

Chapter 58

wén yún nán yuán yǎ jí yǒu gǎn jì liè zuò
闻云南园雅集有感，寄列座

zhū jūn zǐ
诸君子

其一

yuè lìng yóu cún shāng yǒng zhōng
月令犹存觞咏中，

fú chí dà yǎ zhàng zhū gōng
扶持大雅仗诸公。

cūi shī qǐ dài jīn xiāo yǔ
催诗岂待今宵雨？

4 xiū xì yáo zhuī liù dài fēng
修禊遥追六代风。

shí yàn jīng tiān chéng hào jié
石焰惊天呈浩劫，

jīn shēng zhì dì zhèn qún lóng
金声掷地振群聋。

zǔ lóng xiū bō kēng huī huǒ
祖龙休拨坑灰火，

8 wú dào chángchéng yǒu xué gōng
吾道长城有学宫！

To the Yunnan Garden Gathering of the Literati

Feelings Upon Hearing the News of the Yunnan
Garden Gathering of the Literati, Addressed to
the Assembly of Scholars

Verse 1

- Our literary heritage is preserved through wine and song.
Guardians of the Book of Poetry are you, noble Sirs!
Why wait till the storm breaks out to chant your poem?
- 4 To exorcise evil, you can learn from our distant ancient past.
A meteorite explodes across the sky; calamity has befallen us.
Your clarion calls awake the people, muddled and benumbed.
Emperor Qin, desist! Burn not the books, bury no more
scholars.
- 8 The protective Great Wall of our Chinese culture, Nantah
stands.

Verse 2

- The Gathering at Orchid Pavilion is a day long gone,
By the lake, they gathered to write and sing "Yonghe Spring".
The tradition of that bygone day will live a thousand years;
- 4 The Gathering today evokes many a hundred new feelings.
The wine cups upon the winding stream are now filled
with tears;

其二

yǎ jí lán tíng jì yǐ chén ,
雅 集 兰 亭 迹 已 陈 ，

lín chí yóu xiě yǒng hé chūn 。
临 池 犹 写 永 和 春 。

dāng nián jiā huà qiān qiū zài ,
当 年 佳 话 千 秋 在 ，

4 cǐ rì qīng yóu bǎi gǎn xīn 。
此 日 清 游 百 感 新 。

qū shuǐ shāng liú wéi yǐn lèi ,
曲 水 觞 流 惟 饮 泪 ，

mào lín fū guò jìn wéi xīn 。
茂 林 斧 过 尽 为 薪 。

bù kān chóng yì shān yīn dào ,
不 堪 重 忆 山 阴 道 ，

8 dào shàng nán féng bó zuì rén 。
道 上 难 逢 薄 醉 人 。

Once lush forests, swept by the axe, become mere wood to burn.

Painful to recall the walk to the Orchid Pavilion that happy day

- 8 For you will not meet one happy soul along the same old way.

Paraphrase

Verse 1

L1: The spirit of the Yueling chapter in Liji continues to be preserved in our culture of wine and poetry.

L2: We rely on you noble Sirs to preserve the purity of our Chinese heritage (*Book of Poetry*).

L3: Why do you need to wait till you confront a political upheaval (storm) before expressing your will in poetry?

L4: To exorcise evil, you can learn from our distant ancient past.

L5: A meteorite has exploded across the sky, calamity has befallen us.

L6: Your clarion calls will awaken those already muddled and benumbed.

L7: Emperor Qin, desist! Burn not the books, bury no more scholars.

L8: We have Nantah as our Great Wall to protect the great heritage of our Chinese culture.

Verse 2

L1: The Gathering at Orchid Pavilion is a day long gone,

L2: They had gathered by the lakeside to write and recite the song of "Yonghe Spring".

L3: However, the tradition of the Orchid Pavilion Gathering has lived on for a thousand years.

L4: But the Gathering today evokes in us many new and different feelings.

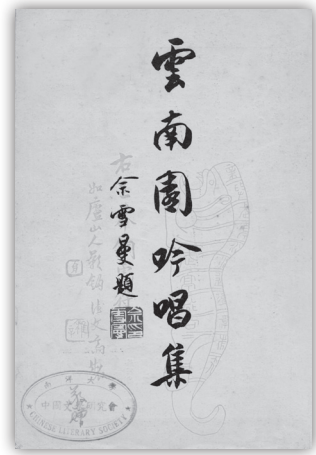
- L5: We continue to place the wine cups in the flowing stream, but the cups are filled with bitter tears.
- L6: The heritage of our lush green forests are all cut down and turned into mere firewood for burning.
- L7: It is painful to recall that breezy day with people strolling happily along the path to the Orchid Pavilion.
- L8: Along this same path today, it will be difficult to meet anyone who is, perhaps in a mild stupor, happy as those who had once gathered at Orchid Pavilion.

Background

Summary

The poem is clearly titled “Addressed to the Assembly of Scholars”. This assembly of scholars refers to the professors and students of Chinese Language and Literature at Nantah. The poem was written for the publication, *Yunnan Garden Anthology of Poems* 《云南园吟唱集》, in connection with the University Week (大学周) which began on 30 March 1960, as part of the celebration of the first convocation of Nantah held on 2 April 1960. We met the editor Mr Huang Ying Liang (黄应良) some ten years ago. He was a final year student at Nantah in 1960 and remembered that most of the poems were received only after the convocation, which explains why the publication was ready only in July 1960, several months after the exhibition.

This is one of Father’s last compositions before he died on 6 June 1960. It was not until some time after his death that



The front cover of *Yunnan Garden Anthology of Poems* 《云南园吟唱集》, a collection of Chinese classical poems published by the Chinese Literary Society of “Nantah” (Nanyang University) sometime after July 1960. Qing Shan’s poem appeared on page 7 of the publication.

the publication in which the poem appeared was printed and a copy mailed to our family. Father never saw this poem in print.

Nantah

Not long after the Communists took over mainland China in 1949, Nantah was founded to cater for the large numbers of Chinese high school students graduating each year in Malaya and Singapore who would otherwise have to go to Taiwan or Hong Kong for their tertiary education in Chinese. Nantah, thus, became an overseas centre of learning for Chinese studies and culture.

During Nantah's fund-raising campaign throughout Singapore and peninsula Malaya in the 1950s, thousands of ordinary Chinese, from the wealthy businessmen to the poor trishaw riders contributed generously. Mother's tailoring school held



The arch in the garden of the former Nanyang University. It is a replica erected in 1995. The original arch still stands in its original position nearby, now by the side of a public road.



The garden in the former Nanyang University.
*"The Gathering at Orchid Pavilion is a day long gone.
By the lake, they gathered to write and sing 'Yonghe Spring'."*

The Library of the former Nanyang University (Nantah).
*"Emperor Qin, desist! Burn not the books, bury no more scholars.
The protective Great Wall of our Chinese culture, Nantah stands."*



a charity sale of clothing and the proceeds were donated to Nantah's building fund. Apart from this very remote connection, Father actually had no other connection with Nantah.

Our maternal uncle Wang Guang Guo 王光国 probably knew Prof She Xue Man 佘雪曼 (1907–1993) who was then the Head of the Chinese Department in Nantah. Several prominent poets from Ipoh also contributed to the Nantah magazine. Prof She appears better known as a painter and calligrapher than as a poet.

Appreciation

In writing this poem for the Chinese scholars of Nantah for their special literary gathering, Qing Shan refers to their gathering as *xiū xì* 修禊. It was an ancient tradition in China for people to go for an outing by the water, during the third day of the third lunar calendar month, where they would enjoy themselves at a picnic, take in the orchids, and rid themselves of any bad luck. (The day of Nantah's first convocation ceremony 2 April 1960 fell on the seventh day of the third lunar calendar month.) It was at such an outing some 1,600 years ago that the famous calligrapher Wang Xi Zi (王羲之, 303–361) once gathered his literary friends at the Orchid Pavilion (Lan Ting 兰亭). By alluding to the "Orchid Pavilion Gathering of the Literati" (兰亭雅集) in Verse 1 Line 1, Qing Shan shows great respect to the scholars gathered at Nantah.

The poem reminds them not to forget the founding purpose of the university, which is the preservation of Chinese culture, "Guardians of the Book of Poetry (Chinese heritage) are you, noble Sirs!" says the poem (Verse 1 Line 2). The righteous call to the scholars to stand firm in the face of the evil forces is echoed in Verse 1 Line 8: "The protective Great Wall of our Chinese culture, Nantah stands (南大 Nanyang University)." These are powerful words of defiance.

Verse 2 Line 5 is rather interesting: “Once lush forests, swept by the axe, become mere wood to burn 茂林斧过尽为薪”. On the face of it, this is another of Qing Shan’s clever puns. Firstly, a person without education is transformed through learning into someone useful, as befitting the role of Nantah as a university. Secondly, Nantah stands on land that was once covered by a rubber estate which had been cleared to build the university. The late Dr Pan Shou was closely connected with the early history of Nantah. When he first read this poem about 14 years ago he exclaimed, “The line is saying much more than that! The reference is to the Da Zheng Feng (大整风) movement persecution of the literati in mainland China in the mid-1950s. This was followed by the Great Leap Forward, the collectivisation movement and the failed attempt to promote (backyard) industrial production.”

The clue given by Pan Shou, brings yet another dimension to these seven words. Firstly, the rich literary heritage of China was being destroyed and would be worth no more than the paper they are printed on. Secondly, the attempt to industrialise China through the proliferation of backyard foundries to produce iron, caused forests to be cut down as fuel for the furnaces and this led to widespread deforestation.

Many of the lines in this poem then fall into place. It is now clear what the metaphor in Verse 1 Line 5 means when it says: “A meteorite explodes across the sky; calamity has befallen us 石焰惊天呈浩劫”. The meteorite (石焰) that explodes over China is Mao Zedong’s persecution of the literati. This line provides a clue that Qing Shan’s poem is likely to be based on an allusion from a poem, “Thermal Spring Song” 温泉行 by Song dynasty 宋 poet Li Fu 李复. The last two lines of Li Fu’s poem revile the Tang Emperor Ming Huang for bringing the country to a ruinous end 唐明皇误国:

The Emperor, vile and contemptuous of the gods and
Heaven, 祖龙心秽慢神天

His hair dripping with stinking sweat, his body covered
with poison. 毛发流腥身被毒

The surname of Mao Zedong has the literal meaning “hair” (*mao* 毛). With the allusion to Li Fu’s poem, Qing Shan is making an oblique reference to Mao.

As indeed in Verse 1 Lines 7 and 8, Qing Shan makes it clear with his own words:

“Emperor Qin, desist! Burn not the books, bury no
more scholars. 祖龙休拨坑灰火
The protective Great Wall of our Chinese culture, Nan-
tah stands.” 吾道长城有学宫

Qing Shan cries out in anger and anguish. He is “pointing to the mulberry to revile the locust tree” (指桑骂槐). Whilst the finger is pointed at Emperor Qin (referred to as *zu long* 祖龙), the real object of the rebuke is Mao Zedong who is ultimately responsible for the Da Zheng Feng movement against the scholars in mainland China.

Qing Shan fiercely loves Chinese literature throughout his life. He is saddened when he learns of the damage that Da Zheng Feng has done to the Chinese culture of five thousand years. The exasperation in Verse 1 Line 3 also becomes more apparent: “Why wait till the storm breaks out to chant your poem [to register your will]? 催诗岂待今宵雨?”

Qing Shan exhibits two sets of conflicting feelings: firmness and anger, softness and sadness. First, he angrily raises his thick eyebrows (横眉), pointing his finger and orders, “Emperor Qin, desist! Burn no more books; bury no more scholars. The protective Great Wall of our Chinese culture, Nantah stands.” Then, lowering his head (俯首), he sadly sighs, “Painful to recall the walk to the Orchid Pavilion that happy day; For you will not meet one happy soul along the same old way.”