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China's Second World of Poetry: The Sichuan Avant-Garde, 1982-1992

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**China's Second World of Poetry:
The Sichuan Avant-Garde,
1982-1992**

Proefschrift

ter verkrijging van
de graad van Doctor aan de Universiteit Leiden,
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door

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geboren te Vancouver, Canada
in 1959

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Where to begin? and where to end?

In some ways, this feels like the finish of a 24-year journey that began early on a Monday morning in September 1980, when Jerry Schmidt, my first teacher of Chinese, and now a good friend, introduced himself in a classroom at the University of British Columbia. And I was there because my best friends at the time – the See family – were Chinese.

During the seven years I lived in China between 1982 and 1992, I met, made friends with, and was encouraged to do what I have now finally done by seemingly countless numbers of poets and other artists and intellectuals – most of them not resident in Sichuan, where I was only ever a visitor.

The Sichuan subject of this thesis is a result of my friend Liu Xiaobo giving me a copy of an unofficial poetry journal edited by Liao Yiwu. In 1986-1988, I used to go Liu's room at Beijing Normal University to talk about literature we had bought, or been given. My interest in the poetry published in Liao's journal led me to write him a letter, and this elicited an invitation to visit him in Fuling. There I also met Li Yawei, Xiao Kaiyu, He Xiaozhu, Gou Mingjun, Zhou Zhongling, Ba Tie, and others. And when I returned to Beijing, I contacted Tang Xiaodu, a good friend of Liao's, whom Liao felt I should know.

While in Sichuan, I was handed large amounts of unofficial poetry material, and Tang offered me more. In the spring of 1988, Tang arranged for me to 'appear' at and, subsequently, be officially invited to the Grand Canal national poetry conference held in Huaiyin and Yangzhou. There I met several other avant-garde poets, such as Ouyang Jianghe, Zhou Lunyou, Han Dong, and Chen Dongdong, many of whom I would next see as I wandered the country visiting poets during May-August 1989. And my collection of materials kept growing. I thank them all for their time, work, and friendship.

After my expulsion from China in late October 1991, I spent the next five years in Vancouver, and a lot of that time in UBC's Asian Studies Library searching the stacks for the poetry of my friends and other poets I admired. There, also, I completed my MA and started a doctorate, which I would not know how to complete until being passed on to Leiden by Michel Hockx of SOAS in the summer of 2000.

The years after my expulsion had been a period of intermittent emotional turmoil (as I came to terms with not being able to live in China anymore) and financial crisis. This was somewhat mitigated by the support and encouragement of Michelle Yeh, nominally my long-distance doctoral advisor until I chose to move to Prague in 1997, and George McWhirter of UBC's Creative Writing department, who oversaw my translation of a few hundred poems.

When, in the summer of 2000, my interest in doing a doctorate was rekindled, Michel Hockx put me in touch with Olga Lomova at Charles University, and she invited me to give seminars and teach courses there. In 2002, I finally registered as a doctoral student at the University of Leiden, and in 2003 – at the urging of Olga, Mirka, and Stan'a – I applied for and won funding from the CCK Foundation for a yearlong period (2003-2004), without which this doctoral thesis could not have been completed.

Olga has also seen to it that I have had free access to computers in the Department of Sinology at Charles University. Without her support, many of the materials I have used in this thesis would have been inaccessible to me, and I could not have contributed to the DACHS project managed by the Chinese libraries at the universities of Heidelberg and Leiden. That said, I thank Remy Cristini for all his IT help, enthusiasm, and friendship, and Hanno Lecher for his similar support.

Another good friend at Leiden, and now at Shenzhen University, is Zhang Xiaohong. Her work on China's avant-garde woman poets, especially the poetry of Zhai Yongming, has been of great help to me.

Finally – my family.

My parents, three brothers, and my half-sister have always been supportive, even proud of me, in all this Chinese stuff I have done over the years. The basement of my mother's house is the repository of most of my unofficial poetry materials and a few thousand

books I have collected over the years. Even on the occasion of my wedding with Stephanie in Minnesota in 2002, my mother flew in with a heavy load of materials I had asked her to bring. And through all the years I was away in China and, now, Europe, I missed her and loved her.

And then there is Stephanie. She would rather be in Minnesota than anywhere else in the world, but... she married me. She loves me and believes in me. She makes me happy. If by September 2005 I am unable to find work at a university teaching modern Chinese literature and language, I will be disappointed, but I will move on to another career. And I will be happy, because this doctorate is done, because it will satisfy the long-held expectations of my family and my friends in China, and, most importantly, because I will be with Stephanie and we can start our own family wherever in the world we will be.

PREFACE

Much of what I write in this text is based on personal fieldwork done in China during 1982-1992, when I was resident in China for a total of seven years. Aside from prolonged contact, conversation, and correspondence with a great number of poets and scholars, I collected a large amount of literary materials, including unofficial, privately printed poetry journals and poetry collections, hand-written drafts of poetry and related essays, officially published poetry anthologies and individual collections, and audio recordings of poetry readings. At the time, my interest was general and nationwide. However, upon later reflection, I found that my materials and knowledge were most complete in relation to the poets Sichuan and their poetry.

The findings of my 1994 Master's thesis at the University of British Columbia (Vancouver, Canada) have fed into this text. That thesis focused on the poetry and lives of three Sichuan poets: Liao Yiwu, Zhou Lunyou, and Li Yawei. Here, I address the events and environment that led to Sichuan becoming a hotbed of avant-garde poetry during the 1980s and beyond – in other words, the genesis of the contemporary Chinese poetry avant-garde.

I believe that this is an important contribution to scholarship in the area of modern Chinese poetry. A full history of the developments in the poetry scene during the 1980s must take into account the unofficial gray areas where much of the impetus towards poetic 'modernization' found its source. Such a study, whether nationwide or limited to one region or province, is still unpublishable for political reasons in China. There have been books dealing with underground literature during the Cultural Revolution 1966-1976 and the activities of the *Today* (今天) poets 1978-1980, but only a small number of articles and chapters in various books and journals, in Chinese and English, on what followed.

To date the best English-language study of developments after – and because of the influence of – *Today* can be found in Maghiel van Crevel's *Language Shattered: Contemporary Chinese Poetry and Duoduo* (1996). Duoduo was a peripheral *Today* poet at the time (1970s, early 1980s), but Prof. van Crevel helpfully devotes 80 pages over two chapters (pp. 21-101) to developments in the unofficial world of poetry in China as a whole during the 1970s and 1980s. *Modern Chinese Poetry: Theory and Practice since 1917* by Michelle Yeh (1991) is the best overview in English of the overall aesthetic development of twentieth century Chinese poetry to date, but due to its very nature, deals only briefly with the poetry and related events of the 1980s in China. As a final example, Bonnie S. McDougall and Kam Louie's *The Literature of Twentieth Century China* (1997) deals with post-*Today* poetry in all of two pages (pp. 429-430).

I use the term *avant-garde* in reference to a vanguard of poets who seek to rescue and expand the scope of the art. Therefore, this also refers to the initial rediscovery, or the genuine discovery, by Mainland Chinese poets of all that this means in the context of Chinese and World poetry, much as it had in the 1910s and 1920s to the first practitioners of New Poetry (新诗). This world of relatively obscure 'Isms' was something Deng Xiaoping and the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) had little comprehension of when they relaxed cultural policies in 1978 after decades of political and cultural repression, and let the voices of Chinese poetry be heard again. A knowledgeable reader or writer of poetry in the west might know what all of this would be from university literature classes and Norton anthologies – from seminal works such as *Leaves of Grass* and <The Waste Land>, to important poets such as Emily Dickinson, Ezra Pound, Mandelstam, Mayakovsky, Pasternak, Milosz, Breton, Stevens, Williams, Ginsberg, Ashbery, Berryman, Olsen, Plath, Brodsky, and so on down to the present day. This western experience entailed a drawn out period of about 100 years, fully experienced by no one person. China's poets would condense all this into a period of just 10 years, a situation that can only be compared with developments during the 1920s and 1930s when China first opened to world culture.

In China, however, we find all this re-enacted, adopted, adapted, reacted against, and improvised on over a period of 10-15 years. This was an anarchic state of poetry, an

advanced seminar in poetics and poetry writing for – often – rank beginners in the art. Thousands of young poetry lovers and students in all parts of China encountered the poetry of *Today*, the New Poetry of pre-1949 China, and translations of western avant-garde poetry and poetics for the first time, as, from 1978, China's publishing houses and literary journals began to print, or re-print, material that for decades had been unpublishable.

All these activities and the networking and planning that were going on at all times from 1978 throughout China, would ultimately lead to the creation of what Zhou Lunyou in 1986 termed a 'Second World of Poetry'¹ – a sub-field in the general field of contemporary Chinese poetry, inhabited by poets more responsive to, and more influenced by, each other and translated works than to officially published poetry and criticism. While much of the poetry published in this Second World can be termed avant-garde, and was officially published on various occasions, the term refers primarily to an unofficial, or underground, publishing scene that was the initial site of most avant-garde poetry publication.

A study that tried to record Second World events in all parts of China would, I believe, prove to be too unwieldy and generalized to be insightful or of lasting scholarly value.

So, something manageable then...the province of Sichuan. But why Sichuan?

Firstly, I found that my materials and knowledge were most complete in relation to the poets and poetry of post-Mao Sichuan. That said, where linkages occur, the scene outside Sichuan will be elucidated as necessary.

Secondly, for reasons of convenience, geography, and internal politics (in general and in the realm of modern Chinese culture), Western scholarly research has been largely limited to China's coastal areas from Beijing south to Hongkong. The fact is that there was, and is, much more to be seen and uncovered in the rest of China, and in the area of poetry this is emphatically the case – as this study shall show. This is not to deny the validity and quality of the poetry and poets who have been brought to the attention of readers outside China interested in contemporary Chinese poetry, but an attempt to fill in several gaps which understandably (in the circumstances) exist at the present time.

¹ A term coined by Zhou Lunyou in an article published in the first issue of the broadsheet *Not-Not Criticism* (非非评论): <On the Second World of Poetry> (论第二诗界; August 13-15, 1986).

However, the best reasons for my choice of Sichuan and its avant-garde poets are the quality of their poetry and their collective 'story'. The quality and representative nature of their poetry is exhibited by the selections of what I, and most others in this field, consider to be among the most authoritative and nonpartisan of multi-author poetry anthologies published by China's official press since the 1987 in the list below. This situation is also reflected in instances of publication in official literary journals.

- 1) *A Selection of Contemporary Chinese Experimental Poetry* (中国当代实验诗选); editors: Tang Xiaodu, Wang Jiaxin; published 1987, 224 pages; 31 poets, including 6 Sichuan poets (23 poems, 50 pages).
- 2) *A Grand Overview of China's Modernist Poetry Groups 1986-1988* (中国现代主义诗群大观1986-1988); editors: Xu Jingya, Meng Lang, Cao Changqing, and Lü Guipin; published 1989, 558 pages; including 33 Sichuan poets (77 poems, 89 pages).
- 3) *An Appreciation Dictionary of Chinese Exploratory Poetry* (中国探索诗鉴赏辞典); editor: Chen Chao, published 1989, 664 pages. *The relevant section for post-1982 poets is found in the last section of the book, pp. 458-664; 41 poets, including 12 Sichuan poets (34 poems, 65 pages of the 206).
- 4) *The Happy Dance of Corduroy* (灯心绒幸福的舞蹈); editor: Tang Xiaodu, published 1992, 300 pages; 37 poets, including 13 Sichuan poets (72 poems, 133 pages).
- 5) *With Dreams for Horses: Poetry of the Newborn Generation* (以梦为马: 新生代诗选); editor: Chen Chao, published 1993, 324 pages; 48 poets, including 18 Sichuan poets (77 poems, 129 pages).
- 6) *A Leopard on an Apple: The Poetry of Women* (苹果上的豹: 女性诗卷); editor: Cui Weiping, published 1993, 205 pages; 14 poets, including 3 Sichuan poets (48 poems, 50 pages).
- 7) *In Symmetry with Death: Long Poems and Poetry Sequences* (与死亡对称: 长诗, 组诗诗卷); editor: Tang Xiaodu, published 1993, 308 pages; 20 poets, including 4 Sichuan poets (49 pages).
- 8) *Avant-garde Poetry* (先锋诗歌); editor: Tang Xiaodu, published 1999, 348 pages; 50 poets, including 14 Sichuan poets (45 poems, 83 pages).

As noted, this is only a partial list. Although there have been several other anthologies, many are clearly partisan in nature or suffer from weak editorial guidelines (some of these will be dealt with, when appropriate, in the main text).

My general impression of poetry out of Sichuan, confirmed in discussions with the poetry critic Tang Xiaodu (editor or co-editor of #1, 4, 7, and 8 above), is that, broadly speaking, in creating often highly original, indeed startling, imagery, poets of the

province appear to make more imaginative use of diction than poets from other parts of China. This may be due to the highly competitive poetic environment in which they learn their craft, given the large number of practicing poets of some note, especially during the 1980s.

In addition, during the period in question radical changes in individual writing styles and poetic technique occurred more frequently among Sichuan's poets than among those of other regions in China. Furthermore, Sichuan's unofficial Second World of Poetry was the largest and one of the most active and influential in China during the period in question.

Geremie Barmé, in the introduction to *In the Red: On Contemporary Chinese Culture* (1999), points out that the relationship of unofficial culture (or counterculture in general) with the over-culture underwent a sea change after the seminal political event of recent times in China (the bloody repression of the peaceful protest movement on June 4, 1989) and a roughly equivalent event in China's market reforms (Deng Xiaoping's 'tour of the South' in January 1992). The elements of "rebellion and co-option, attitude and accommodation" that Barmé builds his book around, while primarily relating to events during the 1990s, were also present to lesser but growing degrees during the 1980s – but not in as pronounced a manner as later when a more mature market economy (and its attendant market for culture) came into existence. Instead, the account that follows will end very near where Barmé's book begins.

Today's avant-garde poet has access to the Internet and many more small – and laxly controlled – publishing houses than the poet of the 1980s. What is now best referred to as avant-garde poetry was necessarily underground during the 1970s. The danger of even the execution of underground poets during the Cultural Revolution in fact ended with the fall of the Gang of Four in 1976. However, throughout the 1980s there was still a danger of arrest and a stint in labor-reform camp, as will be demonstrated in Chapter 11, which deals with the effects of the June Fourth 1989 cultural crackdown. Today, police harassment and threats to employment are still a continuing occupational hazard. Continued state-control, guidance, and censorship of China's cultural organs, including official literary journals and publishing houses, dictate the continued existence of anti-

institutional avant-garde poetry institutions, such as self-published poetry journals, throughout the period covered by this study.

I hold that without a better understanding of developments within this Second World of Poetry, critics of contemporary Chinese avant-garde poetry, whether within or without China, are in danger of producing overly formalistic aesthetically-oriented studies of individual poets and poems based on necessarily simplistic, inaccurate generalizations.

In the French sociologist of culture Pierre Bourdieu's terms, avant-garde poetry is essentially a matrix of literary activities by poets for poets within a highly restricted sub-field of culture, ultimately meaning that the poets themselves (and fellow-traveler critics) are the initial legitimizing agents and, thus, the decisive arbiters of recognition and consecration (and desecration). Given the subject and scope of this study, I have found it useful and apt to refer to the theories and models of Bourdieu. Essays he wrote during 1968-1987 on relevant subjects are collected in *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature* (Polity, 1993). In 1992, Bourdieu followed these efforts with *Le Règles de l'art* (*The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*; Polity, 1996), an updated book-length study based on the previously mentioned essays. A first application of Bourdieu's theories to China has been compiled by Michel Hockx, who edited a collection of essays under the title *The Literary Field of Twentieth-Century China* in 1999 (Curzon).

In his writing, Bourdieu's model is culled from the emergence of the French literary avant-garde during the latter half of the nineteenth century and later related developments. Given that this was also a crucial period in the development of western industrialization and the attendant emergence of modern educational, publishing, democratic, and social structures, it may seem that there can be little convergence between the work of Bourdieu and my work set under the CCP dictatorship. However, these are extra-field occurrences that, while influencing the cultural field as a whole and specific sectors of it more than others, have less efficacy in the restricted sub-fields that are the avant-garde of any cultural activity. After 1978, the relaxation of CCP repression allowed sufficient space for the avant-garde to develop, albeit with its own Chinese characteristics.

Bourdieu shows that the cultural field tends to operate as the economic world reversed,

or a bad-faith economy: agents active in the field apportion greater value to symbolic capital than to economic capital and invest in their cultural efforts accordingly. This is so because economic success (and popularization) is held to devalue products and activities that are initially of high cultural value. This is particularly true of the avant-garde and related agents of consecration, or legitimization, such as universities, museums, and cultural critics. The avant-garde is shown to have developed as a reaction against political-moralizing uses of literature and the popularization of literature, both of which mean subservience to the real economy and dominant political groups. In the middle ground between these two poles, ‘serious’ or ‘high’ art and its practitioners and admirers develop aesthetic theories and traditions based on beliefs in the disinterested pursuit of ideals, such as that of beauty or truth, spiritual or otherwise. The esoteric nature of much of the work and criticism produced means that audiences are small, and appropriately educated, and economic rewards, if there ever are any, are often posthumous or late in arriving. The fact that the critical and poetical terminology common to the avant-garde is often borrowed from religion and philosophy tells its own tale.

Bourdieu defines a cultural field as a space of forces, or struggle, in which ‘producers’, either consciously or unconsciously, stake out ‘positions’ and ‘position-takings’ with respect to other agents already present in the field, or entering the field at the same time. Positions and position-takings are in large part determined by the *habitus* of these agents, which, as the term suggests, refers to relevant acquired habits and the skills, knowledge, and tendencies the individual agent is born with, or into, and acquires through life experience (upbringing, formal education, and so on). A map of any individual’s positions within a cultural field reveals a ‘social trajectory’, and knowledge of that individual’s *habitus* reveals the ‘possible’ position-takings available to the individual in relation to the state of the field at any given time. For this reason, decisions on position-takings are frequently unconscious, being grounded in *habitus* and that individual’s perceived position in the field, or the position that is aspired to.

Bourdieu describes the emergence of the modern French cultural field after the disappearance of the old systems of political and religious patronage and control, and the appearance of new cultural consumers (the bourgeoisie and the working class) and modern cultural institutions (universities, museums, etc.). The emergence of a modern

cultural marketplace and relatively independent institutions of consecration led to divisions within the fields of cultural production (literature, fine art, etc.) and an eventual reordering of the entire field of cultural production. In the case of France, the bourgeoisie and the working class became culture consumers, or economic opportunities for producers, resulting in the production of culture more or less to target audience tastes. In part as a response, or reaction, to these developments, there emerged an avant-garde dedicated to ‘serious’ or ‘high’ art and the slogan “art for art’s sake” – and not for the sake of money, thus the economy reversed referred to above.

The appearance of the avant-garde implies the shared *illusio* of the importance of art to modern culture and life, of a sense of being guardians of disinterested cultural production devoted to beauty, spiritual discovery, and artistic traditions (or selected portions of traditions, as identified by individual agents). However, the betterment of humanity, or society, is considered a tainted motive, ultimately in the service of the ruling social groups, and therefore to be shunned.

Some critics have devalued Bourdieu’s work as Marxist because he makes frequent references to classes and uses terms such as ‘the bourgeoisie’ and ‘producer’, for example. However, the term ‘the bourgeoisie’ was coined in nineteenth-century France in response to evident social changes then occurring, and was later borrowed by Marx. On the other hand, for Bourdieu ‘producer’ is a generic term used to avoid the culturally loaded, highly mystified term ‘creator’ that is an intimate part of the shared *illusio* of a cultural field. That said, he prefers the use of concrete terms such as ‘poet’ and ‘intellectual’ wherever possible.

However, unlike the “sub-field of high literature” dealt with Bourdieu, the sub-field referred to here as the Second World of Poetry possesses only an avant-garde and lacks any form of “establishment” that would be recognizable by western standards. This situation is a result of the unofficial nature of the Second World in which the only valid legitimizing agents are the resident poets and their unofficial publications – these poets have greater prestige and thus cultural authority than others, due to longer histories of publication or longer histories and greater accumulated prestige within the sub-field. In this sense, the earlier Misty poets can be seen as taking on the role of an “established avant-garde,” as they are to some degree legitimized as a target for attack by newcomers

to the sub-field, on account of their earlier and more frequent official publication in the PRC, and subsequent recognition by sinologists and critics outside the country.

Thus, paradoxically, the appearance of acceptance and mere occasional publication of the Second World poets in the CCP-dominated First World of “official” media in the PRC (and, therefore, a form of recognition) has a potentially delegitimizing effect, especially in the eyes of ambitious newcomers to the Second World. This is, in fact, the political element touched on only briefly in the western-oriented model constructed by Bourdieu. To an extent, this situation mirrors the western avant-garde’s reaction against the accumulation of popularity and economic capital through art, which in post-Mao China during the period covered by this study is overshadowed by the accumulation of the political capital necessary before anything else.

Given the inherent instability of the unofficial Second World that arises from the pressurized, borderline illegality of these poets’ publication activities, internal legitimizing agents and a resultant “establishment” cannot enjoy more than a fleeting existence. What cultural legitimacy can be attained is therefore tenuous and frequently reliant on external sources, such as translated foreign poetry and critiques that are often soon destabilized by translations of newer, antagonistic poetical tendencies and critiques as thrown up through the mechanisms of the western avant-garde, as described by Bourdieu. A further paradox results from the universal desire for recognition that leads avant-garde poets in the PRC to seek, or accept, publication in official media, which thereby potentially undermines their own moral authority and position-takings against the CCP-dominated literary establishment.

This is a brief summary of some of Bourdieu’s salient points. Just as he demonstrates the efficacy of his theories by applying them to nineteenth-century French literature and art, I will show their efficacy in relation to the Second World of Poetry and avant-garde poetry in 1980s Sichuan. I will, however, attempt to limit specific references to the theories of Bourdieu, restricting references to those points in the study where I feel they may be useful and enlightening.

Whenever possible, I shall work poems into the text in their entirety, weaving them into the story as it develops, treating texts with the tools that seem appropriate at the time and

which may, in fact, be suggested by the poets themselves, several of whom espoused this or that aesthetic doctrine. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine.

Where possible, I shall apply the standards the poets themselves claim as their own when judging their work. I will attempt to draw my own conclusions, based on close reading practices, as to whether what has been produced is ‘successful’ as a work of poetry within the context of China’s Second World of Poetry at the time.

This begs the question as to what can be considered successful poetry, or even poetry. This issue is of particular importance with regard to New Poetry in China, still struggling – as it has been since its inception in 1917 – to find favor and an audience comparable to that which still exists for classical Chinese poetry, both in China and overseas.

I am aware that by focusing on a limited number of avant-garde poets, I am serving a legitimizing function necessary to the creation of the avant-garde sub-field in Sichuan and China as a whole. However, it is my hope that readers will find my treatment balanced and fair, focused as much on the poetry written by the poets in question as on their position-takings and other related activities, all of which constitute the genesis of the avant-garde during 1982-1992. Also, due to limited access to issues of *The Poetry Press* (诗歌报), for example, during 1986-1989, I have been unable to fully document avant-garde polemics and position-takings in official literary publications. I have primarily focused on such activity as it was embodied and published in unofficial media within Sichuan. As the primary focus of this study is the establishment of the autonomous sub-field of the avant-garde in China, I do not believe this to be a major weakness.

Given the groundbreaking nature of my work, I have felt the need to footnote heavily in several chapters. It is my hope that this will allow interested scholars to pursue related topics, with footnotes serving as a guide to sources and themes of possible interest that are beyond the scope of this study. As in any field of study, the importance of basic fact-finding cannot be stressed enough, especially when such work has not been done on a systematic basis. It is my hope that this study fills the gap that currently exists inside and outside of China. It is of interest to note that there have appeared in China in recent years a number of books consisting of collections of poetry, interviews, photographs, etc. dealing with avant-garde poetry of the 1980s. I am particularly grateful for one of these:

the Sichuan poet Yang Li's *Splendor* (灿烂; 2004), three chapters of which first appeared on the Internet in 2003.

On a final note, a glance at the bibliography indicates that I have used several sources available on the Internet. Part of the reason for this is that I live in Prague and there are virtually no relevant resources available to me here. I have been able to make trips to Vancouver and Leiden to gather materials, but a surprising amount – much of it new – is readily available for download on the Internet. I hope the bibliography may serve as a partial guide to scholars similarly inclined. Furthermore, through DACHS, the joint venture digital archiving project between the University of Heidelberg and the University of Leiden, I have been able to preserve valuable materials in the poetry section of the project, for which I am responsible.

It is my hope that this study will be published online and be freely accessible to all interested in this area. In so doing, I hope to be able to stimulate debate and further research in the area. As responses to my DACHS work to date indicate, Chinese poets will also take part. A dialogue with all interested parties will allow me to update, correct, and expand on what I have written here, and in so doing produce a form of living scholarship, which I believe is the future of scholarship that deals with current events or the recent past.

In what follows, I shall trace the development of the avant-garde in Sichuan on a chronological basis. After a general national overview of the sub-field, I shall address the pre-1978 situation through a brief study of an individual poet (Zhou Lunyou). This will be followed by a focus on group and journal formation, as well as examining related poetry, beginning with *The Born-Again Forest* (1982) and followed by *Macho Men* (1983-1984); the Sichuan Young Poets Association and *Modernists Federation* (1984-1985); *Day By Day Make It New* and *Contemporary Chinese Experimental Poetry* (1985); *Han Poetry*, *The Red Flag* and *Not-Not* (1986-1989); and a number of journals which appeared after June Fourth 1989 (1989-1992). Throughout this, I will track the career trajectories of a number of significant poets, such as Zhou Lunyou, Ouyang Jianghe, Zhai Yongming, and Liao Yiwu, while noting the success, or the lack of it, of avant-garde poetry within the literary establishment and among the poetry-reading public.