

## *Analysis of The Goddess by Guo Moruo*

Qingchen Li<sup>1,a,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, 19121, United States

a. qingchli@sas.upenn.edu

\*corresponding author

**Abstract:** Guo Moruo is a modern Chinese writer, historian, archaeologist and statesman with many masterpieces. This paper mainly attempts to study and discuss the philosophical thoughts and inspirations of Guo Moruo and his anthology Goddess, which was created during the May Fourth Movement and embodied the spirit of the May Fourth Movement. This paper has profound literary and historical significance. By studying the personal feelings and the hidden historical background of Guo Moruo's anthology, readers can understand the historical significance and characters' stories at that time.

**Keywords:** Goddess, literature, poetry, Guo moruo, East Asian studies

### 1. Introduction

Guo Moruo is a modern Chinese poet, who published *Goddess: Songs and Poems* in 1921. The collection focuses on the aspirations and longings of a generation of Chinese people and is considered to be one of the first thought-experiment of the New Literature Movement [1]. It has become a significant book of modern Chinese literature since its publication. Guo Moruo was born in November 1892 in Shawan, Leshan County, Sichuan Province, China. He died in Beijing on June 12, 1978. Guo Moruo was one of China's leading writers in the 20th century and also an important government official. Many later judged him to have given up his academic integrity for political status. As the son of a rich businessman, Guo Moruo showed a wild and unruly temperament early on. After a traditional education, he left his Chinese wife for an arranged marriage in 1913 and went to Japan to study medicine. There, he fell in love with a Japanese woman who became his common-law wife. He began to devote himself to the study of foreign languages and literature, reading Spinoza, Goethe, the Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore and Walt Whitman [2]. Moruo blends his eastern and western education and influence in this collection through the inclusion of the life philosophy of Bergson, the "Faust spirit" of Goethe, and the pantheism of Spinoza with the philosophy and history of China. He was also one of the first Chinese poets who used comparative poetic thought to write poems. This collection was the first poem collection of Moruo, originally named "Nushen" and includes the poems that he composed during 1919-1920. The poems are influenced by the incidents of May fourth, 1919, and are an appropriate representation of modern Chinese poetry. The collection contains one prologue, 53 freestyle poems, and three verse dramas that vary in their subject matter, form, and shape. Thus, this essay will attempt to analyse and discuss the philosophies and inspiration of Moruo and the collection accordingly. This paper has profound literary and historical significance. Through studying Guo Moruo's poetry collection, we can understand the historical background and the meaning behind it.

Although Guo Moruo's criticism in China today is mixed, it is still mainly critical. His political choice in his later years can also be reflected in his book *Li Bai and Du Fu*, in which Guo Moruo compared himself to intellectuals of the "common class" in order to avoid political disaster [3]. In the book, Guo Moruo expressed that in the feudal literati class, if they wanted to do anything, fame was their second life. Du Fu had a strong sense of fame and reflected on his old age as a metaphor [4]. However, Guo Moruo praised Li Bai very much. Li Bai's chivalric spirit was mentioned by him many times, which was a metaphor for his free and easy brilliance in the first half of his life. In the *Swordsman*, the poem "Deep hiding and name" embodies his values. Even in today's society, this poem is very popular. It not only shows Li Bai's yearning for chivalrous life, but also shows Li Bai's admiration for chivalrous spirit [5].

This paper studies the emotion expressed by Guo Moruo in the anthology and reflect the historical characteristics and some political issues of the time, laying the groundwork for in-depth study of Guo Moruo's personal life and the times in the future. In the Chinese academic circle, relevant articles have also been published on *Goddess* by Guo Moruo. Since its publication, this collection of works has attracted wide attention, and as one of the hot spots in the Chinese academic circle, most of them focus on the middle and high education level, and the popularity of Guo Moruo in middle and high schools is relatively superficial [6].

## 2. Analysis of Guo Moruo's Collection *Goddess*

Guo Moruo's collection bears heavy reference to the May 4<sup>th</sup> Movement in 1919, the anti-imperialist fight that started from a student protest. As Schwartz asserts, the movement not only brought cultural or social change but also brought a generational shift [7]. Guo Moruo is one of those people who attained a dual identity through the revolution as a poet and as a cultural leader. Thus, his poems bear the essential mark of this movement and remind people of the time. With his free verse style, Moruo has imbedded his revolutionary voice, which addresses all Chinese people and reminds them of the events of 1919. For this, he was given the title of "baihua" poet of the period, which means "hundred flowers" and refers to the Baihua Movement of 1917, started by the philosopher and historian Hu Shi in China. Although the collection highlights the problems and traumas of the modern age, it is not pessimistic in tone. The poems often talk about hope and even use images of the sun and phoenix to portray the sentiment. Many of his poems resemble the tone of P.B. Shelly and Whitman and these poems were first published in *Shishi xinbao* (New Journal on Current Affairs) and later were included in this collection.

The collection in many ways is a hymn to and an offspring of the movement of May fourth. Thus, the figure of the goddess allows Moruo to form a broader space that permits the reader to see poems of the new movement as an activist and revolutionary power that can benefit the creation of Zeitgeist of Moruo as the amalgamation of "literature" and "rebellion". The question "Why can't it always be harmonious?", Moruo asks in his poem is a reference to the May Fourth movement in particular and to the spirit of revolution in general [8]. The poem "The Regeneration of Goddesses" uses the imageries of rebirth and creation, which he found in the Taoist philosophy and in the works of Huai Nan Tzu.

The collection and the meaning of the poetries also symbolize the revolutionary and modern soul of the poet. The collection was the first, to exhibit Chinese free verse where the poems are neither an imitation of their western counterpart nor old Chinese poetries [9]. Although they portray revolutionary zeal and the traumas of the modern age, they are often read as poems of longing and hope, and a way to break free from the conventional rules and ideas, which can be easily understood by the imageries and symbols used. The works of Moruo bear a mark of creation and revolution at the same time. For example, in the image of a self-incinerating phoenix, Moruo experiments with the idea of death and creation. Inspired by the ideas of Walt Whitman, Moruo reinvents and reimagines

the ideas of old Chinese poetry and history by often introducing mythological figures in a new light. For example, the imagery of the mythological figure, *the Hound*, has been reimagined by Moruo and used in a modern context. *The Hound* represents a rebellious hero whose intention is to join the concept of self-sacrificial burning. Although in the “Heavenly hound”, Moruo uses the symbol or figure of the Hound as somewhat negative, who swallows the sun, the moon, and the entire universe and brings darkness into the world, he makes the *Hound* remerge as the light of all the universe.

He further appreciates the lights and energy of the Heavenly Hound for its self-sacrificing qualities and its ability to rebel against the higher power and emerge victorious. Thus, the poet refers to the hope of a democratic age that needs self-sacrificing activism, like a phoenix or a Hound. Another poem says, “Afraid that in the universe, What havoc will there be again!”, which highlights the ideas of destruction [8]. Through this, although Moruo talks about destruction, he is actually focusing on the idea and importance of revolution which seeming destroys everything, only to create a better society. In addition, the collection also experiments with a revolution of emotions and sentiment in Chinese poetry where the collection teaches people about the appropriate sensibilities, which can be explored. Many of his poems in this collection also come from the writings of the Creation Society that he established in 1921 in Japan with some other founders. The idea of the rebirth of the goddess also comes from the ideas of the creation poems that he uses to write. The goddess is imagined to be reborn from a mythological figure who saved Earth once by saving it from the falling sky. This image is a symbol of a hero, a saviour, and of hope who is attributed with both dynamism and sublimity in the poems. In another poem, “The Regeneration of Goddesses”, the lines, “I’m going to create some new light”, “I’m going to create some new warmth”, “I’m going to make a fresh sun!” focuses on the revival of three goddesses, through which a new society and a new world is created” [8]. Thus, Moruo managed to incorporate multiple ideas and symbolism in his collection that focuses on the revolution and modern poetry.

The collection incorporates theories and philosophies of both Eastern and Western writers, which makes the collection a specimen of comparative poetry. As Li asserts, the collection *Goddess* by Moruo shows the influence mainly of the life philosophy of Bergson, the pantheism of Spinoza, and “Faust spirit” of Goethe including some other philosophies that make it a fusion of different ideas [10]. The life philosophy and theory of creative evolution of Bergson share similarities with the Taoist philosophy of traditional China. Both of their influences thus can be seen in the poems of Moruo. Moruo used the concept of rebirth from Taoist philosophy to explain and explore the life philosophy of Bergson. One of a story in the collection, named “The Goddess Mending the Sky” originated from Huai Nan Tzu. The explanation of the thought that was there in the concept of Huai Nan Tzu inspired the development and concept of “rebirth”. This concept has been explored in many poems through using the imageries of destruction and creation together. The embodiment and reference to the goddess thus can also be considered to have originated from this philosophy. On the other hand, pantheism is the belief that explains the cosmos, the universe, and reality as undistinguishable from divinity and a supreme supernatural being. This philosophy hints at the universe as being an immanent creator who is still expanding and creating. Similar to this, Moruo also believed in nature being the manifestation of God and vice versa, which can be also seen in his poems. Along with this, the theory of “Faust spirit” by Goethe can be also seen in the poems. The theory managed to portray Faust as a character who continuously explores and has an optimistic and struggling spirit. Along with these, his poems also reflect the influence of Tagore and Zhuangzi. As the selection of philosophers entails, the poems of Moruo, specifically in this selection explored the natural elements and represented their significance. The philosophies of Zhuangzi established nature as an essence of man and amalgamated their existence. Moruo used this thought and integrated the theme of freedom and liberation of the spirit. His poems, thus, include many natural imageries, such as the sun, moon, birds, and many others, which further shows the influence of these philosophers on his poems.

### 3. Conclusion

This paper analyzes the poetry of "Goddess" and reveals the historical significance and revolutionary story behind it. The main shortcoming is that there is little analysis of the voice expressed by the author in the poem collection. In the future, the main research will focus on the analysis of the poem and the voice that the author wants to express.

To sum up, this paper discusses Guo Moruo's life, philosophy mind connected with Huai Nan Tzu and collection *Goddess*, and mainly reviews and discusses two of the poems and images in order to further emphasize their importance and analyses them from a broader perspective. While tracing the influence that *The May 4th Movement* affected the balance of political power in China and reference of *The May 4th Movement*, this paper further locates the influence to Guomoruo showed in his poetry collection by Tagore, Spinoza, Goethe, Bergson, Zhuangzi and many other philosophers.

### References

- [1] Zheng, Y.: *Poetics of Crisis and Historical Redirection Guo Moruo's Modern Nirvana. Comparative Literature: East & West*, 16(1), 47-66 (2012). <https://doi.org/10.1080/25723618.2012.12015544>.
- [2] Britannica. *Guo MoRuo*. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Guo-Moruo> (2022).
- [3] Bin Li: *The motivation of Guo Moruo's Li Bai and Du Fu*, Beijing: *Journal of Capital Normal University (Social Sciences Edition)*, 2017, 237, pp.104-113.
- [4] *Guo Moruo, Li Bai and Du Fu*, Beijing: *People's Literature Publishing House* (1971).
- [5] Victor H. Mair: *Li Po's Letters in Pursuit of Political Patronage*, *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 44(1), pp.123-153 (1984).
- [6] Li, Y.: *Study of Comparative Poetic Thought of Guo Moruo's Goddess. Advances in Literary Study*, 4, 1-7 (2016). doi: 10.4236/als.2016.41001.
- [7] Schwartz, B. I.: (Ed.). *Reflections on the May Fourth Movement*. BRILL. Harvard University (2020). [https://books.google.co.in/books?hl=en&lr=&id=D175DwAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PP3&dq=may+fourth+china+1919&ots=6GDctZrvM2&sig=Bu-EvrQyyRZkLuxlWq-y4pKJ7Tc&redir\\_esc=y#v=onepage&q=may%20fourth%20china%201919&f=false](https://books.google.co.in/books?hl=en&lr=&id=D175DwAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PP3&dq=may+fourth+china+1919&ots=6GDctZrvM2&sig=Bu-EvrQyyRZkLuxlWq-y4pKJ7Tc&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=may%20fourth%20china%201919&f=false).
- [8] Moruo, G.: *"The Regeneration of Goddesses"*. *Goddess*. *People's Literature Publishing House* (1921).
- [9] Hu, T.: *From Revolutionary to Civil Activism: May Fourth Intellectual Guo Moruo and Post-Cultural Revolution Artist Ai Weiwei*. *University of South Carolina* (2019). <https://www.proquest.com/openview/d40659aa657d9d492154d40e760cd267/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750&diss=y>.
- [10] Li, Y.: *Study of Comparative Poetic Thought of Guo Moruo's Goddess. Advances in Literary Study*, 4(01), 1 (2016). <http://www.scirp.org/journal/PaperInformation.aspx?PaperID=62542&#abstract>.