Exercises on the causative and putative uses of verbs, nouns and adjectives

In both Classical Chinese and Modern Standard Chinese, verbs, nouns and adjectives (or stative verbs) share a number of similar verbal features. In Modern Standard Chinese, nouns and adjectives (or stative verbs) can take particles like –le. In Classical Chinese, verbs, nouns and adjectives (or stative verbs) have non-canonical special uses such as the “causative” and the “putative” uses. In a causative use, the word has to be re-interpreted as “cause…to…”. In a putative use, the word has to be re-interpreted as “consider … to...”. Normally the context would make it clear that the words are used in a non-canonical sense. Note that verbs in Classical Chinese do not have the putative use.

Observe the following data and figure out

1 which word should be interpreted in a non-canonical way?

2 what part of speech does the word belong to original, i.e. verb, noun, adjective (or stative verb)?

3 is it a causative use or a putative use?

4 translate the sentence into English and reveal how it is such a non-canonical use.

春 風 又 綠 江 南 岸

chūn fēng yòu lǜ jiāng nán àn

spring wind again green Yangtze-River south bank

綠lǜ is an adjective (or stative verb) but used in a causative sense here.

Trans. The spring wind caused the south bank of the Yangtze River to be green again.

先 破 秦 入 咸陽 者 王 之

xiān pò Qín rù Xiányáng zhě wàng zhī

first defeat State-of-Qin enter City-of-Xianyang nom. king/ruler him

王wáng is originally a noun but used here as a causative verb pronounced as wàng temporarily.

Trans. He who first defeats the Qin and enters the Xianyang city will be made the king.

吾 从 而 師 之

wú cóng ér shī zhī

I follow and teacher him

師shī is a noun but used as putative verb.

Trans. I follow him and consider him my teacher.

吾 妻 之 美 我 者， 私 我 也

wú qī zhī měi wǒ zhě sī wǒ yě

I wife nom pretty me nom, be-partial-to me par.

美 měi is an adjective (or stative verb) but used as a putative verb here.

Trans. My wife thinks that I am good-looking. It is because she is partial to me.