

Directives from Chairman Mao's Commentary on the Water Margin¹ and His Critique of Capitulationists²

August 18, 1975

The good in the book *Water Margin*³ is in the surrender [of the rebels]. This serves as education by negative example, allowing people to understand the capitulators.

Water Margin only opposes corrupt officials, it does not oppose the emperor. Chao Gai⁴ was excluded from the one hundred eights⁵. Song Jiang surrendered, practiced revisionism, and

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- 1 *Water Margin (Shuihu Zhuan)* is a historical-fiction novel that is believed to have been written by the late-Yuan-Dynasty-and-early-Ming Dynasty novelist Shi Nai'an (施耐庵) (1296- 1372). The common English translation for *Shuihu Zhuan* is *Water Margin*. However, there are other translations of the title such as *Outlaws of the Marsh* and *All Men Are Brothers*. Drawing on folklore history and popular dramas, the novel depicts the rise and fall of the peasant rebellion led by outlaws Song Jiang and Chao Gai in the late Northern Song Dynasty under the rule of Emperor Hui Zong (1101 – 1125). Because the rebel force was said to be based on the Liang Mountain, located in today's Shandong Province, warriors of the rebel force were often referred to as the righteous men of Liang Shan (梁山好汉 *Liangshan haohan*). The Liang Mountain was located by a marshland, and “water margin” thus was used as the base for the rebel army. The marshland, lake, and mountain together were called the 梁山泊 (*Liangshanko*) or 水泊梁山 (*Shuipo Liangshan*). “泊” (*po*) means lake or water body. In other works of literature and folk culture derived from the novel, *Liangshan*, *Liangshanko*, and *Shuipo Langshan* are used interchangeably. In general, “going onto a mountain” (*shang shan* 上山) is a Chinese colloquial phrase for joining a rebel force in the mountains.
 - 2 Translation, December, 2021. For comments, questions, suggestions, or criticisms, contact us at Wengetranslators@protonmail.com.
 - 3 The novel, though semi-fictional, references a real scene in China's feudal history. Under the rule of Emperor Hui Zong of the Song Dynasty, the imperial court levied a heavy tax on the commoners to sustain its luxurious lifestyle. The annexation of land allowed the big landlord class to seize control of much agricultural territory, a situation that imposed hardships on the peasants. The corrupt officials and their allies persecuted people who stood in their way. They suppressed the resistance of the commoners, and charged righteous officials who dared to challenge them with false accusations. These charges often resulted in exile or death. Many persecuted people and peasants had no other resort but to become bandits to rebel against tyranny.
 - 4 Chao Gai (晁盖) is a fictional character in *Water Margin*. Chao was one of the early leaders of the Liangshan rebels. In the novel, Chao is depicted as a righteous, forthright person with a personal character resembling that of Robin Hood. First working as a village chief, Chao gained popularity among people and established his network of acquaintances. Later, Chao participated in a heist. Chao and his friends robbed a convoy that was escorting precious birth gifts, a tribute for the corrupt Imperial Chancellor. As a result, the Imperial Court put a bounty on Chao's head. After Chao became a fugitive, he chose to join the outlaws in Liangshan. Because of Chao's righteousness, Chao was respected by the Liangshan outlaws. However, Chao was shot by an arrow during an offense that the Liangshan group initiated against Zengtou Shi, a nearby estate in conflict with Liangshan. Chao said “If there is someone that can catch the man who shoots me to death, he should be selected as the leader of Liangshanko.” But in the same chapter, Lin Chong (林冲), Gongsun Sheng (公孙胜), Wu Yong (吴用) and other captains decided to support Song Jiang right after Song assumed leadership of the group after surrendering to the imperial court and accepting the terms of corrupt officials. Song changed the name of the Pavilion for the Rendezvous of Rebellions into Loyalty Hall immediately after his inauguration. Following their early military campaigns, the Liangshan rebels established their base area in the region. Then the Liangshan outlaws reorganized themselves and formed a core group consisting of one-hundred-and-eight captains. In a mystical flourish, Song Jiang announced that the name-list of the 108 captains were carved by Heaven on a stone (known as *yibai dan bajiang* 一百单八將). Song Jiang, one protagonist of *Water Margin*, was elected as the official leader of the group. Each of the one hundred eights was assigned a title named after a star that stood for a specific personality and destiny in Chinese folklore astrology. The star titles also reflect the ranks of the one hundred and eights within the core group's hierarchy. But by the time the one hundred and eights were formed, Chao was already dead. This is one reason for his exclusion from the one hundred and eight. However, there are other interpretations of his exclusion offered in studies of Chinese literature.
 - 5 Though Chairman Mao clearly portrays Song Jiang's surrender as an example of revisionism, it is unclear in this document whether Chairman Mao intended to connect the exclusion of Chao Gai with his criticism of the capitulationist

turned [the name of] Chao Gai's Pavilion for the Rendezvous of Rebellions (*Juyi Ting* 聚义厅) into the Hall of Loyalty (*Zhongyi Tang* 忠义堂)⁶, and eventually allowed himself to be co-opted [by the emperor's army]. The struggles between Song Jiang and Gao Qiu⁷ were internal struggles of the landlord class, where one faction fought against another faction. After Song Jiang surrendered, he [was ordered to] attack Fang La⁸.

The leaders of this peasant rebel force were not good, [they] surrendered. Li Kui, Wu Yong, Ruan Xiaoer, Ruan Xiaowu, and Ruan Xiaoqi⁹ were good, not willing to surrender.

Lu Xun commented on *Water Margin* well. He said: “One book of *Water Margin* made it very clear: because the rebels did not oppose the emperor, they surrendered when the big army [of the emperor] arrived, and they were enlisted in the emperor’s army to attack other rebels for

line. In mid-August of 1975, Yao Wenyuan made a report on the “Directives from Chairman Mao’s Commentary on the *Water Margin*”, which states that Chairman Mao’s criticism revealed the essence of *Water Margin*—the praise of revisionism—and pointed out the real face of the revisionism practiced by Song Jiang. This is a report that equates Song Jiang’s capitulation to revisionism, and thereby raises the question of the two-line struggle. On August 28th, *Red Flag* published an article “Take seriously the comments on *Water Margin* to educate the masses that Song Jiang practiced an opportunist line to seize every chance to let the line of capitulation be established.” On August 31st, *People’s Daily* also published an article in which the author called for the people to distinguish and oppose capitulationists. Yao’s proposal for a wider circulation of Chairman Mao’s comments on *Water Margin* among the masses was approved by Mao. Henceforth, more editorial articles criticizing the line of capitulation presented in *Water Margin* appeared in *People’s Daily* and *Red Flag*. The main theme of these articles was to criticize and oppose the capitulationists in the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. (For a timeline of articles published on *Water Margin*, see *Zhang Chunqiao: 1949 and After* by Zheng Chong, pp. 692 – 693.)

- 6 This is a metaphor for the capitulation of the Liangshan rebels. The Liangshan’s base had a meeting place, a town hall where the one hundred and eight assembled to discuss military and logistic affairs as well as the future of the rebellion. The name of the town hall reflects the nature of the rebellion. *Juyi ting* (聚义厅) means the Pavilion for the Rendezvous of the Rebels. *Juyi*’s literal meaning is the gathering of righteous people. *Water Margin* popularized the word *Juyi*, and it later became a slang in Chinese, meaning to gather and rise up. *Zhongyi tang* (忠义堂) means the Hall of Loyalty. In the context of *Water Margin*, “loyalty” means loyalty to the imperial court. This subtle change in name for the meeting place reflects the changes of Liangshan’s political line – from a rebellious one to a loyalist one.
- 7 Gao Qiu (高俅) was a historical figure who also appeared in *Water Margin*. Historically, he was a high official holding the title of Grand Marshal (Tai Wei 太尉) and commanded the Imperial Guard. In the novel, he was the chief villain who led the imperial army to suppress the Liangshan rebels, but was defeated. After Song Jiang surrendered the rebels to the Court, Gao still distrusted and loathed the rebels, and secretly murdered Song Jiang with poison.
- 8 Fang La (方腊) was the leader of another group of rebels active in southern China at the time. After Song Jiang surrendered himself to the Imperial Court and accepted the term offered by the corrupt officials, the Liangshan force became a lackey to the emperor, and was used to suppress other peasant rebels, such as the group headed by Fang La. Though the Liangshan force’s attack on Fang La was partially at the order of the Huizong Emperor and his Grand Marshals, the determinant factor in this attack was still Liangshan’s defected leadership. After Song Jiang surrendered himself to the imperial court, he attempted to prove his loyalty by volunteering to take the lead in initiating a military campaign against Fang La.
- 9 Li Kui (李逵), Wu Yong (吴用), Ruan Xiaoer, (阮小二) Ruan Xiaowu (阮小五), Ruan Xiaoqi (阮小七) were all members of the Liangshan rebel forces and were among the one-hundred-and-eight heroes. But they did not agree with Song Jiang surrendering the Liangshan forces to the Imperial Court. As they saw it, surrendering represented giving up the original cause of rebellion that “enforces justice on behalf of Heaven” (*titian xingdao* 替天行道).

the state – they were totally not the rebels who ‘enforced justice on behalf of the heaven.’¹⁰ In the end they were flunkies” (Lu Xun *The Transformation of Hooligans*, in *Sanxian Ji*).

Jin Shengtan¹¹ cut out over 20 chapters from the original *Water Margin*. Cutting them out made the book unreal. Lu Xun was very dissatisfied with Jin Shengtan, and he specifically wrote an article with commentary on Jin Shengtan “On Jin Shengtan” (see *The Collection of Southern Pitches and Northern Tunes* Nanqiang Beidiao Ji)

10 *The Transformation of a Hooligan* was an article written by Lu Xun in 1930. It was later included in the essay collection *Three Leisures* (*Sanxian Ji* 三闲集). The article lays out the subtle relationship between the tradition of the righteous outlaw (*xia* 侠) and the power of the state. Many *xia* served as folk heroes in ancient China. Classical Chinese poetry and novels popularized the image of *xia*, and often represented *xia* as wandering vigilantes, swordsmen, conscientious scholars, and practitioners of martial arts. But *xia* did not make up an occupation or social class such as the knights in Europe or samurai in Japan. Instead, *xia* consisted of social characteristics that cut across different occupations and social statuses. *Xia* possessed a dual social nature. On the one hand, they were righteous folk heroes who defended the weak and helped those in need with their prowess in martial arts, literature, art, and political influence. They were seen as the embodiment of heavenly virtues, including justice in particular. On the other hand, *xia* often stood at odds with the interests of ruling groups in society, and thereby were seen as outliers of the establishment or even rogues and hooligans in the eyes of authority. Lu Xun analyzed these features and elucidated another duality—the *xia* also have the potential to become lackeys to the ruling elite: the real hooligans, especially during changing political circumstances. Such a transition is shown in Chinese history. In *The Transformation of a Hooligan*, Lu Xun identified the Han Dynasty as a watershed for *xia*. Before the Han dynasty, *xia* were predominantly followers of Mohism, believing in the principle of impartial love, the protection of commoners, and the criticism of unrighteous rulers, as well as Confucianism. After the Han Dynasty, as the Confucian-feudal system was gradually established, most outspoken and upright *xia* were persecuted, and the remainder started allying themselves with the ruling class for survival. Thereafter, *xia* were absorbed into the establishment, and generally posed little threat to the social order, spare through their skills in martial arts, not posing any real political challenge to the ruling class. To stay safe, *xia* limited their critiques against social injustice to a manner acceptable to the ruling class, acting as mediators between oppressive rulers and the oppressed masses. This subtle transformation in the social function of the *xia* made Lu Xun believe that they had turned from folk heroes into real hooligans—lackeys to the powers that be. *Water Margin* is cited by Lu Xun in the article as an example to demonstrate this transformation from rebels to hooligans. In the end of the article, Lu Xun attributed the stance of hooligans to social critics and intellectuals of his time, whom he deemed as progressive in appearance but opportunistic in nature. According to Lu Xun, these so-called critics offered commentary on many social phenomena while all along upholding both the backward Chinese feudal tradition and even laws foreign countries imposed in the Shanghai foreign concessions during the period of semi-feudalism and semi-colonialism. For Lu Xun, the main purpose of these hooligans was to eclectically gather tools from the ruling elite to intimidate and extort others for profit—all the while pointing their fingers at the masses. These hooligans had no interest in real social change.

11 Jin Shengtan (金圣叹) was a literary critic in the Late-Ming to Early-Qing Era. He wrote a commentary on *Water Margin* in 1641 and edited a version of the novel in which he modified the text extensively and deleted the original ending consisting of Chapter 71 and beyond. In Jin’s time, two versions of *Water Margin*—one with 120 chapters, and one with 100 chapters—were popular. Jin chose chapter 70 as the cutoff point for a reason. The plot shifts in Chapter 70 and 71 in the original one-hundred-and-twenty-chapter version. In the original version, author Shi Nai'an mainly presented the rebellious adventures of the protagonists before Chapter 70. From Chapter 71 onward, the Liangshan outlaws established the one-hundred-and-eight-captain ranking system and the leadership started a tendency of giving up on rebellion. This leads the way to the complicity of the Liangshan leaders with the imperial court in the remaining chapters that were cut out by Jin. In Jin’s time, peasant rebellions were common as a result of the Ming officials’ exploitation of the people. It is said that Jin edited the text in conformance with his views on this situation. Jin criticized the corrupt Ming ruling elites and fantasized about a superior form of “imperial rule” while opposing peasants’ uprisings, which, in his view, were bandit problems that created chaos and disturbed the orthodox imperial order. This partially explains why Jin cut out the last forty chapters of *Water Margin*: he was not against the capitulation of the Liangshan leadership but opposed the fact that the “dignified” imperial court had to offer amnesty to the Liangshan bandits to recruit them to repress other bandit forces—an act, which in Jin’s view, sullied the sacred law and order which an imperial court ought to uphold. Jin’s stance was typical of a backward trend within the intelligentsia. Although critical of aspects of the their times, such individuals were pro-elite and reactionary in nature. Lu Xun criticized Jin’s

The one-hundred-chapter version, the one-hundred-and-twenty-chapter version, and the seventy-one-chapter version, the three versions of *Water Margin* all need to be published. Print that comment of Lu Xun's in the front of the book.¹²

stance on peasant bandits as inadequate at best and opposed to the people at worst. In Lu Xun's essay *On Jin Shengtan*, he argues that Jin's hatred of bandits who stirred up trouble was without merit, explaining that Jin missed the fact that commoners' anger at the bandit problems was not the result of the bandits (*kou 寇*) having a negative reputation, but due to the exploitative and oppressive social relations that fostered the existence of bandits. According to Lu Xun, both bandits and emperors caused trouble for the people. The bandits raided the people while emperors and imperial officials extorted the people through taxation and duty. Thereby, Lu Xun's concluded there was little difference between bandits and emperors, and the real distinction lies in the question of whether the oppressors are "being seated" (*zuo 坐*) or "drifting" (*liu 流*). "Being seated" means one holds office and has the stamp. In Lu Xun's opinion, the imperial officials in Chinese history were seated bandits, and the people dislike both drifting and seated bandits. By extension, Lu Xun argues that Jin's defense of the imperial rulers – as represented by the act of cutting out the last forty chapters of *Water Margin* – is unacceptable as it hid the real social problems behind the phenomenon of bandits. In other words, the Liangshan group portrayed in *Water Margin* was nothing more than a typical bandit army, led by its leadership to abandon resistance to the imperial court in favor of joining the ranks of the generic oppressors of the people. While Jin Shengtan had censored the novel version of *Water Margin*, the chapters he removed from the novel still circulated in rural areas, and often appeared in performances of village opera. In connection with this form of Chinese folk culture, Lu Xun sighs that at his time rural people still had to watch operas based on those last forty chapters. By saying this, Lu Xun implied that if no critical view on Jin Shengtan's act of editing *Water Margin* is introduced to rural people, the operas based on the last forty chapters, which are mainly about Liangshan's capitulation, would teach them nothing but loyalty and obedience to power.

How Lu Xun explained Jin's intention: 自称得到古本，乱改《西厢》字句的案子且不说罢，单是截去《水浒》的后小半，梦想有一个“嵇叔夜”来杀尽宋江们，也就昏庸得可以。虽说因为痛恨流寇的缘故，但他是究竟近于官绅的，他到底想不到小百姓的对于流寇，只痛恨着一半：不在于“寇”，而在乎“流”。百姓固然怕流寇，也很怕“流官”。记得民元革命以后，我在故乡，不知怎地县知常常掉换了。每一掉换，农民们便愁苦着相告道：“怎么好呢？又换了一只空肚鸭来了！”他们虽然至今不知道“欲壑难填”的古训，却很明白“成则为王，败则为贼”的成语，贼者，流着之王，王者，不流之贼也，要说得简单一点，那就是“坐寇”。中国百姓一向自称“蚁民”，现在为便于譬喻起见，姑升为牛罢了，铁骑一过，茹毛饮血，蹄骨狼藉，倘可避免，他们自然是总想避免的，但如果肯放任他们自啮野草，苟延残喘，挤出乳来将这些“坐寇”喂得饱饱的，后来能够比较的不复狼吞虎咽，则他们就以为如天之福。所区别的只在“流”与“坐”，却并不在“寇”与“王”。试翻明末的野史，就知道北京民心的不安，在李自成入京的时候，是不及他出京之际的利害的。宋江据有山寨，虽打家劫舍，而劫富济贫，金圣叹却道应该在童贯高俅辈的爪牙之前，一个个俯首受缚，他们想不懂。所以《水浒传》纵然成了断尾巴蜻蜓，乡下人却还要看《武松独手擒方腊》这些戏。<https://www.kanunu8.com/book/4415/55683.html>

12 Original text: 1975 年 8 月 14 日《毛主席评水浒、批投降派的指示》

《水浒》这部书，好就好在投降。做反面教材，使人民都知道投降派。

《水浒》只反贪官，不反皇帝。屏晁盖于一百零八人之外。宋江投降，搞修正主义，把晁的聚义 Gao Qiu (高俅) was a historical figure who also appeared in Water Margin. 厅改为忠义堂，让人招安了。宋江同高俅的斗争，是地主阶级内部这一派反对那一派的斗争。宋江投降了，就去打方腊。

这支农民起义队伍的领袖不好，投降。李逵、吴用、阮小二、阮小五、阮小七是好的，不愿意投降。

鲁迅评《水浒》评得好，他说：“一部《水浒》，说得很分明：因为不反对天子，所以大军一到，便受招安，替国家打别的强盗——不‘替天行道’的强盗去了。终于是奴才。”（《三闲集·流氓的变迁》）

金圣叹把《水浒》砍掉了二十多回。砍掉了，不真实。鲁迅非常不满意金圣叹，专写了一篇评论金圣叹的文章《谈金圣叹》（见《南腔北调集》）。

《水浒》百回本、百二十回本和七十一回本，三种都要出。把鲁迅的那段评语印在前面。