1932-1945*, eds. David P. Barrett and Larry N. Shyu (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), pp. 21-37; and Wang Kewen, *Wang Jingwei, Guomindang, Nanjing zhengquan* 汪精衛·國民黨·南京政權 (Taipei: Guoshiguan, 2001). Diaries and memoirs of members of Wang's government have also attempted to offer altruistic reasons for their collaboration. See, for instance, Zhou Fohai, *Zhou Fohai riji quanbian* 周佛海日記全編 (Beijing: Zhongguo wenlian chubanshe, 2003); Chen Gongbo 陳公博, "Banian de huiyi" 八年的回憶 (a memoir written in prison before his execution), in *Wang Zhengquan de kaichang yu shouchang*, 4: 185-225; and Jin Xiongbai's five-volume memoir (the first four volumes anthologized and published from 1959 to 1961, and a fifth volume published in 1965 in response to his challengers). Jin also cited the poetry of Wang, Zhou, and others to support his account.

⁶ See Bunker, *Peace Conspiracy*, pp. 3, 5, 215, and *passim*.

voice of Wang's poetry is seen as having multiple public and political functions. Third, I locate Wang in contemporary intellectual movements. I argue that the writings of Wang and his fellow classical-style poets represented an alternative vision for a literary modernity in continuity with tradition and should thus be regarded as part of Chinese modern literature. Finally, I return to the irony when "Wang Zhaoming," a martyr in poetry, was made a martyr of historiography. Through such examinations, I hope we may finally stop asking if Wang lied in his poems and instead move forward to ask, for instance, "How did Wang see himself?" and "What were the factors and desires that influenced Wang's self-perception and self-presentation?" Attempts to answer these questions provide occasional glimpses into the entangled complex world of text, character, and history.

A Portrait of Wang Zhaoming as a Poet

Wang Zhaoming's last testament suggests that he regarded poetry as an important part of his life's achievement and that being a poet was an essential aspect of his identity. In many ways this identity was shaped by his childhood in Sanshui, Guangdong Province, even though his early education did not necessarily hint at his later career as a poet. As the region where the trade city Guangzhou was located, Guangdong and Guangxi provinces fought the two Opium Wars (First, 1839-42; Second, 1856-60) and nurtured the Taiping Rebellion (1850-64). Before the rise of Shanghai, this was where China encountered the West, and where the sense of national humiliation was felt the most keenly among the educated classes. Many initial supporters of Sun Yat-sen's (1866-1925) nationalist revolution, Wang Zhaoming among them, came from this region. Every day after school his father taught the precocious Zhaoming the moral philosophy of Wang Yangming 王陽明 (1472-1529), as well as the poems of the recluse Tao Qian 陶潛 (352?-427?) and the patriot Lu You 陸遊 (1125-1210);⁷ figures whose influence would remain with him his whole life. Both his parents died early, leaving him in the hands of his brother Wang Zhaoyong 汪兆鏞 (1861-1939). Twenty-two years his senior, Zhaoyong was a classical scholar who would later denounce the Republic and remain a Qing loyalist. Even though Zhaoming followed other idealist Cantonese youth in becoming a rebel, reverent memories toward his deceased parents and eldest brother defined his attitude toward the cultural tradition. After joining Sun Yat-sen's revolutionary group in Tokyo, he

⁷ See Zhang Jiangcai 張江裁, "Wang Jingwei xiansheng nianpu" 汪精衛先生年譜, in *Wang Jingwei xiansheng xingshi lu* 汪精衛先生行實錄 (Beijing: Dongguan Zhang-shi Bai-Yuan-tang 東莞張氏拜袁堂, 1943), 1b-2a. This *xingshilu* included also a "Nianpu" 年譜, a "Zhushu nianbiao" 著述年表, a "Gengxu mengnan shilu" 庚戌蒙難實錄, and a "Xingshi xulu" 行實續錄. In this article, the dating of Wang Zhaoming's poems before October 1942 is based on Zhang's "Zhushu nianbiao".

began to publish polemical essays in the nationalist newspaper *Minbao* 民報⁸ under the penname Jingwei. He won recognition by defending republicanism against Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873-1929), whose formidable pen was used to support constitutional monarchy.

Yet Wang Zhaoming became a poet only in the prison of Beijing, following his arrest after his botched attempt to assassinate the Prince Regent Zaifeng 載灃 (1883-1951). He wrote four quatrains, which went on to become famous, portraying himself as the mythical *jingwei* bird and martyr. His long “confession,” which argued for the necessity of revolution, moved Shanqi 善耆, Prince Su 肅親王 (1866-1922), to reduce an almost certain death sentence to life imprisonment. Symbolically, therefore, Wang became a poet on his road to martyrdom and posthumous glory, despite the fact that his words spared him martyrdom, won him overnight fame, and made him a martyr only in poetry.

These four poems, entitled “Orally Composed upon Being Captured” (“Beidai kouzhan” 被逮口占, SZL, pp. 6-7), read:

Carrying pebbles in its beak was the utmost folly;	銜石成癡絕
Over dark waves, ten thousand miles of sorrow.	滄波萬里愁
In its solitary flight it never halts in fatigue,	孤飛終不倦
Shamed to follow the seagulls and float [with the tide].	羞逐海鷗浮
Shades of rich purple, crimson scarlet –	姹紫嫣紅色
It has always been known that these are hard to dye.	從知渲染難
Another day, when the tender blossoms bloom,	他時好花發
Please recognize on them the speckles of my blood.	認取血痕斑
With heroic abandon I sing in the market of Yan;	慷慨歌燕市
With calm and ease I become a prisoner from Chu.	從容作楚囚
Draw the blade, what a thrill!	引刀成一快
Its sharpness deserves this fine young head! ⁹	不負少年頭
I will preserve only my heart, my soul;	留得心魂在
The remainder shall be burnt in a kalpa to ashes.	殘軀付劫灰
Its blue ghost lights will never be extinguished –	青燐光不滅
Night after night, they will shine upon the Terrace of Yan. ¹⁰	夜夜照燕臺

⁸ The martyred woman poet Qiu Jin (1875-1907) had also begun an autobiographical fiction *Jingwei shi* around 1905, while she was in Japan. As this work remained unfinished and unpublished, it is difficult for us to fathom whether Qiu Jin’s project had any influence on Wang’s choice of penname. In any case, the coincidence attests to the popularity of this mythological image in Chinese revolutionary circles in Japan. See Ouyang Yunzi 歐陽雲梓, “Ping Qiu Jin de *Jingwei shi*” 評秋瑾的《精衛石》, *Shaoxing wenli xueyuan xuebao* 30.4 (2010): 71-74.

⁹ A story in *Liaozhai zhiyi* 聊齋志異 tells of a robber who, after being captured, begged an executioner whom he knew to cut off his head because this particular executioner had a very sharp knife which killed quickly. Job done, the fallen head kept spinning on the ground and exclaimed, “What a sharp blade!” See Pu Songling 蒲松齡, “Kuaidao” 快刀, *Liaozhai zhiyi* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1962), 2.209.

For the purpose of revolutionary propaganda, a well-publicized martyrdom is just as effective as a successful assassination. In these quatrains, Wang compares himself to the *jingwei* bird; the azalea flower, allegedly dyed red by the blood of the wronged cuckoo bird; the famous assassin Jing Ke 荊軻 (d. 227 BC), a warrior from Yan 燕 who attempted to kill the First Emperor of Qin (260-210 BC);¹¹ and Zhong Yi 鐘儀, a prisoner in Jin 晉 who kept playing *Chu* 楚 music as a reminder of his homeland.¹² The most notable image is depicted in the first poem: the *jingwei* bird. Wang had always been fascinated by this mythological creature and adopted “Jingwei” as his penname in 1905. Arguably, it was the desire for martyrdom that drove Wang to volunteer for the assassination and, when it failed, to stay behind and be captured. These four poems were thus his testament. They were meant to transcribe his short life into eternal historiographical glory.

For better or worse, Wang survived prison. In 1912, shortly after his release, he joined the Southern Society (*Nanshe* 南社, active 1907-23), a broadly influential classical poetry society that mainly comprised nationalist revolutionaries. As he eventually rose to become a senior leader in the Nationalist Government, however, the function of his poems also underwent subtle changes, as seen in their publication history. A collection of his *shi* 詩 and *ci* 詞 (song lyrics) was published in 1929 as the last section of the *Wang Jingwei ji* 汪精衛集 (Shanghai, 1929). This anthology aimed to showcase Wang’s contributions to the nationalist revolution, thus it mainly contained his political essays. His letters and poetry were included in an appendix to demonstrate his “nature and feelings” (*xingqing* 性情), as well as his “true character” (*renge* 人格).¹³ The poetry section began with the four quatrains composed in prison, an editorial choice that accentuated Wang’s public image as a hero. Since poetry allegedly presents the author’s intimate feelings and thoughts, its publication is an act of self-exposure to the public – one which could work in his favor or against it. Thus, the strategies he chose for self-representation were continuously modified throughout each stage of his political career.

Wang’s self-consciousness regarding the public function of his poetry is reflected in the editorial strategies for the authorized 1930 publication of *Shuangzhaolou shici gao*. The term *shuangzhaolou* (Double-Shining Tower) refers to Du Fu’s 杜甫 (712-770) poem to his faraway wife, which wistfully imagines their heads joining in front of the window and the moonlight drying their tear stains.¹⁴ Wang’s title thus suggests his

¹⁰ A Warring States terrace built by a northern Yan prince; often used to refer to the Beijing area.

¹¹ See Sima Qian 司馬遷, *Shiji* 史記 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959), 86.2526-38.

¹² See Ruan Yuan 阮元, *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhengyi* 春秋左傳正義 [Cheng 9], in *Shisanjing zhushu* 十三經注疏 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1980), 26.203-04.

¹³ “Editor’s Note,” *Wang Jingwei ji* 汪精衛集 (Shanghai: Guangming shuju, 1929), pp. 1-3; a photocopy of the original edition was republished in *Minguo congshu*, 4.97.

¹⁴ “雙照淚痕干”: see Du Fu, “Yueye” 月夜, in Qiu Zhao’ao 仇兆鼈, *Du shi xiangzhu* 杜詩詳注 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979), 4.309.

dedication to his wife, Chen Bijun 陳璧君 (1891-1959), an intimate exposure of his domestic happiness that was rare in classical-style Chinese poetry. Premodern poets tended to talk about their longing for courtesans or concubines, but not for their (living) wives, as the latter kind of emotion belonged to the “inner quarters” and was not supposed to be offered for public consumption. As a high-ranking statesman, Wang Jingwei voluntarily exposed his private life for public scrutiny, creating a sense of transparency. His dedication to his wife, needless to say, was also a rarity among his contemporary politicians, a private virtue that contributed to his personal appeal.

This title of his poetic anthology remained unchanged and the poems written prior to 1930 were collected as *Xiaoxiu ji* 小休集 (Hours of Leisure). This publication was edited by Zeng Zhongming 曾仲鳴 (1896-1939), Wang’s disciple and friend, whose epilogue criticized the previous error-ridden unauthorized editions. Zeng emphasized the fact that Wang did not want to bother with correcting those errors as his poetry “had nothing to do with promoting the revolution.” However, because poetry showed “the cultivation of his mind” and was “the overflow of his nature,” Zeng claimed that it was important for him to take the initiative and publish this edition on Wang’s behalf. Given their extraordinary relationship, Wang must have been informed of this project and perhaps even supervised it personally. In any case, Wang wrote a preface to explain the title “Hours of Leisure.” It alludes to a poem from the *Classic of Poetry* (*Minlao* 民勞, Mao 253) that sympathizes with the toils of commoners and argues that they deserve a few “hours of leisure.” This allusion suggests that Wang never forgot his commitment to public service, but that he was also entitled to private civil pleasures – even though the very act of publication made them public. His claim to privacy is further illustrated by the themes of these poems, which are mostly about landscape, travel, or his romantic sentiments. This sense of privacy is further strengthened by the placement of an 1897 poem (which mourns his parents’ untimely deaths)¹⁵ before the patriotic poems written in prison, making it the first poem in this collection. Such editorial choices reflect a change of purpose. Poetry, once the vehicle of Wang’s revolutionary propaganda, is refashioned here as a leisurely pursuit. But in order to make that argument, Wang could not have acknowledged his interest in its publication. Therefore Zeng’s epilogue stressed the agency of Wang’s Southern Society associations, of other admirers, and of himself. Nevertheless, Wang’s self-image, constructed through these poems, enriched and supplemented his public image as a widely respected statesman, an effect that Wang and his supporters clearly intended.

Strong evidence of the political function of Wang’s “private” poetry was an English translation of his selected poems, published in London in 1938, by George Allen & Unwin Ltd. The translator was Seyuan Shu (Xu Siyuan) 許思園 (1907-74), a

¹⁵ Wang Zhaoming, “Chongjiu you Xishiyan” 重九游西石巖 (1897), *SZL*, p. 5.

mathematician and literary aficionado.¹⁶ According to the foreword by T. Sturge Moore (1870-1944), a British poet who helped to polish the translation, Shu was commissioned “by Mr. Wang’s cousin, Mr. Y. K. Leong, formerly a barrister at Singapore.” This client appears to be Leong Yew Koh (Liang Yugao) 梁宇皋 (1888-1963), Chen Bijun’s cousin and former fiancé. By 1938, Leong was working under Wang’s patronage. We may surmise that Wang had authorized the translation. In 1938, as the Chairman of the Central Executive Council of the KMT, Wang was enjoying the peak of his prestige. Three English books promoting the Chinese nationalist revolution had been published under his name,¹⁷ making him the “intellectual” face of the top echelons of the KMT. This poetry anthology was his first literary publication in English and it helped to burnish his international image. The publicity insert introduced Wang as:

[the] foremost man in the Nationalist Government...known in his own country also as a distinguished scholar and a classical poet of high merit; [the moods of the poems] are in general leisurely and placid [but bearing] unmistakably the imprint of an ardent and aspiring personality.

This was the image of Wang that his poems helped to create and promote in China and beyond.

A second compilation of Wang’s poems appeared in 1941-42. In December 1938, Wang, ranking only below Chiang Kai-shek (1887-1975) in the KMT Central Government, fled from Chongqing to Hanoi to start his doomed collaboration with Japan. Zeng Zhongming was assassinated in Hanoi when KMT agents mistook him for Wang. In 1941, Kurone Shousaku, the Beijing-based editor of *Asahi News*, published Wang’s poetry anthology in a new collection *Saoye ji* 掃葉集 (Sweeping the Leaves), a title that similarly suggests Wang’s indifference to its compilation. Both collections were published by Lin Baisheng 林柏生 (1902-46), Wang’s Minister of Propaganda (*Zhonghua ribao* 中華日報 publisher, 1941), and again by Chen Qun 陳群 (1890-1945), Wang’s Interior Minister (*Zecun shuku* 澤存書庫, 1942). A third collection, *Sanshinian yihou zuo* 三十年以後作 (Composed After 1941), containing poems written

¹⁶ Shu had translated about half of the poems in the 1930 collection. I have translated the poems cited in this article, though at times I have used Shu’s translation for reference.

¹⁷ These are Wong Ching-Wai, Chairman of the Governing Committee of the People’s Government of China, *China and the Nations* (London: Martin Hopkinson, 1927); Wang Ching-Wei et al., *The Chinese National Revolution: Essays and Documents* (Peiping: China United Press, 1931); Wang Ching-Wei, President of the Executive Yuan and Officiating Minister of Foreign Affairs, National Government of China, *China’s Problems and Their Solution* (Shanghai: China United Press, 1934). After his turn toward collaboration, a fourth English pamphlet, *The Peace Movement in China* (China Institute of International Affairs, 1939), would be published to defend his motives.

after 1942, became the final addition when the Editorial Committee of Chairman Wang's Testament 汪主席遺訓編纂委員會 published the complete anthology in 1945.¹⁸

Based on this short review, I divide Wang's poetic career into three periods, not by the date of each compilation but by the function that his poems served for his political career. The first period was 1910-11, that of his Beijing imprisonment, in which his poetry was instrumental in shaping his political persona as a patriot, placing him in the long lineage of mythology and heroism. The second period began with the foundation of the Republic in 1911 and ended with his turn toward collaboration in December 1938. In the poems of this period, he consciously constructed a private self whose actions and feelings were largely detached from political events. Whether he was at the peak of power or banished after failures, his poetry remained serene and was mostly about his transcendental pleasures in the landscape, Chinese or foreign. This stance resembles that of a classical scholar-official and supplements his public political persona. The last period, 1939-44, saw the most active publication efforts by his clique, which suggested their desire to redeem Wang's public image by continuing to promote not just his heroic résumé and his transcendental inner serenity, but also – if these poems are to be believed – his desire to rescue the nation from warfare and his agony in collaborating with the militarily overwhelming Japanese. As David Barrett argues, the Nanjing government had sought to foster a "leadership cult" around Wang. His Ministry of Propaganda "dedicated itself to promotion of the 'leader' and the 'peace movement.' Innumerable editions of Wang's articles and speeches were published,"¹⁹ among other methods, for this purpose. We do not know how much of a hand Wang had in the production of this cult, but, at the very least, he must have been aware of and authorized it. The political use of Wang's poetry, especially in the last stage of his life, stood in stark contrast to his poetic persona of transcendence.

Wang Zhaoming's Poetic Persona

Compared to the work of his contemporaries, the most striking absence from this anthology is social poetry. Very few poems were written for friends or about "elegant gatherings" (*yaji* 雅集), even though he was a member of the Southern Society which regularly held such gatherings. Wang probably shunned most of them. This conspicuous absence heightens the private voice of Wang's poetry. Together with its aesthetic appearance of lucidity and plainness, Wang's poetry strikes its reader as exuding an air of sincerity, a feature consistent with contemporary accounts that on

¹⁸ See Wang Mengchuan's epilogue, *SZL*, p. 381. See also Long Yusheng's 龍榆生 essays collected as appendixes, pp. 372-75.

¹⁹ David P. Barrett, "The Wang Jingwei Regime, 1940-1945: Continuities and Disjunctures with Nationalist China," in *Chinese Collaboration with Japan*, p. 105.

social occasions Wang appeared to be sincere and humble, sometimes to a fault.²⁰ As Gerald Bunker observes, such an appearance of sincerity was sometimes a strategic “political tool.”²¹ A mask of sincerity is paradoxical: its very success relies upon the viewer’s conviction that the face behind the mask bears no difference from what one sees. Constructed through his personal demeanor and through his well-publicized poetry, sincerity was Wang’s trademark.

Speaking in a seductive, private voice, Wang’s poetry helped to construct a powerful self-image of an author who is both a classically educated Confucian scholar and a modern statesman, someone who by nature transcends politics but through his sense of mission is dedicated to the salvation of the nation, and someone who is cosmopolitan and yet is completely Chinese. In the following discussion, I will analyze his lyric self layer by layer, one persona at a time.

Upon hearing the news of Wang’s death, Hu Shi 胡適 (1891-1962), the beacon of liberalism in modern China, wrote in his diary that Wang always had the “martyr complex.”²² Ever since his failed assassination attempt, Wang had been seeking another similar chance of self-sacrifice and historical glory. After his escape from Chongqing, Wang repeatedly invoked his “loyalty and love for the Republic” and his will to sacrifice himself as proof of his noble motives.²³ Because of its moving power and perhaps due to its contrast with the mainstream narrative of Wang’s “treason,” this martyr complex has so far received the most scholarly attention. Yeh Chia-ying acknowledged having been deeply touched by Wang’s poetry precisely because of this complex.²⁴ Herself a witness to history, Yeh further used Wang’s poetry to authenticate her own experience with Wang’s regime during the war and with Wang’s associates whom she encountered after the war.

Yet if we define martyrdom as sacrificing oneself voluntarily for the greater benefit of the people, then we find only a few of Wang’s poems that explicitly reveal such a wish – I count roughly a dozen. They are poems that are usually inspired by concrete subject matters such as the *jingwei* bird,²⁵ ancient heroes,²⁶ an old wheel being

²⁰ See, e.g., Xu Zhucheng 徐鑄成, *Baohai jiuwen* 報海舊聞 (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2010), p. 182.

²¹ Bunker, *Peace Conspiracy*, p.9.

²² Hu Shi, *Hu Shi riji quanbian* 胡適日記全編 (Hefei: Anhui jiaoyu chubanshe, 2001), 7: 563 (13 November 1944).

²³ See, e.g., Wang Zhaoming, “A Reply to False Allegations” (9 April 1939), in *Peace Movement in China*, pp. 14-15.

²⁴ Chia-ying Yeh, “The *Jingwei* Complex in Wang Jingwei’s Poetry” 汪精衛詩詞中的精衛情結 (public lecture at National Taiwan University, 4 October 2007; available on DVD, Taiwan Univ. Publisher, 2009).

²⁵ “Beidai kouzhan” 被逮口占 (1910), *SZL*, pp. 6-7.

²⁶ “Yuzhong wen Wen Shengcai ci Fuqi shi” 獄中聞溫生才刺孚琦事 (1911), *SZL*, p. 27; “Huo’an chushi Yishui songbie tu” 豁齋出示易水送別圖 (1941), *SZL*, p. 295; “Ti Wu Daolin hui ‘Mulan yece tu’” 題吳道鄰繪<木蘭夜策圖> (undated; possibly late period), *SZL*, p. 366.

chopped into firewood,²⁷ a snowfall (its melting would help the next harvest),²⁸ or a painting on a sheep (its meat would feed hungry bellies).²⁹ Significantly, almost all were written either in the Beijing prison or after 1939 – in other words, after he had already made the hard decision to sacrifice either his life or his reputation, revealing a need for retrospective self-justification.

A recurring image in these poems is one of burning firewood. It first appeared in a poem from 1910, written upon seeing a worker chop a worn wooden wheel into pieces. To Wang, this wooden wheel personified the qualities of endurance and sacrifice; it was an object whose last use would be cooking newly harvested rice and feeding people warm food (SZL, p. 22). In 1912, on crossing the Indian Ocean to study in France, Wang wrote two poems lamenting the restless journey of life; yet “if this piece of firewood can still be burnt, / I dare not yet regret becoming cold ashes” 勞薪如可爇, 未敢惜寒灰 (SZL, p. 44). And, almost thirty years later in Nanjing, Chen Bijun wrote a calligraphic scroll which bore Wang’s four prison quatrains as well as an epistle by Wang Yangming which expatiates the doctrine of “attaining innate moral knowledge” (*zhi liangzhi* 致良知) and bringing order to the whole world.³⁰ This scroll was possibly written to encourage Wang not to forget his initial motive for collaboration. He was inspired to reuse the firewood image again, reassuring that “what I expect to be is not the pot but the firewood” 不望為釜望為薪 (SZL, p. 285). This line refers back to a letter that Wang wrote to Hu Hanmin 胡漢民 (1879-1936), before leaving for Beijing for the assassination attempt in November 1909, in which he declared that he himself should be the firewood, soon to be burnt, and that Hu should be the pot that would bring warm food to the mouths of the people.³¹ Through repeated rewriting, the image of firewood was eventually codified to refer retrospectively to a time when Wang’s motives were pure beyond dispute. By reusing this image, Wang suggested that, no matter whether he was taking a respite from politics or becoming the nominal leader of occupied China, he was still that young would-be martyr, dedicating his life’s blood for the people. This is the idealized and sentimental image of a *shi* 士, a term commonly translated in English as “literatus,” but in Wang’s use it may be better understood as a romantic “scholar-warrior.”

A scholar-warrior is born for all under heaven,
And will also die for all under heaven.
As long as he has yet to die,

士為天下生
亦為天下死
方其未死時

²⁷ “Jianren xi chelun wei xin” 見人析車輪為薪 (1910), SZL, p. 22; “Yinduyang zhouzhong” 印度洋舟中 (1912), no.2, SZL, p. 44; “Bingru shoushu Yangming xiansheng da Nie Wenwei shu” 冰如手書陽明先生答聶文蔚書 (1941), SZL, p. 285.

²⁸ “Daxue” 大雪 (1910), SZL, p.18; “Feihua” 飛花 (1931), SZL, p. 198.

²⁹ “Junbi mei yi huayang zhifu jianyi” 君璧妹以畫羊直幅見貽 (1935), SZL, p. 248.

³⁰ See Wang Yangming’s letter to Nie Wenwei 聶文蔚 in *Yangming chuanxi lu* 陽明傳習錄 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2000), pp. 248-52.

³¹ See Lin Kuo, *Wang Jingwei quanzhuan*, p. 32.

On and on his heart beats, never at rest.³²

怦怦終不已

Yet this noble persona of a scholar-warrior is also highly elitist. In envisioning his altruistic dedication, Wang saw the common people as wanting nothing more than full bellies. He himself wished to be the lonely hero who single-handedly changed the world, as he put it in a lyric song written to praise the ancient heroine Mulan:

I risk my hot blood to preserve	
my country's rivers and mountains;	拼將熱血葆山河
I want to reverse the decline	
of heaven and earth with my bare hands.	欲憑赤手迴天地
The spear shall be waved;	戈可揮
The sword shall be leant upon;	劍可倚
From a single shield and a single city wall	
I start on my way.	一干一城從此始
Despite the enemy's being thousands of men strong,	
I go! Ho! ³³	雖千萬人吾往矣

In this song, Wang saw China as being vulnerable to Japanese aggression. Thus he went against the enemy “with my bare hands” to spare the nation from doom. The last line alludes to Mencius who discussed various ways to foster one's courage; the best way was that of Master Zeng, who through self-reflection guarded only the most essential principle (*Mencius* 2A.2). Such Confucian resolution was seen by Wang as his only shield of defense.

Wang's patriotic lyricism shows the influence of Lu You, and his worldview in this poem bears the trademark of Wang Yangming's idealist moral philosophy. In Wang Yangming's view, the whole cosmos is complete in my (the moral agent's) own body, and the suffering of the people is a disease ailing me; therefore, by regaining innate moral knowledge through self-reflection, the Confucian gentleman (*junzi*) can become an impartial agent to bring justice and order to all under heaven.³⁴ Wang Zhaoming's “martyr complex” can be seen as a logical extension of his effort at embodying this moral philosophy.

Yet Wang, through education and experience, was also cosmopolitan. He had studied in Japan on a Qing Government fellowship from 1903-06 and had toured Southeast Asia for revolutionary propaganda purposes before the assassination attempt in 1909. After the victory of the revolution, he promptly retreated from politics in 1912 and went to France, beginning his *Wanderjahre* (1912-17). During this period he came back to China twice (1914, 1915), but, finding politics distasteful, he

³² “Ganhuai” 感懷, *SZL*, p. 34.

³³ “Ti Wu Daolin hui Mulan yece tu,” an undated poem collected in the “Previously Unanthologized” (*buyi* 補遺) section. Judged from its content, however, it is likely to have been composed after 1939, most likely after 1942.

³⁴ Wang Yangming, *Yangming chuanxi lu*, p. 249.

quickly withdrew to the European landscape. It became a pattern for him to escape to Europe whenever he suffered a political setback and, increasingly, when his health was poor. He travelled there in 1919, 1926-27, 1927-29, and again 1936-37, financed by the Chinese KMT Government. The worldview, values, and literary tastes that he might have acquired through such experiences, however, appear suppressed in his poetry in order to conform to the conventions of the native literary tradition.

The tension in his cultural identity is shown in two “translated” poems, loosely based on French poets: a version of Jean-Pierre Claris de Florian’s (1755-94) fable “La Brebis et le chien” (The Lamb and the Dog) and the first part of Victor Hugo’s (1802-85) long poem “À l’obéissance passive” (To Passive Obedience).³⁵ Florian’s fable depicts a lamb and a dog lamenting their miserable fates; yet, as the dog argues at the end, it is better to suffer than to cause suffering.³⁶ In contrast, Hugo’s poem, collected in *Les Châtiments* (Castigations, 1853), is a battle hymn that praises the heroism of soldiers fighting for the Republic.³⁷ Despite their differences in tone, both poems are about self-sacrifice, Wang’s cherished theme. As Wang did not speak French it is likely that he collaborated with Zeng Zhongming (the only French-speaker in his entourage). The precedent for such a collaborative mode of translation was set by Lin Shu 林紓 (1852-1924), who turned many Western novels into elegant classical Chinese. In both cases Wang completely rewrote the poems, often by expatiating upon the mood and the circumstance according to his imagination using the originals as inspiration. Filtered through this “translingual practice,” some foreign elements remain immediately identifiable, such as the first poem’s theme of a pastoral fable and the latter’s intensive use of proper nouns; yet these foreign elements are embedded into the fabric of classical-style meters, a native grammar, and deliberate archaism. For example, the fourth stanza in Hugo’s original poem reads:

La Liberté sublime emplissait leurs pensées.
 Flottes prises d’assaut, frontières effacées
 Sous leur pas souverain,
 Ô France, tous les jours, c’était quelque prodige,
 Chocs, rencontres, combats; et Joubert sur l’Adige,
 Et Marceau sur le Rhin!
 (Sublime Liberty filled their thoughts.
 Fleets taken in assault, borders erased

³⁵ See Wang Zhaoming, “Yi Fo-lao-li-ang yuyan shi” 譯佛老里昂寓言詩 (1914), *SZL*, p. 53; “Yi Xiao-e gonghe ernian zhi zhanshi shi yishou” 譯俄共和二年之戰士詩一首 (1929), *SZL*, p. 149. There is another poem, purportedly a translation, titled simply as “Yishi” 譯詩 (1936) (*SZL*, p. 266), but neither Wang Mengchuan nor I have managed to identify the original. On the translation of European poetry into classical forms, see Shengqing Wu, *Modern Archaics* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2014), pp. 333-79.

³⁶ See Jean-Pierre Claris de Florian, *Fables de Florian* (Paris: Delarue, 1855), 37.

³⁷ See Victor Hugo, “À l’obéissance passive,” in *Œuvres poétiques* (Paris: Pierre Albouy, 1967), 2: 55-64.

Under their sovereign strides.
 O France, every day was another marvel –
 Clashes, encounters, combats; Joubert on the Adige;
 And Marceau on the Rhine.)

Wang's translation reads:

What was stored in the breasts of our valiant soldiers?	健兒胸中何所蓄
It was the Goddess of Liberty, tall and sublime.	自由之神高且穆
Who can say that the fleets were strong?	誰言艦隊雄
The oceans blockaded, they took possession of them.	截海歸掌握
Who can say that the border was tightly guarded?	誰言疆場嚴
It was crushed with one kick of their boots.	鞞尖供一蹴
O! Our nation is wealthy in marvels;	吁嗟吾國由來多瑰奇
Our young men fought, [swords shining] like halos!	男兒格鬪如虹霓
Don't you see, sir –	君不見
General Joubert's victory on the River Adige;	祖拔將軍將軍破敵阿狄江之上
And don't you see, sir –	又不見
General Marceau's troops shining by the Rhine!	馬索將軍耀兵萊茵河之湄

Through the liberal addition of rhetorical questions and descriptions, Wang transformed Hugo's marching song into an archaic *gexing* 歌行 poem. Given its relatively free prosody, this lyric form has been used by poets since Huang Zunxian 黃遵憲 (1848-1905) to accommodate foreign elements.³⁸ For a domestic readership not familiar with European proper nouns, he helpfully added "Goddess," "General," and "River." The solemnity of Hugo's unusual metaphor, "under their sovereign strides," completely dissolves in the triumphant "kick of their boots"; to avoid vulgarity, though, he used the more classical variant *xue* 鞞 for *xue* 靴. Wang probably did understand the original line's implication that the Republic's soldiers assumed active agency in fighting. But, since there was no corresponding notion in classical Chinese, Wang sacrificed this revolutionary image for a more domestic metaphor. In the last stanza, Wang expands Hugo's pithy ending into two long rhetorical questions. This creates a sense of the revolutionary army's might on display, but also dilutes the difficulty of four strange names in a row. Through the process of rewriting, Wang symbolically appropriated the French Revolution as a literary and political precursor.

Wang's lyrical transformation of his modern sensibility into classical aesthetics is also manifested in the poems that he wrote to his wife, Chen Bijun. Chen, a fiercely independent woman born to a rich Malaysian Chinese merchant family, refused her arranged betrothal in pursuit of Wang, and followed him onto the road of revolution.

³⁸ On how Huang Zunxian developed his style during his stay at London (1890-91), see Jerry D. Schmidt, *Within the Human Realm: the Poetry of Huang Zunxian 1848-1905* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1994), p. 32. On the advantages and challenges to his "ancient-style" poetry, see *ibid.*, pp. 58-76.

Well-educated and eloquent, she was described by contemporary accounts as the polar opposite of Wang in appearance: Wang was mild, delicate and handsome, she was petulant, shrewish, and ugly.³⁹ Yet their partnership was based not just on shared purpose but also, it seems, on genuine intimacy. They remained each other's only partner and bore and raised five children together. In a poem on their twenty-fifth wedding anniversary, Wang fondly wrote: "I never expect our faces to look exactly the same as before; but the ineffable intimacy between us remains like new" 頭顱似舊元非望，恩意如新不可名。⁴⁰ Wang must have loved Chen for her modernity, including her temper and looks. In his poems to her or about her, however, she is cast in a quite different light. He draws out certain features to make her resemble a classical ideal of femininity: gentle, dedicated, dimpled, and standing in the snow like a branch of plum blossoms.⁴¹ Through such formal choices, Wang's poetry conceals its cultural hybridity and creates a more "native" identity for its author.

As with many traditional Chinese poets, more than half of Wang's poems are about landscape. Unusually, however, many of them were written in Europe. His landscape poetry features a clear and lucid style, betraying the influence of Tao Qian, whose poetry Wang recited daily to his father after school, as well as that of Tang and Song poets, most notably Wang Wei 王維 (701-761) and Du Fu. Perhaps the most remarkable feature of all is the absence of reference to contemporary politics or history. Instead, Wang seems to have been enchanted by the landscape. Nature for him seems to represent harmony and cosmic order, beyond war and intrigue. As even his otherwise biased biographers have acknowledged, Wang enjoyed peace in nature and devoted himself to poetry even during political setbacks and near exiles, showing where his true interests in life lay – or so he would have liked his readers to believe.⁴² In poetry written during his European journeys, for example, he writes little of political frustration, preferring to focus on joy and transcendence. As he declared in a poem on the Giessbach Falls in Switzerland:

Having aspired for leisure and placid joys all my life,
I am taking pleasure in this exceedingly pure realm.⁴³

平生志淡泊
樂此清絕境

³⁹ See, for instance, Jin Xiong bai, *Wang Zhengquan de kaichang yu shouchang*, vol. 4, p.87.

⁴⁰ Wang Zhaoming, "Ershiwunian jiehun jinianri fu shi Bingru" 二十五年結婚紀念日賦示冰如, *SZL*, p.240.

⁴¹ See, e.g., "Liuyue yu Bingru tongzhou [...]" 六月與冰如同舟[...], *SZL*, p. 58; "Xiboliya dao zhong ji Bingru" 西伯利亞道中寄冰如, *SZL*, p. 61; "Shi'er yue ershiba ri shuangzhaolou jishi" 十二月二十八日雙照樓即事, *SZL*, p. 64; "Bingru boyou Beijing shu ci jizhi" 冰如薄游北京書此寄之, *SZL*, p. 66.

⁴² Lin Kuo, *Wang Jingwei quanzhuan*, p. 55. Wen Shaohua's 聞少華 *Wang Jingwei zhuan* 汪精衛傳 (Beijing: Tuanjia chubashe, 2007), which has largely plagiarized Lin's work, says the same on p. 28.

⁴³ "Ruishi Jixibo pubu..." 瑞士幾希柏瀑布[...], *SZL*, pp. 146-47.

By declaring that such “leisure and placid joys” were all he had aspired to, Wang Zhaoming turned his political success into an obligation – while his exiles became opportunities to realize his “true nature.” Indeed, this portrait of transforming frustration into freedom was by no means invented by Wang Zhaoming but has a long tradition in Chinese literati poetry. If Tao Qian had willingly chosen to retreat, then later poets, by emulating Tao Qian’s poetry and lifestyle in periods of marginalization or banishment, could translate their imposed plight into a willed choice.⁴⁴ By claiming that they found pure pleasure in nature and were now oblivious to the world of politics, they projected agency over their fate and claimed the transcendence of their inner selves to external glory or disgrace. The “happy exile,” fashioned after Tao Qian, embodies the moral self-sufficiency of a genuine *junzi*, so that, as Mencius said, if he prospers, he will benefit all under heaven; but if not, he will benefit only himself (*Mencius*, 7A.9). This trope sees political service as completely altruistic because the inner life of the *junzi* should not be influenced by external circumstances; indeed, it would be better to fail and thus be spared the toil. Wang Zhaoming’s landscape poems helped to fit him into this paradigm.

On the other hand, however, Wang was clearly conscious of the fact that he could not completely return to nature and believed he still had a role to play in history. As he lamented: “[I wish] to sever human ties and to escape from the world, but find no chance” 絕人逃世苦無緣.⁴⁵ Again, this is a conventional image of a Confucian gentleman, like the Eastern Jin statesman Xie An 謝安 (320-385) who, allegedly with great reluctance, ended his retreat in the Eastern Mountains to become Prime Minister only for the sake of the people.⁴⁶ We therefore at times find Wang portraying himself as a weary passenger through nature, where time stands still and farmers live outside history.

When shall this trip of service ever end?	行役何時已
In the depth of autumn, the scenery is profuse with colors.	秋深景物繁
Disorderly mountains, like flower petals, embrace a vast plain;	亂山苞大野
On the flatland sprouts up a distant village.	平地茁遠村
The cowbells returning from pasture clank urgently;	歸牧鈴聲急
Birds fighting to nest make the shadows of trees billow.	爭巢樹影翻
If ever I am allowed to enjoy an hour of leisure,	小休容可得
It shall be below the flickering lamps on an unadorned wooden gate. ⁴⁷	鐙火在柴門

This poem was written in November 1930 during Wang’s flight from Taiyuan to Beijing, and eventually to Tianjin. Earlier that year, he had allied with the Shanxi

⁴⁴ A primary case is Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037-1101), as discussed in Zhiyi Yang, “Return to an Inner Utopia: Su Shi’s Transformation of Tao Qian in His Exile Poetry,” *T’oung Pao* 99 (2013): 329-78.

⁴⁵ “Qiuri chongguo Huomenglou” 秋日重過豁蒙樓, *SZL*, p. 247.

⁴⁶ Liu Yiqing 劉義慶, *Shishuo xinyu* 世說新語, 25.26. See Xu Zhen’e 徐震堦, *Shishuo xinyu jiaojian* 世說新語校箋 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2001), p. 429.

⁴⁷ “Daozhong zuo” 道中作, *SZL*, p. 189.

warlord Yan Xishan 閻錫山 (1883-1960) and other military factions in yet another rebellion attempt against Chiang Kai-shek, known as the Central Plains War. The campaign failed; Chiang's Central Government Army won a decisive victory against regional military forces and Wang hastened his escape. Curiously, he found time to write some meticulously composed poems (note the careful lexical choices of the second and third couplets). But even if this poem was written or revised retrospectively, it is still significant that neither contemporary history nor his fate at the time were even hinted at. Wang apparently saw his failure as simply temporary, and he saw himself still obligated to continue his journey of service with hardly an hour of leisure in the landscape.

The sense that landscape and common people, especially rural residents, live outside history is similarly revealed in the following lyric song, "Baiziling" 百字令 (SZL, p. 305):

Vast, vast, the flat wilds!	茫茫原野
Just when the spring is deep and the summer, shallow.	正春深夏淺
Fragrant blossoms have brimmed my eyes,	芳菲滿目
In which are stored a thousand goblets of New Pavilion ⁴⁸ tears!	蓄得新亭千斛淚
But I shall not pour them in front of the wind.	不向風前根觸
Waves, dabbed in emerald, softly billow;	渲碧波恬
Mountain peaks, in shades of blue, melt in haze;	浮青峰軟
Mists and rains are pure and gentle.	煙雨皆清淑
Fishermen and wood-cutters seem like a painting –	漁樵如畫
Innocence lives on only in their thatched huts.	天真只在茅屋
Fie! Sigh! From the past to our times,	堪嘆古往今來
The inexhaustible affairs of man,	無窮人事
Like a mirage, have transformed oceans into mulberry fields.	幻此滄桑局
Just like the great Yangtze, flowing day and night,	得似大江流日夜
Waves after waves chase each other without end.	波浪重重相逐
The remnant ashes after a kalpa,	劫後殘灰
The abandoned bones left by war,	戰餘棄骨
Are indifferently covered in luxurious green.	一例青青覆
When the cuckoo bird has spent its blood in singing,	鶉嘯血盡
The azalea flowers blossom, again kindling an empty valley.	花開還照空谷

Nanjing, the ancient capital of many southern dynasties, had seen repeated cycles of civil prosperity, conquest, and wreckage. In Wang's eyes, the peaceful Nanjing suburb in late spring is still a battlefield stained by the blood and tears of fallen heroes. As a student of history, Wang portrayed himself as refusing to shed tears at the

⁴⁸ According to *Shishuo xinyu* 2.31, after the Western Jin fell, the ministers who fled South often gathered at the New Pavilion (*xinting* 新亭) to drink. One day Zhou Yi 周顛 sighed that the scenery had not changed but the regime had. The merry drinkers all began to shed tears. Wang Dao 王導 was displeased and admonished that their proper duty was to recover the North, not to shed tears. See *Shishuo xinyu jiaojian*, p. 50.

proverbial New Pavilion for the fallen territories of China. He articulates his resolution to persevere, even though – as a romantic and a pessimist – he saw all effort in history as folly. Ever-renewed nature and generations of farmers live undisturbed by the waves of history. Yet Wang saw himself as being carried by the tides of time to become “remnant ashes” and “abandoned bones.” The “cuckoo bird” in the last couplet is also an image of his desire for martyrdom. Curiously, this poem was written in 1934 when Wang Zhaoming was Chairman of the Central Executive Council and his cooperation with Chiang Kai-shek was productive. Chiang Kai-shek was playing the resistance soldier, while Wang was the chief diplomat who cut deals with Japan at the negotiation table, bidding for more time.⁴⁹ He certainly could not have foreseen the Rape of Nanjing three years later, but the last few lines depict an uncanny image that anticipates cosmic destruction – and a recovery without him.

If “Wang Zhaoming” the poetic persona had perceived an eternal natural order beyond the vicissitudes of human affairs, then by his traditional education as a Confucian *junzi* he was obligated to act as an agent of history. He saw that in history China had been repeatedly conquered by foreign forces, and yet had repeatedly survived and revived after extended periods of occupation. Thus, he suspected that he stood right on the brink of another Buddhist *jie* 劫, or *kalpa* – the end of a cycle of time that brings cosmic destruction. To participate in this kind of time means to throw oneself into destruction. As a young man, the stakes were simply his life – something he would gladly sacrifice in exchange for eternal glory. Now, as a survivor, he faced higher stakes: his honor.

This, at least, is the explanation he offered for his decision to collaborate with Japan. In June 1939, he was on a ship from Japan to Tianjin. Konoe Fumimaro (1891-1945), the previous Prime Minister whose peace policy had enticed Wang to escape Chongqing, resigned in January. The new Hiranuma Cabinet (January-August 1939) had little desire to cooperate. Though, in principle, it would support Wang in establishing a nationalist government, it would later impose harsh conditions for less than a nominal peace. Yet Wang remained at the negotiation table instead of simply walking away. What explained his desperate trust in Japan’s magnanimity? Was it his desire to save China or his will for power? Or was it simply his wish to remain relevant? As Gerald Bunker argues, as an unemployed politician Wang “deeply wanted to establish a government and to play the game of politics” on the great stage, to the extent that he lowered his price from very little to zero.⁵⁰ Wang’s poems, however, depicted his motives in nobler terms and some later readers, including the historians Yü Ying-shih and John H. Boyler, have found this convincing. The poem “Night Onboard,” cited by Yü as proof, was written during a restive night on Wang’s return trip from Japan.

⁴⁹ For an examination of their division of labor, see Xu Yuming, *Wang Zhaoming yu Guomin zhengfu*, pp. 95-224.

⁵⁰ Bunker, *Peace Conspiracy*, p. 215.

Reclining, I hear the bell ringing to report the depth of the night.	臥聽鐘聲報夜深
The remnant of my dream for sea and sky is distant, hard to chase.	海天殘夢渺難尋
The poop deck sags and leans, and the wind remains malicious;	舵樓欹仄風仍惡
The lighthouse shines dimly, and the moon is half in shadow.	鐙塔微茫月半陰
Slowly, through a thousand kalpas, my good friends vanish;	良友漸隨千劫盡
Our Divine Land is again sinking, perhaps for another century.	神州重見百年沉
Desolate, forlorn, I shall not sigh in the Solitary Sea;	淒然不作零丁嘆
I reflect on and examine the unfulfilled vows of my life.	檢點生平未盡心

In the last couplet, Wang evokes the memory of Wen Tianxiang 文天祥 (1236-83), the patriotic Southern Song Prime Minister, who was captured by the Yuan Army and wrote the seven-character regulated-verse poem “Guo Lingdingyang” 過零丁洋 (Passing the Solitary Sea) to show his resolution of continuous resistance. As John H. Boyler has argued, both Wen and Wang were guilty of “irrational behavior,” “but it was irrational behavior in the best Confucian tradition,” namely doing the impossible and the hopeless.⁵¹ However, unlike Wen Tianxiang, Wang declared that he could not simply die, since “the vows of [his] life” had not been fulfilled. This resolution had less to do with fate than with choice. Wang’s previous poems about crossing the ocean often found symbols of eternity, transcendence, and freedom – sometimes including freedom from concerns about his role in history or the fate of China – in the sea, the sky, and the moon.⁵² His “dream for sea and sky,” in this context, could be understood as his dream of personal transcendence. Yet this poem shows Wang as having no more such hopes. He declares that he will throw himself into the *kalpa* and follow the Fatherland’s course of sinking.

The identification of his personal fate with that of the nation is most explicitly revealed in a song-lyric, “Manjianghong” 滿江紅 (SZL, p. 310), written in 1940 in Nanjing.

A sudden gust of west wind	驀地西風
Blows up my	吹起我
Thousand folds of disorderly sorrow.	亂愁千疊
In vain I stare fixedly –	空凝望
My old friends are all gone;	故人已矣
Blue ghost lights rise from their emerald blood.	青燐碧血
My soul and dream cannot be bounded	
even by broad frontiers;	魂夢不堪關塞闊
But with the nation wounded and scarred,	
the universe seems narrow.	瘡痍漸覺乾坤窄

⁵¹ Boyle, *China and Japan*, p. 357.

⁵² See, for instance (all page numbers in SZL), “Taipingyang zhouzhong wan yue” 太平洋舟中玩月, p. 68; “Zi Shanghai fangzhou [...]” 自上海放舟 [...], pp. 69-70; “Zhou ci Tanxiangshan shu ji Bingru” 舟次檀香山書寄冰如, p. 71; “Haishang” 海上, p. 135; “Haishang” 海上, p. 139; “Haishang guan yue” 海上觀月, p. 140; “Dui yue” 對月, p. 220; “Haishang wang yue zuoge” 海上望月作歌, pp. 268-69.

Even after thousands of years,	
when kalpa ashes have all turned cold,	便劫灰冷盡萬千年
My passion will burn on.	情猶熱
Where the mists dissipate,	煙斂處
The Bell Mount ⁵³ reveals its scarlet colors.	鐘山赤
After a shower of rain,	雨過後
The Qinhuai River is azure.	秦淮碧
Just like reading [Yu Xin's] "Rhapsody Lamenting Jiangnan," ⁵⁴	似哀江南賦
Stains of my tears are again moistened.	淚痕重濕
When the nation falls,	
no person is left to be ransomed;	邦殄更無身可贖
The moment of crisis forbids me	
to reveal my heart.	時危未許心能白
With just one village, one brigade,	
I start from the beginning,	但一成一旅起從頭
With no reserve.	無遺力

This tune pattern was associated with a patriotic song, attributed to the Southern Song hero Yue Fei 岳飛 (1103-1142), which expresses his resolution to recover the lost northern territories. Wang was often compared to Qin Hui 秦檜 (1090-1155), a traitor in historical legend who schemed to kill Yue Fei – in fact, after Wang fled Chongqing, two statues in his and Chen Bijun's likeness were made to receive people's spite.⁵⁵ Wang's decision to write to the tune of "Manjianghong" could therefore be read as a gesture of protest and self-defense. Despite his saying "the moment of crisis forbids me to reveal my heart," this song clearly hints at his "genuine" motives. Or, at the very least, it tries to reveal the motives that he would like others to believe: although he did not defend China on the battlefield as Yue Fei did, he was defending her on another front.

Wang declared that he would sacrifice his reputation for the salvation of the nation, which is somewhat paradoxical given that a genuine sacrifice of one's reputation should never be so loudly announced. Writing poetry suggests a desire for immortality: as long as the poet's words are being read, the person can live on in hearts and minds, in an image that he perceived or wished himself to be. Through versification, Wang created and immortalized his own romanticized inner history – despite all his repeated claims that he was willing to spare the world knowledge of it.

⁵³ Bell Mount and Qinhuai River are both Nanjing landmarks.

⁵⁴ "Rhapsody Lamenting Jiangnan" ("Ai Jiangnan fu" 哀江南賦) is a work by Yu Xin 庾信 (513-581), a Southern scholar detained in the North and forced to serve under the subsequent Northern Dynasties. He wrote this rhapsody to lament the conquest of Liang (502-557) when Western Wei (535-557) troops smashed Nanjing.

⁵⁵ The precedent was the setting up of kneeling iron statues of Qin and his wife Yue Fei's temple in Hangzhou, so passersby could beat and insult them. See Lin Kuo, *Wang Jingwei quanzhuan*, p. 400.

To conclude, the private nature of Wang Zhaoming's poetic persona played a vital function in enhancing his public image, promoting his credentials, and justifying his motives as altruistic. Through his poetry, which remains stylistically conservative but also shows innovations in diction and subject matter, Wang constructed a poetic persona which combined features of a classical scholar-official and a modern statesman. Thus, he offered himself as a bridge between China's cultural past and her modern fate. Furthermore, his poetry should not be treated as a kind of vestigial literary practice or private hobby, but should be seen as an active text interlaced into his contemporary cultural and political life. It embodied the kind of culturalist nationalism that Wang and his fellow Southern Society members strove to promote. It is perhaps edifying for us to reexamine their efforts as an alternative to the radical, utilitarian attitude toward indigenous traditions that has dominated the narrative of modern Chinese literary historiography.

Classical-Style Poetry as Modern Literature

Living in an age of literary revolution, Wang, a "romantic radical" in politics,⁵⁶ chose to conform largely to conventional aesthetics in his poetry. His freestyle translations proved that he was capable of a more radical style akin to that pioneered by senior poets like Huang Zunxian and Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873-1929), who embraced Western diction and ideas in traditional poetic genres. His conscious choice represented a conservative (in the ethically neutral sense of the word) vision of literary modernity at a time when vernacular poetry was rising to declare itself the end product of the evolution of genres. His choice was consistent with his ideal of a new national literature for China that would inherit the literary tradition and serve to renovate the national spirit.

Wang's literary criticism was closely associated with his membership in the Southern Society. The few pieces that he wrote to define and defend his literary options were all related to his activities in this Society. He may even have gone so far as to act as its historian after the Society dissolved in 1923 due to internal conflicts. In 1930-31, a "Poetry Discussion on the Southern Society" ("Nanshe shihua" 南社詩話) was serialized in a Hong Kong magazine and was published under the penname Manzhao 曼昭. Wang's Southern Society friends and scholars identified it as his work.⁵⁷ This *shihua* remains important for the study of the Southern Society's poetry,

⁵⁶ Howard L. Boorman, "Wang Ching-wei: a Political Profile," in *Revolutionary Leaders of Modern China*, ed. Chün-tu Hsüeh (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 318.

⁵⁷ See *Nanshe shihua liangzhong* 南社詩話兩種, ed. Yuk Fung Yeung 楊玉峰 (Beijing: Renmin daxue chubanshe, 1997), p. 3. On internal and external evidences for Wang's authorship as well as contentions, see Song Xiyu 宋希於, "Manzhao shi shei" 曼昭是誰, *Dongfang zaobao*, 2 September 2012; Chen Xiaoping 陳曉平, "Manzhao jiushi Wang Jingwei" 曼昭就是汪精衛, *Dongfang zaobao*, 16 September 2012; and William Sheh Wong 汪威廉, "Manzhao Wang Jingwei tong wei yiren: Nanshe shihua shougao de faxian" 曼昭汪精衛同為一人: 《南社詩話》手稿的發

poetics, and personalities. On the other hand, Wang's membership was equally important for the Society. He was invited to write the preface to the Society's anthology published in 1923, a preface which retrospectively defined the Southern Society's tenets.⁵⁸ Liu Yazhi 柳亞子 (1887-1958), the longest-serving chairman of the society, once called Wang the "representative personality of the Southern Society" (Nanshe daibiao renwu 南社代表人物).⁵⁹ As Wang was never in charge of the society's daily affairs and rarely participated in its social gatherings, this mutual recognition suggests a high degree of coherence in their declared agendas. To understand Wang's position on literature, therefore, a quick review of the Southern Society's history and proposals will prove illuminating.

According to the Southern Society's membership application forms (*rushe shu* 入社書), now collected in the National Library of Beijing, Wang joined the society on April 18, 1912, a mere five months after his release from prison. His application number was 260 and his sponsors were Tian Tong 田桐 (1879-1930), Chen Jiading 陳家鼎 (1876-1928), and Jing Yaoyue 景耀月 (1881-1944), three fellow members of the Tongmenghui 同盟會, Sun Yat-sen's anti-Manchu revolutionary group. For a society which would grow to include more than 1180 members, Wang was a relatively early recruit. The Southern Society was founded on November 13, 1909 in Suzhou by Chen Qubing 陳去病 (1874-1933), Gao Xu 高旭 (1877-1925), and Liu Yazhi, all Tongmenghui members. The "South" in the Society's name suggests its antagonism toward the "Northern" Manchu court, and it was likely founded to unite progressive intellectuals in the southeast in preparation for the anti-Manchu revolution. This decided its liaison with the Nationalist party, later restructured on the basis of Tongmenghui. In Wang's words, "the literature-lovers of the revolutionary party all had their names listed in it."⁶⁰ Wang joined the society, however, not just because it was a literary club for nationalists, but also – and perhaps more importantly – because after the success of the 1911 Revolution his interest had shifted from politics to culture. Following ancient examples of withdrawal from politics after honorable service, he moved to Shanghai and prepared to study abroad. Apparently he considered the revolution to be a *fait accompli* and regarded the reformation of corrupt social mores as being more urgent. In February that year he founded a Promoting Virtue Society (*jindehui* 進德會) with Cai Yuanpei 蔡元培 (1868-1940) and Wu Zhihui 吳稚暉 (1865-1953), among others, which aimed to improve the morality of the traditionally educated

現, *Ming Pao Monthly*, December 2013. Yuk Fung Yeung informed me that he acquired the manuscript from a descendant of Wang (personal communication, September 2013).

⁵⁸ Wang Zhaoming, "Nanshe congxuan xu" 南社叢選序 (1923), *Nanshe congxuan* 南社叢選, ed. Hu Pu'an 胡樸安 (Beijing: Jiefangjun wenyi chubanshe, 2000), pp. 1-2.

⁵⁹ See Liu Yazhi's 柳亞子 open letter (1936) to Cao Juren 曹聚仁, cited in Yang Tianshi 楊天石 and Wang Xuezhuan 王學莊, *Nanshe shi changbian* 南社史長編 (Beijing: Renmin daxue chubanshe, 1995), p. 640.

⁶⁰ Manzhao, *Nanshe shihua*, p. 3.

intelligentsia willing to embrace a Western-style modern society.⁶¹ He joined the Southern Society during the same period, as the latter recruited from the same pool of members and shared a similar mission in the field of classical literature.

Strong anti-Manchism had colored the Southern Society's early activities, but its mission was more cultural than political. Many members of this group had joined the earlier National Essence School and published in *Guocui xuebao* 國粹學報.⁶² As Gao Xu announced, the aim of the Southern Society was to "wash away the customary vices of literary societies of previous generations, so as to be the mentor of literature within the seas"; only in this manner could they reinvigorate the spirit of national literature to promote "national learning" (*guoxue* 國學) and ultimately rejuvenate the "national soul" (*guohun* 國魂).⁶³ Therefore, after the success of the 1911 Revolution, their initial anti-Manchu ethnic nationalism quickly transformed into a kind of culturalist nationalism which aimed to succeed and renovate the "essence" of China's indigenous traditions and compete with Western cultural values. After the Society's activities ceased, two Ivy-League-educated members, Mei Guangdi 梅光迪 (1890-1945) and Hu Xiansu 胡先驌 (1894-1968), would go on to found the *Critical Review* (*Xueheng* 學衡, 1922-33), a magazine that continued the debate with the New Culture radicals into the 1930s. The "nationalist" element in their proposal was to see the indigenous cultural roots as the foundational nexus upon which a modern nation's identity could be created. In contrast to the New Culturalists' search for cultural roots in China's minor and allegedly "folk" traditions, the National Essence proponents were unapologetically elitist, since they saw elite cultural values as the "essence" of the cultural tradition that needed to be preserved. Ironically, what they identified as the "essence" of Chinese traditional culture often coincided with Western values such as freedom and democracy. But it was also exactly in this sense that their proposals should not be simply rejected as traditionalist or outdated, but regarded as a viable conservative option to build a modern culture. Lydia Liu has described their self-identity as fashioned "in terms of translated modernity."⁶⁴ Or in Hon Tze-ki's words, what they tried to do was "move China forward by reviving a select Chinese cultural heritage."⁶⁵ The Southern Society shared a similar agenda in the field of poetry.

⁶¹ See Lin Kuo, *Wang Jingwei quanzhuan*, p. 49.

⁶² Many core members of the Southern Society participated in the National Learning Preservation Society (*Guoxue baocun hui* 國學保存會), founded in 1905; see *Nanshe shi changbian*, pp. 38-39. Some members later founded the National Learning Discussion Society (*Guoxue shangdui hui* 國學商兌會) in June 1912; *ibid.*, pp. 283-85.

⁶³ Gao Xu, "Nanshe qi" 南社啟, *Minyu bao*, 17 October 1909; see *Nanshe shi changbian*, pp. 129-30.

⁶⁴ Lydia Liu, *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity--China, 1900-1937* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), p. 256.

⁶⁵ Tze-Ki Hon, *Revolution as Restoration: Guocui xuebao and China's Path to Modernity, 1905-1911* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), p. 6.

Given the sheer size and complexity of the group,⁶⁶ generic statements about their “common purpose” may risk overgeneralization. However, Wang Zhaoming’s preface for the Society’s anthology seems to represent a retrospective consensus on their mission. Wang declared the Society’s poetry to be genuine “revolutionary literature” (*geming wenxue* 革命文學) that could stimulate the dispirited morale of the Chinese intelligentsia and preserve the soul of the weakened nation (“Nanshe congxuan xu”). In contrast to the 1917 New Culture Movement, which sought to completely change the “orthodox” style and form of Chinese literature from the classical literary language (*wenyan* 文言) to a written vernacular, Wang and his fellow Society members envisioned their “revolution” to be less formal than semantic. The “mandate” (*ming* 命) that they aimed to change was the cliché-ridden style of classical poetry and its use as a social tool. In Wang’s words:

The thoughts of riches and power, the doings of evil and debauchery, the habits of fawning and flattering – what noble gentlemen do not usually keep in their minds and despise to speak through their mouths is expressed without reserve in their poetry.⁶⁷

Such vices, however, lay in the use and the content of the poetry, not in the poetic form *per se*. According to Wang, “the essence of ‘poetry’ resides not in its being new or old, but in its excellence” 詩無所謂新舊，惟其善而已 (*ibid.*, p. 2). In other words, what he wanted to restore was the moral and aesthetic values that classical-style verse had previously embodied.

This view succeeded that of Liang Qichao. As Jerry D. Schmidt observes, what Liang meant by a “Poetic Revolution” was

not a violent rejection of the entire Chinese literary heritage but merely an extensive reform of Chinese poetry and, most important of all, a restoration of values he felt had been lost by poets of recent centuries.⁶⁸

The same preferences had been upheld by other society members, including Mei Guangdi and Ren Hongjun 任鴻雋 (1886-1961), whose debate with Hu Shi in 1916 had led Hu to attempt the composition of vernacular poems so as to prove that complete

⁶⁶ Chinese-language studies on this group include: Sun Zhimei 孫之梅, *Nanshe yanjiu* 南社研究 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2003); Liu Jingsong 劉景松, “Tuoxu yu jiuwei: Xiandai shiye zhong de Nanshe xingxiang” 脫序與就位：現代視野中的南社形象 (Ph.D. diss., Beijing Normal University, 2005); Lu Wenyun 盧文藝, *Zhongguo jindai wenhua biange yu Nanshe* 中國近代文化變革與南社 (Beijing: Shehui kexue chubanshe, 2008); Lin Xiangling 林香伶, *Nanshe wenxue zonglun* 南社文學綜論 (Taipei: Liren shuju, 2009). An English monograph on this group is overdue.

⁶⁷ Wang Zhaoming, “Haogetang shichao xu” 浩歌堂詩鈔敘 (1924), *Chen Qubing quanji* 陳去病全集, ed. Zhang Yi 張夷 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2009), p. 1.

⁶⁸ Jerry D. Schmidt, *Human Realm*, p. 48.

vernacularization was possible.⁶⁹ One may argue that the “lost values” that generations of Chinese reformers sought to recover were often fabricated in ways that reflected the needs of their own ages. Such claims dress the “new” as the “ancient” in order to ease its acceptance. Nonetheless, the rhetorical claim of “restoration as revolution” encourages at least an attempt at cultural continuity, resulting perhaps in its taking on a certain degree of reality.

Like many other Southern Society members, Wang did not appear to believe that the “new” vernacular literature would ultimately replace the “old” *wenyan* literature. In his *Nanshe shihua*, he criticized the New Culturalists for being ahistorical. Hu Shi for him was “a figure [who came of age] after the founding of the Republic, who never participated in the revolutionary movement before the Republic” and thus was oblivious to its hardship. As a founder of the Republic, Wang lamented that the pride of China had been trampled after her maritime defeat by Japan in 1897. “Without promoting her national glory to awaken the nation’s self-awareness and to recover her confidence, she would day by day sink into depravity.” According to Wang, the Southern Society and its related cultural institutions resurrected “the spirit of unyielding masculinity and independence,” an irrevocable contribution to the nationalist revolution.⁷⁰ Given the *de facto* rise of *baihua*, he proposed that “the new and the old [poetic] styles could coexist”: “we should stimulate them to compete, as the harder their competition is, the faster their progress will be” (*ibid.*, p. 74). In this Darwinian view, to preemptively declare the triumph of either lyric form goes against the spirit of evolution, namely, survival of the fittest. The truly “progressive” form is the one that survives competition in the free market. In actual fact, in the 1930s, classical-style poetry and semi-classical fiction continued to enjoy a broad base of writers and readers.⁷¹ Wang’s confidence thus seemed to reflect contemporary trends which were later lost in the standard narrative of vernacular literature’s “steady march from triumph to triumph.”

In the same spirit of compromise and competition, facing the rise of vernacular literature, Wang consistently maintained that formal innovation was welcome, but the true evolution of literature should be a continuum where “old” literature evolved and developed through competition. In real life, at least up until December 1938, Wang was on friendly terms with both Liu Yazi, the advocate of formal renovation in classical poetry, and Hu Shi, the pioneer of vernacular poetry. One of the very few pieces of social poetry that Wang wrote was addressed to Liu Yazi, lauding his talent

⁶⁹ See Hu Shi, “Bishang Liangshan: wenxue geming de kaishi” 逼上梁山：文學革命的開始, *Hu Shi wenji* 胡適文集, ed. Ouyang Zhesheng 歐陽哲生 (Beijing: Peking Univ. Press, 1998), 1.155-56.

⁷⁰ Manzhao (Wang Zhaoming), “*Shilun ji qita*” 詩論及其他, *Nanshe shihua*, p. 73.

⁷¹ On the vitality of semi-classical fiction, see Perry E. Link, Jr., *Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies: Popular Fiction in Early Twentieth-Century Chinese Cities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), pp. 18-19; Xueqing Xu, “The Mandarin Duck and Butterfly School,” in *Literary Societies of Republican China*, ed. Kirk A. Denton and Michel Hockx (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2008), pp. 47-78, esp. pp. 67, 71.

and moral stature.⁷² And, unlike his Southern Society peers who often mocked Hu's vernacular poetry – in Liu's words, it was “half a donkey, half a horse, and simply a bad joke”⁷³ – Wang remained respectful. His response to the two vernacular poems that Hu sent to him tactfully called them “very interesting” (*jiyou quwei* 極有趣味) – although he wondered aloud in the same letter whether he simply was not used to reading vernacular poetry, or if vernacular poetry provided another kind of pleasure, or perhaps both.⁷⁴ On a more serious note, he suggested that new and old poetry should be allowed to coexist. He then sent Hu two “Morning Mist” poems (“Xiaoyan” 曉煙, *SZL*, p. 46) that he had written in 1914 for the purpose of showing something similar in spirit to Hu's poem,⁷⁵ but perhaps also in the spirit of poetic competition.

To Yü Ying-shih, this letter is precious since it disclosed a side of Wang “in the pure world of poetry.”⁷⁶ This may be the case but, on the other hand, the friendship of political figures is often calculated. Wang in 1923, as the leader of the left-wing KMT, clearly wished to befriend a prominent liberal. His literary eclecticism lent itself to making political allies. Since this letter predated his preface to Chen Qubing's anthology, it is possible that he first articulated his moderate position in the debate between new and old poetry as a response to Hu Shi. Needless to say, for a national leader, this neutral stance was also the politically safest one.

Wang's literary views were consistent with his cultural identity as a nationalist with cosmopolitan awareness and with his belief in an eclectic Darwinism. Despite the highly polemical anti-Manchu rhetoric that he adopted in his early *Minbao* career,⁷⁷ he later modified his ethnic views to advocate racial interdependence, coexistence, and peaceful competition. According to Wang, a nation was a group of people who shared the same interests. The nation-state was a temporary institution toward the ultimate stage of world unity (*shijie datong* 世界大同); but, on the current historical stage, it must first be improved so as to provide the basis for a democratic international order.⁷⁸ He argued that social Darwinism, if pushed to extremes, would lead to the hegemony of a single culture or perhaps of a single individual.⁷⁹ And if competition was essential for evolution, the coexistence of races was necessary. Thus

⁷² See “Jianglou qiusi tu” 江樓秋思圖, *SZL*, p. 103.

⁷³ See Liu Yazhi's letter to Yang Quan 楊銓 (1893-1933; known as Xingfo 杏佛), *Minguo ribao* (Shanghai), 27 April 1917. For Hu Xiansu's more scholarly criticism, see “Ping Changshi ji” 評<嘗試集>, *The Critical Review* 1 (1922). It should be mentioned that Liu later supported vernacular poetry.

⁷⁴ Hu Shi wrote two “Yanxiadong zashi” 煙霞洞雜詩 poems after an outing with Wang and sent them to Wang in a letter on October 1 1923; see *Hu Shi riji quanbian*, 4.59-61.

⁷⁵ Hu Shi, *Hu Shi riji quanbian*, 4.67-68 (October 7 1923).

⁷⁶ Se Yü Ying-shih, “Preface,” *SZL*, p. 30.

⁷⁷ See, e.g., “Minzu de guomin” 民族的國民, *Wang Jingwei ji*, 1.1-52.

⁷⁸ See “Wuren duiyu guojia zhi guannian” 吾人對於國家之觀念, *Lü Ou zazhi*, 4 (1 October 1916): 1-7.

⁷⁹ See “Xisheng zhi yi” 犧牲之意義, *Lü Ou zazhi*, 1 (15 August 1916): 4-5.

he disagreed with those scholars (“especially German scholars,” as he himself puts it) who regarded warfare as a means of evolution. He argued instead for mutual assistance and international equality so as to ensure positive competition.⁸⁰

As he lived in wartime Europe, Wang must have been exposed to the brand of militant nationalism prevalent in Germany. According to Ernest Gellner, modern nationalism was born as “the fusion of Herderian communalism and cult of specificity, with Darwinism as mediated by the romantic Nietzsche.” This was an explosive mixture, as “the community was to be not merely culturally, but also biologically distinctive,”⁸¹ its cultural specificity to be affirmed politically with an aggressiveness which expressed its vitality. Though this infectious brand of nationalism would later nurture Japan’s aggression, Wang appeared resistant to the Nietzschean factor. For him, the continuous existence of a national culture depended upon its adaptability but also its uniqueness – both characteristics being crucial in a peaceful competition, marked by compromise and moderation. For a nationalist, such a belief was essential to defend China against the aggression of imperial powers claiming to be as superior civilizations. The culturalist aspect in Wang’s thought, however, might have been a factor in easing his collaboration with Japan (seen as a sibling culture) in a stated common defense against Communism, whose radical anti-traditionalism was portrayed as a greater threat to Chinese civilization. As David Barrett points out, Wang after 1940

redefined Chinese nationalism as attainable only within a Great East Asian nationalism, [even though the] precise manner in which East Asian nationalism and Chinese nationalism would complement and fortify each other was never spelled out.⁸²

Whether Wang’s endorsement of Greater East Asian nationalism was sincere or strategic is hard to tell.

Coda: When Poetic Persona Became Lyric Truth

On March 19, 1940, eleven days before his collaborative regime was formally founded in Nanjing, Wang Zhaoming led a small entourage to pay respects at Sun Yat-sen’s mausoleum. It was a cold, rainy day. Two and a half years before, the KMT Central Government had abandoned this city to the rage of Japanese soldiers. Now Wang was back to work with an enemy who had no regard for any sort of limits in the massacre of his compatriots. Witnesses reported that as Wang Zhaoming read the memorial speech in front of Sun Yat-sen’s marble statue, tears streamed down his cheeks. The Wang government was founded on agony.

⁸⁰ See “Renlei gongcun zhuyi” 人類共存主義, *Wang Jingwei ji*, 2.1-18, esp. 3.

⁸¹ Ernest Gellner, *Nationalism* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), p. 70.

⁸² David P. Barrett, “The Wang Jingwei Regime,” p. 112.

Wang Zhaoming's "peace movement" was bankrupt. He overestimated his diplomatic capacity to win at the negotiation table what China could not seize on the battlefield. Without the backing of military power, his bargaining was ineffective. Some of his Japanese negotiators developed a disdain toward his weakness and wished to reserve the best peace conditions only for the "main guest," Chiang Kai-shek.⁸³ Wang had wished to curb Japanese aggression and to forestall an ultimate Communist victory, but he achieved neither. Perhaps this also explains the terms of his last testament: the only achievements in his last years that he could be proud of were his poems. They portrayed the complicated inner history of a classically educated man who had thrown himself into the crushing machine of war just to remain relevant. However accurately they depict their author's role, they are moving pieces of literature.

Even in Wang's own time, his reputation as a fine poet and his persona as a tragic hero gained him sympathetic supporters. When his admirer Zhang Jiangcai 張江裁 (1908-68) published a set of biographical accounts of Wang's life and works in 1943,⁸⁴ he introduced it with dozens of laudatory prefaces and calligraphies from cultural celebrities including Long Yusheng 龍榆生 (1902-66), Qian Zhonglian 錢仲聯 (under the name Esun 蕪孫; 1908-2003), Zhou Zuoren 周作人 (1885-1967), Yang Yunshi 楊雲史 (1875-1941), and Qi Baishi 齊白石 (1864-1957). They were from different generations and political persuasions. Many were not serving in Wang's government and their compliments at least appeared to be sincere. Qian Zhonglian went so far to compare Wang to Qu Yuan 屈原 (339?-278? BC), the paragon of patriotism, and praised his poetry as an exemplar of "truth, goodness, and beauty."⁸⁵ Zhou Zuoren further compared Wang's sacrifice to the example of Buddha feeding his body to a hungry tiger. Though he had served in Wang's government, Zhou declared that he had never met Wang in person but he was convinced of Wang's true character because he had been reading his works for more than three decades.⁸⁶

Wang's critics, however, were more skeptical of the enchantment of his poetry. In most of Wang's modern biographies, we find much unease when the biographer quotes Wang's poems to illustrate his life or thoughts, an unease that is rare, if not completely absent, in Chinese biographies of writers. Whenever possible, the biographer attempts to read against the text and impose critical evaluation, seeing Wang's poems as a cynical effort to "mix black and white" or "reverse right and

⁸³ Inukai Takeru 犬養健, *Youxiang Wang Jingwei milu* 誘降汪精衛秘錄, trans. Ren Changyi 任常毅 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1996), pp. 252-53.

⁸⁴ See n. 5.

⁸⁵ See Qian Zhonglian's preface to "Wang Jingwei xiansheng zhushu nianbiao" 汪精衛先生著述年表.

⁸⁶ See Zhou Zuoren's preface to "Wang Jingwei xiansheng gengxu meng'an shilu" 汪精衛先生庚戌蒙難實錄.

wrong.”⁸⁷ Less ideological, but similarly unfavorable, is Qian Zhongshu’s 錢鍾書 (1910-98) opinion. As a general rule, Qian cautioned:

What one says could be used to disguise: a great traitor may write words of anxiety for his nation, and an avid power-broker may write words of loftiness and transcendence.

然所言之物，可以飾偽：巨奸為憂國語，熱中人作冰雪文，是也。⁸⁸

We may wonder, when Qian said this, whether he had Wang Zhaoming in mind. Earlier in 1942, Qian had written a critical poem in regard to Wang’s poetic anthology, which ends thus:

Do not utter words of sorrow just to make pretty poems – 莫將愁苦求詩好
From a high position, what one says easily becomes prophecy.⁸⁹ 高位從來讖易成

The “great lord” (*jugong* 鉅公) in his poem could be seen as a euphemism for the “great traitor” (*jujian* 巨奸) targeted in his later work. For Qian, Wang’s “words of sorrow” are not the echo and picture of his mind (*xinsheng xinhua* 心聲心畫), but rather a manipulative disguise for Wang’s treason and thirst for power.

Whether his suspicion of Wang’s hypocrisy was just or not, Qian’s sarcastic warning that Wang’s words could become prophecy indeed came true. After Wang died in Japan, his body was carried back to China to be interred below Sun Yat-sen’s mausoleum, where he had shed tears just four years earlier. When the Nationalist Army recovered Nanjing after Japan’s surrender, soldiers secretly blew up his tomb under cover of night. The remains of Wang’s body were dug out and cremated.⁹⁰ To some observers, this victor’s crime of desecration fulfilled a prophecy in Wang’s quatrains of martyrdom:

I will preserve only my heart, my soul;
The remainder shall be burnt in a *kalpa* to ashes.⁹¹

The same images of burning and catastrophe were frequently evoked in his subsequent poems. Ironically, the ruthless victors of history helped to realize a lyric truth by making “Wang Zhaoming the person” and “Wang Jingwei the poetic persona” inseparable. In the ensuing half-century, the political taboo that both the

⁸⁷ See for example Wen Shaohua’s citation of Wang’s “Night on Board” poem, *Wang Jingwei zhuan*, p. 133.

⁸⁸ *Tan yi lu* 談藝錄 (expanded edition, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1984; 1999 reprint), 48.163.

⁸⁹ Qian Zhongshu, “Ti moushi ji” 題某氏集, *Huaiju shicun* 槐聚詩存 (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2001), p. 67.

⁹⁰ The soldiers who carried out this unauthorized act assumed that Wang’s tomb hid a large amount of treasure. They were disappointed. See Lin Kuo, *Wang Jingwei quanzhuan*, pp. 779-87.

⁹¹ Jin Xiongbai, *Wang Zhengquan de kaichang yu shouchang*, 5: 129-32.

Nationalist and the Communist governments imposed to prevent more nuanced research on Wang's collaborationist regime has made him a martyr of historiography. Overly sympathetic readings of Wang's poetry are perhaps driven by discontent. The scholars who contributed to his republished anthology took over from Wang's contemporary admirers and made poetry his redemption. In this sense, Wang has achieved "non-decay" (*buxiu* 不朽) through his words, if not through his virtues or deeds.⁹² To examine Wang Zhaoming and his poetry in full complexity, however, one must go beyond the cycle of suppression and counteraction.

⁹² On the three "imperishable things" (*buxiu*), namely the establishment of virtues (*lide* 立德), of deeds (*ligong* 立功), and of words (*liyan* 立言), see *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhengyi* (Xiang 24), in *Shisanjing zhushu*, 27.277.