Wen Yiduo's Qu Yuan and Guo Moruo's Qu Yuan: An Encounter of Three Chinese Poets

Yin, Juan

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Name: Juan Yin
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Introduction

Qu Yuan 屈原 (c.340 - 278 BCE) was a Chinese statesman, China's first named poet, and a controversial figure in Chinese culture. According to legend, Qu Yuan was a native of the state of Chu who was framed by the surrenderists of Chu for his strong opposition to the invasion of Chu by the neighboring state of Qin (Schneider 1980, 3). His loyalty and the facts that the slander led to his downfall resonated deeply among the literati and scholars of imperial China's authoritarian monarchy. Through the interpretations of different literati and politicians over the generations, the name "Qu Yuan" has gradually become a cultural symbol of special significance in China. At the beginning of the twentieth century, with the overthrow of the Qing Empire and the influence of Western culture, China's politics, society, and culture underwent radical changes, and Qu Yuan's image underwent a process of deconstruction and remodeling, evolving from a "loyal minister" to a "patriotic poet", and finally to a "people's poet". The reading comprehension of the *Chu Ci* (楚辭), a collection of poems written by poets of the Chu State during the Warring States Period (c.475 - 221 BCE) represented by Qu Yuan, has also changed dramatically.

In the evolution of Qu Yuan's image, Wen Yiduo (聞一多, 1899-1946) and Guo Moruo (郭沫若, 1892-1978) were two representative figures. Both contemporaries, they shared an overseas education background and high literary acclaim, yet approached Qu Yuan with distinctive perspectives shaped by their times and personal ideologies. They played a key role in the growing cult of Qu Yuan (Schneider 1980, 111).

Wen Yiduo's attitude toward Qu Yuan underwent a process of change: at first, he called Qu Yuan a "patriotic poet", a statement similar to Guo Moruo's attitude toward Qu Yuan; later, he wanted to dismantle Qu Yuan's inherent image and restore "the real Qu Yuan", a view similar to Hu Shi's 胡適. According to Wen Yiduo, Qu Yuan was arrogant and unruly, he did not commit suicide out of patriotism but to vent his anger (Wen 1991, 260 jia). Finally, Wen Yiduo came to his own conclusion, calling Qu Yuan a "people's poet". The change in Wen Yiduo's attitude towards Qu Yuan reflects his gradual deepening of understanding of Qu Yuan. Against the backdrop of China's resistance to Japanese aggression in the 1930s and 1940s, he finally chose to refer to Qu Yuan as a "people's poet", a choice that carried a hint of compromise.

As a writer adept at grasping the pulse of the times, Guo Moruo has always actively intervened in literary, cultural, and political trends and has even been at the forefront of

influencing the readers of the times and speaking out for those in power. Guo Moruo was fascinated by Qu Yuan and spared no effort to study him and promote his works. In his 1920 poetic drama "Xiang Lei" (湘累), he portrayed Qu Yuan as a patriot pursuing freedom, which quickly resonated with the young people of the time. Furthermore, Guo Moruo strongly supported Qu Yuan as a "national hero" and "patriotic poet", and his five-act historical drama *Qu Yuan* (屈原) caused a huge response at home and abroad, and academic research was launched in the 1930s in China. With the contribution of Guo Moruo, Qu Yuan was transformed from a "god of personality" into a "patriotic spiritual icon".

In recent years, English-language scholarship on Qu Yuan has continued to produce high-quality research works. Stephen Owen's *Reading the Li Sao* (2004) not only provides a detailed translation of *Chu Ci*'s most famous poem, "Li Sao" (離騷), but also explains the principles and reasons for the translation. David Hawkes's *Ch'u Tz'ŭ: the Songs of the South, an Ancient Chinese Anthology* (1985) has given Western readers a complete and authoritative reference translation of *Chu Ci*, he also argues that Wen Yiduo was the initiator of the cult of Qu Yuan as "China's first patriotic poet" (Hawkes 1974, 42). While most scholars in English-language scholarship have focused on Guo's poetic work *The Goddesses*, Monica Zikpi conducted an in-depth analysis of Guo Moruo's motivations and purposes for studying Qu Yuan. Zheng Yi's study argues that Guo's process of molding Qu Yuan into a "great" and "original Chinese poet" reflects Guo's desire and dilemma of translating and reshaping the sublime poetics for different societies and is a microcosm of the attempts of the modern Chinese intellectuals to translate and reshape the modernity of their cultures out of anguish and anxiety (Zheng 2004).

In Chinese academic circles, Wen Yiduo's study of Qu Yuan has attracted the attention of many scholars. The works of Li Leping, Ye Hanyun, and Sun Dan analyze the reasons for the changes in Wen Yiduo's interpretation of Qu Yuan (Li 2003, Ye 2012, Sun 2015). Yang Qingpeng believes that Wen Yiduo has his own unique and profound understanding of Qu Yuan. Of course, there is no doubt that Wen Yiduo's viewpoints are also political, as shown by the changes in his views in different political environments (Yang 2008).

However, most of the current studies focus on the vertical aspect, i.e., Wen Yiduo's and Guo Moruo's understanding of Qu Yuan and the transformation of this understanding, while the horizontal comparisons of Wen Yiduo's and Guo Moruo's research on Qu Yuan are still relatively rare. Lawrence Schneider is one of the few who have contributed. According to Schneider: "Each age has its own Qu Yuan" (Schneider 1980, 202). He believes that Qu Yuan

in Guo Moruo's works is a bound Prometheus, while Qu Yuan in Wen Yiduo's works is an unbound Prometheus. (111, 120).

The question I want to explore in this paper is: How did Wen Yiduo and Guo Moruo represent Qu Yuan in their writings over time, how do their respective images of Qu Yuan compare, and what explains the difference? This paper is based on a comparative literature review. Starting with an overview of Qu Yuan's image, this paper selects Wen Yiduo's and Guo Moruo's works from different periods of time and compares the images of Qu Yuan in the writings of the two authors as well as the influence of Qu Yuan in their poetic works. It will centrally feature a critical engagement with the English-language scholarship on Qu Yuan as represented in Wen's and Guo's writings.

After 1949, the People's Republic of China applied strict cultural censorship and unified political propaganda, the research on Wen Yiduo and Guo Moruo in mainland China had a certain political color, especially because of Guo Moruo's status as a senior party and government official of the Communist Party of China (CCP), and it was difficult to find fair and neutral research articles on them.

This paper is structured into three parts. The first part delves into the evolution of Qu Yuan's image in imperial China. Parts II and III analyze the evolving interpretations of Qu Yuan by Wen Yiduo and Guo Moruo respectively, exploring their roles in shaping Qu Yuan's image. Emphasis is placed on comparing their approaches, highlighting both similarities and differences in their writings. Ultimately, the paper concludes that labeling Qu Yuan as a "people's poet" by Wen Yiduo and Guo Moruo is a flawed assertion, while also asserting the continued practical relevance of Qu Yuan's study for modern China.

Chapter One: Qu Yuan

"Qu Yuan's interpretation" has been integral to Chinese culture for over two millennia, originating from the Han dynasty (202 BCE - 220 CE). His poetry plays a central role in the narrative of Qu Yuan (Schneider 1980, 4), offering a lens through which his story is understood (Owen 2004, 9). Despite scholarly debates over Qu Yuan's historical existence and authorship of "Li Sao", most scholars throughout history revered Qu Yuan as an exemplary figure, admiring his literary prowess and honoring his loyalty. Across generations of literati, Qu Yuan remained an enduring symbol of loyalty to the emperor until the collapse of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) in 1911.

The story of Qu Yuan

According to Sima Qian's 司馬遷 *Records of the Grand Historian* (史記) and Liu Xiang's 劉向 *Strategies of the Warring States* (戰國策), during the Han Dynasty, China was divided into seven major kingdoms, with Qin being the most powerful and consistently seeking to annex the other six kingdoms. Qu Yuan lived in Chu, one of these six kingdoms. Between 236 BCE and 221 BCE, over a span of fifteen years, King Ying Zheng 嬴政 of Qin successfully conquered and assimilated the other six kingdoms, thereby ending China's 500-year period of warlord separatism and establishing the Qin Dynasty (221 - 207 BCE) as the first unified centralized feudal dynasty in Chinese history (Sima 1959). This event was pivotal in Chinese history, marking a significant shift in the political structure of Chinese feudal society and ushering in a new era of governance. However, for the rulers and inhabitants of the six kingdoms, including Chu, this unification was a tragic and disruptive event. Qu Yuan's story is intertwined with this historical backdrop.

In the story of Qu Yuan, he is depicted as a highly educated individual from childhood, driven by ambitious aspirations to restore the State of Chu. Revered for his talent, Qu Yuan gained favor from King Huai of Chu but also faced jealousy from aristocrats who favored surrendering to Qin. Despite his loyalty to the king and Chu, Qu Yuan was eventually exiled due to slander from political rivals. Rather than seek safety elsewhere, Qu Yuan remained steadfast in Chu, urging resistance against Qin. Tragically, after King Huai's death and the Qin army's invasion of Chu's capital in 278 BCE, Qu Yuan chose to martyr himself by drowning in the Miluo River (Schneider 1980, 3).

It's important to note that there are no direct historical records from Qu Yuan's era or contemporary evaluations that confirm his existence or attribute the authorship of "Li Sao" to him. Thus, verifying Qu Yuan's historical reality and his literary contributions remains impossible based on existing evidence.

"Li Sao"

"Li Sao", often regarded as the most significant work in the *Chu Ci*, is believed to be an autobiographical poem attributed to Qu Yuan during his exile. In this poem, realism serves as the foundation while romanticism enhances its lyrical and noble protagonist (Zheng 2004, 169). The depiction of Qu Yuan in "Li Sao" thus complements his image, reflecting his personal struggles and aspirations through a blend of realism and romanticism.

"Li Sao" can be roughly divided into two parts: the first part primarily depicts the harsh reality of Qu Yuan's Chu state, detailing his personal struggles amid the conflict between his painful experiences and his lofty ideals. The second part delves into a fantastical realm, expressing Qu Yuan's melancholy, uncertainty, and contemplation of the future. Through his own words in the poem, Qu Yuan emerged as a disillusioned figure. He metaphorically compared himself to a beautiful woman who, despite her virtues, faces jealousy and slander, lamenting: "Women-throngs envied my delicate brows, scurrilous songs claimed I found lewdness good" (眾女嫉餘之蛾眉兮, 謠諑謂餘以善淫)(Owen 2004, 39-40).

"Li Sao" marked a departure from the four-character verses of the *Book of Songs* (詩經), an early collection of Chinese poetry considered the foundation of ancient Chinese poetic tradition. It introduced a new form known as Sao Ti (騷體), characterized by irregular syntax and a blend of rhyme and prose, which later became a recognized tradition. Sao Ti utilized varying sentence lengths and combined elements of both poetry and prose, imbuing it with a romantic sensibility and emotional depth (Zheng 2004, 165). The use of the particle "xi" (兮) in "Li Sao" is particularly noteworthy, serving as a hallmark of Sao Ti. This style is marked by its flexibility and versatility, juxtaposing richness with rusticity, and blending passionate expressions of grief and anger with a sense of melancholy. It not only reflects the southern Chinese flavor of Chu dialect but also preserves the melodic quality of classical poetry.

Liao Ping 廖平, a scholar from the Republic of China, raised doubts about the authorship of "Li Sao", suggesting that since *Chu Ci* was considered a branch of the *Book of Songs*, the author of "Li Sao" might not have been Qu Yuan (Liao 2008). Similarly, in English-language scholarship, Stephen Owen posited that while Qu Yuan described in Sima Qian's biography

likely existed and wrote "Li Sao", the figure depicted in the poem is more of a mythological persona than a historical reality (Owen 2004, 10). Owen further argued that in "Li Sao", Qu Yuan's moral integrity lacks specific moral content; rather, it serves as a blank canvas upon which interpreters project their own interpretations of ethics, values, and actions (13). According to Owen's perspective, any characterization of Qu Yuan is more reflective of the interpreter's perspective than historical fact (13).

Qu Yuan's image through the ages

Qu Yuan first appeared in a poem by government official Jia Yi 賈誼 around 174 BCE, where he was depicted as a man who, like Jia Yi himself, was framed by jealous officials and exiled by the emperor (Owen 2004, 3). Subsequently, during the Han Dynasty, Liu An 劉安, the Prince of Huainan, was tasked by Emperor Wu to compile a biographical note on Qu Yuan and his poem "Li Sao". Liu An's work is considered the earliest known version of the anthology and is likely an abridged form of the "Li Sao" as it is known today (Hawkes 1985, 32-33).

However, the earliest comprehensive historical account of Qu Yuan, which serves as a crucial foundation for studying his life, is found in the *Records of the Grand Historian* by Sima Qian of the Western Han Dynasty (206 BCE – 9 CE). In Sima Qian's biography of Qu Yuan, he described him as follows: "He had a wide knowledge and a strong memory, understood the principles of statecraft, and was adept at diplomatic rhetoric. Internally, he deliberated on state affairs with the king of Chu and issued commands; externally, he received guests and entertained feudal lords and princes" (Sima 1959). Through Sima Qian's account, Qu Yuan emerged as a capable minister who contributed significantly to the state of Chu. Sima Qian's portrayal of Qu Yuan was one of admiration for his abilities and loyalty to the Chu state, without elevating him to a mythical status (Hartman 1986, 352).

Later, Ban Gu 班固, the historian of the Han Dynasty and author of the *Book of Han* (漢書), held a contrasting view of Qu Yuan. While Ban Gu acknowledged Qu Yuan's literary contributions, describing them as "magnificent and elegant, and the progenitor of Ci (詞) and Fu (賦) poetry forms", he criticized Qu Yuan for "resenting the monarch, showing off his talents and promoting himself, and imprudent pursuit of advancement" (Ban 1962). In Ban Gu's perspective, Qu Yuan was portrayed as neither a loyal minister nor a patriotic figure.

However, Wang Yi 王逸, a renowned writer of the Eastern Han dynasty (25-220), elevated Qu Yuan's image to a new stature. Wang Yi remarked, "After Qu Yuan's death, loyal

subjects, literati, and wanderers read his essays 'Li Sao' and 'Nine Chapters' (九章) and were deeply saddened, their hearts filled with grief. They regarded Qu Yuan's conduct as noble and his literary style as exquisite and refined" (Wang 1967, 19-21). The "Nine Chapters" refers to a section of *Chu Ci*. Wang Yi's portrayal contributed significantly to Qu Yuan's transformation from a mere scholar to a revered figure akin to a "god of personality". Wang Yi emphasized Qu Yuan's literary achievements and praised his noble conduct and refined style, which underscored his loyalty.

Over the next several hundred years, scholars from various dynasties continued to affirm the literary prowess of Qu Yuan. Many Chinese literati expressed deep admiration for him. Su Shi 蘇軾, a literary giant of the Song dynasty (960-1279), once lamented, "The people of Chu grieve for Qu Yuan, for thousands of years, it has not stopped" (Su Shi). Li Bai 李白, a celebrated poet of the Tang dynasty (618-907), praised Qu Yuan's enduring literary legacy, stating, "Qu Yuan's poetry still competes with the sun and the moon for immortality; while the palaces and pavilions built by the king of Chu have long since disappeared" (Li Bai).

The saying that Qu Yuan was loyal to the emperor and patriotic probably originated from the historian Zhu Xi 朱熹 of the Southern Song Dynasty (1127-1279). He said in the *Annotated Preface to the Collection of Songs of Chu* (楚辭集注序): "Yuan was a human being. Although his ambitions and actions may be too mediocre to be lawful, they are all based on the sincerity of loyalty to the emperor and patriotism" (Zhu 2002). Here, Zhu Xi explicitly equates Qu Yuan's loyalty to the emperor with patriotism, emphasizing the sincerity underlying his actions and ambitions.

Later in history, Qu Yuan's image as a "loyal minister" continued to evolve and was elevated to unprecedented heights during the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing dynasties. In the late Ming Dynasty, poet Huang Wenhuan 黃文煥, in his work *Chu Ci listening to the truth*, expounded on the spirit of Qu Yuan's writing and praised his "loyalty" (Huang 2019). This was the first time Qu Yuan's life was clearly linked with the order of the selected poems, setting the tone for the textual research of Qu Yuan's life and migration process from the late Ming Dynasty to the Qing Dynasty, and had a profound influence on later generations' annotations on Qu Yuan (Chen 2006). Gong Jinghan 龔景瀚, an official of the Qing dynasty, affirmed that "Qu Zi's (referring to Qu Yuan) loyalty surpasses that of all ministers throughout history" (Gong Jinghan). These accolades illustrate how Qu Yuan came to be increasingly revered as the epitome of loyalty over successive dynastic periods in Chinese history.

In summary, traditional interpretations of Qu Yuan predominantly emphasize his "loyalty to the emperor" alongside his literary achievements. Until the Qing dynasty, Qu Yuan's image continued to be one of "loyalty to the emperor".

Chapter Two: Wen Yiduo on Qu Yuan

In 1911, with the fall of the Qing dynasty, China entered a republican era marked by the influx of various foreign ideas. This period sparked a re-evaluation of China's traditional culture, including new debates surrounding Qu Yuan's image. During this wave of intellectual ferment, Qu Yuan's portrayal evolved from that of a "loyal minister" to a "patriotic poet", and eventually to a "people's poet". Among the scholars who significantly influenced this re-examination, Wen Yiduo stands out as one of the most prominent figures. His reputation, deep knowledge, and scholarly contributions played a pivotal role in shaping the modern understanding of Qu Yuan. However, Wen Yiduo's interpretation of Qu Yuan is marked by an apparent contradiction. Initially, he called Qu Yuan a ""patriotic poet", then he agreed with Sun Cizhou's 孫次舟 characterization of Qu Yuan as a "literary jester" (Wen 1991, 245 jia), a term typically used for entertainers kept by emperors. This perspective implies a lesser status, focusing more on Qu Yuan's literary skills and entertainment value rather than his political or moral stature. However, Wen Yiduo ultimately bestowed upon Qu Yuan the title of the "people's poet", a position of utmost honor and reverence. These evolving perspectives mirrored the changing sentiments among Chinese intellectuals in the first half of the 20th century (Hsü 1958, 134).

Several factors contributed to this evolution. Firstly, Wen Yiduo sought to portray Qu Yuan primarily as a poet rather than as a political figure or sage (Yeh 2004, 33), aiming to restore a more authentic and humanistic portrayal of Qu Yuan's life and works. This approach emphasized Qu Yuan's literary achievements and his emotional resonance with the human condition, distancing him from traditional views that solely focused on his loyalty or political role. Secondly, Wen Yiduo's personal admiration for Qu Yuan played a pivotal role (Yeh 2004, 33). He was deeply moved by Qu Yuan's character, passion, and commitment, which resonated with his own poetic sensibilities and aspirations. This personal affinity likely influenced Wen Yiduo to elevate Qu Yuan to the status of a national poet.

Moreover, the historical and cultural context of Wen Yiduo's era also shaped his interpretation. During a period of significant intellectual ferment and political change in early 20th-century China, Wen Yiduo and other scholars reevaluated traditional figures like Qu Yuan in light of modern challenges and aspirations. This reevaluation sought to align Qu Yuan's legacy with contemporary notions of cultural identity and resilience.

Historical background in the Republic of China

In ancient times, the distinction between the emperor and the country was often blurred, with loyalty to the emperor seen as synonymous with loyalty to the country. This perspective prevailed until the Revolution of 1911, which politically abolished the imperial system and established the Republic of China. With the advent of modern concepts of the state, intellectuals and elites began identifying themselves as citizens rather than subjects, leading to a divergence between the notions of "emperor" and "country". Revolutionaries during this period actively pursued de-monarchization and democratization, challenging the traditional equation of royal authority with national identity (Schneider 1980, 87-89). In this evolving intellectual and political landscape, Qu Yuan inevitably became a subject of controversy. His historical legacy, previously intertwined with notions of loyalty to the monarch, now faced reinterpretation and scrutiny amidst the backdrop of modern state-building and democratic aspirations in China.

In 1919, at the Paris Peace Conference following World War I, China, despite being a victorious country, was unable to regain the rights and concessions in China that had been seized by Germany. Instead, these rights were transferred to Japan by the participating nations. When this news reached China, it triggered a wave of long-simmering nationalistic sentiments among the Chinese people. On May 4th of that year, students took to the streets to protest and demonstrate, sparking what became known as the May Fourth Movement. This movement quickly evolved into a nationwide political and cultural awakening, fueling patriotic fervor among the Chinese populace. It also created fertile ground for the introduction and eventual acceptance of communist ideology in China (Chen 2007, 1-2).

Later, on September 18, 1931, Japan initiated an aggressive war against northeastern China. Amid this national crisis, Qu Yuan's image emerged as a powerful symbol to encourage and rally the Chinese people in resisting both foreign invasion and domestic authoritarianism. Qu Yuan's story, widely known across China, resonated deeply because he hailed from the Chu State, which had faced aggression from the powerful Qin State—a historical parallel that struck a chord with Chinese people enduring Japanese invasion.

In July 1937, conflict erupted between the Chinese National Revolutionary Army and the Japanese Imperial Army near Beijing, an event known as the Marco Polo Bridge Incident, which escalated into full-scale war. As national humiliation intensified and the call for national salvation grew louder, the study of Qu Yuan and his poetry in the *Chu Ci* gained greater prominence. As a matter of fact, "Qu Yuan's patriotism" became a vital ideological and cultural

asset mobilizing anti-war sentiment and political resistance efforts for both the Nationalist Party (Kuomintang) and the CCP during this period of conflict.

In the resurgence of Qu Yuan research during the Republic of China period, two main attitudes towards Qu Yuan emerged. One perspective was skeptical, represented by scholars like Liao Ping and Hu Shi. They cast doubt on whether "Li Sao" was truly authored by Qu Yuan and questioned the attribution of *Chu Ci* solely to him, even entertaining the possibility that Qu Yuan may not have existed at all (Liao 2008). On the other hand, there was an affirmative group led by figures like Guo Moruo and Fu Baoshi 傅抱石, who celebrated Qu Yuan as a national hero and a patriotic poet. They deliberately departed from traditional interpretations by emphasizing terms like "country" instead of "the emperor" and using broader descriptors like "literati" rather than "loyal minister". This shift aimed to modernize the concept of Qu Yuan's loyalty into the idea of "patriotism". While Wen Yiduo's interpretations of Qu Yuan's legacy intersected with both schools of thought, his views did not align completely with either.

Wen Yiduo's biography

Wen Yiduo was born into a scholarly family. In 1913, he enrolled at Tsinghua School in Beijing. During the May Fourth Movement, Wen Yiduo played an active role in mobilizing Tsinghua students to join the movement (Hsü 1958, 137). In 1922, he initially went to the United States to study painting but later redirected his focus to making a significant contribution in China's educational field (Hsü 1958, 139). During this period, he published his first collection of poems, *Red Candle* (紅燭), and began a systematic study of the metrical theory of new poetry. Upon his return to China in 1925, he taught at the university and published "Dead Water" the same year, a notable work expressing his disillusionment and indignation toward contemporary China. In 1929, no longer content with being solely a poet, Wen Yiduo shifted his scholarly focus to classical Chinese literature. Initially exploring Tang poetry (唐詩), he later turned his attention to *Chu Ci*. Following the outbreak of the Anti-Japanese War six months later, Wen Yiduo began in-depth studies of *Chu Ci* and introduced a course at Tsinghua University that included the "Nine Songs" (九歌) from *Chu Ci* (Hsü 1958, 139).

With scholarly rigor, Wen Yiduo divided his study of *Chu Ci* into three main tasks: providing historical background, interpreting the meanings of the texts, and correcting textual inaccuracies (Wen 2023, 3). His significant works include *Compilation of Chu Ci* (楚辭補校), *Exegesis of Li Sao* (離騷解詁), *Exegesis of Nine Songs* (九歌解詁), and *Exegesis of Nine Chapters* (九章解詁). In addition to these academic contributions, Wen Yiduo authored a series

of influential articles on Qu Yuan and *Chu Ci*, such as "Liao Jiping on Li Sao" (廖繼平論離騷), "Qu Yuan's Questions - Respectfully Asked to Mr. Sun Cizhou" (屈原問題-質問孫次舟先生), "Miscellany of Reading Li Sao" (讀騷雜記), and "The People's Poet - Qu Yuan" (人民的詩人-屈原), among others (Hsü 1958, 139).

Wen Yiduo endeavored to present readers with a more authentic portrayal of Qu Yuan based on his identity, thoughts, and the form and content of his works such as "Li Sao". He applied innovative ideas and methodologies in the study of *Chu Ci,* significantly advancing the field and earning himself a reputation as an authority on Qu Yuan during his time. Beyond *Chu Ci*, Wen Yiduo made notable contributions to the study of ancient Chinese literature by editing and analyzing other major texts like *The Book of Changes* (易經), *The Book of Songs* (詩經), and *Zhuangzi* (莊子).

Tragically, in 1946, during the Chinese Civil War, he was assassinated in Kunming by unknown persons, likely acting at the behest of the Kuomintang, after delivering a political speech (Li 1994, 130). His untimely death marked a loss to Chinese literary scholarship and cultural discourse.

From "patriotic poet" to "literary jester " to "people's poet"

In 1925, while studying in the United States, Wen Yiduo wrote a poignant poem titled "Elegy Under the Great Wall" (長城下的哀歌), where he portrayed Qu Yuan as a "patriotic poet". During this period, China was in a state of poverty and weakness, and Wen Yiduo personally experienced the pervasive racial discrimination prevalent in the United States, which deeply affected him. According to his son Wen Lidiao 聞立雕, Wen Yiduo's encounters with discrimination and humiliation intensified his feelings of national pride and patriotism, causing him great pain and anger (Wen Lidiao 2009). These experiences abroad instilled in Wen Yiduo a profound sense of the national crisis facing China, prompting him to compose the elegy as a testament to his deep emotional connection to his homeland.

The "Great Wall" is a symbol of China. It may have played a role in defending against foreign enemies in history. There is a sentence in "Elegy Under the Great Wall" that says:

> The patriotic poet who chanted the beauty of sweet herbs! The brave man who starved to death in the Western Mountains and the brave man who sang the tragic song of Yishui river! Oh, All the Heroic Spirits in the Twenty-Four Histories! Get up, get up, please

get up - please examine our sorrow and be my cross-examination, please come and see the China of tomorrow.

(Wen 1984, 273)

The phrase "the patriotic poet who chanted the beauty of sweet herbs" refers to Qu Yuan, as in his poem "Li Sao", Qu Yuan extensively used licorice imagery to illustrate the poet's noble character. "The brave man who starved to death in the Western Mountains and the brave man who sang the tragic song of Yishui river" refer to refer to Bo Yi 伯夷, Shu Qi 叔齊 and Jing Ke 荊軻. Bo Yi and Shu Qi were from the Shang Dynasty (c.1600 - c.1046 BCE), who chose starvation over submission to the Zhou Dynasty (c.1046 - 256 BCE), symbolizing loyalty to their homeland across dynastic changes. Jing Ke, who attempted to assassinate the King of Qin to protect his homeland and died heroically, also embodies this loyalty. The "Twenty-Four Histories" refers to the authoritative historical texts compiled by various Chinese dynasties. In his poem, Wen Yiduo placed Qu Yuan on par with these famous loyal ministers and heroes, highlighting Qu Yuan's role as a patriotic figure dedicated to his Chu homeland.

Bo Yi, Shu Qi, and Jing Ke all sacrificed themselves for their country. Wen Yiduo had a reverence for death in his early days, believing it to be the ideal expression of beauty, truth, and mystery (Hsü 1958, 143). In 1922, he wrote the poem "Death" (死), included in his poetry anthology *Red Candle.* This poem emphasizes devotion and dedication, qualities embodied by Qu Yuan in his work "Li Sao"(Wen 1984, 71). It's through this lens that Wen Yiduo saw Qu Yuan's suicide as a noble act of patriotism in his early years.

Wen Yiduo's deep dive into the study of Qu Yuan led to a subtle evolution in his interpretation of Qu Yuan's image. During the 1930s-1940s, Wen Yiduo penned a series of works focused on Qu Yuan. While most scholars throughout history have relied on Sima Qian's historical records for their studies on Qu Yuan, Wen Yiduo contested the reliability of Sima Qian's portrayal. In his "Miscellaneous Notes on Reading Sao", Wen Yiduo remarked, "Han dynasty people can still see the real Qu Yuan clearly" (Wen 1935), referring to Ban Gu. It's evident that Wen Yiduo aligned with Ban Gu's perspective that Qu Yuan was "showing off his talents and promoting himself".

Furthermore, Wen Yiduo also had a new understanding of "Li Sao":

I don't believe that "Li Sao" is a book of death. Whenever I read this marvelous text, it seems to me that I can always see a graceful and beautiful man, playing the role of a "immortal", whose name is Zheng Ze (alias of Qu Yuan), and whose character is Lingjun, speaking (rather to sing), but as he spoke, the actor lost his identity as a playwright and

> reveals what is in his heart, so that his personal life, the destiny of his country, turns into lamentation and anger, spewing out to the audience like fire and paste, scorching and burned the hearts of hundreds of people - at this point probably he himself did not know whether he was acting or cursing!
>
> (Wen 1991, 256, jia)

From this we can see that Wen Yiduo had similar views to Stephen Owen. He did not think that the Qu Yuan in "Li Sao" represents the "real" Qu Yuan.

In 1933, in his article "Qu Yuan's Questions - Respectfully Asked to Mr. Sun Cizhou", Wen Yiduo affirmed Sun Cizhou's characterization of Qu Yuan as a "literary jester". However, Wen Yiduo went further to elucidate that while Qu Yuan did not fit the traditional mold of a loyal official, even if he was a slave, he maintained dignity, and his status did not preclude him from political engagement (Wen 1991, 251 jia). Wen Yiduo's explanation reveals his effort to reconcile Qu Yuan's identity with a suitable new title. He recognized that the prevailing values associated with Qu Yuan were shaped by the autocratic imperial era (Wen 1991, 256 jia), prompting him to challenge the idealized image of Qu Yuan as a sage. Despite exposing this discrepancy, Wen Yiduo's feelings were complex rather than self-satisfied.

During the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression, Wen Yiduo argued vehemently against the indifference of literati and scholars towards politics, asserting that such indifference contributed to the nation's tragic circumstances (Hsü 1958, 177). Clearly, Wen Yiduo aimed not to diminish Qu Yuan's revered image among the people. He believed Qu Yuan was essential for wartime China, emphasizing that debates over whether Qu Yuan was a "literary jester" were less significant. Instead, Wen Yiduo contended that Qu Yuan transcended his enslaved origins to become a scholar and, fundamentally, a "human being". He advocated for respecting Qu Yuan as a rebellious slave who broke societal shackles (Wen 1991, 251 jia). Furthermore, Wen Yiduo promoted interpreting Qu Yuan's poems through the lens of his personality, advocating for a deeper understanding of the poet himself.

In June 1945, Wen Yiduo published the article "The People's Poet Qu Yuan", where he argued that Qu Yuan deserved the title of "people's poet". Wen Yiduo provided four reasons to support this assertion: first, Qu Yuan's identity belongs to the people; second, his main works are accessible art forms appreciated by ordinary people; third, Qu Yuan's writings openly critique the injustices of the ruling class; and fourth, his literary prowess and actions inspire the people's spirit of resistance (Wen 1991, 259 jia).

It seems there are several points of contention regarding Wen Yiduo's characterization of Qu Yuan as the "people's poet". Firstly, Stephen Owen's observation that Qu Yuan is

portrayed more as a ruler in parts of "Li Sao" contradicts the notion that he could represent ordinary people (Owen 2004, 2). This challenges Wen Yiduo's claim that Qu Yuan's identity belongs to the people. Secondly, throughout "Li Sao", the predominant theme is Qu Yuan's personal frustrations rather than a critique of ruling class injustices. This undermines Wen Yiduo's assertion that Qu Yuan's works exposed the sins of the ruling class. Lastly, the idea that Qu Yuan's deeds inspired popular resistance seems unsubstantiated. Wen Yiduo's own conclusion that Qu Yuan died in despair contradicts the notion that his actions spurred resistance, and historical evidence linking Qu Yuan to peasant uprisings in Chu is lacking. Therefore, while Wen Yiduo argued that Qu Yuan expressed the people's anger in his poetry, what "Li Sao" primarily reflects is Qu Yuan's own feelings of sorrow and lamentation rather than a broader societal critique or call to action among the people.

Regarding Wen Yiduo's second point about Qu Yuan's engagement with folk art forms, he argued that Qu Yuan's "Nine Songs" was rooted in the ritual music used by Chu folk for religious ceremonies, indicating a strong influence of folk culture. "Nine Songs", a part of the *Chu Ci* anthology, consists of eleven chapters and is a set of sacrificial songs heavily inspired by folk traditions. The poem is rich with imagery of gods, many of which are depicted through love songs between humans and deities. Wen Yiduo had a deep appreciation for "Nine Songs", evident in his dedicated article "What is Nine Songs?" (什麼是九歌) and his creation of a large-scale musical based on the work.

However, the authorship of "Nine Songs" is highly contested. You Guoen 游國恩, another prominent *Chu Ci* scholar during the Republic of China, argued that "Nine Songs" originated from the folk and was composed by an unknown civilian poet, thus asserting that Qu Yuan, as an aristocratic poet, could not have been its author (You 1946, 76-78). This view, though marginal, was effectively silenced after 1949, as it conflicted with the image of Qu Yuan propagated by the CCP (Schneider 1980, 160). The CCP preferred a narrative that aligned Qu Yuan with folk traditions and popular sentiment, thus reinforcing the portrayal of Qu Yuan as a "people's poet". In essence, while Wen Yiduo's arguments highlighted Qu Yuan's engagement with folk forms, the contested authorship of "Nine Songs" raised questions about the extent to which Qu Yuan's works can be considered genuinely representative of folk-art traditions.

After exposing the myths surrounding Qu Yuan's image, Wen Yiduo still diligently worked to elevate Qu Yuan as a "people's hero". One significant reason for Wen Yiduo's admiration for Qu Yuan was the resonance he felt with Qu Yuan's character and passion. This connection is poignantly illustrated in Wen Yiduo's representative work, "Dead Water".

"Dead Water"

Although Wen Yiduo's masterpiece "Dead Water" does not directly depict Qu Yuan, it is profoundly influenced by him. The first line of the poem, "This is a ditch of hopeless dead backwater" (Wen 2016), carries significant meaning: it symbolizes the chaotic state of China during the warlords' melee, reflecting its semi-feudal and semi-colonial condition. The second line, "Fresh breezes can't breathe a ripple from its skin" (2016), contrasts "breeze" with "dead water", metaphorically representing fresh ideas and forces that fail to stir the stagnant, corrupt society. The third and fourth lines, "You'd better junk all your old scrap metal here or dump the leftovers of your dinner in" (2016), convey the poet's contempt and anger towards the "ditch of dead water".

Wen Yiduo employed the Bixing (比興) technique to describe the "dead water" in detail, vividly exposing the corrupt and decadent social status quo of China at that time. In the poem, Wen Yiduo used images like "jade", "peach blossom", "silk", "clouds", and "pearl", which were typically associated with beauty and brightness, to describe the filthy and dirty stagnant water. This contrast between false beauty and real ugliness served to highlight the corruption and decay of the society he critiques. The combination of imagery and emotion with a strict rhythm in "Dead Water" marks a new height in modern Chinese literature, demonstrating Wen Yiduo's mastery and innovation in poetic form (Hsü 1958, 157).

Bixing is a traditional expression technique in Chinese poetry. Wilt Idema refers to it as "unspoken presuppositions" (Idema 1989, 280). "Bi" (比) means "compare", while "Xing" (興) means "associate". This technique first appeared in the *Book of Songs*. Compared to the simpler Bixing techniques in the *Book of Songs*, Qu Yuan's "Li Sao" takes it further by imbuing plants, fish, insects, birds, beasts, wind, clouds, thunder, and lightning with life, movement, and even human will to express the poet's thoughts and feelings. For instance, Qu Yuan wrote, "I thought on things growing, on the fall of their leaves, and feared for the Beauty, her drawing toward dark". (惟草木之零落兮, 恐美人之遲暮)(Owen 2004, 23). Qu Yuan used this technique extensively to create a world of fragrant plants and beautiful women, using beauty as a metaphor for himself. Moreover, this approach employed the relationship between men and women to parallel the relationship between monarchs and ministers, and the marriage contract to symbolize the encounter between ruler and subject. While the imagery in "Li Sao" may be fictional and imaginary, the content, thoughts, and feelings it expresses are entirely realistic. This technique laid the groundwork for later poetic methods of "expressing feelings through scenery" and "expressing ambitions through objects".

Qu Yuan was extremely dissatisfied with the Chu State where he lived, and Wen Yiduo was also deeply disappointed with the China he saw in 1925. Qu Yuan used Bixing techniques to create a strange and colorful world of fragrant plants and beauties, while Wen Yiduo employed Bixing to depict a decadent and dark China. Both poets cursed their reality and expressed a strong desire to change it. Qu Yuan's line, "On and on stretched my road, long it was and far, I would go high and go low in this search that I made" (路曼曼其修远兮, 吾将上下而求索)(Owen 2004, 64), embodied this persistent quest for a better world, a sentiment that Wen Yiduo also sought to convey in his work.

The origin of Dragon Boat Festival

The Qu Yuan portrayed by Wen Yiduo was deeply influenced by the circumstances of his time, as evidenced by Wen Yiduo's perspective on the origin of the Dragon Boat Festival. The Dragon Boat Festival is one of China's important traditional cultural festivals (Schneider 1980, 7). Every year on the fifth day of the fifth month of the lunar calendar, people celebrate with customs such as dragon boat races and eating rice dumplings, combining traditions of praying for good luck and cooling off from the summer heat. There are various theories regarding the origin of the Dragon Boat Festival. Before the Republic of China, a widely circulated folk legend claimed that the festival commemorated Wu Zixu 伍子胥, a minister of the State of Wu in the late Spring and Autumn Period (770 - 476 BCE), or Cao E 曹娥, a filial daughter (Giles 1920, 759). In fact, the Dragon Boat Festival was not originally intended to commemorate Qu Yuan (Schneider 1980, 135).

Wen Yiduo maintained a pragmatic attitude towards research on Qu Yuan, which is evident in his examination of Qu Yuan's connection with the Dragon Boat Festival. In his paper "Dragon Boat Festival Examination" (端午考), Wen Yiduo explored the origin of the festival. He cited numerous classical texts to demonstrate that the ancient Wuyue people in southern China used the dragon as a totem to express their status as "sons of the dragon" and to solidify their right to protection (Wen 1991, 221-228 jia). According to Wen Yiduo, the two most important activities of the Dragon Boat Festival—eating rice dumplings and racing boats—are both related to dragon worship. Rice dumplings are meant to feed dragons, while dragon boat racing serves as an entertainment program in sacrificial ceremonies (Wen 1991, 221-228 jia).

Linking Qu Yuan with the Dragon Boat Festival was crucial in shaping his image as a "people's poet" because folk customs are closely intertwined with the lives of ordinary people. In 1941, with the support of Guo Moruo, political and cultural figures held a grand party for the

first "Poet's Festival" (詩人節) and issued the "Poet's Day Declaration" (詩人節宣言). This declaration refined the concept of "Qu Yuan's Spirit" to embody "patriotism for the country and the nation" (Nan 1948, 18). The declaration linked the commemoration of Qu Yuan with the ongoing Sino-Japanese War, emphasizing that the establishment of Poet's Day was to emulate "Qu Yuan's spirit" and to make poetry the voice of the nation (Nan 1948, 18). Guo Moruo provided significant academic support and ideological guidance for this initiative (Wang 2020). Consequently, the legend of Qu Yuan was officially endorsed by the Nationalist Government, and the concept of "Qu Yuan's patriotism" became increasingly established. Through commemorative festivals, Qu Yuan's image as the "people's poet" permeated Chinese life and gained widespread recognition, even becoming a national belief in the context of the Anti-Japanese War (Wang 2020).

In 1943, Wen Yiduo wrote an article titled "Historical Education of Dragon Boat Festival" (端午節的歷史教育), where he emphasized that the origin of the Dragon Boat Festival predates Qu Yuan. However, he expressed acceptance of contemporary use of the festival as associated with Qu Yuan. Wen Yiduo believed that preserving China's two thousand years of cultural tradition necessitates maintaining such festivals, albeit with meanings adapted to fit the modern era (Wen 1991, 239 jia). He argued, "If we still want this festival to exist, we must give it a meaning that our era needs... But for the sake of this meaning, what could be a more appropriate symbol than Qu Yuan's death?" (Wen 1991, 239 jia). Wen Yiduo's viewpoint is straightforward: while using the Dragon Boat Festival to commemorate Qu Yuan may not align with historical origins, it holds contemporary significance and serves as a symbol resonant with the needs of the modern age.

In summary, Wen Yiduo's complex portrayal of Qu Yuan reflects a nuanced evolution influenced by his literary focus, personal admiration, and the socio-cultural milieu of his time. These elements together contribute to the multifaceted understanding of Qu Yuan as both a literary figure and a symbol of national sentiment.

Chapter Three: Guo Moruo on Qu Yuan

In contrast to Wen Yiduo, who remained independent from political affiliations, Guo Moruo aligned himself with communism, shaping his portrayal of Qu Yuan out of political necessity. While both Wen Yiduo and Guo Moruo ultimately dubbed Qu Yuan a "people's poet", their motivations and approaches diverged significantly. Wen Yiduo bestowed the title upon Qu Yuan not only out of admiration for his literary prowess but also to rally Chinese morale during the war against Japan. In contrast, Guo Moruo's efforts were driven by his collaboration with the CCP's propaganda machinery, actively promoting the notion of "Qu Yuan's patriotism" to bolster political favor. Guo Moruo's advocacy led to Qu Yuan's deification, enhancing both Qu Yuan's and Guo Moruo's political standing and fame. Since the 1940s, the modern interpretation of "patriotism" has become standard in evaluating Qu Yuan, solidifying his image as a celebrated "patriotic poet".

Talks at the Yan' an Forum of Literature and Art

Following the fall of the Qing Dynasty in 1911, the Kuomintang gradually gained control over most of China. In 1921, the CCP was established, marking the beginning of its challenge to Kuomintang rule. After the end of the eight-year Anti-Japanese War, the two parties entered civil war in 1945. By 1949, the CCP emerged victorious, establishing the People's Republic of China and ending Kuomintang rule of mainland China. Throughout the protracted conflict, both on the battlefield and in the cultural sphere, "Qu Yuan's patriotism" held a prominent place in the CCP's political discourse (Zikpi 2014, 181). Within the framework of Chinese Communist propaganda, terms like "patriotic poet" and "national poet" largely supplanted earlier labels such as "loyal minister", solidifying Qu Yuan's new predominant image (Zikpi 2014, 199-200).

In 1942, Mao Zedong 毛澤東, Chairman of the Central Committee of the CCP, delivered a speech at the Yan'an Literary and Artistic Symposium, advocating that literature should serve politics (Mao 1972, 1). This speech, known as the "Yan'an Talks", emphasized the " everything that truly belongs to the masses of the people must now be led by the proletariat", and "literature and art should be integrated with the masses and the principle of literature and art serving the workers, peasants and soldiers should be established" (Mao 1972, 1). The CCP subsequently developed policies like "mass culture" and "revolutionary culture", which were shaped by these ideas. After 1949, mainland China implemented strict censorship, requiring all literary and artistic works to align with political propaganda. The CCP utilized Qu Yuan's image

to unify the masses, gradually institutionalizing and politicizing the concept of "Qu Yuan's patriotism" (Schneider 1980, 159).

Guo Moruo's biography

Guo Moruo, born into a wealthy family and educated abroad, initially pursued medicine but later shifted his focus to literature while studying in Japan. In 1921, alongside numerous translations, he published his first poetry collection, *The Goddesses* (女神). In 1927, he joined the CCP. Three years later, he wrote *Research on Ancient Chinese Society* (中國古代社會研究). He cited historical documents and applied Marxist perspectives to sociological development, thereby established the Chinese school of historical materialism, which remains influential in academic circles (Dirlik 2005, 113).

After the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, Guo Moruo held various prominent government positions. During the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), he compromised his principles to protect himself, renouncing his earlier works and engaging in sycophantic behavior toward the ruling regime. Consequently, he was criticized for lacking integrity by many intellectuals of his era (Hu 1987, 278).

Guo Moruo enthusiastically responded to Mao's call to mobilize the masses through art, and Qu Yuan figured prominently in his efforts (Zikpi 2014, 181). In the decades surrounding the founding of the People's Republic of China, Guo Moruo employed a diverse array of genres—such as ancient and new poems, modern translations of ancient works, novels, scholarly essays, dramas, and reportage—to craft a nuanced narrative of Qu Yuan. Beginning as early as 1935, Guo Moruo conducted extensive research on Qu Yuan's life, works, art, and philosophy. He published the monograph *Qu Yuan* (屈原), and later wrote "Qu Yuan's Era" (屈原時代) and "Qu Yuan's Thoughts" (屈原思想). In 1942, Guo Moruo authored the comprehensive study "Research on Qu Yuan" (屈原研究), delving into Qu Yuan's life experiences, literary contributions, the historical context of his era, and his philosophical insights, systematically shaping his interpretation of Qu Yuan's image.

In addition, Guo Moruo authored more than ten articles, including "About Qu Yuan" (關於屈原), "Revolutionary Poet Qu Yuan" (革命詩人屈原), "Qu Yuan Will Not Be a Court Jester" (屈原不是文化弄臣), "People's Poet Qu Yuan" (人民詩人屈原), "A Brief Introduction to Qu Yuan" (屈原簡介), and "The Great Patriotic Poet - Qu Yuan" (偉大的愛國詩人屈原).

After 1949, as Guo Moruo's reputation grew, his writings, including these nationalist explanatory texts, were constantly edited and published, exerting considerable influence. For example, referring to Qu Yuan as a "patriotic poet" became increasingly common. Through this process, Guo Moruo gradually became a leading authority on Qu Yuan's interpretation. In 1953, Guo Moruo, as Minister of Culture, led a delegation from the People's Republic of China to the World Peace Council. At this meeting, Qu Yuan, as a "patriotic poet" and the only Chinese, was chosen as one of the world's four most famous cultural figures, which laid the foundation for Qu Yuan's cultural status in the following half century and even today (Schneider 1980 161).

From "Xiang Lei" to five-act play "Qu Yuan"

Like Wen Yiduo, Guo Moruo also depicted Qu Yuan through a process of evolution. Guo Moruo wrote two plays centered on Qu Yuan: "Xiang Lei" (1920) and "Qu Yuan" (1942). These plays presented two entirely different images of Qu Yuan, reflecting the distinct historical contexts in which they were written. While the transformation of Qu Yuan's image in Wen Yiduo's writings aimed to resonate with the theme of the War of Resistance, the changes in Guo Moruo's portrayal of Qu Yuan were more aligned with the CCP's utilization of Qu Yuan's symbolism (Zikpi 2014, 199).

At the end of 1920, Guo Moruo wrote the poetic drama "Xiang Lei", featuring Qu Yuan as the protagonist. "Xiang Lei" is a one-act play with a simple plot: Qu Yuan and his sister, Nu Yan, are traveling by boat through Dongting Lake (the source of the Miluo River, where Qu Yuan is said to have thrown himself to death). Suddenly, they hear singing and the sound of a flute. The boatman explains that, according to legend, the music comes from the concubines of Emperor Shun (one of China's earliest legendary emperors). Qu Yuan declares that he is Emperor Shun and that the women are awaiting his return. Nu Yan, distressed, remarks that he is speaking nonsense again. Qu Yuan then delivers two long monologues expressing his fervor. As the singing resumes, Qu Yuan, Nu Yan, and the boatman are all moved to tears. Qu Yuan throws a lotus pendant into the lake as a gift to the goddesses. The old man punts the boat forward, and the story concludes (Guo 2001, 25-27).

Such a simple story resonated with the young people of the time, inviting analysis of the ideological values Guo Moruo expressed in this play and the social environment of that era. While studying medicine in Japan, Guo Moruo was exposed to a wealth of European and American literature and was deeply influenced by liberalism. According to Monica Zikpi, Qu Yuan in "Xiang Lei" represents Guo Moruo's fusion of Western aesthetic values and

individualism, which he encountered and admired, with the Chinese traditions he had always cherished (Zikpi 2014, 180).

In "Xiang Lei", Guo Moruo portrayed Qu Yuan as a "human being" who pursued freedom and individual emancipation, aligning with the ideological desires of young people after the May Fourth Movement. At the end of "Xiang Lei", the protagonist exclaims: "Oh, destruction! Destroyed! I welcome you! I welcome you! I have no hope now. I stand in front of the door of destruction, just waiting for the god of death to open the door. I want to go to that endless world!" (Guo 2001, 25-26). Reflecting on his creative state of mind, Guo Moruo stated: "I truly compare myself to Qu Yuan. 'Xiang Lei,' which I wrote that year, was my own voice. What Qu Yuan says there are entirely my own genuine feelings" (Guo 2001, 96-97). Guo Moruo fused his personal emotions with the dissatisfaction and grievances of the May Fourth youth, creating a May Fourth version of Qu Yuan. In doing so, "Xiang Lei" passionately expresses the youth's discontent with the status quo and their aspiration to use literature to reconstruct a new world. The early Qu Yuan in Guo Moruo's writings had not yet become a symbol of Marxist unity, but he was undoubtedly revolutionary (Zikpi 2014, 179).

"Xiang Lei" helped Guo Moruo gain a reputation, but he himself did not initially regard Qu Yuan as a figure worthy of respect. In 1926, during the Kuomintang's Northern Expedition to unify China after the fall of the Qing Dynasty, Guo Moruo accompanied the Northern Expeditionary Army through the Miluo River, where Qu Yuan had famously committed suicide. Guo Moruo wrote a poem reflecting on this journey: "The place where Qu Zi (屈子, referring to Qu Yuan) was chanting, I have passed by on horseback today" (Guo 1926). At that time, Guo Moruo, brimming with enthusiasm, viewed Qu Yuan's suicide with sarcasm, seeing him as a disillusioned man who ended his life in despair because his talents were not recognized. This perspective starkly contrasted with the later portrayal of Qu Yuan as a great "patriotic poet" and "national poet".

Years later, in 1941, Guo Moruo redefined Qu Yuan's death in a speech at the Poet's Day Conference: "The great national poet Qu Yuan...his death was not due to complaints and depression, nor was it a passive suicide, but he died calmly with a noble spirit of martyrdom for his country!" (Guo 1942, 9). By this time, Guo Moruo had abandoned his earlier mocking tone, now presenting Qu Yuan as a "national poet" who sacrificed his life for his country. This shift in interpretation marked a significant change in how Qu Yuan's legacy was perceived and utilized for nationalistic purposes.

As Shen Congwen 沈從文, one of modern China's greatest writers, observed: "He [Guo Moruo] saw the changes in the times and knew how to keep himself ahead of the times in this change, so he did so" (Shen 1936). In the 1930s, amidst a surge of anti-Japanese sentiment and nationalistic fervor, Qu Yuan's image as a defiant patriot became highly sought after. Sensing this enthusiasm, Guo Moruo began to delve deeply into the study of Qu Yuan, significantly altering his understanding of the poet. In 1934, Guo refuted the "denial theory" of Qu Yuan posited by Liao Ping and Hu Shi, arguing that their critiques, while seemingly sharp at first glance, did not hold up under closer scrutiny (Guo 1952, 8). He even verified the dates of Qu Yuan's birth and death to affirm "Qu Yuan's existence" (Guo 1952, 1). Furthermore, Guo claimed that "Li Sao" was written by Qu Yuan after his true exile, identifying it as his latest and most mature work (Guo 1952, 26).

In contrast to Wen Yiduo's agreement with Ban Gu, Guo Moruo argued that Ban Gu did not understand Qu Yuan at all. According to Guo, Ban Gu's criticism of Qu Yuan for "showing off his talents, promoting himself, and complaining about his superiors" only exposed Ban Gu's own pitiful nature (Guo 1952, 60). This stance underscored Guo Moruo's effort to redefine Qu Yuan in a manner that resonated with the political and cultural sentiments of his time.

In 1942, Guo Moruo wrote a five-act play titled "Qu Yuan". This drama, based on the *Records of the Grand Historian* and *Strategies of the Warring States*, and has been substantially adapted. "Qu Yuan" portrays the story of the Queen of Chu colluding with the state of Qin, which aimed to annex Chu, to frame Qu Yuan. King Huai of Chu, believing the Queen's deceit, surrendered to Qin and imprisoned Qu Yuan. Following this, Qu Yuan's disciple, Song Yu, defected to the Queen of Chu. In a turn of events, the palace maid Chanjuan and the palace guards rescued Qu Yuan. Tragically, Chanjuan accidentally drank poisoned wine and died during the rescue (Guo 1946, 108).

The 1942 drama undoubtedly showcased Qu Yuan's fervent patriotism, aiming to inspire the audience to oppose Japan (Zikpi 2014, 183). Guo Moruo's portrayal emphasizes Qu Yuan's patriotism, deliberately downplaying his loyalty to the emperor. Unlike the mixed feelings of love and hate toward the monarch in "Li Sao", Qu Yuan in the play conveys a heightened sense of crisis for the country and its people. Explaining his motivation for creating "Qu Yuan", Guo Moruo noted that during that time, "the Communist Party of China, representing the power of the people, was under blockade in northern Shaanxi..., so I resurrected the anger of this era in Qu Yuan's era" (Guo 1982, 250). The intention of using theater to serve political purposes is evident.

However, Guo Moruo's 1942 version of "Qu Yuan" exhibits notable logical inconsistencies. In this play, Qu Yuan said: "Although I'm not happy about their stupidity, I love their stupidity. ...What do you think of me? Should I learn to be a farmer? I can't get a hoe. Should I go abroad? I can't bear to abandon Chu State" (Guo 2001, 135). Qu Yuan expressed disdain for the ignorance of the people and clearly states his inability to adopt the role of a farmer. This contrasts with the "class solidarity" (階級團結) advocated by the CCP. This obvious logical error in the play reflects Guo Moruo's forcing Qu Yuan to the side of the commoners while forgetting to change the tone of Qu Yuan's aristocratic nature.

This inconsistency and ambiguity in Guo Moruo's portrayal of Qu Yuan are not confined to one play; rather, they permeate his other works as well. In his *Modern translation of Qu Yuan's Fu* (屈原賦今譯), we can see that Guo emphasized "popularity" in his translation of the "Nine Songs", while his translations of the "Li Sao" and the "Nine Chapters" faithfully expressed Qu Yuan's loneliness as a lyric poet. These two approaches are discordant, making it challenging for readers to reconcile them and thereby diminishing the credibility of his interpretations.

Examining Guo Moruo's interpretation of Qu Yuan reveals a pattern of adaptation to the prevailing needs of the times. During the May Fourth Movement (1919), when the masses sought individual liberation and valued romanticism and lyricism, Guo Moruo's portrayal of Qu Yuan in "Xiang Lei" emphasized his personal emotions and artistic expression. However, during the Anti-Japanese War (1937-1945), Guo Moruo shifted to depicting Qu Yuan as a "great national poet", highlighting his patriotic qualities. Qu Yuan's suicide was reinterpreted not as an act of "misanthropy" with its previously negative connotations, but as a "silent sacrifice" inspired by "sublime martyrdom".

The Goddesses

Around the time of the May Fourth Movement, a New Poetry Movement (新詩運動) emerged in China, characterized by the shift of scholars to writing poetry in vernacular Chinese. Until the end of the Qing Dynasty, classical Chinese was the common written language. Compared with classical Chinese, vernacular Chinese is easier to understand. This modern Chinese poetry featured free form, eschewing traditional rhythms, and was deeply influenced by Western poetry. Wen Yiduo and Guo Moruo were key figures in the foundation of modern Chinese poetry, though their theories and styles were markedly different. Wen Yiduo aimed for structural precision and aesthetic harmony in his poems, favoring subtle emotional expression

over overt declarations. In contrast, Guo Moruo advocated for an improvisational approach to poetry, prioritizing raw emotion and vivid expression.

In terms of the vibrancy and emotional intensity of his poetry, Guo Moruo's work aligns closely with Qu Yuan's. While the similarities and differences between Wen Yiduo and Guo Moruo's new poetry are not the primary focus of this paper, it is worth noting their distinct approaches. Having discussed Wen Yiduo's "Dead Water" in the previous chapter, I will now turn to Guo Moruo's collection *The Goddesses* to explore the influence of Qu Yuan on his modern poetry.

The Goddesses, a collection of poems and prose prefaces written by Guo Moruo while he was studying in Japan, is recognized as a pioneering work in the new poetry revolution and is considered a monumental piece. This collection is viewed as the embodiment of the May Fourth spirit, celebrating revolutionaries and iconoclasts, and is suffused with youthful hope for revival (Zheng 2004, 162). In *The Goddesses*, Guo Moruo employed mythological themes and symbolic techniques to reflect contemporary reality, a method that is reminiscent of Qu Yuan's "Li Sao". In *The Goddesses*, Guo Moruo cleverly and aptly selected images from ancient myths, historical stories, and personified natural scenery to convey his feelings. The choice of these images was not only appropriate and novel but also consistent with the emotional content he sought to express. Elements such as mountains, oceans, the sun, the moon, stars, wind, clouds, thunder, and lightning were used metaphorically to convey a range of sentiments. This approach mirrored the techniques found in "Li Sao", where Qu Yuan utilized mythological references and rich natural imagery to explore personal and political turmoil.

In *The Goddesses*, the poem "Phoenix Nirvana"(鳳凰磐涅) served as a profound example of Guo Moruo's self-expression, echoing the themes and techniques found in Qu Yuan's "Li Sao". The phoenix in "Phoenix Nirvana" symbolized the poet himself, representing a journey of destruction and rebirth. This metaphor paralleled Qu Yuan's self-description as "vanilla beauty" in "Li Sao", where Qu Yuan used fragrant plants and flowers to symbolize his own virtues and integrity. The technique of Bixing is employed in "Phoenix Nirvana". The phoenixes served as a metaphor for the poet's own feelings and experiences, particularly the act of self-immolation as a form of resistance and a break from the old world.

In "Heavenly Dog" (天狗), another prominent poem in Guo Moruo's collection *The Goddesses*, the poet employed the metaphor of the "Heavenly Dog" to convey a powerful image of rebellion and dissatisfaction with the status quo. This poem, much like "Phoenix Nirvana", demonstrated the influence of Qu Yuan's "Li Sao" in both thematic content and stylistic

approach, using the Bixing technique to draw vivid parallels between the poet's inner world and the natural or mythological elements he described.

The Goddesses stands as a testament to Guo Moruo's innovative use of mythological and natural imagery to express revolutionary ideals. His work not only reflects the influence of Qu Yuan's "Li Sao" but also represents a significant evolution in Chinese poetry, aligning with the cultural and ideological shifts of the May Fourth Movement. However, Wen Yiduo believed that Guo Moruo's *The Goddesses* imitates the West too much and lacks Chinese characteristics (Hsü 1958, 153).

The Affinity with the people

If Wen Yiduo called Qu Yuan a "people's poet" because of Qu Yuan's character of not bowing down to the powerful, then Guo Moruo called Qu Yuan a "people's poet" because Guo Moruo held high the banner of the Communist Party and wanted to unite the masses (Zikpi 2014, 181). In the propaganda of the CCP, the CCP was the voice of the people, their army was the "people's army" (人民軍隊), and the country was the people's country. As a patriotic figure, Qu Yuan was naturally "the people's Qu Yuan". But Qu Yuan's air of detachment from the masses and exalted speech and behavior obviously did not meet the political needs.

The term "people's poet" focus on Qu Yuan's embodiment of "affinity with the people" (人民性). Schneider uses "populism" and "popular quality" to elucidate this concept (Schneider 1980, 168), yet an exact English translation remains elusive. I interpret this term as reflecting a connection with the common people, in contrast to glorifying the aristocracy and the ruling class.

To enhance the "affinity with the people" of Qu Yuan's image, Guo Moruo created a series of characters that belong to the "people" in the five-act drama "Qu Yuan", such as Qu Yuan's maid, fisherman and guards, which did not exist at all in the *Records of the Grand Historian* or *Strategies of the Warring States*. In the play, they were impressed by Qu Yuan's personal charm and still firmly believed in him when Qu Yuan was framed and ostracized. Therefore, Guo Moruo created the phenomenon that Qu Yuan was loved by the people.

Moreover, compared with "Xiang Lei", Qu Yuan has changed his social class in this five-act play, and he has become a friend of common people (Zikpi 2014, 182). In the play, Qu Yuan is highlighted through his maid Chanjuan. Chanjuan said many times: "You killed our master. You know what a loss it is to our Chu country and what a loss it is to our people! There

is only one sun in the sky, and you shot it down" (Guo 1946, 108). Chanjuan represented the people at the bottom who admire Qu Yuan, who was the hope of Chu State.

What is more, to curry favor with the CCP, Guo Moruo not only depicted Qu Yuan as a "people's poet" but even as a "proletarian worker", because the CCP claimed itself to be the "vanguard of the proletariat". In 1953, it was Guo Moruo himself who once again and significantly revised the script of "Qu Yuan". The original version only expressed Qu Yuan's exile in the north, but the new version allowed the protagonist to volunteer to become a "proletarian worker". To emphasize Qu Yuan's "affinity with the people", Guo Moruo changed the ending to Qu Yuan's statement: "I am determined to join the ranks of the people in the north and become a farmer cultivating the fields" (Guo 1953, 132-135). Therefore, Qu Yuan shed his aristocratic garb and transformed himself into a peasant.

Furthermore, Guo Moruo appeared to have deliberately misinterpreted the words to assert that "Qu Yuan loved the people". One of Guo Moruo's arguments highlighting Qu Yuan's concern for people's lives comes from a line in "Li Sao": "Long did I sigh and wipe away tears, sad that men's lives have so many hardships"(長太息以掩涕兮, 哀民生之多艱) (Owen 2004, 38). Stephen Owen translated the word "min" (民) as "men". According to Owen, Qu Yuan's concern encompassed the lives of "men", including everybody not solely the common people or masses.

Wen Yiduo also supported translating "min" as "men". In his commentary "Interpretation of Li Sao" (離騷解讀), he argued that the word "min" should indeed be understood as "men", citing other verses in the poem where "min" appeared (Wen 1991, 291 jia). There are six sentences in "Li Sao" where "min" is used and translating it as "men" makes sense in all of them.

In his "Li Sao" translated into Modern Chinese in 1938, Guo Moruo rendered the line as: "I pity the suffering I have suffered in this world, and I can't help but shed tears with a long sigh"(Guo 1952, 167). In this translation, Guo Moruo interpreted "min" as "I". However, in 1953, Guo Moruo further revised the sentence to: "I am pitying how hard the people's life is, and I sigh deeply and can't help but shed tears of snow" (Guo 1953, 94-95). Here, Guo Moruo changed his translation from "I (Qu Yuan) pitied his own life" to "I (Qu Yuan) pitied the people's life".

The changes in Guo Moruo's translation illustrated his strong emphasis on aligning Qu Yuan's literary thoughts with political correctness. Through the changes in Guo Moruo's translation, Qu Yuan's focus in "Li Sao" shifted from himself to the lives of people. Ironically,

to make sense, Guo Moruo had to use "I" or "my" instead of "people" in other sentences in his translation of "Li Sao". For example: "I hate you, King. You are so ridiculous. You always refuse to understand and appreciate my heart" (怨靈修之浩蕩兮，終不察夫民心)(Guo 1953, 95).

Fearing that others would question Qu Yuan's status as a "people's poet", Guo Moruo further explained that Qu Yuan cared about the people and was on the same side as the people:

> His thoughts of not forgetting the people's livelihood are inseparable from his thoughts of never forgetting the kingdom. The reason why he wanted to never forget his kingdom was to think about how to reduce hardships in people's livelihood and avoid being separated.
>
> (Guo 1943, 125-126)

This passage is superfluous. He changed the explanation and translation of the words to defend Qu Yuan and emphasized that Qu Yuan was the "people's poet".

In response to Mao Zedong's Yan'an talks emphasizing that "our literary and artistic workers must speak in the language of the masses" (Mao, 1942), Guo Moruo undertook the innovative task of translating "Nine Songs" from ancient Chinese into modern Chinese ballads (Zikpi 2014, 184). This approach was groundbreaking, showcasing Guo Moruo's exceptional talent. His version became more accessible and engaging, resonating widely with readers. Through this original translation effort, Guo Moruo effectively forged a strong connection between Qu Yuan and "the people", transforming *Chu Ci* from a niche, scholarly research material into a narrative that resonated with the everyday lives of ordinary people (Zikpi 2014, 184). This transformation was pivotal in establishing Qu Yuan as a "people's poet".

However, Guo Moruo's portrayal of Qu Yuan's "affinity with the people" is not consistent in his writings, as he struggled to reconcile Qu Yuan's flamboyant individuality and recurring themes of loneliness and sadness in his poetry. In the 1953 edition of the *Modern translation of Qu Yuan's Fu*, in "Nine Chapters" translated by Guo Moruo, we encounter lines such as: "Watery snow was falling at the end of the world, thick clouds were covering the sky, and poor me was living an unpleasant life, escaping alone in such a mountain. I cannot change my ambition and go with the flow; therefore, I should be sad and suffer without dying" (Guo 1953, 128). Such expressions of melancholy and isolation are pervasive throughout Guo Moruo's translations of *Chu Ci*, which are at odds with the "affinity with the people" he emphasized. Despite Guo Moruo's efforts to interpret certain chapters of *Chu Ci* as ballads to

make Qu Yuan more accessible to the public, the portrayal of Qu Yuan as a "people's poet" remains unconvincing.

In short, as the image of Qu Yuan became crucial for the CCP to unify the masses and solidify its rule, Guo Moruo's portrayal of Qu Yuan consistently aligned with this agenda (Zikpi 2014, 182). While he revitalized ancient culture, ensuring Qu Yuan maintained cultural relevance in post-1949 China, his interpretations often distorted the texts and diluted the persuasive power of Qu Yuan's true image.

Conclusion

The story of Qu Yuan holds significant cultural and political implications in China, particularly during the Republic of China era, where his image evolved from one of "loyalty to the emperor" to that of a "patriotic poet", eventually solidifying as a "people's poet", thanks in large part to the influence of two literary giants: Wen Yiduo and Guo Moruo.

Wen Yiduo's and Guo Moruo's interpretations of Qu Yuan have both similarities and differences, reflecting their different purposes in engaging with Qu Yuan, and their different personalities. They both admired Qu Yuan greatly, and their poetic works were profoundly influenced by him. Wen Yiduo, driven by patriotic fervor and a deep affinity for traditional Chinese culture, revered Qu Yuan for his moral integrity and steadfast defiance against corruption. His portrayal emphasized Qu Yuan's individualistic courage, resonating with the ideals of intellectual independence and moral clarity championed during the May Fourth Movement.

In contrast, Guo Moruo's interpretation of Qu Yuan was more politically oriented. Initially advocating for personality liberation during the May Fourth period, he later emphasized Qu Yuan as a "patriotic poet" in the 1930s and subsequently highlighted his role as a unifying figure for the masses under the Communist Party's narrative after 1942. Guo Moruo's flexibility in aligning with political agendas led to a portrayal of Qu Yuan that served broader revolutionary and nationalist sentiments.

The enduring relevance of Qu Yuan in contemporary China underscores his symbolic importance, particularly in nationalist discourse promoted by the Communist Party. This highlights a continual tension between political agendas and intellectual integrity within Chinese cultural narratives. Furthermore, academic discourse on the Republic of China period faces challenges within mainland China due to cultural censorship, contrasting sharply with the interest of overseas scholars who delve into "Li Sao" and question the authenticity of Qu Yuan's image. This disparity underscores the ongoing need for rigorous scholarly exploration to uncover deeper truths beyond political rhetoric.

In conclusion, the interpretations of Qu Yuan by Wen Yiduo and Guo Moruo provide a lens into the cultural and political dynamics of their era. Their divergent portrayals reflect not only their individual perspectives and scholarly pursuits but also broader shifts in Chinese intellectual and literary discourse, urging continued critical examination to illuminate the complexities of Qu Yuan's cultural legacy.

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