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CHAPTER 5: A CONFLUENCE OF INTERESTS: THE INSTITUTION OF THE ANTI-INSTITUTIONAL

In October and November of 1984 a confluence of the interests of Sichuan's avant-garde poets led to a province-wide union in an attempt to make room for themselves – or at least a few of them – as recognized 'poets' in a public, if not official, sense. In other parts of China similar events involving groupings of newcomer poets were also occurring. In hindsight, given the thousands of poets involved and the scores of publications they produced nationwide, it seems that the shock that was expressed by many critics in 1986 upon the exposure of the nation to this plethora of new poetry in the <Grand Exhibition> was somewhat disingenuous. On the face of it, up to this point, these younger poets might have been justified in believing there was an attempt by the CCP-led literary establishment to suppress them and their new work.

This chapter will lay out in some detail a few of the activities that were occurring in an 'underground' fashion 'among ordinary folk' (民间) during 1983-1984. Much of this information is based on the memories of various participants in Sichuan and, as a result, must be taken with a grain of salt. The account below is based on the evidence of the available concrete materials, in addition to conversations between the author and several of the participants.

Setting the Scene

Aside from a genuine interest in the art of poetry, opportunity and self-promotion are the two decisive factors that led to the appearance of the *Today* group in Beijing in 1978. There was a period of liberalization allowed at a time when the Deng faction was still

trying to dispose of Maoist elements in the CCP (primarily Hua Guofeng and his cohort of conservative Maoist survivors in the leadership) while the trials of the Gang of Four were being conducted, and there also happened to be an ambitious group of talented, young poets (and other artists) centered around underground literary salons in Beijing that had been in existence for some time.¹⁵⁹ Consciously or otherwise, for newcomer poets the *Today* poets whose work eventually appeared in Beijing's *Poetry* – the must-read of all lovers of poetry – were not only exemplars of a new form of poetry writing, but also an object lesson to all of China's aspiring poets in just how to get the recognition, if not the adulation, the *Today* group had received, and still were receiving. *Today* had shown all younger poets that group activity of this kind was possibly more effective than poetry collections produced for individual poets.

In Sichuan, it was not only publication in *Poetry* that was much sought after by poets of all persuasions, but also in *Stars* published in Chengdu, a nationally circulated monthly poetry journal considered second in rank to the Beijing-based journal. *Sichuan Literature*, also with a national circulation and based in Chengdu, was a third choice in terms of prestige. It has already been noted that Zhou Lunyou bombarded the editorial offices of these journals with his manuscript poems, finally being published in all three in 1982-1983. Zhai Yongming and Liao Yiwu had similar success at approximately the same time. And Ouyang Jianghe had preceded them all in 1981-1982.

It is difficult to over-emphasize the importance of the publication of a would-be poet's work in one of these nationally circulated journals in China. There is little doubt that an early love of poetry was the initial motivating – and continuing – impulse behind the vast majority of the individual decisions to write poetry. Beyond that there was strong self-belief in one's abilities, support and encouragement from an initial group (however large) of readers, and finally, and perhaps most crucially, the willingness to promote oneself in the search for editors who will be enamored of one's work. Quite apart from whatever material rewards could be won (not much), it must have been the public acknowledgement of being a 'poet' that was the primary goal. In a country such as China, where the literary heritage is an important source of national pride, this was quite some aim, and one the attainment of which only time could possibly prove. Still, to be so

¹⁵⁹ Van Crevel (1996): 52-58.

publicly labeled a ‘poet’ in the present day put one already, however prematurely, among the likes of such acknowledged masters of classical forms as Qu Yuan, Li Bai, Du Fu, Su Dongpo and, even, Mao Zedong – the initial source of inspiration for many of these younger poets. Much of this can be said about any poet elsewhere in the world within their literary traditions, and individuals such as Emily Dickinson are the rare exceptions that prove the rule.

Few poets anywhere seem to enjoy going into any real detail about their efforts at self-promotion. And there are, accordingly, few comments to be found among Sichuan’s poets in this regard. Wan Xia, in a November 2001 interview with Yang Li in Beijing, claims that he wrote out Macho Men poems (not just his own) on toilet paper and condoms and sent them to famous poets and official literary journals in 1984.¹⁶⁰ Not surprisingly, none of these poems were selected for publication at the time. However, the poems did somehow come to circulate on campuses in the northeast. Wan cannot remember clearly, but thinks he sent copies to Xu Jingya or Lü Guipin, poets associated with Misty poetry who were resident at Jilin University at the time. As a result, Wan and others of the Macho Men poets struck up a correspondence with young poets in the northeast, notably Guo Lijia and Shao Chunguang, who both came to be considered part of the Macho Men group by the Sichuan poets. Wan Xia made trips to the northeast in both the autumn of 1984 and early 1985 during which he further cemented this link. Eventually, once a friend of Guo Lijia – the young editor Zong Renfa – discovered their poetry in 1985, many of their poems began to be published in the Liaoyuan-based *Guandong Literature* in a special bimonthly section devoted to ‘Third Generation’ poets.¹⁶¹

A refreshingly frank discussion of these issues and what was occurring in Sichuan at the time by Yang Ran can be found on the Internet.¹⁶² Yang was born in Chengdu, and

¹⁶⁰ Yang Li (2004): 212.

¹⁶¹ Zong has been an editor at *Author* based in Changchun since 1988. *Guandong Literature* was highly unusual in that while every second issue was devoted to ‘high’, or ‘serious’, literature, the other six issues in the year were given over to ‘popular’ literature. This latter literature served to support the ‘serious’ art, a publishing model of Zong Renfa’s devising that proved successful from 1985 on, but was not copied by other literary journals elsewhere in China. The author has collected the journal and spoken with Zong on several occasions. Additional background information can be found in an interview with Guo Lijia in Yang Li (2004): 269-281.

¹⁶² See Yang Ran (2002a).

was an early schoolmate of Liao Yiwu. In 1976 upon graduation from middle school, Yang was sent to the countryside as a rusticated youth. Except for two years at Chengdu Teachers University (1978-1980), he has lived, married, taught, and written his poetry in the small town of Ranyi. He relates how his desire to become a famous poet, and his jealousy of other young poets published in *Poetry and Stars*, led him to put together his own private poetry collection in the winter of 1980. This consisted of 114 poems written between the years 1974-1980, which he then mailed to a dozen-or-so well-known poets and twenty-odd friends. None of the poets responded, but he did receive encouragement from his friends. Yang claims that this jealousy and the limited opportunities to be published led many young poets (including himself) to feel antipathy toward the official poetry scene and the poets published in those journals, such as the Misty poets. He sees this as one of the reasons, if not the main one, that young poets began to reject Bei Dao *cum suis*, opposed all forms of poetic tradition, and imported western poetical Isms, in the search for poetry that would distinguish their work from officially acceptable poetry. And this, Yang argues, led to the view among many younger poets that official poetry actively worked against their ‘new’ poetry, blocked the modernist experimenters, and was attempting to stifle the genius of the young generation of poets. Yang holds that a natural outgrowth of this situation was the desire to publish their own journals and organize poetry groupings.

These are similar to the feelings that Bei Dao and other *Today* poets had in 1978, which led to their decision to produce their unofficial journal. This fact was not entirely lost on the younger poets, but jealousy and a competitive spirit led to mixed feelings about these predecessors who were publishable – if only intermittently – in *Poetry and Stars*.

In mid-1981, Yang Ran and a friend in Ranyi worked together to put out a poetry handbill (传单) entitled *Poetry Seeds* (诗种), which they mailed to friends in Chengdu. They received a very enthusiastic response and in October Yang traveled to Chengdu where, together with Liao Yiwu and another aspiring poet, he organized the Traveling Clouds (行云) poetry society. Liao, then a long-distance truck driver following a stint as a cook in the countryside, brought in other poets of his acquaintance, such as the woman poet Li Jing. Yang was in charge of printing operations in Ranyi, and over the course of the next year put out eight issues of *Poetry Seeds* and twenty-nine of *Traveling Clouds*

(also in handbill format). Aside from works by Yang, Liao, and Li, there was also the work of Gu Cheng, who had begun a correspondence with Yang after receiving the first issue of *Poetry Seeds*.

By way of these handbills, in 1982 Liao was able to get an introduction to the editors and official poets of *Stars* where he received both education as a poet and part-time editing work in reading and commenting on some of the thousands of poetry manuscripts that were mailed into the journal's editorial offices. As a result, Liao had some of his poems published in the poetry section of *Sichuan Literature*.¹⁶³ He made the pages of *Stars* in 1983 with the poetic sequence <Ancestral Land: The Age of the Sons> (祖国：儿子们的年代), and finally appeared in *Poetry* in February 1984. Liao Yiwu had clearly made it as a poet in the official literary scene.

Yang Ran, on the other hand, had to wait until 1984 before having a poem placed in *Stars*.¹⁶⁴ This, he says, was the direct result of Liao recommending him for a job reading manuscripts for that journal in Chengdu during Yang's summer vacation in 1983. Later, he attended a conference convened by *Sichuan Literature* where it was announced that the journal would cease to carry a poetry section from January 1984. Many of the younger poets present were extremely unhappy to see one of the few opportunities to publish eliminated, so Yang organized a petition, which all the younger poets signed and which was ultimately ignored without any explanation. CCP cultural policies such as these angered and alienated many younger poets. Autumn 1983 also saw the CCP cultural establishment mount a six-month-long campaign specifically meant to counter and denounce the popularity of Misty poetry and modernism among younger poets and readers of poetry.¹⁶⁵

Yang's response was to return to Ranyi and to form a purely local poetry society with a friend: *Honey Flower* (蜂蜜花). And there followed a poetry journal, or paper, of the same name. In addition, also during the summer of 1983, Yang had been to a writing conference for poets at Qiongxia where he had met several local young poets. Later in 1983, they were able to form the Qiongxia poetry society, and with the support of the

¹⁶³ <The Date> (约会) and <A! Bamboo Shoot Diggers> (啊! 挖笋的人) in the September 1982 issue.

¹⁶⁴ May issue, <Searching for a Bronze Statue> (寻找一座铜像).

¹⁶⁵ Barmé & Minford ed. (1988): 345.

local cultural bureau produced a poetry journal called *Daybreak* (晨). In 1985, this society would become the Qiongxia branch of the province-wide Young Poets Association, and produce *The Third Generation Poetry Paper* (第三代人诗报), in addition to *Daybreak*, until the provincial government banned the association following nationwide student demonstrations in December 1986-January 1987.

Yang Li

Another even more precocious self-promoter and organizer was Yang Li. In his last year of high school in Chengdu in 1980, he and four friends put out two issues of a poetry journal called *The Plague* (鼠疫), named after Camus' novel by the same name. Copies of the journal came into the hands of the police who put an end to their activities.¹⁶⁶ Following graduation, Yang worked as a bank teller for four years, but, in 1983, he and some of his old classmates put out one issue of another poetry journal entitled *Nevertheless* (然而). The publication in this journal of Yang's poems <The Stranger> (怪客),¹⁶⁷ the title of which is apparently derived from Camus' novel *The Outsider*,¹⁶⁸ and <Noon> (中午)¹⁶⁹ made his name as an avant-garde poet, even if it did not lead to immediate publication in an official literary journal. Yang's interest in Camus had carried on to the reading of translations of French *nouveau roman*, and the biblioclastic theories of Robbe-Grillet: namely that novels should be about things, be an individual version and vision of things, and be a systematized and analytical record of things. Yang now attempted this in poetry:

<The Stranger>¹⁷⁰

When a train traveling into the past stops at a small station
A woman wearing a red windbreaker
Gets down from the fifth carriage from the end

¹⁶⁶Yang Li (2004): 59-61

¹⁶⁷In Tang Xiaodu ed. (1992)

¹⁶⁸*L'Etranger* in the French is translated as 局外人(The Outsider) for the Chinese version of the book, presumably from an English translation by the same name. Yang may have known a French-speaker.

¹⁶⁹In Xi Ping ed. (1988).

¹⁷⁰Both this and <Noon> are in *Modernists Federation*.

When the train moves
This woman heads off in the opposite direction of the train

A red spot

Those houses are squat
Strangely short --- crowded close like musical notes
Scattered around by a musical genius

There is a similarly undersized road passing through these houses
The stranger is coming up this road (the footprints he leaves
Can make a woman pregnant)

By chance it snows that night. This guy
Leaning forward
Wears a black windbreaker
Squeezes into the squattest little wooden hut of all the houses

A black spot

In the restaurant by the road
Just as the waiter and some drinking oldsters are discussing the stranger
That woman wearing the red windbreaker
Rushes in
Outside, the snow has yet to melt

Remember that afternoon a seldom-seen drizzle fell
The sky, low and small
I tell my news to a strange telephone
Go find that eraser lost in primary school

You certainly want to know: Who am I?

While I walk
I silently recite the places I'm going to: this place
This place. I remember to myself

The woman wearing the red windbreaker sits on a chair by the window
What do you want to eat? The waiter asks
"The stranger!" this woman says and from a pocket
pulls out a handgun puts it on the table

From here the actor in the poem wanders in fear outside; gets lost; appears on a boulevard
in Paris where all are frightened of him; and then he is on a train without a terminus,

telling a nun she cannot get off; he realizes all is false – including his own words; all the women vanish; he is told the woman in black has committed suicide; he meets a sick old man; the power goes out; he looks for a woman; and enters a room full of people dancing in candlelight...

.....

“Excuse me,” I’m very polite: “Of you all

Who is the stranger?”

I’m the stranger
 You’re the stranger
 The stranger is the stranger

He joins them in their dance. On the morning of the third day, the dead woman is gone, but he then sees her sitting, thinking on a bench in a park. He sees the nun again, but then again, maybe not:

Again it’s the small hours of the night
 The stranger wearing his black windbreaker
 Leans forward and pushes in

As far as I’m concerned
 I’m the stranger

Is this poetry? It was not considered so by most of its readers until Yang Li met Wan Xia in Chengdu in 1984. When Yang read the poems of the Macho Men, he felt he had found poetic soul mates, poets who faced similar criticism. Essentially <The Stranger> is an existentialist denial of reality and of self. On the printed page, it certainly looks like poetry. The language is simple, rhymeless, and there is plenty of action. A novel condensed into a poem? Actually, it is more like the script of a play or a film, with minimal dialogue, but with vital stage directions meant to be internalized and acted out by the various actors who are in fact one actor – the reader.

This poetry shares the concern with narrative encouraged by Wan Xia and Hu Dong in Macho Men poetry, as well as what Yang Li, Li Yawei and Wan, in their November 2001

interviews, consider to be a “counter-cultural” (反文化) stance with regard to officially acknowledged poetry: that is, the lyrical (抒情) tradition at the center of classical Chinese poetry (particularly *shi* 诗 and *ci* 词). There is also a rejection of the ‘root-seeking’ (寻根) poetry that had sprung up out of the work of the *Today* poets Jianghe and Yang Lian, which was influencing a growing number of poets in Sichuan at the time: Shi Guanghua, the brothers Song Wei and Song Qu, Liao Yiwu, and Ouyang Jianghe, among others.

Yang Li writes in much the same style in <Noon>, only here the speaker seems to be located in a quiet coffeehouse on a hot day – a coincidental similarity with Ma Song’s 1984 poem, <The Coffeehouse>. The main actors are noon and the imagination, or memory, which are populated by ‘you’, ‘me’, ‘he’, and ‘she’ to express personal desires and angst:

.....

This noon
Should be like that waitress leaning back sleeping in a chair in the coffeehouse
A high ceiling fan
Twirls her skirt. This
Noon
Should be like her red knickers sometimes seen sometimes not
This noon is boring ---
Who isn’t

Can’t say there’s any loneliness
This noon
Should be lying like everybody in their own rooms
Let the boulevard
Lie there exhausted as you this noon
Too hot --- it says
Need
A kind of
Quiet

This quiet might be only possible in death, at the end of the making of the poem, and in that blank space beneath it, forever unfilled, always empty, unlike the bordello-like vessel that is “this noon.”

If they were not officially published at the time, these poems did serve as a link for Yang to Wan Xia and his ever-growing circle of poetry friends and associates in Chengdu and the rest of the province. Given the development of a province-wide range of friendships centered on ambitious individual poets such as Yang Li, Liao Yiwu, Zhou Lunyou, and Wan Xia in particular, and the greater freedoms of movement and expression enjoyed by these poets than any of their predecessors since at least 1949, it was perhaps inevitable that something bigger would occur.

The Establishment of the Sichuan Young Poets Association

In and of itself, the Sichuan Young Poets Association (四川省青年诗人协会) amounted to little more than a province-wide talking shop. However, it did provide a forum in which several like-minded poets were able to meet, and thereby created the opportunities that yielded two major poetry journal publications in 1985 (*Modernists Federation* and *Chinese Contemporary Experimental Poetry*), and the creation of two further poetry groups and their journals (*Not-Not* and *Han Poetry*) in 1986. The impetus towards the organization of the Association in its initial stage, however, seems to have come from Xichang, in the person of Zhou Lunyou's elder twin brother Zhou Lunzuo.

The Zhou family in its entirety is of some interest to this study.¹⁷¹ Their parents, having served the Chinese Nationalists as minor functionaries before 1949, were subjected to persecution during each of the political campaigns that washed over China until 1976. Residence in the remote western Sichuan town of Xichang further added to the family's difficulties. In small Chinese towns, a smaller population often means that the victims of political campaigns become permanent scapegoats placed at the top of the list of the usual suspects to be rounded up with each new campaign.

Inevitably, in the early 1960s, the Zhou family was ordered out into the countryside near Xichang in order to have their class-consciousness rectified and raised through toiling with the farmers on the land. Before this, the Zhou family's eldest son had been

¹⁷¹This information is based on conversations between the author of this study and Zhou Lunyou during 1988 and 1989, and with his wife Zhou Yaqin in 1990, while Zhou Lunyou was imprisoned.

able to win a place at university in Chengdu. There he was driven insane by persecution during the Cultural Revolution, because a theoretical article he wrote was viewed as an attack upon the regime.

Compelled to go to the countryside and unable to attend school after only three years of primary education, Zhou Lunyou and his elder twin brother, Lunzuo, began a program of intensive self-education, against the wishes of their parents. With the death of Mao and the fall of the Gang of Four in 1976, the education system slowly returned to a state of pre-Cultural Revolution normalcy, and the twins were able to complete college degrees by way of TV University in 1979.

Like his elder brother, however, Lunzuo's interests also lay in politics and philosophy. Initially a high-school teacher, due to an essay deemed critical of the CCP he was arrested in 1980 (and again in 1987) and sentenced to two years of 'reform through labor' – a fate that was also to befall Lunyou in August 1989.¹⁷²

As a result of Zhou Lunzuo's essays and Lunyou's success as a poet in the early 1980s, the twins had made a large number of acquaintances in Xichang and its environs, and consequently also in Chengdu. In the summer of 1984, Lunzuo was mulling a possible essay topic to be entitled <A Study of the Composition of Human Personality> (人格建构学). His ideas were praised by Zhou Lunyou and his local poet-friends, Jimu Langge and Wang Shigang (later to take the pen-name Lan Ma), who then recommended them to friends in Chengdu.¹⁷³

Zhou Lunyou had become close friends with the Chengdu poets Liao Yiwu and Li Zhengguang when all three attended the officially sponsored Sichuan Youth Creative Activists Delegates Conference in autumn 1983, at which they had publicly challenged

¹⁷² Zhou brother number four was sentenced to life imprisonment on trumped-up charges of rape (of a girlfriend who was the daughter of a local high official) in the early 1980s. Finally, in early 1990, the youngest of the five brothers, a taxi driver whom their parents had successfully kept out of school and illiterate, was killed in a car accident. The driver of the other vehicle was clearly at fault, but was never charged. Up until that time, this son and his wife had been able to parlay Deng's economic reform policies into a thriving chicken farm that allowed him to drive Xichang's first privately owned taxi cab and purchase a newly-built apartment.

¹⁷³ The following details can be found in an essay written by Zhou Lunzuo and published in the ninth issue of *Not-Not*. This is the only detailed account of these matters in existence and, due to Zhou Lunzuo's relative neutrality as a non-poet, rings far truer than any of the very partial accounts of events from other individuals, including Zhou Lunyou, Wan Xia, and Yang Li. See Zhou Lunzuo (2001): 396-451, in Zhou Lunyou ed. (2001e).

current literary orthodoxy.¹⁷⁴ The three came to be collectively known as the Three Musketeers (三剑客¹⁷⁵), and this name was given to their larger group, or forum, a coterie that included the two woman poets, Li Juan and Liu Tao (later to become the wife of Wang Shigang).¹⁷⁶ It was these two who were so enthused by Zhou Lunzuo's essay topic that they undertook to arrange for him to lecture at Sichuan University in Chengdu through Zhao Ye, who was the leader of the university's poetry society at the time. Zhou Lunzuo traveled to Chengdu in early October 1984 and was put up in Wan Xia's home, where he also made the acquaintance of Yang Li. On October 13, Zhou Lunzuo gave his lecture to a receptive audience of hundreds at Sichuan University. The school wanted him to lecture again and he drew invitations from the Medical Institute and the Chinese Medicine Institute. However, all came to naught when the university party organization objected to Zhou Lunzuo's reply to a question about Marx at the first lecture – he had said that Marx had little to say on the subject of his lecture beyond the effect of economics on people. At the time, it was still punishable heterodoxy to state that Marx did not have an answer to everything.¹⁷⁷

One of the listeners to Zhou Lunzuo's lecture at Sichuan University had been Chen Lirong, who would become a managing director of the Sichuan Knowledge Development Workers Association (四川省智力开发工作者协会), officially established in July 1984.¹⁷⁸ Chen wanted the Association's activities to expand beyond the purely educational into broader cultural areas and, together with Zhou Lunzuo, hit upon the idea of setting up a group of lecturers who would travel throughout the province and, ultimately, the country. The initial core group of lecturers was to consist of the Zhou twins, Ouyang Jianghe (then still known as Jianghe), Wang Shigang, and a few others. This idea was scrapped due to Zhou Lunzuo's political difficulties after the university lecture, but he was instead hired to work in the Association's offices. While there, Zhou

¹⁷⁴ Zhou Lunyou ed. (1994b): 108.

¹⁷⁵ A label used for several other threesomes in contemporary Chinese poetry. For example, see Maghiel van Crevel (1996): 49-50.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.; in 1983, presumably after the conference, the three poets were joined by Liu Tao, Chen Xiaofan, Wang Shigang, Li Juan, and Wan Xia, among others, and, in 1984, Yang Yuanhong, Zhao Ye, Shi Guanghua, Song Qu and Song Wei also took part. It was also at the Activists Conference that Zhou Lunyou first met He Xiaozhu, a resident of Fuling, who later became a contributor to the Zhou-edited *Not-Not* (1986-1989).

¹⁷⁷ Zhou Lunzuo (2001): 403.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.: 410.

was visited by poet-friends such as Wan Xia, Liu Tao, Li Juan and another female poet, Chen Xiaofan, who all made the acquaintance of Chen Lirong and others in the Association. In late October 1984, Yang Li suggested that the Association set up some sort of organization for young poets and this idea appealed to Chen, softened up, as he effectively was, by the young, vibrant poets who frequently visited Zhou Lunzuo there.

At the time, in Zhou Lunzuo's eyes, there were two groups of poets in Sichuan: one, centered around Ouyang Jianghe, Zhai Yongming, Zhong Ming, Bai Hua (essentially the poets of *The Born-Again Forest*), had close connections with Misty poets and poetry,¹⁷⁹ considered themselves to be proper modernists, and had nothing to do with the other group. This other group included Zhou Lunyou, Liao Yiwu, Li Zhengguang, Liu Tao, Li Juan, Wang Shigang, Jimu Langge (the pen name of Ma Xiaoming), Yang Li, Wan Xia, and others. Zhou Lunzuo thought that Ouyang Jianghe would be the hardest to bring around, but felt that as neutrals he and Chen Lirong might be able to get the two groups to work together within the similarly neutral Association.¹⁸⁰

Chen was able to convince the other directors on the Association's board to establish an arts department under which he would manage this new organization. He and Zhou Lunzuo approached Ouyang Jianghe, who agreed to join under the condition that the Association send an official letter of invitation to his military work unit in which he would be asked to take the position of vice president of the new organization. With Ouyang Jianghe and his group now willing to cooperate, and Chen Lirong as the president, Lunzuo was asked to draw up a list of names for other leadership positions. He remembers preparing the following list:¹⁸¹

President: Chen Lirong

Vice Presidents: Ouyang Jianghe, Li Zhengguang, Luo Gengye, Zhou Lunyou (also

¹⁷⁹ Ouyang met Yang Lian in 1981, and had traveled together with him, Zhai Yongming, and others to Jiuzhai Gou, a famous tourist site in western Sichuan. Before this, a poetry meeting in honor of Yang had been convened in Chengdu's Wangjiang Park. In 1982-1983, Yang returned to Chengdu with Bei Dao. See Yang Li (2004): 431-433.

¹⁸⁰ Zhou Lunzuo (2001): 412. This impression would have been reinforced by Zhou Lunyou's editing of a poetry collection in autumn 1984 that was tentatively entitled *Wolves* (狼们). Zhou Lunyou wanted to promote a "primitive, instinctive, untamed free expression of life consciousness" in poetry, and had selected work of his own, Yang Li (then using the penname Jiazi), Wan Xia, Hu Dong, Li Yawei, Li Yao, Liu Tao, Chen Xiaofan, Lan Ma, and Liu Jiansen. Zhou says Yang Li was responsible for the collection not being printed. See Zhou Lunyou (1994b): 108.

¹⁸¹ Zhou Lunzuo (2001): 410.

Secretary General)

Assistant Secretary Generals: Zhai Yongming, Liao Yiwu, and Wang Shigang
 Directors: Yang Li, Yang Yuanhong, Zhong Ming, Liu Tao, Li Juan, Chen Xiaofan,
 Shi Guanghua, Song Qu, Song Wei, Wan Xia, Zhao Ye, Hu Xiaobo.

Not a poet himself, Zhou Lunzuo did not wish to be part of this organization, and he returned to Xichang after giving this list to Chen Lirong. Chen was also not a poet, but he was a director, and now head of a newly established arts department, at the Knowledge Development Workers Association, a body recognized by, and under the supervision of, the provincial department of the Communist Youth League Council. This provenance would prove invaluable in providing necessary letters of introduction to printers who would produce the publications of various ‘research societies’ (研究学会) during 1985 and 1986, including *Modernists Federation*, *Chinese Contemporary Experimental Poetry*, *Han Poetry*, and *Not-Not*.¹⁸²

The Sichuan Young Poets Association was officially established on November 4, 1984, at a special congress held in the Chengdu Municipality Working People’s Cultural Hall Auditorium. Predictably, Zhou Lunzuo’s list was altered.

How it was changed can be seen in a brief notice published on page eight of the Association’s first publication: *Modernists Federation*. The concluding two paragraphs run as follows:

Currently the association has 110 members, association branch membership runs close to 2,000, and [the association] is in the process of establishing five district branches. The Chongqing University Student Branch has already been established and has 1,200 members; the Chengdu Municipal Universities Branch has 400 members.

Currently the association has three research groups: the Oriental Culture Research Society (东方文化研究学会), the Wholism Research Society (整体主义研究学会), and the Third Generation Alliance (第三代人同盟). After repeated discussions and consultations among the directorate, Comrade Luo Gengye was chosen as president, (Ouyang) Jianghe, Fu Tianlin, Li Zhengguang, and Wan Xia as vice-presidents, and Comrade Shi Guanghua as acting secretary general(代任秘书长).

The changes to the initial list tendered by Zhou Lunzuo are instructive in several senses as to what the poets wanted this association to promote. It is perhaps not surprising that

¹⁸² Ibid.: 409.

Chen Lirong was willing to relinquish the role of president. It is also unsurprising that Zhai Yongming had no interest in acting as a vice-president, for she was looking after her mother, who was in hospital at the time.¹⁸³ What is surprising is the disappearance of Zhou Lunyou's name from this new list, although he did remain a director. The other surprise might be the appearance of Wan Xia as a vice-president. According to Zhou Lunyou in an April 7, 2001 interview with a reporter from the *Asia Pacific Times* (《亚太时报》),¹⁸⁴ Wan Xia's involvement in the preparatory phase was in propaganda work, but after the list of positions had already been finalized, the directors gave in to Wan Xia's pleading and added the position of "deputy secretary general (and vice-president) in charge of propaganda" which was subsequently filled by Wan.

It is also of interest to note the creation of the two research – or 'study' – societies and the alliance. These titles deliberately hark back to similarly-titled organizations created during the May Fourth period (1917-1922) when such bodies, in all spheres of social life – including one founded by Mao Zedong in 1918 which led on to the birth of the CCP¹⁸⁵ – sprang up like mushrooms in China's major cities. Furthermore, Yang Li, Wan Xia, and the Macho Men poets took the title of 'Third Generation' from the Chongqing poets of the 1982 Beipei conference by adding the character for 'person' (人) to 'Third Generation'. Given such apparent political machinations on the parts of those involved in the Association, it would seem that the organization was not purely oriented toward the art of poetry.

However, on 18 January 1985, Zhou Lunyou received a telegram in Xichang (where he was working on a collection of poetry that ultimately remained unpublished, and which may be why Shi is listed as 'acting' secretary general) from Yang Yuanhong in Chengdu telling him to return and that Wan Xia was mounting a *coup d'état* of sorts. Zhou says that Wan, together with a "trusted friend" of Zhou's, had created a new board of directors consisting of people not in the association, called for an expanded congress, named himself as both a vice-president and the secretary general of the association, and made

¹⁸³ More on this in Chapter 6.

¹⁸⁴ Xiao Yun (2001).

¹⁸⁵ Chow (1960): 74-75.

one of his co-plotters a vice president. Zhou returned to Chengdu, confronted Wan Xia, and the *coup* was forthwith aborted.

In his November 2001 interview with Yang Li, Wan Xia goes into some detail as to why he may have tried to alter the leadership structure of the association. He states he did not like the pointless, interminable meetings, and that Shi Guanghua and Zhou Lunyou were only interested in publishing things. Wan wanted activities such as the parties, poetry readings, and lectures he had organized on campus in Nanchong. Wan also says he thought that the poetry of himself, Yang Li, Hu Dong, Li Yawei, etc., belonged to the future, that Ouyang Jianghe, Li Zhengguang, and Zhou Lunyou were incapable of putting anything good together, and that Luo Gengye was only interested in doing business.¹⁸⁶

These comments indicate that the list published in the journal is accurate as to the leadership before the *coup* attempt, and that Chen may have stepped down in favor of Luo as president before publication of the journal in 1985. This also rings true with Wan Xia's comments about others only being interested in getting things published, for both Luo Gengye and Fu Tianlin (a woman poet who appears as a vice president in the journal's list) were members of the official Writers Association and were Sichuan's most famous practitioners of Misty poetry. Both poets were selected as representatives of Misty poetry in the tremendously successful *Misty Poetry Selections* (朦胧诗选) published in Shenyang in November 1985.¹⁸⁷ Asking members of the official Writers Association to lend their names to Second World projects would become common practice for unofficial journals, as it was hoped that doing so would provide some modicum of protection against official wrath directed at their illegal publications.

Zhou Lunyou's reference to a "trusted friend" who participated with Wan Xia in the attempted *coup* was to Yang Li, a fact confirmed by Shi Guanghua in his 2001 interview with Yang.¹⁸⁸ The vagueness of Zhou, Yang, and others on this matter may have much to do with saving face, for most of Sichuan's prominent younger poets had been somehow involved in these events, pro- or anti-*coup*, and in hindsight would not have wished to admit to any role in such political shenanigans. In any case, personal relationships were

¹⁸⁶ Yang Li (2003b). The author downloaded this chapter from the Xiangpi Internet site in March 2003. This information, which appears on page 24 there, is edited out of Yang (2004) where it should appear on page 217. Perhaps Yang or Wan felt the comments were too incendiary.

¹⁸⁷ Yan Yuejun et. al., ed. (1985); by the fifth reprint in April 1987, 192,500 copies had been published.

¹⁸⁸ Yang Li (2004): 414.

strained, or broken, and in many cases continue so to this day, as comments by Wan Xia, Yang Li, and Zhou Lunyou in 2001 indicate. In 1986, however, Zhou and Yang seemed to have repaired their personal relationship, as Zhou invited Yang to join his and Wang Shigang's nascent *Not-Not* group.

So far, all of this is centered on events in Chengdu. Little is said anywhere about what took place in Chongqing and its environs, where many of Sichuan's universities and colleges are located, and in which the Young Poets Association claimed 1,400 members. In Bai Hua's book *The Left Side*, there is a brief account of events in November-December 1984 when the Association was being set up.¹⁸⁹ Wu Shiping was one of the main organizers of what was called the Chongqing Youth Cultural Arts Association (重庆青年文化艺术协会). Peng Yilin, a friend of Bai and Zhong Ming whose poetry had been included in *Born-again Forest*, was also one of the leaders. Bai and another friend, the poet Zhang Zao, attended the last preparatory meeting in Beipei, and it was there that Bai first met Pan Jiazhu, who was made a vice-president of this association and was then teaching English at the Liberation Army Communications Institute in Linyuan, another suburb of Chongqing. In 1988, Pan would become a poet and theorist of the Wholism group in Chengdu.

The First Product of the Association: *Modernists Federation*

Modernists Federation is the English name of the first journal produced by the Association, which is given on the front cover in Chinese as 现代诗内部交流资料 (*Modern Poetry Internal Exchange Materials*). The innocuous Chinese title was evidently chosen to maintain legality, as the journal did not have a book number that would allow it to be publicly circulated and sold. (The last few issues of *Today* had also taken this tack in 1980 in a vain attempt to avoid being banned.) Presumably, the journal was meant for circulation among Young Poets Association members only – at least that is what the authorities would have been told. The cover also carries the date “January 1985,” but the editors' comments on the back inside-cover indicate that the journal did

¹⁸⁹ Bai Hua (1996a): Part 3, Chapter 6.

not appear until March of that year. Further proof of this is found on page 19 where, at the conclusion of Shi Guanghua's poetic contribution, it is noted that final changes were made to the text on February 26, 1985.

The back cover carries contact information and the list of editors. The Oriental Culture and Wholism research societies are credited as the “sponsors” or “principal producers” (主办) of the journal, Wan Xia is editor-in-chief, and Yang Li and Zhao Ye are his assistants – all three were members of the Third Generation Alliance. However, the “responsible editors of this issue” (本期责任编辑) are listed as Song Wei, Hu Dong, Zhao Ye, Shi Guanghua, Wan Xia, Yang Li, and Wang Gu. In comments made during his interview with Yang Li, Wan Xia claims that his original hope of getting maximum exposure for what he felt was new, experimental poetry by the likes of the Macho Men poets and Yang Li was never high. He claims the association was controlled by the Song brothers, Shi Guanghua (Wholism poets), and Zhao Ye and the local university student poets; all of whom Wan felt were not up to the job of producing a journal.¹⁹⁰ This might mean that the January 18 attempted leadership *coup* was Wan's endeavor to create a ‘Third Generation’ journal, and this could explain the later March publication date. Yet Wan then goes on to admit that they could not do an issue of just ‘Third Generation’ poets, because there was also good poetry from Shi Guanghua, the Song brothers, Ouyang Jianghe, and Beijing's Haizi, among others.¹⁹¹ Liao Yiwu had been put in charge of contacting poets and soliciting contributions for the journal before the *coup*, and the contents of the journal that eventually emerged seems to have come about through his efforts as much as anyone else's.

The end result was a journal of 82 pages (including editors' comments on both the inside front- and inside back-covers) divided into six sections. The first section, entitled <Conclusion or Beginning> (结局或开始) – the title of one of Bei Dao's most famous poems – had only seven pages, which carried the poetry of Bei Dao, Gu Cheng, Yang Lian (these three were *Today* poets), Xu Jingya, and Luo Gengye. As is often the unwritten rule of unofficial poetry journals, works in *Modernists Federation* were previously unpublished in official literary journals, and by including the works of well

¹⁹⁰ Yang Li (2003b): 23. Again, the relevant comments have been edited out of Yang (2004): 217.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.: 24.

known Misty poets the journal was able to acquire a certain cachet, or – in Bourdieu’s term – symbolic capital. The appearance of the journal, both inside and out, was highly professional, on a par, in fact, with *Poetry*. There were three poems each from Bei Dao and Gu Cheng: Bei Dao’s <Conspirators> (同谋),¹⁹² <Curriculum Vitae> (履历), and <Capriccio> (随想); and Gu Cheng’s <The Sea of Parting> (分别的海), <Garden of Dreams> (梦园), and <Coming Close> (来临). Yang Lian’s contribution was <The High Plateau> (高原), a long three part segment of the second <Dunhuang> (敦煌) section of his series <Ceremonies of Souls> (礼魂). This latter work was, strictly speaking, already no longer Misty poetry, but poetry that was more ‘root-seeking’, or a search for the soul of Chinese culture.

In their 2001 interview, the newcomer poets Yang Li and Li Yawei complain about Wan Xia and the other editors’ decision to include Misty poetry, saying it was a simple ruse to attract the attention of official literary editors to the poetry of *Modernists Federation* in the hope of possible official publication for the non-Misty work. Coming almost twenty years later from Yang Li, then one of the editors, there is a ring of self-justification – if not deliberate distortion – in his words: in light of later events, who could argue that *all* the Association poets were not hoping for just such an outcome? Poets such as Li Yawei and Ma Song, who had no part in the editorial process, might have had such sentiments at the time, but it would be hard to believe that they were not thrilled to see their work published in such a fine-looking journal. Nor would it be difficult to imagine that they might also have felt some satisfaction in seeing their names so closely linked to those of Bei Dao, Gu Cheng, and Yang Lian. Surely this had been an unstated intent of the editors, in addition to a desire to interest poetry-lovers (and publishers) beyond Sichuan’s borders in their journal – Misty poets acting as a ‘hook’ – and an apparent desire to include the finest poetry available to them in their journal. Here Liao Yiwu’s admiration of *Today* poets and his responsibility in soliciting work from out-of-province poets played a large part. In this respect, Liao’s influence would be seen again later in 1985 in the composition of the Association’s next journal, *Chinese Contemporary Experimental Poetry*.

¹⁹² In Tang Xiaodu ed. (1993b).

The influence of Yang Lian on contemporary poetry in Sichuan was immediately apparent in the second section of poetry under the heading of <Asian Bronze> (亚洲铜), the title of the poem by Haizi¹⁹³ that concludes the twenty-two-page section.¹⁹⁴ The other relatively short poem in this section is one by the Beijing poet, Niu Bo. The remaining six poems are all very lengthy and belong to what is best referred to as the Wholism (整体主义) tendency, including work by Shi Guanghua, Song Wei and Song Qu, Ouyang Jianghe, Liao Yiwu, Li Zhengguang, and Zhou Lunyou (the Three Musketeers, still intact on paper at least).

The third section is entitled <The Third Generation Poetry Conference> (第三代人诗会). This section is the biggest, at twenty-nine pages in length and over twenty poems. Here are poems by Yang Li, Ma Song, Hu Dong, and Li Yawei, all previously discussed, and all written at least six months and up to two years earlier in the case of Yang Li.

It is of interest to note the layout of the table of contents at this point. It is two pages long, and clearly what were felt by the editors to be the most important authors and works are to be found on the first page, starting with the name of Bei Dao and ending with that of Wan Xia. The names of twenty-two poets are on the first page (six of whom were out-of-province) and their work is given fifty-one, or roughly two thirds, of the journal's seventy-eight poetry pages. Zhang Zao, Zhang Xiaobo, Zhao Ye, and Wan Xia are the other poets under the Third Generation banner on the first page. The editor's comments (presumably those of Wan Xia) on the inside front- and inside back-covers make reference to only these three (or two and a half) sections and to the poets and work found on page one of the table of contents. At the top of page two, the Third Generation section is filled out by four poets of the university student group from Chengdu – Deng Xiang,¹⁹⁵ Hu Xiaobo, Huang Yun, and Cheng Ning – and an honorary member of Macho Men from the northeast, Guo Lijia.

¹⁹³ In Xi Ping ed. (1988).

¹⁹⁴ This poem was written in 1984, and in 1985 was awarded the May Fourth Special Prize for Literature at the first such award ceremony at Beijing University, from where Haizi had graduated in 1983. See Xiang Weiguo (2002): 124. See Yeh (1998): 281-296, for an article on the position of this poem in Haizi's oeuvre.

¹⁹⁵ Deng's two poems were selected from the 1983 journal *The Third Generation*: <A Man> (一个汉子) and <Story> (故事). See Deng Xiang (2004) for these poems.

The following section is only nine pages long and carries thirteen works by six poets who constitute a glaring absence up to this point: the women. Here then, finally, their poetry is consigned to a section simply entitled <Woman Poets> (女诗人). And all the poets previously mentioned as active in the Sichuan avant-garde poetry scene are here: Zhai Yongming, Liu Tao, Li Yao, Li Jing, Li Juan, and Chen Xiaofan. There is no contribution from Fu Tianlin, who was apparently drafted into the association as a vice-president for appearance's sake only.¹⁹⁶

The fifth section of poetry is designated <The Sea of Summer> (夏之海). Eleven poems are crowded onto six pages, with Wang Shigang's contribution suffering a horrible hatchet job of editing. Kunming-resident Yu Jian's oft-anthologized <Opus # 11> (作品 11 号) concludes the poetry of this section. The section also holds three excellent poems by Bai Hua, as well as poems by Zhong Ming, Yang Yuanhong, Chen Dong, Zhang Xiande, and Sun Wenbo.

Finally, there is an important section titled <Foreign Poetry> (外国诗), which consists of the husband-and-wife translation team of Daozi and Zhao Qiong of Xi'an presenting four poems from Sylvia Plath's *Ariel* collection, and an essay from Daozi entitled <Plath and the 'Confessional School' of Poetry> (普拉斯与“自白派”诗歌).

Looking at this impressive list of names, it can be said that no other unofficial poetry journal in China matched it until the 1990s and the appearance of *Modern Han Poetry* (现代汉诗), a nationally circulated unofficial journal edited variously in Beijing, Shanghai, Chengdu, Hangzhou, and Shenzhen, which selected poetry from other unofficial journals all over the country.¹⁹⁷ There have been criticisms – by Li Yawei and Yang Li in their interview for example – that the focus of *Modernists Federation* was too

¹⁹⁶ Personal communication with Liao Yiwu in 1989. Ouyang Jianghe had been familiar with establishment poets, such as Fu, Liu Shahe, Luo Gengye, Li Gang, and others since 1978, and may have played a role in involving figures such as Fu and Luo in the Association. See Yang Li (2004): 430-432.

¹⁹⁷ An argument might be made that the winter 1985 unofficial journal *75 Chinese Contemporary Poems* (当代中国诗歌七十五首), edited by Huang Beiling and Meng Lang from Beijing and Shanghai respectively, fulfills such a role. However, of the thirty-two poets whose work is selected, only five are from beyond Beijing and Shanghai and its environs. There are three poems each from Bai Hua and Zhai Yongming, as representatives of Sichuan. In addition, as the selection of these two poets indicates, the issue was overwhelmingly devoted to lyric poetry. Bai's poems are <Who> (谁), <Afternoon> (下午), and <Reason> (道理), and Zhai's are <Nightmare> (噩梦), <Evidence> (证明), and <The Finish> (结束), all from the 20-poem sequence <Woman> (# 10, #12, and # 20).

diffuse. However, today *Modernists Federation* reads like an anthology of avant-garde poetry for 1984. The one instance that comes close to matching *Modernists Federation* is the next of the Young Poet Association's journals, *Chinese Contemporary Experimental Poetry*, published in September 1985. This journal would carry the work of ten out-of-province avant-garde poets, only one of which – Bei Dao – was an older Misty poet.¹⁹⁸

In *Modernists Federation*, all the names on the first page of the table of contents, with the exception of Li Zhengguang, can be found in most anthologies of post-Mao poetry published since 1987. Of those on the second page, the names of Zhai Yongming, Bai Hua, Sun Wenbo, and Yu Jian stand out in particular, and Guo Lijia, Liu Tao, Chen Xiaofan, Zhong Ming, and Wang Shigang (Lan Ma) will be familiar to any reader of avant-garde poetry of the 1980s and 1990s.

As for the poetry by non-Sichuan poets, Bei Dao's <Conspirators> -- the first poem in the journal – has become one of his most anthologized pieces, as has Yang Lian's <High Plateau>, Haizi's <Asian Bronze>, and Yu Jian's <Opus # 11>. The Second World poets of Sichuan were very much 'conspirators' in spirit with the *Today* poets and their journal, if not altogether with their poetry. As far as the Sichuan poets are concerned, there is much new, experimental work, and most is worth more than a brief comment in light of what became of these poets and their poetry in the ensuing years. With the exception of poems discussed in the preceding chapters, the next chapter will take a closer look at these texts.

¹⁹⁸ See Chapter 7 for more on this journal and related issues.