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

Day, M.

CHAPTER 3: *THE BORN-AGAIN FOREST*: AN EARLY PUBLICATION

It comes as something of a surprise how little has been publicly said in China or elsewhere about this earliest of Sichuan's privately produced poetry journals. The works of fifteen poets are featured in *The Born-Again Forest* (*次生林*), of whom ten are Sichuan poets, and five of the total are now prominent and prolific poets known throughout China and overseas. The latter five poets are Ouyang Jianghe, Zhai Yongming, Zhong Ming, Bai Hua[46] and the then Guizhou-based poet-dissident, Huang Xiang[47] of The Enlightenment Society of Beijing Spring-renown. It is also somewhat surprising how little Bai Hua and Zhong Ming have had to say about the genesis of this journal. In the 1990s, both had officially published, lengthy autobiographical books that dealt with developments in Sichuan poetry, focusing to some extent on events during the 1980s.[48]

In Zhong Ming's own words:

> … At the time, I very much wanted to unite northern and southern poets by way of a mimeograph publication even more special than *Today* and *The Rising Generation.*[49] I don't know why I then felt this was very important. I remember that Luo Gengye was responsible for contacting the Beijing poets, but don't know why he wasn't successful. I invited You Xiaosu, Guo Jian, Chen Jinke and Ouyang Jianghe to Sichuan Normal University to discuss putting out a publication. Before this, Wang Daorong had put out *Wild Grass*[50] in Chengdu. We had never met, only

---

[46] Not to be confused with the older, eponymous army writer of the 1981 film script *Unrequited Love* (*苦恋*).

[47] Huang has been resident overseas since 1997. See Andrew Emerson (2004) for details on Huang's life and poetry.

[48] See Bai Hua (1996a), and Zhong Ming (1998).

[49] *崛起的一代*, a poetry journal founded by Huang Xiang et al. in Guizhou in 1980.

[50] *野草*. This appears to be a reference to one of the three issues of this journal produced by Chen Mo and Deng Ken, the first of which appeared in March 1979 during the height of the Beijing Spring period. Wang Daorong was one of several contributors to the journal at the time. Formed during mid-1960s, *Wild Grass* was also one of the earliest underground poetry groups/salons to operate in China. Initially consisting of over a dozen members, another dozen or so entered the group during the 1970s when two poetry collections

> corresponded a few times. But later I included his poetry in *The Born-Again Forest*. With no northern poets participating, I found myself considering the issue of southern poetry. I contacted Guizhou by way of Li Jinxi, a female classmate in the Chinese Department who wrote poetry. From Tang Yaping she got the addresses of Huang Xiang, Ya Mo (Wu Lixian) and Zhang Jiayan. And the poetry manuscripts of Chongqing's Bai Hua and Guangzhou's Wu Shaoqiu, I got from Peng Yilin who was at the time still studying at Sichuan Normal. Zhang Jiayan was the main editor of *The Rising Generation*, and through him poets in Hunan and Hubei also mailed in their work. … .[51]

Here are only the barest of bones about the genesis of the journal, and these are colored by a seeming reticence about certain factors. For example: Is it possible that Zhong would have 'forgotten', or had no apparent interest in, important issues such as why the northern poets did not wish to participate, and why no work of Hubei and Hunan poets was chosen for publication? Aside from Huang Xiang and Wu Shaoqiu, the three other out-of-province poets were Liang Fuqing and Chen Yuanling, both of Guizhou, and Lu Lu[52](Lu Guoxin) of Xining in Qinghai, but formerly a classmate of Zhong's in Sichuan. Zhong must have exercised his editorial judgment, but he does not wish to comment on the subject, just as he chooses not to talk about any of the poetry published in the journal, with the exception of Bai Hua's famous poem <Expression> (表达),[53] which was first published in *Born-Again.*[54] Bai Hua himself in *The Left Side – Lyric poets of the Mao Zedong Era* (*左边—毛泽东时代的抒情诗人*), frequently refers to this poem,[55] but not

---

were produced (1971, 1974). Due to the political pressures of the time, the group changed the name of their journal to *Poetry Friends* (*诗友*), of which 27 issues were produced before it was blacklisted. *Poetry Friends* reappeared in 1988, but after 4 June 1989 two of the group's poets were arrested (Du Jiusen and Xu Lu) the journal closed for a year before reappearing in 1990. Up to 2000, 87 issues of *Poetry Friends* had appeared. Among many contributors since 1979 were the well-known local Misty poet Luo Gengye and the Wholism poetry group member Pan Jiazhu. Two poetry collections have been published in recent years: *A Selection of Wild Grass Poetry* (*野草诗选*; 1994) and *The Path of Wild Grass* (*野草之路*; 1999). For more on this group and the circumstances of various members since the mid-1960s see: Deng Ken (1994), (2000), (2004a), (2004b), and Cai Yongmei (2004).

[51] Zhong (1996): 67.

[52] Lu was a classmate of Zhong's, and, together with fellow classmates Meng Ming and Xiong Yu, put together a pamphlet of their poems in 1980: *One Two Three Four* (*一，二，三，四*); Zhong (1998): 676-677.

[53] Anthologized in Tang & Wang ed. (1987), Chen Chao ed. (1989), and Tang Xiaodu ed. (1992).

[54] Zhong (1998): 677-680.

[55] Bai Hua (1996a); Part 2, Chapters 2, 3, and 4; Part 3, Chapter 5; Part 4, Chapter 1.

once to its publication in *Born-Again*, and then only to say that his poetry was supplied to Zhong by Wu Shaoqiu.[56]

In Part 3 of Bai's book – <Chongqing, 1982-1986; Chapter 3: An English Teacher at Agriculture University>, he adds little to what Zhong has already said, aside from praising him as the editor of Sichuan's first two "underground" poetry journals – the other being *A Selection of Foreign Modern Poetry* (*外国现代诗选*), which also appeared in 1982 and contained the translated work of Dylan Thomas, Wallace Stevens, Sylvia Plath, and others. In fact, it is the quality and influence of the latter journal that Bai Hua praises, while merely commenting on *Born-Again*'s historic value and adding that it was the first underground poetry journal to actually 'look good' (its covers were plastic coated, and black-and-white drawings were interspersed throughout the journal – the work of Guo Jian).

The only other comment by Zhong Ming that is of some value concerns the use of quotations from Marx or Engels in the editor's comments, or introduction, to unofficial poetry journals, as in *Today* and *The Rising Generation.*[57] He refers to this as the "poeticization" (诗化) of these loaded political classics, as well as being an indication of oppositional re-exegeses of the world as read by the CCP. Zhong restricted himself to one line from Engels' <The Development of Socialism from Empty Thoughts to Science> (社会主义有空想发展伪科学): "Although correctly expressing the general nature of the whole state of phenomena, it is insufficient in explaining the details which constitute this general state; and if we are not aware of these details, we cannot understand the general state." Zhong deploys this quotation in a refutation of CCP-establishment critics who were at the time attacking the poetry and poets of *Today* and those who were attempting to follow in their footsteps, experimenting with forms and techniques deemed inappropriate.[58]

It might seem that this citation of Engels is little more than a pre-emptive bit of protective lip service in a nod to official censors, and this may have been the case with regard to *Today* and other Beijing Spring publications. The editors of the first issue of

[56] Ibid., Part 2, Chapter 4: 56.
[57] Zhong (1996): 69.
[58] See relevant essays in Wu ed. (1993); Yao ed. (1989); and Yang & Liu (1985).

Today featured a lengthy quotation from Marx to open the second paragraph of the journal's opening <To the Reader> (致读者) announcement. Zhong, on the other hand, buries his much briefer Engel's quote in the third paragraph. In fact, the first line of the quotation from Marx used in *Today* may have inspired Zhong's choice of his journal's name: "You praise the multifarious changes in Nature that gladden eyes and minds, and its endless, bounteous treasures; you do not insist roses and violets emit the same fragrance; yet why do you insist that the world's most fertile thing – the spirit – can possess only one form of existence?" Zhong says nothing of it, but it is not beyond the realm of possibility that his choice of a 'born-again forest', with all such growth entails, found inspiration in Marx as quoted in *Today*.

Already, in 1982, Zhong Ming speaks of a new poetry, moving on from the practice of *Today*:

> … [The time] when a few poems could stir up enthusiasm is already gone forever; those souls who tremble after experiencing storms, in coming to understand the actual bad practice, also begin to calm down; as usual people of the world in the crowded ranks of mankind quickly glance back, and without clearly seeing anything carry on walking forward talking happily, simple-minded as before, as always looking down on self-conscious heroes, and do not dare go against society, as before praising barren hills and letting the Himalayas be obliterated by murky snow and mist.

It is poetry, the new poetry, that is one of the details being missed by society, and the detail that *Born-Again* is meant to provide to those interested in such. Zhong goes on to explain the journal's *raison d'êtr*e in more detail:

> … that poets are dissatisfied with universal indifference, or barbarity, and as a result convey a rebellious spirit is beyond dispute… True poetry cannot appear without impediments, but all in all it carries still uncertain rhythms, a rebirth of a primitively pure nature.
>
> When people reacquire the experience of being poets and become entangled in the delights of poetry, they will ultimately admire our efforts today, and with tolerance and sympathy confirm the art of individuals and the influence of individualization… 'Our religion materializes ourselves within facts, within hypothetical facts; it pins its emotions to these facts, but today's facts are unable to support it; however, in poetry thought is everything … poetry pins its emotions to thought, and thought is indeed fact,' (from Mathew Arnold, <On Poetry>)… this kind of fact must become a thing of

supreme value to people.

Zhong's use of a quotation from Arnold appears to be a counter-weight to Engels' – the social comment balanced by the poetic – and, placed as it is near the end of his comments, seems to carry greater weight. Simply put, Zhong advocates a new social orientation toward the details of the life of the individual: emotion and thought, and, ultimately, poetry as the true embodiment of this. Arnold advocated the study of the English language, literature, and poetry as a humanizing tool to be applied to the newly risen, and still rising, middle class of 18th and 19th century Britain.[59] Substitute the word Chinese for English and it is easy to imagine Chinese poets of the 1970s and early 1980s picking up Arnold's mantel, much as many of China's poets of the pre-War period had done, and attempting to humanize the people of China (like Lu Xun's attempt to be a literary doctor to the nation), if not the then almost insignificantly small middle-class specifically.

A variant translation of the title *Cisheng lin* (*次生林*) is 'Second-growth forest'. This translation is justified by an excerpt from a letter from a forest technician working in Sichuan's Wolong Nature Reservation, which is published on the first page of the journal, before the <Editor's explanation> (编者说明) above and the table of contents. There is intentional irony in this, given that the definition of the term in the letter refers to a forest that recovers after a natural disaster or human interference of some sort. It is easy to connect this with the natural disasters and failed economic schemes of the Great Leap Forward and the early 1960s, when tens of millions died of starvation and related causes, and the Cultural Revolution and its aftermath. However, this term is likely used in reference to the whole of Chinese society, and not merely poetry, ergo its placement at the forefront of the journal, followed by a poetry-centered foreword, which stresses the spiritual dimension. This being the case, the translation of *Born-Again Forest* – complete with all its religious overtones – is preferable, for to say poetry in some quarters of China's Second World has been something of a quasi-religious movement would not be an exaggeration.[60]

[59] See Eagleton (1996a): 21-23.
[60] See Michelle Yeh (1996b).

Another feature of the journal is a brief poetical statement, ranging from one sentence to two paragraphs, from each poet before the presentation of their work. The first of these poets is Ouyang Jianghe. In a nation obsessed with nomenclature as it concerns the CCP hierarchy, who is on lists and where one is on them are of paramount importance. This is particularly true among the poetry avant-garde in initial quests for recognition. The changing structure of this particular nomenclature in the unofficial poetry journals of Sichuan is of particular interest, in as much as this is both reflective of friendships, artistic proclivities, and other not necessarily poetry-related concerns, and very much related to who are the organizers of said journal. *Born-Again*'s 'list', in the form of the table of contents, looks like this:

1) Ouyang Jianghe (Chengdu), 4 poems, 14 pages;
2) You Xiaosu (Chengdu), 4 poems, 12 pages;
3) Chen Jinke (Chengdu), 3 poems, 8 pages;
4) Zhai Yongming (Chengdu, b. 1955), 2 poems, 3 pages;
5) Wang Daorong (Chengdu), 3 poems, 5 pages;
6) Xiong Yu (Chengdu), 4 poems, 8 pages;
7) Lu Lu (Xining), 4 poems, 8 pages;
8) Meng Ming (Chengdu), 3 poems, 7 pages;
9) Zhong Ming (Chengdu, b. 1953), 4 poems, 9 pages;
10) Peng Yilin (Chongqing), 1 poem, 4 pages;
11) Bai Hua (Chongqing, b. 1956), 2 poems, 5 pages;
12) Wu Shaoqiu (Guangzhou), 2 poems, 6 pages;
13) Liang Fuqing (Guizhou), 1 poem, 6 pages;
14) Chen Yuanling (Guizhou), 4 poems, 4 pages;
15) Huang Xiang (Guizhou), 1 poem, 10 pages.

As mentioned previously, five of these fifteen poets are names that are recognizable to knowledgeable readers of Chinese poetry today, and this fact, in and of itself, is quite remarkable. However, with the exception of the one previously mentioned poem of Bai Hua's, the quality of the work is reflective of the early stage of the growth of the born-again forest that was Chinese poetry, especially by poets in their early to mid-20s who had only recently proclaimed themselves to be poets (with the exception of Huang Xiang who was both older and more practiced). First off, there is the obvious group of eight Chengdu poets, followed by the three from Guizhou, two from Chongqing, and one each from Xining and Guangzhou. We know that Wang Daorong was included because his

poetry appeared in an earlier poetry journal – which leaves six poets from Chengdu who apparently were acquaintances of Zhong's.

Ouyang Jianghe and Misty Beginnings

In fact, Zhong Ming, Ouyang Jianghe, Zhai Yongming, and You Xiaosu had been friends since 1981. Ouyang had first met You at Sichuan University, where You was a student, in 1978.[61] This was also the year that Ouyang became serious about writing poetry, and, with the encouragement and introductions of the established poets Sun Jingxuan[62] and Luo Gengye, had poems published in *Sichuan Literature* and *Stars*. In 1981, Ouyang attended a literary activity organized at a steel plant in Chengdu by the plant's literary society and Sichuan University's poetry society.[63] Zhai was there at the invitation of a friend who worked at the plant and for its literary society, and, having made the acquaintance of poets, she turned her previous hobby of poetry into a profession.[64] Ouyang and Zhai also met Zhong Ming at literary activities in 1981, and Ouyang's acquaintance with Peng Yilin at a similar activity led to a first meeting with Bai Hua, when Ouyang traveled with Peng to Chongqing, where Peng lived and Ouyang had attended high school. During 1981-1984, Ouyang became the first of Sichuan's avant-garde poets to be invited to lecture on modern poetry, first at universities in Chengdu and then in Chongqing. In an interview conducted by Yang Li in 2001, Ouyang states that he has never been an organizer or an editor of an unofficial journal, but has rather always been a "core member" (核心成员) and "planner" (谋划者). However, he does not explain why this was the case, nor does he explain what his influence might have been on the many journals he participated in during 1982-1992.[65]

---

[61] Yang Li (2004): 431.
[62] Sun was a 'returned' poet, in other words a poet condemned by the CCP as a rightist in the 1950s or 1960s who returned as establishment poets in 1978 with the rise to power of the 'returned' Deng Xiaoping. In Sun's case, he was branded a rightist in 1958 and sent to the countryside; in 1981, he acquiesced to writing and having published a self-criticism that allowed him to retain his post on the *Stars* editorial board. See Flower (1997): Chapter Four.
[63] Yang Li (2004): 432.
[64] Ibid.: 471.
[65] Ibid.: 433-434.

Given that Ouyang was the first officially published and best known (at the time) of the local poets involved in the journal, it is no surprise to see him chosen by the editors to lead off *Born-Again* with this statement:

> Wanting to express the highest truth, one must transcend truth of an immediate, individual and general significance. Poetry is not a great pile of permutations or a series of purely individual daily experiences accompanied by extreme fortuitousness. To merely remain capturing instantaneous experiences, instantaneous images and instantaneous impulses is far from enough.
>
> Poetry is a look back at every phenomenon in all of the natural world and the whole of mankind's society from every side, after the poet has moved to the highest conceptual and emotional levels, with a vision that has been abstracted and filled with universal meaning.

These poetical statements are of particular interest. In some ways, they are indications of the insecurities and ambitions of the poets themselves, a sort of biographical note that may or may not be as opaque as the poetry that follows. They do not appear in other journals of this type in Sichuan, but do elsewhere in China. They also appear in the first officially published anthology of post-Misty avant-garde poetry: Tang Xiaodu and Wang Jiaxin's *Selections of Chinese Contemporary Experimental Poetry*.[66] In addition, through the mid- and late-1980s it was common to find such statements before mini-collections of such poetry in the more liberal official literary periodicals, such as *Author Literary Monthly* (*作家文学月刊*) of Changchun and *Guandong Literary Monthly* of Liaoyuan in Liaoning province.

Under the circumstances, this is understandable, as poets sought to have themselves and their art taken seriously once again after, arguably, twenty-three years (if not forty, from the date of Mao's <Yan'an Talks>). During this time, poetry was effectively treated as a branch of CCP propaganda – although poets, such as Guo Xiaochuan and He Jingzhi, did produce works that employed fine poetical technique in service to their chosen master. On the other hand, there is also an urge among newcomers to achieve recognition and distinction in the avant-garde sub-field, or the larger field of poetry in general, and such statements can be read as position-takings.

---

[66] Tang & Wang ed. (1987). Of the authors published in *Born-Again*, this volume includes work by Bai Hua, Ouyang Jianghe, and Zhai Yongming.

However, in the cases of Zhai, Zhong, and Bai, their statements are here restricted to one line. Possibly, it was Ouyang Jianghe's interests in poetic theory, even in 1981-1982, which earned him the right to lead off the collection with his rather lofty-sounding, romantic rhetoric. The other three had only this to say:

Zhai Yongming: Because it is creation left for future lives, my heart will always refuse to lose its aspirations.

Zhong Ming: To look at this world, we only need one eye.

Bai Hua: What the world gives us is only one form of enlightenment.

Moving on to the poetry itself in *Born-Again*, no small number of titles appears to hark back to the nature imagery, if not the titles, of *Today* poetry. For example, the first three poems of Ouyang Jianghe's indicate this influence: <Snowy Night> and <Sundown: Impressions and Feelings>, and the third, <Untitled>, is a title, or non-title, favored by poets such as Bei Dao and Duoduo. There is also You Xiaosu's <Still Sundown>, Wang Daorong's <The Second Month>, Lu Lu's <Twilight>, Meng Ming's <Winter>, Bai Hua's <To Autumn>, and Wu Shaoqiu's <Springtime, A Child Falls into the River>. Also, as with *Today* poetry, plants and animals feature prominently: Zhai Yongming's <Dandelions>, Lu Lu's <Autumn Chrysanthemums>, Meng Ming's <Peacock>, Zhong Ming's <Black Tea> and <Birds in Flight>, and Liang Fuqing's poetic sequence <Wild Beast: A Love Song>. Finally, Chen Yuanling has a poem entitled <Mama, My Time's Stopped> – an apparent response to a famous Misty poem by Liang Xiaobin: <China, My Key's Lost>.

The visual appearance of the journal, as already noted by Bai Hua, was of importance to Zhong Ming and leads one to believe that much thought was put into the choice of the first poem (by Ouyang Jianghe), as well as all the poems included in their totality. Zhong would have been aware that the plasticized covers and the artwork inside would impress readers, as would the name of the well-known (unique in this collection at the time), heavily politicized Huang Xiang at the end of the collection. The trick was to get readers to read more than this one poem, hence its being placed last and so many 'familiar' titles to be found in the table of contents. Ouyang Jianghe's first poem – <Snowy Night> (雪夜)

– thus should be the ‘hook’ to draw readers into reading the rest of the collection. The first stanza reads as follows:

> It’s that coldest snowy night of a year
> quietly gathering up
> the gentle, fragrant talk piled by the fire basin
> together we move toward a vast white wilderness
> move toward a dream of winter
> move into the distance

This hook is intended for those who are able to place themselves within the pronoun “we” – other poets, or friends of poets and New Poetry (many of these would have been found on university campuses in Chengdu and Chongqing, even if they had no real experience of the polar conditions described). It would also have helped that the first named poet in the journal is Jianghe, and not Ouyang Jianghe. Jianghe is the name of a famous *Today* poet, but it is also the given name of this previously unknown Sichuan poet. Many of the readers in Chengdu may have known the difference, but there must also have been a fair amount of confusion, with the only hint as to this Jianghe’s identity in a parenthetical Chengdu beside his name in the table of contents. In Sichuan, their Jianghe was often referred to as ‘little (小) Jianghe’ and the other as ‘big (大)’.[67] He did not take the pen name of Ouyang Jianghe until 1986. Here, in *Born-Again*, it is just possible that both Zhong Ming and he were taking deliberate advantage of the possible confusion among younger, less knowledgeable readers.

In 1982, Zhong Ming had just graduated and was working at Sichuan Normal University in Chengdu. He, as most everyone else, had little money. The mimeographed journal would have had a print run in the low hundreds, and, as with later such journals would be distributed to, and by, contributors to the journal and friends, at nominal or no cost. In fact, the editor and the contributors would probably have known most of their readership beforehand.[68]

---

[67] From conversations with Sichuan poets.

[68] Bai Hua (1996, Part 4, Chapter 5) writes that the journal subsequently came to the attention of the authorities in Sichuan. He relates that when Zhong was asked to explain the purpose of the journal, he replied: ‘To become famous’ (为了出名).

And, so, in Ouyang Jianghe's poem 'we' are talking around a warm fire before setting off on a long journey on a frigid, snowy, windy, moonless night. This is the world 'we' grew up in, are used to, and 'we' walk through it without fear towards a different world beyond this one (走向世界). This would appear to be a reference to the years of the Cultural Revolution, and this hostile environment is reminiscent of that described in several poems written by the *Today* poets and Shi Zhi, many of which Ouyang would have read. The poem is not dated, and could just have easily been written during the 1970s as in 1982, following the crackdown on Beijing's Democracy Wall in 1980 and the subsequent closure of *Today*.

There is a clear reference to Bei Dao's <The Answer> which opens the eighth stanza of Ouyang's ten-stanza poem: "Having spent childhood in an ice-age / you grow into the lord of snow / and are no more afraid of the cold….".[69] While Bei Dao, who was born in 1949, may previously have experienced something other than the 'ice-age' (if this is held to refer to the Cultural Revolution and its aftermath and not the entire period of CCP rule in China), Ouyang (b. 1956) and his fellow travelers seem to feel they grew up in this ice-age, were formed by it, and, at the time of *Born-Again Forest*, still live in it.

Finally:

> A starless night sky
> like a fairy tale without words
> pored over in a blizzard, gradually
> we are also frozen into characters in the tale
> on that coldest snowy night of the year
> at that last watch point on the edge of night

This reference to a 'fairy tale' recalls poems by Gu Cheng (1956-1993), one of the youngest of the *Today* poets, sometimes called the 'poet of fairy tales' (童话诗人). Gu Cheng's poem <A Generation> (一代人) seems to have been written for Ouyang Jianghe's 'we': "Black night gave me black eyes / yet I use them to search for light." Only here all have been transformed into characters in a bleak, frigid fairy tale – 'we' are frozen in place in expectation of a dawn to come, having left behind the comforts of the communal hearth referred to in the third line of the first stanza ("the gentle, fragrant talk

[69] See the first two lines of <The Answer>'s second stanza: "The ice-age is past, / why ice everywhere?…".

piled by the fire basin"). It is possible to read this poem as a position-taking by Ouyang Jianghe, Zhong Ming, and the other contributors to this journal – with the exception of Huang Xiang – setting them apart from the somewhat elder *Today* poets. In fact, with few exceptions (Ouyang and Zhong), the age differential is five-to-seven years on average. However, those few years could have meant the difference between actively participating as a Red Guard during the height of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1969), with all this implies, and then being 'sent down' (下放; or 'rusticated') to the countryside for periods of up to ten years, and, on the other hand, being a younger observer of these events before also being sent down for a briefer period of time in the early- or mid-1970s. The term 'educated youth' (知识青年) has been used to refer to both groups however, as they both were sent down after high school or had that education interrupted when entire families were sent down for 'reeducation'.[70] Another approach to this apparent difference could be to take into account how long the individual in question had been writing poetry. Again, with exceptions, such as Zhou Lunyou, most of the post-Misty poets began writing poetry *circa* 1980, and read and were influenced by *Today* poetry. The *Today* poets, once they were published in nationally circulated, establishment journals such as *Poetry* and *People's Literature*, were transformed into pioneers and educators.

The differences between these two general groupings may seem subtle, but they did exist, particularly in the minds of younger poets who could not have shared many of the experiences and worldviews of the *Today* poets and sought to reflect their own experiences in poetry. At this point, while the younger poets were still learning the trade of New Poetry and perceived themselves to be engaged in an effort to reclaim it from previous political misuses, there seems to have been little sense of envy or competitiveness with regard to the famous (in poetry circles, at least) Bei Dao, Jianghe, Shu Ting, *cum suis*.[71] This would follow soon enough.

---

[70] For more of an insight into this, a comparison of the short stories of Bei Dao and Han Dong is particularly enlightening, but is beyond the scope of this study.

[71] An abbreviated age comparison of relevant poets: Huang Xiang (b. 1941), Shi Zhi (1948), Duoduo (1951), Yan Li (1954);
Today poets: Bei Dao (b. 1949), Jianghe (1949), Mang Ke (1950), Shu Ting (1952), Yang Lian (1955), Gu Cheng (1956-1993);
'Older' Sichuan poets: Zhou Lunyou (b. 1952), Zhong Ming (1953), Zhai Yongming (1955), Bai Hua (1956), Ouyang Jianghe (1956), Sun Wenbo (1956);
'Younger': Liao Yiwu (1958), Shi Guanghua (1958), Xiao Kaiyu (1960), Yang Li (1962), Wan Xia

It is, however, of interest to note what appears to be a preliminary differentiation of a non-hostile, or non-competitive, variety. This 'we' of Ouyang Jianghe's lacks individuality, and refers to a group of apparently like-minded individuals who could be a generation of younger, or newer, poets, or a coterie of poetry-lovers such as the Chengdu poets (with the possible exception of Wang Daorong) published in *Born-Again*.

Ouyang Jianghe addresses an international theme in <Variation: The Twentieth Century> (变奏：第二十世纪), which opens with: "This is a century that has lost it's virginity…" Here there are references to heroin, nuclear weapons, sex, the Venus de Milo, the deleterious influence of Isms on the arts, the Jonestown massacre in Guyana, the leaning tower of Pisa, Israel, Picasso, and Apollo, as well as the Great Wall and tortoise shell inscriptions.

There is very little of such internationalism in the work of the *Today* poets, who adhered primarily to native subject matter, imagery, and personal experience. While they too must have known something of current events outside of China, contemporary Western artistic traditions and trends, etc., there is very little evidence of this in *Today* poetry – beyond the use of symbolist and modernist poetic techniques in their poetry. Duoduo wrote two poems in 1974 – <Marguerita's Travels with Me> (玛格里和我的旅行) and <Doctor Zhivago> (日瓦格医生) – in which similar foreign subject matter appeared, but this poem would not have been available to Ouyang Jianghe.[72] While such subject matter was not uncommon in pre-1949 New Poetry,[73] it would have come as something of a surprise, even shock, to those younger readers who had not yet had access to this older poetry, or translations of western poetry.

In Ouyang Jianghe's poem there is a new voice crying out for admission to a new world – as previously inferred in <Snowy Night> – a much bigger world of which China is merely a part, not all. The *Today* poets, on the other hand, were understandably, primarily concerned with their own experience and a humanization of China, themselves, and

---

(1962), Tang Yaping (1962), Zhang Zao (1962), He Xiaozhu (1963), Li Yawei (1963), Zheng Danyi (1963), Song Qu (1963), Song Wei (1964).

[72] See van Crevel (1996): 142-146; 128-130.

[73] For example, see translations of poetry by Xu Zhimo, such as <Elegy for Mansfield>, <Thomas Hardy>, and <Second Farewell to Cambridge> in Michelle Yeh ed. & trans. (1992); and by Xu Zhimo and Wang Duqing in Kai-yu Hsu ed. & trans. (1963).

poetry after the Cultural Revolution and the death of Mao, and before China's re-opening to the world following the first economic reforms of Deng Xiaoping's CCP leadership.

You Xiaosu

Bei Dao's 'ice-age' also reappears near the conclusion to You Xiaosu's <Gold Bell> (金钟), but here it is used in a long, dramatic, lyrical love poem:

"Do you know of the ice-age?"
"No"
"Then there was no love"

You Xiaosu is little know outside of Sichuan, and possibly would not be known at all today if Zhong Ming were not his exclusive champion, writing of him as he has in his three-volume opus *Spectator* (Zhong's translation of *pangguanzhe 旁观者*, normally rendered as 'bystander').[74] Admittedly, You did write daring love poetry for the time and was well-known in Chengdu in the early 1980s, but the following impressionistic – or 'misty' – poem is an example of a superficially apolitical work which strives to apply some of the poetic techniques exhibited in earlier *Today* and Misty poetry in general.

<It's Still Dusk> (依然是黄昏)

Seems to be snowing
the time beside me begins to cloud up
snowflakes like a crowd of sleepwalkers
possessing a single direction
yet indifferent to the old one
perhaps only my thought of this moment
in a windless sunset
goes on a immaterial trek

It's still dusk
not one person walks toward me
no beams of familiar sunlight
I have not the slightest doubt
there is nothing before my eyes

[74] Zhong Ming (1998b).

nothing
distant and huge

Must hide
must sympathize
all people are like this
fingers slowly fall from eyes
but nothing can be seen
disquiet and restlessness beset the mind

I hear the sky bend
I see the emptiness of a small stone
looking back once and again
dusk even now as before

This poem is both apolitical and very political, as was much Misty poetry.

This sunset could be a reference to the death of Mao, which would then make this poem a statement about the lack of change since that time (six years previous). Otherwise, the poet stands alone as ever with his thoughts and heightened sensitivities. As with Ouyang Jianghe, there is little or no use of rhyme or punctuation in You Xiaosu's poetry. Ouyang seems to favor regular stanza and line lengths, but You has no such inclinations.

Chen Jinke

The first of Chen Jinke's three poems, <For Y> (给 Y), is a paean to You Xiaosu and the power of poetry – further evidence of You's influence at the time. <Campfire> (篝火), the second of his poems in *Born-Again*, appears to describe the fires that have burnt in the hearts of the youth of the poet's experience – as a young pioneer, or Red Guard – to ill effect; again, "in the final winter" (1976, the death of Zhou Enlai?); and, finally, the real thing "in early summer / by the pretty seaside" and the youth of China… "a crowd of suffering stars happily gather / rise, into deep blue space / forming a new constellation", at which the universe rejoices. Chen's third poem, <Mountain Range> (山峦), is a lyrical, impressionistic account of the Himalayan Mountains in Sichuan, a poetic subject that would be fruitfully mined for years to come. There had been politically motivated hymns to the Himalayas previously, but this was among the first to be written with no political

subtext in evidence, beyond a paean to the uplifting, pure spirit of mountains and, by extension, life and everything beyond the mess of Chinese human society.

Zhai Yongming

Zhai Yongming is the only female poet in *Born-Again Forest.* This might seem to reflect badly on Zhong's editing, but the fact is that there have been few anthologized female poets in the history of Chinese poetry.[75] In 1982, the sole frequently anthologized female poet of classical Chinese poetry was Li Qingzhao (1081?-circa 1150). New Poetry has seen an increase in this number, as could be expected, but still the number is low: Bing Xin (1900-1999),[76] Chen Jingrong (1917-1989), and Zheng Min (1920-) prime among them. Misty poetry threw up new names, but still not a great increase: Shu Ting, Fu Tianlin, and Wang Xiaoni. Zhai is one of the first well-known female poets to rise in the wake of the Misty poets, but – as will be seen – she and changing circumstances would inspire many more (for example, in Sichuan alone, Tang Yaping, Xiao An, Liu Tao, Xiaoxiao, Chen Xiaofan, Tang Danhong, Hong Ying, and Yin Lichuan).

Zhai had met Zhong Ming and Ouyang Jianghe at unofficial poetry gatherings in Chengdu during 1981. It was also in this year that she came to the attention of the editors, who were also poets, of *Stars*,[77] much as other poets, such as Zhou Lunyou and Liao Yiwu, would later. These older poets, such as Sun Jingxuan, Bai Hang, Chen Xi, and Liu Shahe, acted as mentors to young poets they held to be promising, and the young poets' work was more easily published in *Stars* and other official journals as a result of this relationship. For Zhai, this close relationship with editor-poets at *Stars* would end in 1983 because of increased attacks on Misty poetry by official critics and her mother's illness.

Zhai Yongming has two lyric poems in *The Born-Again Forest*, and both seem indicative of the influence of the poetry of Bing Xin and Shu Ting.

---

[75] In fact, there were thousands of women poets. For more on this, and why they were not anthologized, see Chang & Saussy ed. (2000).

[76] Bing Xin wrote most of her poetry for newspapers and magazines in the early 1920s and collected these in two poetry collections, both published in 1923: *Constellations* (*繁星*) and *Spring Water* (*春水*).

[77] Conversation with Zhai in Aarhus, Denmark, on 28 April, 2004.

<Dandelions> (蒲公英)

Who has trodden out shallow footprints in the champaign
A bamboo basket flung onto the riverbank is full of green smells
Wind, gathers up innumerable balls of down
Unfolding a stretch of wingless fireflies
A dandelion is like a white smile
Spreading a mood of Spring

Enticed by this dreamlike miracle
A little girl who's forgotten to cut vegetables
Step by step enters the picture
Purses her small mouth
An illusion floats across the long dyke
A white flame
Lights a pair of chaste pupils

The years long ago regressed the boundary marker of youth
A lullaby occasionally still stirs my childhood memories

Childhood memories were a favorite theme of Bing Xin, as were plant and flower imagery to which it was often linked. Shu Ting also was using much plant and flower imagery at the time,[78] but was more inclined to weave a net of private symbolism linked to themes of love or social concerns. It is not clear that Zhai was influenced by either of these female poets however, as plants and flowers were also a common theme for traditional and modern poetry written by male poets. Furthermore, traditional male poets felt no compunction about writing poetry from what they considered a female point of view. And several female figures did appear in classical poetry: various goddesses, the courtesan, and the good, long-suffering wife chief among them.

So, being a woman poet was a serious business for Zhai, as for any other woman who wished to be known as a poet in China. These two poems come across as juvenilia, even exercises, stepping-stones on her path to maturity and a distinctive voice of her own.

<Last Night I had a Thought> (昨夜，我有一个构思)

Last night I had a thought -----

[78] See poems dedicated to mango trees, maple leaves, plum blossoms, rubber trees, locust trees, and irises, etc., such as <To a Rubber Tree> （致橡树）and <Maple Leaves> （枫叶）in Yan Yuejun et. al. ed. (1985).

We ran from a small grass hut to a big river
A wooden paddle supplanted our interface with the ground
To the other bank [we] went
Gathering up a ripeness which arrives with Autumn
Wind comes as if bidden
Waves want to change my course
But I have a compass
The straight-backed mast is me

Last night I had a thought -----
We lit a campfire
In a cold night stood guard over a distant promise
Even though the brook still sobs under a layer of ice
The horizon still keeps a black silence
Our gaze is forever to the east
There a star is
Telling of daybreak and the fall of dusk
Finally rising up
That pillar of light represents the morrow
The rays of morning light prancing on the mountaintop are me

In 1974, at the age of 19, after high school graduation, Zhai Yongming was sent to live in the countryside, or 'rusticated', for two years. This poem seems to hark back to that experience, though without biographical detail beyond an ode to her strength of character at the time (a characteristic of Misty poetry). In hindsight – and also at the time – the symbolic imagery seems obvious, even clumsy, with its echoes of the *Today* poets (dusk, star, daybreak, the mast). Zhai will return to her years as a rusticated youth in a later, artistically more successful poetry sequence <Peaceful Village> (静安庄) in 1985. Most obviously, however, the second stanza appears to be a rewriting of Ouyang Jianghe's opening poem, <Snowy Night>, where the campfire, cold night, etc. can also be found. The friendship between the two Chengdu poets makes such a situation quite possible.

Wang Daorong

Wang Daorong's <Small Alley> (小巷) is of particular interest as it is an apparent rewriting of <Rainy Alley> (雨巷) by Dai Wangshu (1905-1950), one of the acknowledged classics of New Poetry. Written in 1928, <Rainy Alley> was one of the

first and most successful poems written in Chinese in the French impressionistic style. It has also been accused of representing an extreme bourgeois, nihilistic trend among some poets of the time.[79] The subject of Dai's poem is a sad memory of a beautiful girl walking through an alley, rendered with a haunting use of rhyme, repetition, and parallelism.

Wang's poem cannot be accused of similar failings, but he does attempt to emulate the form and style of Dai:

Walls
gray, red
white, yellow
walls

at birth
a place of windows

growing green vines and gauze curtains
quietly concealing
venomous eyes
TV and guns[80]

The peace of early morning
struck dead at
the newly painted
small alley

my small alley
reading last words left on
a wall by the wind

standing beside a well overgrown
by moss. Here is a
solitary lilac
like a long lost melody
in death
ancient and at peace…..

[79] In May 1928, there was a violent clash between Japanese troops and the National Revolutionary Army in Ji'nan, Shandong province, and Marshall Zhang Zuolin was assassinated in June, all of which contributed to the rise of a cry for more socially responsible work from artists sympathetic to the CCP. See Gregory Lee (1989).

[80] Appears as "TTV" in the journal; could also be CTV: China TV.

The primary end-rhymes are *–iang* (x 11) and *–ang* (x 6), which are further reinforced by *–uang* (x 3) – a total of twenty characters out of the 111 used in the entire poem. 'Wall' (墙) both opens and concludes the first stanza, and others of these characters appear as line-end rhymes 7 times. While Dai's poem is decidedly melancholy in tone and is far more musical and whimsical than Wang's, Wang's poem conveys an angry tone and message – although why that may be is ambiguous. The alley has somehow changed (newly and colorfully painted), and that change is linked to death, possibly the death of an ancient way of life, symbolized by the lilac. Guns and malevolence fill Wang's alley, instead of Dai's rain and memory, and the "last words" on the wall may be the remains of an execution notice, all too common during the Cultural Revolution. The fresh paint hints at renewal of a sort, perhaps referent to Deng's so-called reforms, but the poet reveals this as a dangerous facade. Written in China in 1982, after the closure of *Today* in 1980, and with the recent crackdown against bourgeois liberalization and the ongoing attacks on Misty poetry, this poem seems to be addressing Chinese current reality, very unlike Dai Wangshu's.

It is also worth noting, that if this poem was, as Zhong Ming suggests, selected from an issue of the officially banned *Wild Grass*, Zhong was also making something of a political statement by including it and two other poems by Wang in *The Born-Again Generation*.

Xiong Yu

A rewriting of Gu Cheng's <A Generation> appears again, this time in the final lines of Xiong Yu's <Someone knocks at the door> (有人敲门). Here "Black night gave me black eyes / yet I use them to search for light" becomes:

Du Du Du

The top is spinning
It's a sun rising out of a cemetery
that falls into the black eyes of a child

All Gu Cheng's romantic heroism has been stripped out. The poem renders China as a wasteland represented by a deserted, crumbling courtyard, house, temple and, finally, cemetery. Moreover, Xiong Yu seems a very conscious product of it. The mood is much the same in his other poems: <Strolling> (散步), <The Beach> (沙滩), and <The Song of Stones and Us> (我们和石子的歌).

Lu Lu

While Lu Lu's work is, for the most part, almost as bleak in tone, he does hold out hope: poetry and love as antidotes to the seemingly omnipresent malaise. Most interesting, for the time, was his modernist experimentation with form in the poem <Weariness> (倦):

1

when that cruelly hot eye
finally closes behind a mountain
the earth punished till numb
then disgorges a long long breath ……

2

like a shadow
I walk watching the night sky
my shadow follows close
one dark shadow piled on another

3

sound clock

clock sound

clock
。
。
。
sound

4

the sky is a great lid
----- releasing a pattering rain
an umbrella is a little lid
----- rain falls in a patter

5

the gateway to hell
truly is inscribed with a line of heavy black characters?

6

“Freeze the brain!”
this idea is really amusing
----- the steel plate is damn hot

7

sound clock

clock sound
clock
◦
◦
◦
sound

8

Really, walking at night
why ever open your eyes?

9

Tomorrow……
Tomorrow……

Is this a poem written by an insomniac?

The sequence opens with an ‘aabb’ end-rhyme scheme. Is this a beautiful ending to a very hot day? Glad for the sun to be gone, anyway. Rhyme does not reappear in any of the other segments. However, what follows is seemingly a description of the mental torture an insomniac might endure: the oppressive nature of shadows and darkness in segments 2, 5 and 8; obsession with sounds (clocks and rain) and the passage of time in 3,

5 and 7; and something bordering on madness in 6, concluding with what can be taken as a plea, a prayer, or a promise: tomorrow – but it may never come, or, at the least, is not yet here. Again, this may also be read as alluding to the death of Mao and the intervening six years. Experimentation with character layout on the page, as in segments 3 and 7, was not unknown before 1949, but now this – like so much else – was new and unfamiliar again, especially for establishment literary hacks who had nothing good to say about it.[81]

Comments by Gu Gong in response to Gu Cheng's <Love me, Sea> （爱我吧，海） are exemplary:

> I understand my child Gu Cheng's poetry less and less, and am getting angrier and angrier……
>
> Reading on, my fury increases: Too downcast, too frightening!…[82]

Meng Ming and Zhong Ming

The motto set before Meng Ming's three poems reads: "I hope every one of my words is true." Moreover, his poems are marked by a good-natured earnestness, dealing with emotions, mutual understanding, freedom, and beauty, and, unusually, portraying winter in an eponymous poem as a harbinger of spring.

Meng is followed by Zhong Ming and the unrelenting bleakness of the world glimpsed through his eyes in a selection of four poems: <Jumping from the House> (跳房) on escape and preparations to do so from cultural tradition; <Meaningless Fragments> (没有意义的片断) on misery and death; <Black Tea> (红茶菌)[83] about a world like a sealed bottle, full of troubles and emptiness, in which only words and poetry give nourishment; and <Flying Birds> (飞鸟) on being trapped in a brutal world of birds – birds carrying

---

[81] See Yao ed. (1989), especially essays by Gu Gong (Gu Cheng's father), Gong Mu, Gong Liu, and Zheng Bonong.

[82] This is excerpted from Gu's <Two Generations – Talking from poetry's "incomprehensibility"> （两代人—从诗的"不懂"谈起）, first published in the October 1980 issue of *Poetry*, in Yao Jiahua ed. (1989): 35-43.

[83] Dedicated "to the poet B. H." (致诗人 B. H.), who may or may not have been Bai Hua, although Zhong has claimed that he had yet to meet him and had only read his poetry. Possibly this is a poetic response to Bai's work – the poem's theme would seem to be appropriate.

the sense of alien, incomprehensible chaos. This last poem is of some formal and stylistic interest. Firstly, beneath the title are two lines of poetry in English:

> We are the hollow man
> We are the stuffed man
> T. S. Eliot <THE HOLLOW MEN>

The girl Junzi[84]
died my heart
simultaneously died too

A heavy
shade flew over
black reed blossoms fill the brain

Giant hornets
on a bomb run
again we see Proserpine[85]

Seizing her
flowers thrown into
an incomparably black heart

The sumptuousness of a summer night
pulls in its wings
lays a wedding bed

Welcoming everlasting
days and a comatose naked body

A pair of white
ducks descend

Feathers gently quiver
a return to ribs[86]
completing the holy joining

Blazing daylight
we die
love causes us to live again

---

[84] [Zhong's note] "In the summer of 1980, because of shattered ideals and the indifference of her mother and the world the multi-talented Junzi unfortunately killed herself in Beijing."
[85] [Zhong's note] "Proserpine: The Queen of Hell."
[86] [Zhong's note] "*New Testament* Chapter 2: Jehovah made Adam from dust, and afterwards took one of his ribs and made Eve for his companion."

In a kingdom of birds
I curse
traps killing
the alliance of great boom nets

References to Eliot, Proserpine, and the Bible indicate future developments in Zhong's poetry, and some similarity in interests between him and Ouyang Jianghe. Whether this liberal importation of western poetic tradition and culture into Chinese poetry is appropriate is a question that has bedeviled New Poetry since its inception. Forms, techniques, and the use of colloquial language are a lesser issue which most writers, readers, and critics of New Poetry have more or less come to terms with. However, poems such as this were often attacked as elements of a vanguard of 'wholesale westernization' (全盘西化). In fact, a campaign against Misty poetry and, more broadly, bourgeois liberalization was underway just at the time *Born-Again* appeared. While it seems that the poem is meant to be read as no more than a memorial for a friend, there is good reason not to do so, apart from the public nature of its appearance here. Zhong's later poetry will see a much deeper mining of the western cultural tradition, as well as of the Chinese – a truly difficult experience for even the most devoted of poetry readers in any language. Possibly, at this stage, Romantic and Victorian poetry, earlier New Poetry, and the modern Russian poets, Osip Mandelstam and Boris Pasternak, among other influences, inspired Zhong. (Both Ouyang Jianghe and Zhong Ming translated poems of, and wrote poems on, Mandelstam and Pasternak in later years.)

However, does the poem succeed artistically? In 1982, the appearance of Greek and Christian mythology in a Chinese language poem written in China would have been somewhat shocking – certainly not what was practiced by *Today* poets, and only familiar to those who remembered pre-1949 New Poetry or had access to such earlier poetry and translations of western poetry. Equating Junzi with Proserpine and Eve might seem excessive, but is perhaps explained by the Cultural Revolution and the verbal excesses of that time. The showy use of two lines from Eliot's <Hollow Men> is uncalled for, as it only seems to connect with the closing denunciation of the state of Chinese society. Eliot's poem was written in criticism of a world lacking beliefs and faith in general, while

Zhong's mix of Christian and pagan imagery here has more in common with Romantic and Victorian poetry than with that of early modernism.

Bai Hua and Peng Yilin

Following Zhong, after a single poem by Peng Yilin – apparently a love song to his hometown, Chongqing, <The City: A Love Affair Suddenly Ignited> (城市：突然触发的一次恋爱) – there are two poems by Bai Hua, also a native of Chongqing, but written while a student in far-off Guangzhou. According to Bai Hua,[87] from the autumn of 1981, for one year he read and studied the translated poetry of Baudelaire, Verlaine, Valéry, Mallarmé, and Rilke, among others, learning the art of Symbolism. In his words, he learned anger from *The Flowers of Evil*, sighs from Verlaine, and colorlessness and frailty from Valéry, and these allowed him to find a voice to express his own dirges. <To Autumn> (致秋天), the first of the poems here, is an example of his newly acquired skills:

Autumn rolls in
the blue of the ocean spreads toward land
throwing a big piece of sorrow at mankind
a heavy, deep yellow
comes sweeping across the horizon

I want to protest against this color
a season that should be cursed
a seaside with no teeth
a prematurely bald prairie
a cast-off woman
a blind codger
flocks of white butterflies
a dried-out heart
a moldy dream

The season and the color entangles naked lamp-light
tosses a multi-colored misery all over the street
lights the fire of a large tract of pain
the fire of fatigue, the fire of mayhem
that everlasting, fiery melancholy
burns out the last, lonely autumnal sun

[87] See Bai Hua (1996a), Part 2, Chapter 2.

It seems clear that this poem is heavily influenced by Baudelaire's practice of *correspondances*, the idea that sensations are not merely sensations, but that they can convey an array of thoughts or feelings. The following poem, <Expression> (表达),[88] while in the same vein, however, is far more original and daring in conception, while still quite raw in practice. According to Bai, he had seen 'expression' as the title of an English-language poem in early 1981, and was so entranced by the word that it stayed with him and became the title of this poem written in October 1981 – though he has no recollection of having read the English-language poem itself.

In *Born-Again*, beneath the title to Bai's poem there is a single line from Samuel Beckett – "People live within an unspeakable feeling of sorrow"[89] – which is not found in any later published version of the poem. Thus, Bai hints not only at a difficulty of expression, but at a parallel existential aspect as well.

I want to express a mood
a white sentiment
This mood can't speak for itself
Neither can you feel its presence
But it exists
It comes from another celestial body
only for this day, this night
does it come into this strange world

It's desolate yet beautiful
dragging a long shadow
But it can't find another shadow to speak with

If you say it's like a stone
cold and silent
I'll tell you it's a flower
The scent of this flower moves stealthily under the night sky
Only when you die
does it enter your plain of awareness

Music is incapable of carrying this mood
Dance can't express its form

[88] This poem was officially published for the first time in Tang & Wang ed. (1987): 118-120.
[89] 人活着有一种不可言喻的悲伤感.

You can not know the number of its hairs
and don't know why it is combed in this style

You love her, she doesn't love you
Your love began last year on the eve of Spring
Why not this year at the dawn of winter?

I want to express a mood of the motion of cells
I want to ponder why they rebel against themselves
bringing to themselves odd stirrings and rage

I know that this mood is hard to express
Like the night, why does it fall at this moment?
Why do you die now?
I know that the flow of blood is soundless
Though tragic
this iron-paved earth will not be melted by it

The flow of water makes sound
The crackle of a tree makes a sound.
A snake wound around a frog makes sound
This sound presages what?
Does it mean to pass on a particular mood?
Or express a philosophy contained within it?

There are also those sounds of crying
Those inexpressible wails
The sons and daughters of China have wept beneath the ancient walls
The true children of Christ have wept in Jerusalem
Tens of thousands have died at Hiroshima
The Japanese have wept
Those who died for a just cause, and the timid have also wept
But all of this is hard to understand

A white mood
An inexpressible sentiment
on this night has come into this world
beyond our vision
within our central nerve
it silently shrouds the entire universe
it won't die, neither will it leave us
in our hearts it goes on and on
it can't be calmed, can't be sensed and known

What begins as a highly personal expression of a sentiment (which at the same time is universalized through use of the pronouns ‘you’, ‘she’ and ‘I’) is suddenly wrenched into the realm of hackneyed imagery and the cant of politics in the last two stanzas. Perhaps Bai was still not sure of the feasibility of purely personal expression in 1982, while the poetic environment in which he moved was still highly politicized. He may also have been merely keeping his head down, wary of attacks from official literary hack-critics. Possibly, he was also unsure of his audience’s ability to process and comprehend lyrical ambiguity rooted in purely sensory experience. This poem, like several others written over the course of the next few years, is concerned, in part, with the various difficulties of poetic expression. Bai makes it a practice of restating the familiar in unfamiliar ways. His unique brand of lyricism features cognitive angles and perspectives that are regularly askew in his pursuit of words to express the seemingly inexpressible.

Wu Shaoqiu, Liang Fuqing, and Chen Yuanling

Following on, Wu Shaoqiu’s poems consist of two bleak studies: <Spring　A Child Falls into a River> (春天，有一个孩子掉进河里) exposes the differences in winter between the north and the south of China, and the unremembered disappearance of a child;[90] and <Thirteen-line poem> (十三行诗)[91] reveals bleakness and loneliness as dawn is followed by a storm. Both poems may be read as referring to the crackdown following the Beijing Spring period in China. There follows a sequence of seven poems by Liang Fuqing entitled <Wild Beast　Love Song> (野兽　情歌) – a bleak rendition of life in the countryside, presumably as a rusticated youth. The editors place four short poems by Chen Yuanling after this: <Position> (方位) sees the poet lost with no place in the world, <Adventure> (探险) has him on a journey of self-discovery, and <Boulders> (岩石) sees him risen with sight of a dark world and memory of a bloody past.

The third of these four, however, is of some interest in relation to a famous Misty poem by Liang Xiaobin: <China, I’ve Lost My Key> (中国，我的钥匙丢了), a very political

[90] See Maghiel van Crevel (2005) for comments on the possible influence of this poem on the later work of the Beijing poet Haizi: <Spring: Ten Children Haizi> (春天，十个海子).
[91] This seems to be a take on 14-line poems (十四行诗), as sonnets are called.

poem, dealing with rootless, discarded feelings of former Red Guards and rusticated youths. The title of Chen's poem – <Momma, My Time's Stopped> (妈妈，我的时间停了) – appears a deliberate echo of, or response to, Liang's:

Cries at falling to earth,
a sprung hour hand.
A clock of life born with difficulty.

Coquettish tears,
a fixed minute hand.
A morbid clock of life.

Riotous dream-shades,
gulp down the second hand.
A malformed clock of life.

Momma, my time's stopped,
an exposed soul,
buried time,
a rotten clock of life.

Held up against the highly personal, self-pitying poem of Liang's, this strikes a more modernist tone. Here there is no reference to an evil past shared by many, but a continuing bleak situation without heroes or victims, a (clock of) life in China that is still difficult, morose, deformed and corrupt, shorn of the naive hopes and plaints of poems like Liang's. 'Momma' and 'China' are interchangeable here and in Liang's poem – Chen's use of momma instead adds to the sense of irony with which this poem is imbued.

Huang Xiang

The last ten pages of *Born-Again* are given over to Huang Xiang and eight parts of his long "psychological narrative"[92] poem, <Cries out of a Nightmare – A Living Tombstone> (魇 – 活着的墓碑). Below the title is a brief verse that further clarifies the poem's subject matter for the prospective reader:

[92] Huang's words: 99 (心理叙事诗). A translation of the poem in its entirety can be found in Andrew G. Emerson (2004).

I feel I am already dead
But I still live
This poem of mine
    is the music of death
is a living tombstone

This is followed by a prose preface and a verse introduction (引子), then six poems selected from two of at least ten sections of the poem. Huang seems to attempt to recreate the long, flowing lines of Whitman here (and in most of his previous and subsequent poetry). The selections here dwell on various tragedies, the crises of thought, faith, and morals of Huang's generation – which, given his age (b. 1941), would include all those born into post-1949 China. He quests after man's truth, a way out from an unnatural world not of his choosing, thus striking the very Romantic figure of the lonely cultural hero.

In Conclusion

This is a dire conclusion to *Born-Again Forest*, although there was never much hope for more than this, despite Zhong's choice of the journal's name. After all, the leadoff poem did start on a dark, cold, snowy night – written by a poet (Ouyang Jianghe) living in Chengdu! This symbolism frequently employed by *Today* poets like Bei Dao and Mang Ke – true northerners – is evident throughout *Born-Again.* The poets here are still, to lesser or greater extents, students of the Misty poets. Bai Hua is a notable exception.

If there is anything that can be called a 'Sichuan' voice in *Born-Again Forest*, it must be the apparent perception of the poets themselves to be still living in an 'ice-age', possibly moving towards something better, but more likely than not this would be some other country or some other future – they are seeking to enter 'the world', but still reside in a dark, restrictive China (Ouyang Jianghe, <Snowy Night>). There is evidence of alienation from both China and Misty poetry, a feeling of powerlessness and a struggle to give voice to the self: a self shorn of optimism and the romantic, heroic 'I' evident in much Misty poetry. Perhaps the lack of the experience of being Red Guards during the anarchic days of 1966-1969 left the somewhat younger poets with no illusions about their

individual – or group – power to change their conditions through personal action, much less poetry (with the possible exception of Huang Xiang). This generalization could just as easily be applied to many other poets of similar experience, or lack of such, elsewhere in China. However, this does seem to be the first noticeable beginning of a turning away from the poetry of *Today*, certainly the first such collection of like-minded individuals that evidence this in China. With regard to poetic technique, they may have still been learning from Misty poetry, but thematically there are signs of movement off in different directions. Some proof of this is in the reworking of famous images from Bei Dao, Gu Cheng, Shu Ting, and Liang Xiaobin.

So, in the end, Zhong Ming's attempt to unite new Chinese poetry, north and south, fails in more ways than the simple fact of being unable to recruit poets from the north. Yet, here is also something new, a darker vision of individuals alienated from the country and culture in which they live. If not accusingly screaming out to be recognized and valued as individuals and poets, like Huang Xiang, there is a muted recognition of a similar bent in their choices of subject and voice in this collection. Zhong's decision to include poetry by Huang Xiang indicates that he was aware of this affinity. That said, Zhong's silence on these issues in later recollections is perhaps indicative of present disapproval or disavowal of past actions and earlier poetry. If this is true, he has clearly misjudged the position and value of his journal in the development of avant-garde poetry in China in general and Sichuan in particular.

In 1991, in an interview with Maghiel van Crevel,[93] Zhong Ming was very outspoken about having helped move the 'center' of contemporary poetry southward by means of *Born-Again*, which he claimed to have been a 'large-scale', influential underground poetry journal. However, this is a rather far-fetched claim on Zhong's part. During the author's years in China (1982-1984, 1986-1988, 1989-1991), while collecting materials and conversing with avant-garde poets in all parts of the country, there was no mention of this journal by anyone other than Zhong Ming, Ouyang Jianghe, and a few other Sichuan poets. Still, the journal evidently was a major influence on poets in Chengdu and Chongqing, and this in itself was an important achievement, as the journal stands as proof of a preliminary stage in the development on Sichuan avant-garde poetry. Chinese

[93] Notes taken by Maghiel van Crevel at the time (unpublished).

literary critics would take up this North-South issue during the 1990s, and this would develop into a major polemic in 1998-2000 in which Zhong Ming would play his part. Whether Zhong Ming and his journal were early indicators of the existence of such a split, or the precipitators of it, is an issue that may be worthy of further study.[94]

In 1982, in *Born-Again Forest*, there was yet no apparent animosity directed at the better-known exemplars of Misty poetry. None of the poets in this journal would ever explicitly take part in such a polemic. This would come soon enough, as shortly after the appearance of *Born-Again* ambitious, even newer newcomer poets in Sichuan would begin a revolt against China's official cultural orthodoxy and literary classics – both ancient and contemporary, including Misty poetry.

[94] See further comments on this issue in the Conclusion to this text.