

The Strategic Value behind Revolutionary Art: The Trend Analysis of Studying Chinese Military Thoughts From Mao Zedong's Poems in the United States

Xi Dong^{[a],*}; Lü Chunni^[b]

^[a] Doctor of Literature; Vice professor, College of Humanities and Foreign Languages, Xi'an University of Science and Technology, Xi'an, China.

^[b] Graduate student of Translation and Interpreting major, College of Humanities and Foreign Languages, Xi'an University of Science and Technology, Xi'an, China.

*Corresponding author.

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Abstract

Revolutionary art has long been a powerful medium for expressing political ideologies, inspiring movements, and shaping societies. The study of Mao Zedong's military thought through his poems is a new trend in American academic circles, which, from the 1930s till now, first focused on military aesthetic research on the heroism of the "struggle and revolution" of Mao's poems. Now, the research trend of the American academia can be summarized into two themes: military strategic interpretation represented by *Dragon in Ambush: The Art of War in the Poems of Mao Zedong*, and the contemplation of military philosophy in Mao's poetry within the context of the communist revolution in China. These three perspectives have been closely linked to the evolving international landscape and historical developments in Sino-US relations.

Key words: Mao Zedong's poems; Military thought; The United States; Struggle and revolution; Military philosophy

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Only in Peking, however, do we find a world leader who

combines distinctive political abilities and literary talents. Indeed, the juxtaposition of strategic and artistic instincts in Mao Tse-tung is so unusual in the post-Churchillian world that the case merits more than a passing note. (Boorman, 1963, pp.15-38)

(by Howard L. Boorman, Former U. S. Ambassador to China)

Mao Zedong (1893-1976), the founding father of the People's Republic of China and a key figure in modern Chinese history, crafted poems that encapsulate his revolutionary fervour and contain strategic wisdom applicable to military affairs. American scholars regard Mao Zedong as both a poet and a distinguished militarist; his poems are considered an essential manifestation of his military doctrine.

Approximately one-third of Mao's poems are centred around the themes of fighting and marches, from the 1927 Autumn Harvest Uprising (for which Mao wrote a poem titled "The Autumn Harvest Uprising" 《西江月·秋收起义》) to the founding of New China. The United States is an essential center for studying Mao's poetry. In the current complex international environment, a comprehensive understanding of the latest developments in the study of Mao Zedong's poetry and military thought in the United States should receive the attention it deserves.

The research context of Mao Zedong's poetry and military thought in the United States is based on the historical development of Sino-US relations. It is consistent with the changes in the international situation. Generally speaking, the research on military thoughts in Mao's poems by the American academic circle is carried out from the following three aspects: first, from the 1930s, the interpretation of heroic military aesthetics of "struggle and revolution" ("斗争和革命") in Mao's poems; then, the military strategic interpretation of Mao's poems; third, the contemplation of military philosophy in Mao's

poetry within the context of the communist revolution in China. Approaching Mao's poetry from a military perspective allowed scholars to gain insight into the ideological underpinnings of his military thought.

1. THE INTERPRETATION OF HEROIC MILITARY AESTHETICS OF "STRUGGLE AND REVOLUTION" IN MAO'S POEMS

Mao Zedong's poems, written during periods of intense revolutionary upheaval, celebrate the courage of revolutionary heroes, the solidarity of the masses, and the transformative potential of armed conflict in reshaping society. In academic circles in the United States, the study of Mao's poetry has a long history dating back to the 1930s. During a time marked by anti-communist sentiments, American scholars sought to extend literary research by delving into the poetic expression of Mao's military thoughts during his revolutionary career. His heroic military aesthetic qualities of "struggle and revolution" were considered one of the core vocabularies of research in the American academic community.

One of the central themes in Mao Zedong's poems is the glorification of the revolutionary hero. Through vivid imagery and emotive language, Mao immortalizes the bravery, resilience, and selflessness of individuals who dedicate their lives to the cause of revolution. These heroic figures, whether guerrilla fighters in the mountains or peasant soldiers on the frontlines, embody the spirit of sacrifice and commitment to the revolutionary struggle. Mao's portrayal of these heroes instills a sense of awe and reverence, inspiring others to emulate their courage and determination in the face of adversity.

In 1937, with the success of Edgar Snow's *Red Star over China* in the United States, the "Long March" became the inaugural image of military aesthetic research in American academia. In the poem *Long March* (《七律·长征》), the lines "The Red Army, never fearing the challenging Long March, Looked lightly on the many peaks and rivers" (Snow, 1944, p. 218) (红军不怕远征难, 万水千山只等闲) vividly depicted an unprecedentedly majestic wartime scene. The verse "Wu Liang's Range rose, lowered, rippled, and green-tiered were the rounded steps of Wu Meng" (Snow, 1944, p. 218) (五岭逶迤腾细浪, 乌蒙磅礴走泥丸) exemplified the brave and dauntless spirit of the Red Army's struggle. The words "A thousand joyous li of freshening snow on Min Shan, and then, the last pass vanquished, Three Armies smiled!" (Snow, 1944, p. 218) (更喜岷山千里雪, 三军过后尽开颜) portrayed the revolutionary team led by Mao Zedong with boundless enthusiasm after their victorious battle. Snow commented, "Wherever in their incredible migration's destiny had moved these Reds, they have vigorously demanded deep social changes—

for which the peasants could have learned to hope no other way—and have brought new faith in action to the poor and the oppressed. However badly they have erred at times, however tragic have been their excesses, however exaggerated has been the emphasis here or the stress there, it has been their sincere and sharply felt propagandist aim to shake, to arouse, the millions of rural China to their responsibilities in society". (Snow, 1944, pp.116-117) "... In one sense, this mass migration was the biggest armed propaganda tour in history". (Snow, 1944, p.217) Despite the controversial tag of "pro-communist" given to many biographical works in the American context at that time, Snow's firsthand account of *Red Star over China* achieved tremendous success in the United States. The poem *Long March* (《七律·长征》), written by Mao Zedong, endows the Long March with profound and tragic beauty from an aesthetic perspective.

As Jonah Raskin stated, "Edgar Snow gave Mao a big boost in *Red Star Over China* (1937). (Raskin, 2009. p.12) The keyword "Long March" as an aesthetic image successfully launched the study of military aesthetics in Mao Zedong's poetry in American academic circles, as American scholars found Chinese poetry "depends very much on images." In 1965 Michael Bullock and Jerome Ch'en's work *Mao and the Chinese Revolution* included and translated 37 of Mao Zedong's poems, many of which featured military themes, such as *The Double Ninth Day* (《采桑子·重阳》)、*Against the First Encirclement Campaign* (《渔家傲·反第一次大“围剿”》)、*Against the Second Encirclement Campaign* (《渔家傲·反第二次大“围剿”》)、*March from Tingzhou to Changsha* (《蝶恋花·从汀洲向长沙》)。Taking *New Year's Day* (《如梦令·元旦》) as an example, "To the mountain, the foot of the mountain, Red flags stream in the wind in a blaze of glory" (山下山下, 风展红旗如画) as depicting the magnificent scene of the victorious advance of the Red Army into western Fujian Province(闽西) and the aesthetic pleasure of symbolizing the success of the revolution is vividly displayed on the page with the image of "Red Flags stream." (Bullock, Ch'en, 1965; Johnson, 1965, p.136.) In 1975, Wang Huiming published *Ten Poems and Lyrics by Mao Tzetung*, Ma Wen Yee released *Snow Glistens on the Great Wall: A New Translation of the Complete Collection of Mao Tse-Tung's Poetry* in 1986, and in 2002, C. Edwin Vaughan, a sociology professor at the University of Missouri, published *Mao Zedong as Poet and Revolutionary Leader*, all of which featured extensive annotations and commentary, integrating Mao Zedong's poems, including those related to the Long March, into a broader discussion of Chinese revolutionary history, delving into the background and revolutionary themes of the poems, thus showcasing the grand military aesthetic aspect of Mao Zedong's pursuit of glory and dreams in his poetry.

The Poems of Mao Zedong, translated and introduced by Willis Barnstone, is regarded as a significant work in the American military aesthetic study of Mao's poetry. Barnstone is "the most fitting American to bring Mao's work to Americans." (Raskin, 2009, p.12) Published by Bantam Books in New York in 1972, this book is a culmination of Mao's poetry, calligraphy works, revolutionary biographies, and cultural critiques, which have been meticulously compiled to demonstrate the epic and grand aesthetic power depicted in Mao Zedong's poetry during his decades-long revolutionary journey. (Willis, 1972) Furthermore, the book significantly enriched the Western readers' understanding of the military aesthetic of Mao Zedong's poetry. Even 37 years after its publication, *The Poems of Mao Zedong* continues to exert a lasting influence.

In May 2009, Jonah Raskin, a literary critic for the *San Francisco Chronicle* and the *Santa Rosa Press Democrat*, published a review in the socialist journal *Monthly Review* titled *Mao Zedong: Chinese, Communist, Poet*. The review begins with a quote from a *Washington Post* article, stating,

"What are we to think of Chairman Mao? A man of immense contradictions — a nationalist, communist, revolutionary, and warrior, as well as the author of *The Little Red Book* and the leader for decades of the People's Republic of China — he was also one of twentieth-century China's best poets. A new translation of his work provides an opportunity to evaluate him as a writer and as an artist. A reviewer in *The Washington Post* called Mao's poems 'political documents' but added, 'it is as literature that they should be considered.' Separating the political from the literary, however, isn't possible. 'We woke a million workers and peasants,' (唤起工农千百万) *Against the First Encirclement Campaign* (《渔家傲·反第一次大“围剿”》) Mao wrote in the First Encirclement Campaign, and though all his lines are not as explicit about the Chinese Revolution as it is, a great many of them are." (Raskin, 2009, p.12)

Jonah Raskin believes that even amidst the hardships of the Long March, Mao Zedong was filled with revolutionary optimism, which was vividly represented in poetic natural images: "War did not curtail his aesthetic appreciation of flowers, snow, horses, geese, sky, rivers, and the moon. The mountains are almost always pleasing to his eye, as in *Snow*, his most popular poem in which he writes, "Mountains dance like silver snakes."¹

However, as this review article puts it, young readers might "not connect Mao the poet to Mao, the communist revolutionary" (Raskin, 2009, p.12) However, many,

if not most, of the poems are overtly political, even propagandistic, and it would be hard to read them and not think of war and revolution. *Long March* (《七律·长征》) begins, "The Red Army is not afraid of hardship on the march" (红军不怕远征难) and seems to have been written to inspire the troops. "Militia Women" is directed at the "Daughters of China" and means to bring them into the revolution. "Tingzhou to Changsha" (《蝶恋花·从汀州向长沙》) is covertly political; "soldiers of heaven" tie up and defeat "the whale" (六月天兵征腐恶, 万丈长缨要把鲲鹏缚), but that's pretty explicit symbolism.

Overall, the interpretation of heroic military aesthetics of "Struggle and Revolution" in Mao Zedong's poems encapsulates the essence of his revolutionary spirit and strategic mindset. Mao articulated a distinctive military aesthetic that celebrated the courage of revolutionary fighters, glorified the collective struggle against oppression, and exalted the transformative power of armed conflict in shaping history. Through vivid imagery, emotive language, and powerful symbolism, Mao portrays the epic saga of the revolutionary struggle as a heroic endeavor fraught with danger, sacrifice, and triumph. Mao Zedong's poetry verbalizes his aspirations: "Mao's poems do not reveal an obsession with violence. He did sometimes, however, romanticize weapons as in the image of a 'forest of rifles.'" (Raskin, 2009, p.12) The military beauty in Mao Zedong's poems comes from the justice, magnificence and sublimity of the people's war. His revolutionary heroic sentiments of pursuing glory and dreams fit in with the simple heroic aesthetics of people worldwide stemming from hero worship. Although the study of Mao Zedong's poetry in the United States has expanded from the conceptual category of poetry to the interpretation of Mao Zedong's "struggle and revolution" heroism and military aesthetics, the research on the military aesthetics of Mao Zedong's poetry in American academic circles is still lacking in academic depth. In *Chinese Strategic Thinking under Mao Tse-Tung*, William Adie pointed out that many writers did not discuss Mao Zedong's psychology. "The consensus among such writers is that Mao is fired with the idea of military heroism and that he identifies himself with 'Robin Hood' figures in literature." However, "we must remember that Mao Zedong is not only an object of admiration, he is also a human being, and his thoughts or mindset are very important. Scholars studying Mao Zedong's ideas should delve deep into the origins of Mao Zedong's thoughts."

2. THE MILITARY STRATEGIC INTERPRETATION OF MAO'S POEMS

In the 1980s and 1990s, Sino-US relations fully thawed, and the two countries began to dialogue on a broader

¹ The original text is as follows: War did not curtail his aesthetic appreciation of flowers, snow, horses, geese, sky, rivers, and the moon. The mountains are almost always pleasing to his eye as in *Snow*, his most popular poem in which he writes, "Mountains dance like silver snakes".

range of political, military and other issues. There has been a noticeable trend in academic and military circles in the United States in recent years towards studying Mao Zedong's poems to understand Chinese military thinking. This trend is driven by the recognition that Mao's strategic insights, embedded within his poetic verses, have relevance in contemporary military strategy and tactics. Several key themes emerge from Mao Zedong's poetry that hold strategic significance for military analysis. These include the concept of protracted warfare, the mobilization of the masses, the importance of ideological indoctrination, and the utilization of terrain and geography to gain tactical advantages. Mao Zedong's poems record the time, place, and characters of the war in a series of poems, which is of great historical value. American academic circles use the military career reflected in Mao Zedong's poems as an information path to refine the "art of war" in Mao Zedong's poems and analyze the poems. Through careful analysis and interpretation, scholars and military analysts in the United States aim to decipher the nuanced layers of Mao's strategic thought and conduct in-depth research on the methodology for studying and guiding war, the assumptions of China's rise, and military strategies such as continuing the revolution, therefore seeking lessons applicable to modern warfare scenarios and geopolitical challenges.

In the military and strategic studies of Mao Zedong's poetry, Jeremy Ingalls, an American poet and expert on Chinese affairs, produced a unique and insightful work in 2013 entitled *Dragon in Ambush: The Art of War in the Poems of Mao Zedong*. (Ingalls, Wittenborn, 2013) First of all, as a database, the book compiles 20 commentaries and new translations of Mao Zedong's poems from 1925 to 1936, supplemented with Chinese and phonetic transliterations alongside the translations, allowing readers to seamlessly navigate between Chinese and English while appreciating the charm of Mao Zedong's poetry. Secondly, Ingalls conducts detailed literary, historical, and structural analyses of each poem, providing extensive analytical annotations, references, and character vocabularies, offering comprehensive explanations of Mao Zedong's other works, contemporary works, and the literary traditions of ancient times to 20th-century Chinese history. Lastly, Ingalls takes a unique approach by using Mao Zedong's poetry as an extension of his political and military thought, interpreting the poems from a military strategic perspective.

Ingalls meticulously translated and analyzed Mao Zedong's poems' political and military expressions, providing a comprehensive interpretation of the reasons behind his discourse. He juxtaposed them with significant military and political events of the time, Chinese historical myths, and essential traditions and symbolic meanings in Chinese literature. Ingalls posited, "When Mao mentions streams or mountains, suns or moons, clouds or winds

or icicles, these and all his other images have politically symbolic functions in Mao's algebra of verified political discourse." Ingalls' translation and interpretation of *Changsha* is as follows:

Chang Sha (1925)
Adjunct title:长沙
独立寒秋,
Alone I stand in fall's hard frost,
湘江北去,
Here where Xiang River travels north,
橘子洲头,
Beyond this Juzi Island point,
看万山红遍,
I see our countless hills now turned to red.....
层林尽染,
Our serried forests deep-red dyed.....
曾记否,
Do you still can remember:
到中流击水,
How, venturing midstream, the oars lashed the waters
浪遏飞舟
And the waves yet staying the flight of our boats? (Ingalls and Wittenborn, 2013, pp.131-133)

Ingalls' interpretation and traditional poetic analysis of *Changsha* differ: The poem begins with "Du li (独立)." Although the literal translation may be "I stand alone in fall's hard frost," it also emphasizes an underlying meaning, such as uniqueness, independence, and undisturbedness. In this poem, Mao Zedong reflects on how to become the master of his fate as he faces the northward-flowing river, referring to himself as a swimmer at the end of the poem. His strength in the flowing water embodies physical and mental resilience, capable of surpassing any vessels on the creek. The essence of this poem aligns with Mao Zedong's study of warfare and his strategic methods for guiding it, as he aims to strategically defy the enemy and achieve unexpected victories by relying on outstanding determination. (Ingalls and Wittenborn, 2013, pp.135)

Coincidentally, in terms of the interpretation of "I", Jonah Raskin once commented, "If I had to compare Mao to an American, I'd say he was akin to Whitman, though I'd add that Whitman's lines are longer, that the rhythms feel different and the voices aren't the same. Like Walt, Mao sings a song of himself. There's an all-powerful 'I' as well as an all-seeing eye, and the 'I' can be wistful and sad as in 'I see the passing, the dying of the vague dream.' In 'Swimming,' Mao writes, 'I taste a Wuchang fish in the surf/ and swim across the Yangzi River.' He identifies himself with China in much the same way that Whitman identified himself with America, and that seems fitting because twentieth-century China was like nineteenth-century America: a country developing economically at a furious pace, with substantial social dislocation and the unleashing of immense creativity as well as destructive forces, all of which were embodied in Mao himself." (Raskin, 2009. p.12)

Ingalls believes that Mao Zedong's poetry is also full of ideas about future military strategy. The poem *A Further View of Jinggangshan* (《水调歌头·重上井冈山》) was written by Mao Zedong in 1965, and the last two lines of the poem are “世上无难事，只要肯登攀 (Shi shang wu nan shi, Zhi yao ken Deng pan).” Ingalls' interpretation is as follows:

A Further View of Jinggangshan(1965)
Adjunct title: 水调歌头·重上井冈山
.....
世上无难事: Shi shangwu nan shi
To rise and rule the world is no hard task,
只要肯登攀: Zhi yao ken deng pan
Needs but to choose to mount and fix our grasp.

Ingalls evaluates the last two lines of this poem as follows: Mao Zedong hoped that this poem would continue to be passed down. In it, he placed great expectations on China's future development strategy, wishing for China to develop into a strong nation. Here, Mao expressed the military strategic guiding principle of persisting in noble ideals and great practices to the end. It is for this reason that Mao returned to Mountain Jinggangshan, to inspire future generations to strive forward in the new era, expressing the “aspiration to soar above the clouds” for continuing the revolution in the future.²

The book *Dragon in Ambush: The Art of War in the Poems of Mao Zedong* sparked widespread discussion in American academia upon its release. Francis Grice, a professor of Political Science & International Studies at McDaniel College in Maryland, believes that Mao Zedong intended his poems to serve as military strategic handbooks.³ It is evident that Francis' viewpoint is based on Ingalls' own perspective. Francis Grice provides the following systematic interpretation of the military and political significance of Mao Zedong's poetry as described by Ingalls in the book: The military thought of Mao Zedong's poems came from military practice; Mao imbued his poems with complex political and military ideas; This theme can only be appreciated by studying all of the poems sequentially; Marxist-Leninism acted

² “The poems include not only his version of his own past but his designs for continued impact upon world events far beyond his own lifetime. As the poems themselves insist, their ultimate purpose is to serve as motivation and policy guide for his successors. The poems are Mao's major manifesto, not solely to his own times but, most especially, to future generations.” Quoted from *Dragon in Ambush: The Art of War in the Poems of Mao Zedong*, 2013. P3)

³ “1, Mao imbued his poems with complex political and military ideas; 2, These notions combine to provide a driving political and military theme: the ruthless pursuit of psychological domination to achieve supremacy over all rivals; 3, This theme can only be appreciated by studying all of the poems sequentially; 4, Marxist-Leninism acted as a political convenience rather than a doctrinal centerpiece in Mao's poetry; 5, Mao believed that the full meaning of his poems could only be comprehended by a select cohort of readers: those who possessed a sophisticated understanding of Chinese history, language, and culture.”

as a political doctrinal centerpiece in Mao's poetry; Mao believed that the whole meaning of his poems could only be comprehended by a select cohort of readers: those who possessed a sophisticated understanding of Chinese history, language, and culture.⁴

Paul Manfredi, Director of the China Studies Center at Pacific Lutheran University, wrote in his assessment of *Dragon in Ambush: The Art of War in the Poems of Mao Zedong* in October 2015, “The commentary that follows each poem, meanwhile, is truly exhaustive, working through line by line with general historical setting for twenty of Mao's poems composed between 1925 and 1936, full explication of textual origins wherein demonstration of Ingalls' extensive knowledge of classical Chinese literature is in full display. Whatever one's political position, historical and/or literary training, Ingalls' book is a rich source of information about Mao's poetic work, and in some respects his personal and political philosophy.” (Manfredi, 2023)

The American Amazon reviews of this book evaluate it as follows: This seminal work stands out from previous translations of Mao's poems in seeing them as an expression of his core political beliefs rather than for their poetic effect. Instead, Dr. Ingalls shows in consummate detail that Mao was careful and deliberate in employing imagery in his poetry to lay out procedures for political supremacy in which the central drive was his will to psychological domination. That is, domination of the minds of others is the unifying theme of Mao's verse-sequence...The crux of Prof. Ingalls' work lies in her focus on the symbolism in the poems...In Mao's use of them as a means of communication, the poems are meaningless on their surface. No image, however seemingly commonplace, is ever employed for merely lyrical or aesthetic description. Every image functions as a factor in an entirely political calculus.

The New York Review of Books regards “*Dragon in Ambush* is immensely detailed..... [The author's] emphasis is a much-needed corrective to the work of the many earlier translators and compilers, Chinese and foreign, who have been far too reverential toward Mao. Ingalls surpasses her predecessors in the detail and erudition of her work, and in the end, conveys a sense of the inner Mao that is more credible than theirs”.

Asian Affairs points out that Jeremy Ingalls' translations and analysis may be...informative and educative to government policymakers and researchers, scholars, and students seeking to understand the impact of

⁴ “The military thought of Mao Zedong's poems came from military practice; Mao imbued his poems with complex political and military ideas. This theme can only be appreciated by studying all the poems sequentially; Marxist-Leninism acted as a political, doctrinal centerpiece in Mao's poetry. Mao believed that the full meaning of his poems could only be comprehended by a select cohort of readers: those who possessed a sophisticated understanding of Chinese history, language, and culture.”

Mao Zedong on his country. It would also provide readers with the fundamentals in discovering why the People's Republic of China has advanced to the level of a colossal global power in the twenty-first century. *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* (《中国现代文学与文化》) notes that Jeremy Ingalls' translation and explication of Mao Zedong's poems is an extraordinary work, so full of information.

While Ingalls' work has received widespread acclaim, it has also faced challenges, with some scholars arguing that Ingalls asserts a pre-existing belief to present Mao Zedong's poetry. According to them, once the algebra of Mao Zedong's scripture is understood, his overall strategy and the procedural steps to implement it can be directly traced. Consequently, Ingalls selectively imagines or extracts meaning from the poetry rather than allowing the content to express the viewpoints. The *E-International Relations* points out that "although the book has subjective interpretations of certain information, it presents thought-provoking proposals: "Ingalls provides a seminal translation of twenty of Mao's poems, which will interest many scholars across multiple fields. Her assertion that Mao intended to deliver a series of military and political messages for potential successors, which combine to endorse a strategy of ruthless psychological domination, represents a thought-provoking proposition, albeit one which may have been formed using subjective interpretations and a teleological approach. The work has considerable merit."

3. THE CONTEMPLATION OF MILITARY PHILOSOPHY IN MAO'S POETRY WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF THE COMMUNIST REVOLUTION IN CHINA

The poetry of Mao Zedong embodies a profound philosophical expression. William Adie, a member of the Oxford Society who previously served in British and Indian intelligence agencies, analyzed, "In fact, the Thought of Mao Tse-tung has much in common with the pre-Socratic (or rather pre-Platonic) philosophers, especially Heraclitus. In his poem 'Swimming' Mao quotes a tag from Confucius about how 'all things are in perpetual motion.'" (Adie, 1972, p.2)⁵ Building upon the comparative study of Mao Zedong's philosophy and Western philosophy, the American academic community has extended the analysis of Mao Zedong's poetry philosophy into dialectics in Communist Revolution military strategies. The view on war and military philosophy in Mao Zedong's poetry is considered a

⁵ "In fact, the Thought of Mao Tse-tung has much in common with the pre-Socratic (or rather pre-Platonic) philosophers, especially Heraclitus. In his poem 'Swimming' Mao quotes a tag from Confucius about how 'all things are in perpetual motion'".

significant development of Marxist philosophical theory, thus establishing a new paradigm for philosophical research in studying Mao Zedong's military thoughts through his poetry.

First and foremost, the American academic community has extensively linked Mao Zedong's poetry with Marxist military philosophy. The contemplation of military philosophy in Mao Zedong's poetry within the context of the Communist Revolution in China offers profound insights into the strategic thinking, ideological motivations, and revolutionary zeal that characterized Mao's leadership. Through his verses, Mao articulated a comprehensive military philosophy grounded in Marxist-Leninist principles and tailored to the specific conditions of China's revolutionary struggle.

Still taking *Long March* as an example, the dialectical principles of military strategy it portrays, such as "retreat to advance," "trading space for time," and "giving full play to people's subjective initiative," garnered great appreciation from the American academic community as early as 1965. In an article titled *Mao Tse-tung: His Military Writings and Philosophy*, published in the *Naval War College Review*, R.K.S. Gandhi pointed out, "Mao warns that defense purely for the sake of defense is wrong. He pleads for offensive defense...He is prepared to trade space to yield time and to trade time to yield will. Time and space he is prepared to give up so that his ultimate goal is achieved." (Gandhi, 1965, p.17)⁶ Mao Zedong, when discussing the "material" of weaponry and the "human" element in military combat, highlights the decisive role of "subjective agency" in war. He states, "Weapons play an important part in war, but advises that they are not the decisive factor---to him it is the man behind the gun that counts." R.K.S. Gandhi asserts in the article, "Mao is a firm believer that it is the man behind the rifle that is the greatest single factor in war. Weapons and material are of secondary importance." (Gandhi, 1965, p.17)

In 1956, Dr. Edward L. Katzenbach, the Director of the Defense Studies Program at Harvard University, wrote, "Writing in 1956, Dr. Edward L. Katzenbach, then Director of the Defense Studies Program at Harvard University said: What Lenin did on the subject of imperialism and Marx on capitalism, Mao has done for warfare. That is why an understanding of Mao's military philosophy may be of rather more than casual interest."

⁶ "Mao warns that defense purely for the sake of defense is wrong. He pleads for offensive defense.He is prepared to trade space to yield time, and he is prepared to trade time to yield will. Time and space, he is prepared to give up so that his ultimate goal is achieved."

(Ghandhi, 1965, p.1)⁷ In 1962, American writer Anne Fremantle praised Mao Zedong as the most influential Marxist philosopher. She included a selection of Mao's writings from 1926 to 1957 in her anthology *Mao Tsetung: An Anthology of His Writings*. The anthology is divided into Mao's philosophical works and political strategies. In the introduction to the book, the author discusses Mao's poem *The Snow* and views Mao's poetry as a medium for Marxist military philosophy. (Fremantle, 1962, p.77) On March 29, 1964, an article titled *Lines by China's Poet Laureate—When Mao Tse-tung writes poetry, what the Peking Government is thinking* was published in *The New York Times*. When interpreting Mao's poem *Ode to the Plum Blossom*, the article states, "This poem depicts the new situation of the upsurge of world revolution. It is a historical declaration; ...it is a battle song announcing the victory of Marxism-Leninism in the world; it is a new crest of the wave in the long river of Marxist-Leninist truth."⁸

Next, the American academic community has placed the revolutionary poetry represented by Mao Zedong's poems in the broader context of the Chinese communist revolution. They have tried to deeply interpret the coexistence of the classical forms of revolutionary poetry and the communist revolution's military philosophy. In June 2019, Gregor Benton's work *Poets of the Chinese Revolution: Chen Duxiu, Zheng Chaolin, Chen Yi, Mao Zedong* (Benton & Feng, 2019) expanded the study of Mao Zedong's poetry to the field of poetry associated with communist revolutionary leaders represented by Mao Zedong. The book includes a large number of Mao Zedong's, Chen Duxiu's, Zheng Chaolin's, and Chen Yi's poems, and for example, it contains 27 of Mao Zedong's poems, including *The People's Liberation Army Captures Nanjing* (《七律·人民解放军占领南京》), *Snow* (《沁园春·雪》), *The Long March* (《长征》)以及*Two Birds: A Dialogue* (《念奴娇·鸟儿问答》), as well as 11 poems by Chen Yi, such as *Climbing Dayu Mountain* (《登大庾岭》), *Three Stanzas Written at Meiling* (《梅岭三章》) and *Guerrilla Fighting in Gannan* (《赣南游击词》). Benton points out that the Chinese revolution is a hopeful, complex, and enduring event, "...and many poets are among the revolutionary soldiers. Chen Duxiu led an early cultural awakening in China before the establishment of the Communist Party in 1921, Mao Zedong led the new regime in 1949, and guerrilla leader Chen Yi wrote flamboyant poetry during mountainous

guerrilla warfare. The role of poetry in China and the Chinese Revolution is different from that in the West. In the West, poetry has long been a means of personal expression, abstracted from society. In China, poetry is the 'accepted mode of serious reflection,' and the connection between poetry and society has always been strong. 'Poets are the acknowledged legislators of the world.' In most revolutions, poetry serves as a mirror, medium, and venue of revolutionary activity, and this holds true for the Chinese revolution as well. The revolutionary poets who wrote in a classical style together illustrated the complex relationship between the Communist revolution and Chinese cultural traditions." (Benton and Feng, 2019)

The publication of *Poets of the Chinese Revolution* has sparked considerable discussion among American scholars. The American academic community has shown interest in the entanglement of the Communist revolution and classical-style poetic writing in 20th-century China. In December 2019, Professor Wang Pu from Brandeis University published a review in the *China Quarterly*, noting that "It is only recently that we have witnessed a surge of scholarly interest in the persistence of the classical style in post-May Fourth Chinese cultural production and communication, particularly during the most anti-traditional period. The role of classical-style poetry in China's Communist movements is even less touched upon. Filling this gap and illustrating the complex relationship between the Communist revolution and Chinese cultural traditions, ... Except Mao, the Red Poetry written by three other revolutionaries in the classical style has been little known in the English-speaking world... Putting the four Red poets on an equal footing, this book demonstrates the diversity of politics and poetry in Chinese Communism." (Wang, 2019, pp. 173-1175)

On March 29, 1964, *The New York Times* published an opinion article on page 12, *China's Poet Laureate—When Mao Zedong Wrote Poetry, What Was Beijing Thinking?* "Mao Tse-Tung, political leader and poet laureate of Communist China, declared at Yanan in 1942, when he was master of a mere 700,000 Communists, that art and literature must serve politics. He also urged China's Communist literati to use art forms more comprehensible to the masses than classical styles."⁹

However, Mao Zedong's poetry did not adopt art forms "more comprehensible to the masses than classical styles." The paradigm of Mao Zedong's poetry mainly comes from poets from the Tang Dynasty (618-907) and Song Dynasty (960-1127), "where writing poetry was expected of emperors". (Raskin, 2009, p.12) In 2000, Perry Link from the University of California and Maghiel van Creveld from the University of Leiden published an article in *The*

7 "Writing in 1956, Dr. Edward L. Katzenbach, then Director of the Defense Studies Program at Harvard University said: What Lenin did on the subject of imperialism and Marx on capitalism, Mao has done for warfare. That is why an understanding of Mao's military philosophy may be of rather more than casual interest."

⁸ Original text: "This poem depicts the new situation of the upsurge of world revolution. It is a historical declaration; it is a battle song announcing the victory of Marxism-Leninism in the world; it is a new crest of the wave in the long river of Marxist-Leninist truth."

⁹ Please refer to <https://www.nytimes.com/1964/03/29/archives/lines-by-chinas-poet-laureate-when-mao-tsetung-writes-poetry-its.html>

Poetry of Our World—An International Contemporary Poetry Anthology edited by Jeffery Paine pointed out. “China’s Maoist interlude at midcentury affected all aspects of life, including poetry. For the three decades from the late 1940s to the 1970s, only one mainland Chinese poet, Mao himself, could publish poems that sprang from personal inspiration. Everyone else had to ‘Serve politics,’ which meant giving priority to prescribed guidelines.” (Link and Crevel, 2000, p.439)¹⁰ These privileges not only exist based on Mao Zedong’s guideline that “literature serves politics,” but the classical style of Mao Zedong’s poetry creation itself is a manifestation of privilege. It seems that only Mao Zedong is allowed to write classical poetry.

Hilary Chung, a scholar of East Asian studies at the University of Edinburgh, published an article at the “International Symposium on Socialist Realism” and pointed out: “As McDougall pointed out, in the Yan’an speech ‘classicist’ Mao Zedong opposed the ‘May Fourth Modernists’. He (Mao Zedong) was the predecessor of the new intellectuals and continued to write poetry in classical forms. Because the foreign form, style, value and language of new literary works did not conform to his (Mao Zedong’s) taste.” (Chung, 1996, p.5.) Of course, this is the discussion over content and form. Still, as American Scholar Fredric Jameson mentioned in *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*, form is interpreted as content. (Jameson, 1981, pp.98-99)

In 2011, Rosemary M. Canfield Reisman, a scholar at Charleston Southern University in the United States, edited the *Asian Poets* pointed out: “Though his regime was harshly repressive of poetic creativity, Mao himself fancied his own poetic abilities and took a general interest in the state of Chinese poetry made an uneasy fit with the sloganeering and propaganda of the Maoist belief system, but Mao nonetheless produced many fervid poems that inevitably received much comment from Chinese literary organs. In Maoist ideology, the cultural sphere was an important vehicle for disseminating the ideology of the state.....though poetry did not entirely grind to a halt, creativity was trampled.” (Rosemary, 2011, p.287)¹¹

Subsequently, according to American scholars,

¹⁰ The original text: “China’s Maoist interlude at midcentury affected all aspects of life, including poetry. For the three decades from the late 1940s to the late 1970s, only one mainland Chinese poet, Mao himself, could publish poems that sprang from personal inspiration. Everyone else had to ‘Serve politics’ which meant giving priority to prescribed guidelines”.

¹¹ The original text is as follows: “Though his regime was harshly repressive of poetic creativity, Mao himself fancied his own poetic abilities and took a general interest in the state of Chinese poetry made an uneasy fit with the sloganeering and propaganda of the Maoist belief system, but Mao nonetheless produced many fervid poems that inevitably received much comment from Chinese literary organs. In Maoist ideology, the cultural sphere was an important vehicle for disseminating the ideology of the state.....though poetry did not entirely grind to a halt, creativity was trampled.”

the philosophical proposition of the coexistence of the communist revolution and the Chinese classical poetry creation form in red revolutionary poetry is worth exploring in depth. This proposition highlights the reformation of the past and exploration of new possibilities brought about by the communist revolution, as well as the emphasis on the inheritance of tradition in Chinese classical poetry, which is evident in red revolutionary poetry. Communist revolutionaries and rulers and Chinese classical poetry exhibit a mutually antagonistic yet harmonious relationship.

On the one hand, the Communist revolutionaries are followers of Marxist-Leninist revolutionary military philosophy, swearing to break free from “feudal traditions” in poetry. On the other hand, these revolutionaries belong to a generation educated in both traditional Chinese and modern Western learning. For centuries, classical Chinese poetry has been considered as a manifestation of achievement, refinement, and cultivation, representing advanced literary culture in China. Communist revolutionaries appear also to need to use this esteemed genre to express their military thoughts and desires. Of course, Gregor Benton himself has provided a pragmatic answer to the entanglement of the Communist revolution and classical-style poetic writing in China, “Communist poets writing mainly in the classical style used poetic exchange to forge links with prominent local gentry and intellectuals during the wartime multi-class united front.” (Benton, Feng, 2019)¹²

Clearly, the American academic community did not stop at Gregor Benton’s pragmatic interpretation. They delved deeper into the reasons for the coexistence of Communist revolutionary military philosophy and classical forms in revolutionary poetry. They argued that, within revolutionary connotations, the revolutionary military philosophy written in classical forms in red poetry shares the same essence as the Communist revolutionary military philosophy. The Communist revolution in post-May Fourth China was a modern revolution of breaking old to establish new. Although revolutionary poetry in the classical style was used as a narrative of modern revolutionary history, these revolutionary poems are imbued with the enlightening thoughts of liberation and salvation and the fighting spirit of Marxist-Leninist ideology. “Revolution is the violent action in which one class overthrows another” is reflected in revolutionary poetry, as depicted by Mao Zedong’s phrase, “Boldly we chase our worn-out foe, rather than ape Xiang Yu the Conqueror, who preferred to fish for compliments and fame,” which signifies the “strength of character and determination.” (Benton and Feng, 2019, p.290) Furthermore, it is also demonstrated in Chen

¹² Communist poets writing mainly in the classical style used poetic exchange to forge links with prominent local gentry and intellectuals during the wartime multi-class united front.

Yi's *Guerrilla Fighting in Gannan*, which embodies the military philosophy of "guerrilla warfare" and "people's war," focusing on depending on the people and eradicating enemies through movement, achieving victory despite being outnumbered.

Rebecca E. Karl, a professor of history at New York University, noted, "Each of the four 'red' poets draws on classical forms and imageries to produce utterly new senses and sensations of China and political possibility through the twentieth century...political radicalism and cultural traditions can sustain a productive historical dialogue." And the American poet critic Juliana Spahr adds about the relationship between revolutionary poetry and classical national traditions, "While poetry for sure has, as T. S. Eliot noticed, a stubborn relationship to nationalism, the list of revolutionaries who are also poets is long and robust. This book collects the work of four Chinese poet-revolutionaries Chen Duxiu, Zheng Chaolin, Chen Yi, and Mao Zedong. All of them were using poetry's long traditional formalism and conventions to wrestle with and better understand the upheavals of the Communist revolution. The complications of their work have for too long been overlooked in the endless debates about poetry and politics." (Spahr, 2024)¹³

In short, the way of thinking in studying Mao Zedong's poetry and military philosophy in American academic circles has a cross-complex research orientation. Starting from the connection between Mao Zedong's poetry and Marxist military philosophy, American academic circles try to explore the creations of revolutionaries represented by Mao Zedong in turbulent years. The isomorphic relationship of revolutionary poetry corroborates the classical form of revolutionary poetry, the military philosophy of revolutionary poetry, and the Chinese communist revolution. It infers the multi-dimensional relationship between the three. Among them, the philosophical discussion in American academic circles on the coexistence of communist revolutionary military philosophy and the classical art form of revolutionary poetry is particularly novel and creative. The seemingly binary opposition between old and new concepts of "communist revolution" and "classical poetry" does not seem to have any influence. Judging from the value judgment of American academic circles, its strategies and paths for studying revolutionary poetry are worthy of in-depth study by academic circles.

¹³ The original text is as follows: While poetry for sure has, as T. S. Eliot noticed, a stubborn relationship to nationalism, the list of revolutionaries who are also poets is long and robust. This book collects the work of four Chinese poet-revolutionaries Chen Duxiu, Zheng Chaolin, Chen Yi, and Mao Zedong. All of them were using poetry's long traditional formalism and conventions so as to wrestle with and better understand the upheavals of the Communist revolution. The complications of their work have for too long been overlooked in the endless debates about poetry and politics.

Mao Zedong's poems serve as a treasure trove of strategic wisdom for military analysts and scholars seeking to understand the intricacies of Chinese military thought. The trend of studying Mao's poetry in the United States reflects a growing recognition of the strategic value inherent in revolutionary art and its relevance to contemporary military strategy.

4. CONCLUSION

Since the last century, the interpretation of Mao Zedong's poetry has been comprehensive within the American and global academic communities. Scholars from the fields of history, literature, military expertise, and intelligence agencies have all delved into Mao's works. Mao Zedong's poetry serves as an important expression of his ideology. As early as 1972, William Adie mentioned in *Chinese Strategic Thinking under Mao Tse-Tung* that "The 'Mao Tse-Tung's thought is essentially all military thought - it applies essentially military thinking to all sorts of problems, from industrialization of a large backward country to the conduct of international affairs." (Adie, 1972, p. 1)¹⁴ The lofty spirit and value pursuit embodied in Mao Zedong's poetry continue to provide enlightenment and a source of inspiration for governance and policy-making in today's global context. The military wisdom contained within his works still holds significant practical relevance in contemporary times. In 2012, James R. Holmes, a military strategy professor at the US Naval War College, stated that Mao Zedong's military strategy rivals that of the Western military theorist Clausewitz. Furthermore, in July 2014, Iain King, a researcher at the Center for Strategy and International Studies, published an article in *Military History Matters* titled *Thinkers at War: Chairman Mao*, where he discussed guerrilla warfare and its impact, stating, "Mao had a direct and very personal role in attempting to apply Marxist-Leninism to agricultural societies in the Third World... Maoist guerrilla doctrine has since been taken up worldwide with varying degrees of success... Guerrilla warfare is still practiced in many of the world's most intractable conflicts." (King, 2024)¹⁵

Li Mu'an (李木庵) once evaluated revolutionary poetry with the phrase, "The military song and the war drum resound together; the poetry altar and the battlefield join in triumph." (军歌与战鼓齐鸣, 吟坛共

¹⁴ The original text is as follows: The 'Mao Tse-Tung's thought is essentially all military thought - it applies essentially military thinking to all sorts of problems, from industrialization of a large backward country to the conduct of international affairs.

¹⁵ The original text is as follows: Mao had a direct and very personal role in attempting to apply Marxist-Leninism to agricultural societies in the Third World..... Maoist guerrilla doctrine has since been taken up around the world with varying degrees of success..... Guerrilla warfare - a form of warfare still practiced in many of the world's most intractable conflicts.

战场并捷) (Huo, 1987) From a historical perspective, the American academic community has recognized the spiritual power of Mao Zedong's poetry beyond its literary aspects. Driven by a historical archeology rooted in a critical or problem-consciousness, American scholars are motivated to unearth the relationship between reality and history. They hope to achieve a breakthrough at the nodes of military thinking to obtain a multi-dimensional interpretation of Mao Zedong's poetry and the ideal beliefs of the Communist Party. However, it is undeniable that due to differences in historical and cultural contexts, the study of Mao Zedong's poetry and military thought in the American academic community is still restricted to certain levels by the Huntingtonian "The Clash of Civilizations." Under the diversification-oriented research perspective, how to accurately grasp the research trends of Mao Zedong's poetry in the United States and the entire world has crucial strategic significance. Analyzing Mao's poetry in the United States has proven to be a valuable means of understanding the strategic value of revolutionary art and its role in shaping the course of modern Chinese military strategy.

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