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

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CHAPTER 7: *MAKE IT NEW* AND *CHINESE CONTEMPORARY EXPERIMENTAL POETRY*

After the publication of *Modernists Federation* in March 1985, the Sichuan Young Poets Association was involved in the publication of a further two unofficial publications and a number of other activities carried out by individual members under the organization's hazy auspices. Over the course of 1985 the Association's activities moved out of Chengdu to the east, to Chongqing and Fuling, led by strong personalities and poets such as Zhou Lunyou, Bai Hua, and Liao Yiwu. *Day By Day Make It New* (*日日新*) – originally a saying of Confucius, but imported back into China from Ezra Pound and the Imagist Movement – was a journal edited by Bai Hua and Zhou Zhongling that appeared in Beipei/Chongqing in April; and *Chinese Contemporary Experimental Poetry* appeared in Fuling in September. Other members of the Association organized lectures, such as a lecture and reading in honor of the 100th anniversary of Ezra Pound's birth organized by Zhang Zao in the Chongqing Municipal Library on 30 October 1985.[256] In early March the Chongqing branch of the Young Poets Association invited Bei Dao to give a poetry reading.[257] And not long after this, Zhou Lunyou and Zhou Lunzuo set off on a lecture tour through the province, visiting university and college campuses in Xichang, Chengdu, Chongqing, and Wuhan. During this time, Zhou Lunyou made new contacts that would help to lay the foundations for a poetry grouping gathered around the journal *Not-Not* in 1986.

All these activities, including those surrounding the production of *Macho Men* and *Modernists Federation*, and the networking and planning that were going on at all times throughout the province, would ultimately lead to the creation of a 'Second World of

[256] Bai Hua (1996a): Part 3, Chapter 6.
[257] Ibid.

Poetry' in Sichuan – a sub-field in the general field of contemporary Chinese poetry, inhabited by poets now more responsive to, and more influenced by, each other and translated works than to officially published poetry and criticism, and even Misty poetry. Denied official publication opportunities for avant-garde poetry during 1984-1985, Sichuan's poets took advantage of an increasingly liberal social and literary atmosphere, heretofore unknown in CCP China. Similar activities were occurring in other parts of China – unofficial poetry groupings and journals such as *Them* in Nanjing and *On the Sea* (*海上*) and *Continent* (*大陆*) in Shanghai – but nothing as organized and large-scale as what was taking place in Sichuan.

As the analysis of the poetry in *Modernists Federation* has already indicated, at least two major strains of poetical experimentation were developing in the province. The Wholism trend took an interest in the roots of Chinese culture, delving into traditional popular religion, mythology, and philosophy – a return to sources common to newcomer-challengers in the western avant-garde. The Third Generation trend, represented by the poetry of Yang Li and Macho Men, was exploring the poetical possibilities of existentialism, alienation, sexuality, and colloquial language, among other things. Bai Hua represented lesser trends with his innovative blending of lyricism, symbolism and surrealism, as did Zhai Yongming with her interest in a woman-centered, partially autobiographical approach to poetry. In fact, time would show that Zhai had more or less single-handedly marked out a position for women's poetry in the avant-garde sub-field. The unofficial journal *Modernists Federation* was the first unofficial calling card of these new poets and their new poetry in Sichuan, and throughout China.

Growing Ties and a Setback

The interest in modernist poetry was growing stronger throughout the province – and all China – as was demonstrated by a lecture tour by Zhou Lunyou and Zhou Lunzuo. Initially, in January-February 1985, the twins presented a series of three lectures each in their native Xichang. Zhou Lunyou's lectures were offered at the local teachers' school to paying crowds in a packed auditorium that held about 200 listeners, and his topic was

<The Imaginative Forms of Modernist Poetry> (现代诗的想象形式).[258] The cost of 55 cents may not seem much to foreigners and the people of today's China, but in 1985 a movie ticket cost 20-30 cents and papers sold for 10 cents at most. As Zhou Lunzuo observes, part of the reason for such interest was natural curiosity, as Misty poetry and western modernist poetical forms had been under attack during a polemic in the Chinese literary media since 1980.[259] However, the lectures were also inspirational, as attested to by the Daliang Mountain poet (Zhou) Faxing, editor of the 1990s unofficial poetry journals *The Wind of the Kai People*[260] (*开风*: founded 1997) and *Independence* (*独立*: founded 1998). As an 18-year-old student at the Xichang Trade and Finance School, (Zhou) Faxing remembers Zhou's lectures on Misty poetry in particular, and modern poetry in general, inspiring him to start writing poetry.[261]

Encouraged by such interest, Zhou Lunyou contacted university poets in other parts of Sichuan suggesting he could present the same lecture at their schools. As an official in the Young Poets Association, he was able to acquire an official letter of introduction, which would pave the way for university authorities to grant permission to lecture and provide accommodation and payment to himself and his brother.[262] After the brothers had both asked for a two-month leave-of-absence from their workplaces, the tour got under way on April 10 at Sichuan Teachers' University in Chengdu. Over the next ten days Zhou Lunyou lectured three times there, before moving on to do the same at Sichuan University – all organized by the schools' poetry societies. The auditoriums were bigger than the one in Xichang, and were also full to bursting. On April 20, the Zhou's traveled to Beipei, the suburb of Chongqing that was home to the Southwest Teachers' University and the Southwest Agricultural University, and over the next two weeks Zhou Lunyou presented the same series of three lectures in both schools with similar results. While residing at the Teachers' University, Zhou was visited by local poets, including Bai Hua, who was teaching at the Agricultural University, and his friend Zhang Zao, a student at

[258] The information regarding this lecture tour is based on Zhou Lunzuo (2001): 417.
[259] Ibid: 421. See also Yao (1989) for a collection of relevant articles, both pro and con.
[260] A reference to the Kai people who live in Daliang Mountain County, three hours bus travel from Xichang. (Zhou) Faxing is Han Chinese, but this journal is primarily a forum for Kai and other minority nationalities writing poetry in Chinese.
[261] See (Zhou) Faxing (2003a). (Zhou) Faxing remembers the lectures occurring in October 1984. This may refer to earlier lectures given by Zhou Lunyou alone, written of by Zhou but without giving dates.
[262] Zhou Lunzuo (2001): 420.

the Foreign Languages College in Shapingba, another suburb of Chongqing. [263] (At this time, Bai and Zhang were in the process of producing the poetry journal *Day By Day Make It New*, discussed later in this chapter.) As in Chengdu previously, these meetings between poets primarily involved the reading and discussion of poetry – their own and that of others.

On May 5, after receiving invitations to lecture at other schools in the Chongqing area, the Zhou brothers went to Shapingba and took up residence in the Chongqing Teachers' College. While there, all the Zhous' lectures, accommodations, etc., were organized by the newly formed Chongqing University Students Poetry Federation (重庆大学生诗歌联合会) and its three leaders, Yan Xiaodong, Shang Zhongmin, and Zhang Jianming, then establishing the University Student Poetry Group (大学生诗派).[264] Zhou Lunyou had been corresponding with them for some time and the Federation was in the process of joining the Sichuan Young Poets Association. Yan Xiaodong was the head of the Teachers' College poetry society and Shang Zhongmin was head of the literary society at Chongqing University. In 1986, Shang would move to Chengdu and become one of the key members of the Not-Not poetry group, contributing poetry and theoretical essays. In addition, at this time, the Federation sponsored the publication of the first issue of the *Modern Poetry Paper* (*现代诗报*), edited by the poets Zheng Danyi and Wang Fan, both students at the Teachers' University in Beipei.[265]

Zhou Lunyou had finished his series of three lectures at the Chongqing Teachers' College and was about to move on to lecture at Chongqing University, when on May 11 an edict from the provincial educational authorities banned all further lectures by the brothers in Chongqing and anywhere else in Sichuan.[266] Moving quickly, the brothers caught a boat down the Yangtze River to Wuhan on May 15. Zhou Lunyou had previously contacted the literary societies at three universities in the city about lecturing there, and the leaders of the societies met the Zhou brothers as they disembarked in Wuhan two days later. Zhou Lunyou was able to complete his first series of lectures at

[263] Ibid: 426.
[264] Ibid: 430.
[265] Bai Hua (1996a): Part 3, Chapter 6. It should be restated that this student paper was of semi-official status, having been approved and partly funded by the university. This had also been the case with the earlier *This Generation.*
[266] Zhou Lunzuo (2001): 433-434.

the Central China Engineering College, before news of the ban on their lectures in Sichuan reached Wuhan and resulted in similar action by the Hubei government on May 23.[267] A delegation of propaganda department chiefs from Sichuan's schools of higher education happened to be in Wuhan, and they received instructions from Chengdu to ensure the Zhou brothers returned to Sichuan together with them. As it was, the brothers had already run out of money, and so, making the best of a bad situation, they accepted the delegation's 'hospitality' and returning to Chongqing. Upon finally returning to Xichang on June 4, the brothers discovered that on May 11 an official police investigation into their activities had already begun at their places of employment and all the schools at which they had lectured in Sichuan and Wuhan.[268] However, by September 1985 the matter was officially dropped without any real explanation.

It might be argued that Zhou Lunyou and Zhou Lunzuo's lecture tour was doomed by the enthusiastic response their lectures received at every school. Since 1980 there had been an ongoing political campaign against Misty poetry, western modernism in the arts, and what was perceived as 'bourgeois liberalization' in general, led by the more conservative elements in the CCP, especially in areas relating to culture and propaganda. However, in December 1984 at the Fourth Congress of the official, national Writers' Association, one of the top CCP leaders at the time, Hu Qili came out in favor of "creative freedom" (创作自由) for writers. At the same congress, writers and poets were for the first time permitted to elect by popular vote their own board of directors[269] – an action mirrored by the creation of the Sichuan Young Poets Association. In light of these events, it is not surprising that university students and the province's younger poets felt encouraged to establish their own poetry associations. Nor could Zhou Lunyou be entirely blamed for thinking that the time was also ripe for a lecture tour. However, moving so quickly to take advantage of a sliver of light at the top of the CCP cultural pyramid was to prove the undoing of the Zhou brothers' lecture tour.

According to Zhou Lunzuo, the banning of their lectures in Sichuan's universities on May 11 was the result of a negative report from the secretary of the Communist Youth League committee at Chongqing University. This report had been passed on to the

[267] Ibid: 436.
[268] Ibid: 439-442.
[269] Link (1999): 33.

Chongqing City Propaganda Department, and then on to Chengdu and the provincial Propaganda Department. The main complaint had been based on an overcrowded auditorium and some students who were unhappy about that situation at a lecture of Zhou Lunzuo's at Chongqing University. However, there were also said to be problems with the contents of the lectures.[270]

Zhou Lunyou's lectures, <The Imaginative Forms of Modernist Poetry>, dealt with subject matter seldom mentioned in university classrooms at the time in China – or since 1949, for that matter. Over three evenings, students received an explanation of how modernist poetry works, from symbolist up to high modernist practices, with examples from Chinese and western poetry, and this was followed by question-and-answer sessions.

The published outline-notes on which these lectures were based[271] show Zhou Lunyou's introduction to have been more than a little provocative as far as young, conservative members of the Communist Youth League might have been concerned. He outlined the recent polemic concerning Misty poetry and pointed out the inappropriate nature of using the old, politics-based critical model to criticize post-1976 literary phenomena. He then proceeded to list this model – "social criticism (including the theory of reflection)" – as but one of five great critical models for poetry, the others being moral criticism, formal criticism, archetypal criticism, and psychological criticism. There followed a further five parts to the lecture(s): 1) a definition of the imagination, drawing on Kant and Einstein; 2) three types of imagination, drawing on da Vinci, the Dadaists, and Croce; 3) three types of reality which constitute an individual's existence, here comparing traditional Chinese and modern western approaches, drawing on Jung, imagism, expressionism, Aristotle, Diderot, and Kant again; 4) the efforts to transcend the three types of reality, moving fully into the area of poetry and drawing on examples from Tang poetry, Frost, and others; and 5) the six imaginative forms of modern poetry (the abstract, the symbol, the communication of emotions, anti-logical associations, subjective time and place, and emotive expression), drawing on examples of traditional and newer forms of the Chinese and western arts to demonstrate that the art of modernist poetry is not entirely western or alien to China. The outline ends with a quotation from

[270] Zhou Lunzuo (2001): 434.
[271] Zhou Lunyou (1999a): 109-121.

Breton and Zhou Lunyou's own words: " 'Among all the dishonors we have inherited, humankind's greatest freedom – the imagination – is left to us.' Let us cherish it!"

The above amply demonstrates that Zhou Lunyou wanted to use this series of lectures to refute the official critics of Misty and western-influenced modernist poetry.[272] However, on the surface, this was merely tweaking the nose of the CCP's cultural organs and the cultural line they had been trying to impose, or re-impose, on the arts in China since 1980. The main criticism of his lectures dealt with concrete details, namely the impugning of the 'good name' of Guo Moruo[273] and Zhou's claim that "literature should transcend politics." These criticisms relate to the fifth part of Zhou's lectures, in which he stated that modern poets should transcend intrinsic and extrinsic schematizations, politics, and three-dimensional spatial perception – to which he referred as the three forms of reality.

It seems natural that a secretary of a university's Communist Youth League should be upset by a call to transcend politics in his school – university students were meant to be the hope of China, the brains behind the organization and functioning of society, and also the engine for any type of future reform. Yet, here was an outsider who had been invited by students to preach a message that must have seemed to the secretary to be telling the students to disconnect from society and politics, and pursue art alone. Given the circumstances at the time, it is surprising that these lectures were not banned while Zhou Lunyou was still in Chengdu.

In his lecture, Zhou made unattributed use of Hu Qili's call for "creative freedom," and this serves as indirect legitimization of his call for the depoliticization of poetry and poets. After 1949, Guo Moruo had written poetry and plays that served as propaganda pieces in the service of the CCP, and Zhou holds him up as a negative example to aspiring artists. However, the reverse could also be said to be true: if one wished to achieve fame, high position, and wealth in the here-and-now, it clearly paid to 'sell' one's services to the state, despite criticism from 'neutral' or 'pure' artists of the type Zhou Lunyou claimed to be.

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[272] For more on modernism debate in China as a whole see Chen Xiaomei (1995).

[273] A native of Sichuan who first became famous as a poet upon the publication of what was the first book of 'modern' poetry published in China – *The Goddesses* (1921) – and later rose to senior positions in the CCP cultural apparatus.

Could Zhou have said all this without referring to CCP cultural policies, Hu Qili, and Guo Moruo? Yes, but the legitimacy of his message would have been weakened. In addition, his comments pandered to the interests of students and some teachers who would have been excited to hear words that were previously only ever uttered in private conversation – although many articles in defense of Misty poetry and modernist poetical practice, as well as Misty poetry itself, were being published again in official literary journals since January 1985.[274] Taken all together, Zhou's comments would seem to mark Zhou's direct participation in a political polemic regarding CCP cultural policies. Yet in 1985, and even today, not being a member of the CCP or the arts establishment he was not entitled to go to the youth of China with this political message. Furthermore, the Communist Youth League and the educational authorities in Sichuan province, by undertaking an investigation of the Zhou brothers' activities and of all those who had assisted them in organizing the lectures, were sending a clear message of their own to Sichuan's students and poets: Despite what Hu Qili may have indicated and what was being published in some official journals (not Sichuan's), we do not approve. The fact that the investigation started in May and was not wound up until September is an indication of how unwilling the Sichuan government was to implement a more liberal cultural line within the province. In his article about the lecture tour, Zhou Lunzuo lists the names of eleven individuals (mostly students), aside from himself and Zhou Lunyou, who either lost their positions (two) or were forced to write self-criticisms (all).[275]

The Second World of Poetry in Sichuan would become notable in China for the hostility of the local authorities towards the unofficial journals and activities of avant-garde poets. However, in this case the gradually improving political and cultural climate in 1985 in China as a whole prevented a more thorough investigation and more serious consequences for more people.

[274] For a list of relevant critical articles, see Yao ed. (1989): 531-536. Also, see 1985 issues of *Poetry*, for example, for poetry.
[275] Zhou Lunzuo (2001): 440.

University Poets in Chongqing

Mention has been made of Shang Zhongmin and Yan Xiaodong as organizers of the Chongqing University Student Poetry Federation and as founders of the University Student Poetry Group. There is confusion about this group among poetry critics in China. On two occasions the poet-critic Xu Jingya has claimed that the origins of the group, which he sees as a loose nationwide assembly of poets of similar inclination, are found in the establishment in 1982 of a special section for university student-poets by the Lanzhou-based, nationally circulated *Feitian Literature*.[276] Shanghai poet-activist Meng Lang goes so far as to write that Han Dong and Yu Jian – founders of the Nanjing-based unofficial poetry journal *Them*, who had had poetry published in *Feitian* – were also members of this group,[277] and critics such as Xiang Weiguo have uncritically accepted these claims.[278]

It is true that many of these poets were published in *Feitian*, and, doubtless due to editorial proclivities, there was a similarity in styles among them. However, this did not lead to the organization of any grouping, loose or otherwise, aside from the aforementioned *Them*. Han Dong has stated that he first read the poetry of future *Them*-contributors Yu Jian and Wang Yin in the Lanzhou-based 1982 unofficial poetry journal *Same Generation* (*同代*),[279] and liking their poetry had struck up correspondence with them.[280] Both Yu and Wang had poetry published in *Feitian*, but at later dates.[281]

In fact, in May 1985, entirely by coincidence, while Shang Zhongmin and Yan Xiaodong were organizing their poetry group, the first issue of *Them* appeared in Nanjing. As a further coincidence, it was in the April 1985 issue of *Feitian* that Shang Zhongmin first had a poem officially published. A revealing note from the author is appended to it:

Already in the fourth year [at university], the burden of class work and the burden on

[276] Xu et. al. ed. (1988): 186-187; and Xu (1989): 132-133.
[277] Xu et. al. ed. (1988): 186.
[278] Xiang (2002): 97-98.
[279] *Same Generation* also featured the poetry of Han Dong himself – his most famous poem, <About the Great Goose Pagoda> (有关大雁塔) – Bei Dao, Yan Li, Lu Yimin, Chen Dongdong, Niu Bo, Daozi, and Liao Yiwu, among others. The journal's editor was Feng Xincheng, later also a contributor to *Them*.
[280] Han Dong (2003c).
[281] Yu Jian in the January 1984 issue and Wang Yin in the January 1985 issue.

> the spirit are all pretty heavy. This poem's contents are primarily based on fact. One day we suddenly realized life cannot always march on following one-dimensional coordinates, [that] it should strike up varied melodies. This is the seventh time I've sent you poetry.

In fact, both Yan Xiaodong and Shang Zhongmin were in their final year of university. By the time they were able to edit and publish the first issue of *The University Student Poetry Paper* (*大学生诗报*) in June 1985[282] they were both about to leave university, and, in a few months, Shang would become a member of another poetry group (Not-Not). The "one day" on which "we" suddenly realized that life/poetry could be lived/written in more than one way (the officially acceptable way?) could have been the day Hu Qili spoke at the official Writers Association, but more likely was the day Shang read the poetry of Macho Men or *Modernists Federation*, as the poem published in *Feitian* seems to indicate:

<Just Before the Test> (临考之前)

> Page after page the days in books turn
> also day-by-day our well-behaved lives pass by
>
> Finally there's a day --- that day before a test
> our anxiety makes us ants on a hot pot
> the cracks between the teacher's teeth will not again let pass
> even half a syllable about a topic
> suddenly, on the silvery-white night of that day
> with a loud commotion we raise the siege of the very square teaching buildings
> and like giant birds throw ourselves down to perches on an irregularly shaped lawn

They start playing cards, drinking beer, argue, fight, and joke around.

> Also among us is a poet
> he often writes Ah wind Ah rain anyway can't get away from Ah Ah
> but that night he had a good line a publicly acknowledged good line of poetry
> he said youth should stamp to a disco beat swishing as they advance
> and then those who could twist and those who couldn't all began to twist

[282] Comments by Shang in Xu et. al. ed. (1988): 186. Apparently four issues in total where published, the last in autumn 1986. Dates are not clear, but the first issue seems to have appeared in June 1985 (as noted in <A Grand Exhibition>, but as 'June 1986' in Xu et al.).

They dance, there is shy interaction between boys and girls, and they sing songs. Going home at midnight they discover they've relaxed, are not worried about the test any more.

> Page after page the days in books turn
> and on that night before the test we stop going through books
> yet leaf our way through to a philosophy

Like Macho Men poetry, Shang uses a long unrhymed line, a narrative element, and plainspoken, colloquial Chinese. Considering where he hoped to publish the poem, it is not surprising that the crudity and black humor of Macho Men poetry is largely absent. However, there are still echoes of Li Yawei's <Chinese Department> where there is a more graphic description of how students react to the boredom and regimentation of student life. The poem can also be seen as a bland re-writing of Wan Xia's raucous <Tests> -- but while Shang's poem deals with the same university tests, it is also written to meet the official editorial test of *Feitian*. Finally, the first and final stanzas of Shang's poem echo the final stanza of Li's poem:

> Sometimes the Chinese department flowed in dreams, slowly
> like the waves of urine Yawei pisses on the dry earth like the disappearing
> then again rising footprints behind the pitiful roaming Mianyang, its waves
> are following piles of sealed exams for graduation off into the distance

Certainly there is no urine or openly mocking tone in Shang's poem, but the same feeling of an inexorable passage of time and general lassitude can be sensed. The students in Shang's poem leaf their way through to a philosophy of life, and the foregoing stanzas indicate that this is a message to loosen up, relax, live and enjoy life, much as Yawei described himself and his friends as trying to do at school in Nanchong.

Zhou Lunyou's understanding and explication of modernist poetry was able to attract the interest of young poets like Shang Zhongmin. While Shang shared certain traits with Nanjing's *Them* poets, the personal connection to Zhou by way of correspondence and personal contact, as well as geographic proximity, found him on the editorial board and among the contributors to Zhou's journal *Not-Not* when it first appeared in May 1986.

Furthermore, the <University Student Poetry School Manifesto> (大学生诗派宣言), which Shang wrote in the summer of 1986 at the request of Xu Jingya,[283] seems to be an indication of the influence of Zhou and the Not-Not group. In claiming that the Student 'school' of poetry called for "opposition to the sublime" (反崇高) – a slogan shared with Not-Not – "the elimination of the image" (消灭意象), and a "cold-blooded" (冷酷) handling of language, together with black humor – tendencies also shared by Not-Not and Macho Men – Shang effectively merged the Student 'school' with the Not-Not and Macho Men groups, and thereby claimed membership among the Third Generation for himself and any other Student poets who cared to follow his lead.

The fact that poets such as Yang Li, Li Yawei, Wan Xia, and even one of the principal *Them* poets (Ding Dang) contributed work to the first issue of *Not-Not* indicates the shared interests and poetical inclinations of the poets involved, both previously and at the time. As it is, it is these poets – including those of *Them* – who are today generally held to be the representatives of the Third Generation in contemporary Chinese poetry.[284]

Day By Day Make It New and the Makings of an Unofficial Avant-Garde Polemic

In April 1984, Ouyang Jianghe had preceded Zhou Lunyou in lecturing on modernist poetry at the Southwest Teachers' College in Beipei/Chongqing. It was at this time that Ouyang first met, and then formed what amounted to a poetry circle with Bai Hua and Zhang Zao,[285] whom Bai had only first met the month before, not long after Zhang's arrival in Chongqing from his native Changsha in Hunan. Out of this confluence of mutual admiration and interests would come the poetry journal *Day By Day Make It New* in April 1985. It is also from this time that the name Zhou Zhongling – listed in the journal as co-editor with Bai Hua – first appears in Sichuan's Second World of Poetry.

Zhou Zhongling is a writer of modernist short fiction, but he also is the proprietor of one of Sichuan's first privately-owned printing shops, located across the road from the

[283] Xu et. al. ed. (1988): 185-186.
[284] See Xiang (2002): 94-117; Xie & Liang (1993): 165-304; Tang (2001): 74-80; Zhou Lunyou (1999a): 167-185, 194-201; and numerous officially published articles by other critics.
[285] Bai Hua (1996a): Part 3, Chapter 4.

back-entrance to the Southwest Agricultural University in Beipei – where Bai Hua was teaching English in the mid-1980s. Zhou's interest in all forms of modernist literature resulted in friendships with a large number of Sichuan's avant-garde poets. Furthermore, he was often also a source of funding for unofficial journals, and printed *Make It New* and several individual poetry collections, including those by Bai Hua, Zhang Zao, and Liao Yiwu. Individuals like Zhou Zhongling, with both money and a printing press, were extremely rare in China during the 1980s.

Make It New had the semi-official imprimatur of the Chongqing Youth Cultural Arts Association, an organization that had earlier joined the Sichuan Young Poets Association. The semi-official nature of the organization, and the fact it was also stated on the back of the journal that it was intended for 'internal circulation', made the printing of it a less risky undertaking for Zhou Zhongling. Safety was further ensured by drafting in a 'consultant' (顾问) the famous 'returned' poet Peng Yanjiao,[286] whose name featured prominently on the inside-leaf of the cover page. Zhou had to be wary of authorities who could heavily fine him, reduce his state-allotted paper allowance, or take away his business license. The fact that he is still in business today indicates both the intelligence and caution with which he played his role.[287]

The choice of the journal's name came about during a discussion about Ezra Pound's poetry between Zhou Zhongling, Bai Hua, and Zhang Zao. At the time Zhang had an abiding passion for Pound, Imagist poetry, and classical Chinese poetry, and this had had some influence on both the poetry of Bai Hua[288] and Ouyang Jianghe, as shall be demonstrated below. In his <Editor's Words> (编者的话) on the first page after the table of contents of *Make It New*, Bai notes that Pound had the Chinese characters 日日新 (day day new) printed on a neckerchief. These were words of Confucius that Pound also incorporated into an historical anecdote in <Canto LIII>:

Chen prayed on the mountain and

[286] A native of Fujian province, a poet, and editor since 1939. The term 'returned poet' referred to those poets of the 'first' generation who returned to writing poetry after a period of imposed silence during the time of the Cultural Revolution, or an even longer period after being labeled as 'rightists' during the 1950s.
[287] On paper allotment as a state instrument of control, see Link (1999): 94.
[288] Bai Hua (1996a), Part 3, Chapter 4. Both Bai Hua and Zhang Zao had the ability to read Pound in English, and presumably translated his poetry for Ouyang Jianghe and Zhou Zhongling, among others.

wrote MAKE IT NEW
on his bath tub
Day by day make it new

Pound's ability to combine history, mythology and masterful poetical technique fascinated the poets, and led Bai on behalf of the poets in *Make It New* to end his <Words> with two slogans which he claims encapsulate the spirit of 'new poetry': "Technique is the true test of an individual" and "Day by day make it new".

This being said, it comes as a surprise that there are two poems in the journal which were first published over two years previously in *Born-Again Forest*: Wu Shaoqiu's <Thirteen-Line Poem> and You Xiaosu's <It's Still Dusk>. As with the similar republication of Bai's <Expression> in *Modernists Federation*, presumably the editorial committee (listed as Zhang Zao, Ouyang Jianghe, Peng Yilin, Bai Hua, Zhou Zhongling, and Chen Yueling) decided that these poems had not received the attention they deserved. The fact that no newer works of these two poets are included supports this opinion, and the inclusion of these two poems may also indicate that the editors wished to encourage the poets to continue with their experimentation. However, if this was the case, the editors failed – it was ultimately left to Bai Hua and Zhong Ming in their autobiographical writings in the 1990s on this period to resurrect interest in the names, if not the poetry, of Wu Shaoqiu and You Xiaosu. Peng Yilin's name is also familiar from *Born-Again*, however his two poems here are new work.

Make It New itself, at 38 pages, is thin compared to many of the other journals dealt with in this study. However, the quality of the poetry found in the journal calls for a detailed analysis. With two exceptions, the poets in *Make It New* are natives – or residents, in the case of Zhang Zao – of Sichuan. The exceptions are Wu Shaoqiu of Guangzhou and Bei Dao of Beijing. Bei Dao's contribution – acquired by the editors during a recent visit to Chongqing – consists of two poems: <You Are Waiting for Me in the Rain> (你在雨中等待我) and <Many Years> (很多年), both first published here. The inclusion of Bei Dao's work speaks to the appreciation of his craftsmanship by the editors and the continuing influence of his work on this segment of China's avant-garde poets. Other names appear for the first time: Chen Yueling, Wang Yonggui, and Li Yi are

all natives of Chongqing – as are Bai Hua and Peng Yilin – the latter only eighteen-years-old at the time, and Lu Fu is a native of Leshan in the west of Sichuan.

There are also two prose works in *Make It New*, and both are indicative of the poetical interests of the journal's editors and the broader interests of Sichuan's avant-garde poets. After Bai's editorial comments and a preface written by Zhou Zhongling, there is a short essay entitled <Random Thoughts on Modern Poetry> (关于现代诗的随想) by Ouyang Jianghe (still going by the name of Jianghe). To conclude the journal, there is a translation by Zhang Zao (who was studying German as well as English) of Carl Jung's <On Poets> (论诗人).

In his essay, Ouyang speaks of a form of "purity" (纯粹) that he believes modern poetry offers poets and readers alike. This purity is ultimately spiritual, a return to the 'one', found after a journey through the travails of life as rendered by poetry. For Ouyang poetry is close to being "the spiritual substance of absolute reality" and, therefore, he claims: "the enterprise of poetry is the enterprise of kings," and "each poem is a spiritual kingdom" unto itself, with the caveat that the poet (or reader) is simultaneously a normal person living in the concrete world. Following this he cites Octavio Paz, Bai Hua ("every address is a death" from <Expression>), and St. John Perse to support his argument. Finally, Ouyang states that contemporary Chinese poetry lacks a "great master" (大师) who is needed to bring about sudden change in the nation's spiritual evolution, and will in his person act as a sort of cultural summation of a generation, or several generations. Wallace Stevens is cited as having had a similar wish, and Ouyang follows this with his hope that the current flood of poetry will not only include work of permanent value, but also contribute "a few world-class masters." He concludes:

> From Greece, the source of tragedy, Odysseus Elytis sent out this sort of prediction: "The breakout will die" (<Seven Nocturnes>). Modern poetry in the whole of China is now breaking out, is it also simultaneously dying?

With this, Ouyang Jianghe opens a polemic that continues to this day. This Nietzsche-like desire to find a Super Man, or men (are there any acknowledged, or desired, Super Women?), who will transform the world of poetry, has become an obsession for a certain type of poet the world over. In part, this belief in charisma is a response to the

marginalization of poetry during the twentieth century in all parts of the world influenced by European culture. This marginalization has come about because of the ascendancy of new, modern art forms, such as popular music, TV, movies, and photography, which have won massive audiences worldwide. The fact that in the west and in China more people are reading or writing poetry of all sorts today than at any time in history is, apparently, beside the point – poets should be kings. But, as Ouyang himself (and Stevens) points out, they are kings only within the field of the poetry they write, or within the poem itself. Therefore, a messianic poet must surely be a contradiction in Ouyang's own terms.

After the ravages of CCP cultural policy in recent years, in 1985 China it was understandable that young poets would seek to reestablish poetry as a respectable art in their own eyes and in those of others. Yet they must also have realized that poetry is the property of its writers first and of an audience second. So, this respect had primarily to be 'self-respect'. Given poetry's marginalized status, already evident in 1985 with regard to post-Misty poetry, there was little prospect of acquiring anything more than symbolic capital among a select group of people interested in the western-influenced modern arts. The fact that uncountable numbers of Chinese took up poetry in the late 1970s and early 1980s was more than enough evidence of the art's continuing high status in Chinese society. Apparently, there was little interest in maintaining the degree of real popularity that New Poetry briefly enjoyed after the Cultural Revolution period. Instead, poets such as those of Macho Men attempted to create a 'new' style of poetry directly accessible to the common man they felt themselves to be, writing about common experience in familiar, colloquial language. Presumably, Ouyang – and by implication, Bai Hua and Zhang Zao as well – was here indirectly criticizing the "technique" of other poets such as those of Macho Men, and via the choice of journal title, and Bai's and Ouyang's comments, urging other poets to choose their path, nominating Pound for emulation, if not also all the foreign poets mentioned by Ouyang in his essay. This was a movement toward the world, but simultaneously away from the Chinese poetry readers who had enjoyed the topicality of Misty poetry.

Despite this apparent contradiction, Cassandra-like cries such as Ouyang's, when he worries about the demise of Chinese poetry, continue to be heard to this day. This is true

whether speaking of the need for a Great Master (where in the world today is there a living poet such as Ouyang or Stevens describes?) or the necessity of a Chinese writer or poet to win the Nobel Prize for literature (the imprimatur of Swedes is somehow necessary to resurrect the far-from-dead art of poetry in China? and is s/he who wins it therefore a Great Master?).[289]

Jung's essay, <On Poets>, also speaks to this issue, and was doubtless chosen for translation and publication with this in mind. Jung addresses the mystery of creative power, rejecting Freud's idea that a poem's archetype can be found in the poet's life experience. Jung sees a poem as transcending the realm of individual life and allowing the poet's spirit and soul to be transmitted to the spirit and soul of humankind. Thus, the artist is his work, and not an individual. Jung describes art as a sort of internal impulse, and this impulse forces the artist to be a tool of art. The artist is a person without free will and is not questing for personal goals. Instead, he is a "collective person" passing on and forming the subconscious psychological life of all of humankind. As a result, all artists are at war within themselves – the earthly, common person versus this supra-human creative impulse. This explains the often-troubled life of an artist, and further emphasizes the need to address in isolation the artworks produced by him or her. Jung goes on to say that a great piece of art is a dream, and, although it may appear clear on the surface, yet of itself provides no explanation as to its meaning – nor can the author, for this is left to others and later generations. Furthermore, dreams never say "you should" or "this is truth," they only throw out images as Nature grows out plants.

The attraction of Jung's ideas to China's younger poets – and the avant-garde everywhere – is clear: not only do they serve to deflect the traditional moralistic, socio-politically grounded attacks by orthodox critics, they also elevate poets to a special status akin to that of a shaman, a seer, or an idiot-savant. The potential obscurity of poetry – of all art, and not just the modern – is authoritatively explained and excused. All poets answer to a higher authority, there is no questioning the validity of their 'dreams'; there is only the question of form, of technique, of best expressing what must be expressed. This brings us back to Bai Hua's and Ouyang Jianghe's comments at the front of *Make It New*.

[289] For more on this see Julia Lovell (2002b).

However, how does all this match up with the poetry in *Make It New*? In his autobiographical account of life as a poet in the 1980s, *The Left Side*,[290] Bai Hua states the editors (himself and Zhou) decided to present a fairly conservative face to readers, opening the journal with lyric poems by Zhang Zao and Ouyang Jianghe, and to later shift into a sort of surrealistic "madness", presumably referring to his own poems. The following poem by Zhang Zao is the first in the journal and, therefore, the face of this supposed conservatism:

<In the Mirror> (镜中)[291]

You need only remember things regretted in life
and plum blossoms fall
such as watching her swim to the other bank of the river
such as climbing up a ladder made of pine
while admittedly pretty dangerous things
are no equal to watching her return on horseback
cheeks warm
ashamed, head lowered, answering the emperor
a mirror forever waits on her
let her sit in the place she often sits in your mirror
looking out the window, you need only remember life's regrets
and plum blossoms blanket South Mountain

This poem is possibly Zhang's most anthologized work, and the one which first brought him to the attention of readers and critics alike.[292] It seems Zhang has taken Pound's principles for writing Imagist poetry to heart. There are six of these principles; the first three were published by Pound in *Poetry* (1913) in <A Few Don'ts for an Imagist>, which is in fact a list of both does and don'ts: 1) Direct treatment of the "thing", whether subjective or objective; 2) To use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation; 3) regarding rhythm: to compose in the sequence of the musical phrase, not in that of the metronome. These were further embellished in Pound's anthology, *Des Imagistes* (1915): 4) To use the language of common speech, but always the exact word;

[290] Bai Hua (1996a), Part 3, Chapter 6.
[291] In Tang & Wang ed. (1987) and Tang Xiaodu ed. (1992).
[292] For example, Chang & Lu (2002): 242-243.

5) To create new rhythms, not necessarily free verse; 6) Absolute freedom in the choice of subject.

Zhang economically presents what might be the image of a woman remembered. It is not made clear what the regrets specifically refer to. However, the fact that they are said to exist and are then mirrored in nature by the falling plum blossoms, indicates aging as well as the passage of seasons, and this suggests the regrets are linked to this. The images of the woman between the opening two lines and closing two lines are clear and familiar to readers of classical Chinese poetry – with the possible exception of her swimming – and are confirmed as such with the appearance of the "emperor". In both Chinese and English, the poem seems to meet Pound's criteria, and this is confirmed by similar comments from critic-poet Chen Chao.[293] However, it is these opening and closing lines which Pound would most likely have criticized as unnecessary (in particular the use of the word "regret"), wordy, and over-sentimental, transforming the poem into a representative of "Amygism" – the name Pound gave to the last stage of the Imagist movement, after he had withdrawn and Amy Lowell edited the Imagist anthologies (1915-1917).[294] Yet there are unmistakable musical qualities in Zhang's use of repetition here – harking back to China's poetic tradition – which are original and apt. Overall, the artistic architecture here is quite remarkable for a poet only twenty-three years of age.

The fact is that, as happened with the so-called Romantic poets in the English-language literary tradition, there is much that is 'romanticized' and sentimentalized about Chinese classical poetry in China today. A more distanced stance towards this poetry was easier to achieve for a foreigner who was perhaps unaware of the underlying meanings within the images, such as Pound, in his re-written 'versions' of the same. Take, for example, Pound's <The Jewel Stairs' Grievance>:[295]

> The jeweled steps are already quite white with dew,
> It is so late that the dew soaks my gauze stockings,
> And I let down the crystal curtain
> And watch the moon through the clear autumn.

[293] Chen Chao ed. (2002): 936.
[294] Pratt ed. (1963): 20-23.
[295] Ibid.: 57.

Pound places the emotionally charged noun “grievance” in the title, thus leaving the poem’s imagery superficially clear of emotion. He does, however, provide a note which helps the western reader better understand the ‘hidden’ meanings. An un-annotated poem is <Liu Ch’e>:[296]

> The rustling of the silk is discontinued,
> Dust drifts over the court-yard,
> There is no sound of foot-fall, and the leaves
> Scurry into heaps and lie still,
> And she the rejoicer of the heart is beneath them:
>
> A wet leaf that clings to the threshold.

Whereas Pound ends his poem with a powerful image which derives its emotive strength from the lines that precede it, at the conclusion of <In the Mirror> Zhang returns to the initial image of the plum blossoms falling and sentimentalizes it by locating it in South Mountain (南山) – a well-known poem from the pre-Han dynasty classic *Book of Songs* (*诗经*) and a thereafter traditional site of lovers’ trysts. Zhang’s circular technique brings about a form of closure, but this diminishes the impact of the potentially final image of the woman in the mirror.

Zhang Zao’s melancholy mood – minus the finely crafted imagery – is present in his other two contributions to the journal: <Villanelle: Recalling Years Passing Like Water> (维昂纳尔：追忆逝水年华)[297] and <What Is It Makes People Sad? > (那使人忧伤的是什么？). The villanelle is an old French form of pastoral poetry made up of five tercets and a concluding quatrain, in which the first and third lines of the first tercet alternately recur as a refrain and form a final couplet. Pound had briefly experimented with it for its musical possibilities, but the form’s major English language practitioners were Wilde, Henley, and Auden. Given Bai Hua’s teaching and scholarly interests in English literature, as well as his demonstrated interest in musicality in verse, it seems that in this poem – if not the previous – Zhang has been somewhat influenced by Bai. In *The Left Side*, Bai also recalls that Zhang Zao changed all the modern Chinese characters for ‘you’ (你) to an

[296] Ibid.: 59.
[297] This is the Chinese translation of Proust’s *A la recherché du temps perdu* (*Remembrance of Things Past*).

older, classical form of the word (汝) out of interest in tradition[298] – both Chinese and French, in the case of <Villanelle>. However, this use of archaic language comes across as affected.

A perusal of the poetry titles in *Make It New*'s table of contents (in Chinese in the front and in English in the back) further demonstrates this interest in both Chinese and western poetical traditions: there is Wu Shaoqiu's <Thirteen-Line Poem>, reminiscent of the sonnet, called a fourteen-line poem in Chinese; Chen Yueling's <Pear Buds Blossom> (梨花开了) reminds one of a classical poetical subject, the pear generally blossoming in March as an early harbinger of spring; Peng Yilin's <Elegant Songs> (雅歌) are takes on poems by the same name in *The Book of Songs* (where they are dynastic hymns); the title of Wang Yonggui's <Elegant> (尔雅) is the same as that of China's oldest dictionary said to have been partly written by the Duke of Zhou and Confucius, among others; and the title of one of Bai Hua's poems says it all: <Only the Old Days Bring Us Happiness> (惟有旧日子带给我们幸福). The foreign influence on the poetry in the journal is also evident in the four-line English language extract from Pound's <Canto LIII> and in titles like <Villanelle>, <To Borges> (致博尔赫斯) by Chen Yueling, and Bai's two English language poems: <Name> and <Something Else>.[299]

While the majority of the poems in *Make It New* are personal lyrics, the poetry of Ouyang Jianghe strikes one as incongruous, given that the first of his two poems – <Death of a Young Girl> (少女之死) – is a meditation on death and its appearance in the form of a young girl. This apparent interest in appearance and reality is indicative of the influence of T. S. Eliot, as had also been the case with his long prose poem <Suspended Coffin>. Similarly, as in the following poem, Eliot's efforts to express the ennui and repulsiveness, even horror, of many aspects of the modern world are to some extent mirrored by Ouyang, but in a decidedly Chinese context:

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[298] Bai Hua (1996a), Part 3, Chapter 6.

[299] Of little more than curiosity-value in English, but an oft-anthologized poem, after Bai Hua rewrote it in Chinese as<或别的东西>.

<A Night in Your Silhouette> (背影里的一夜)[300]

A drop of blood makes me remember all kinds of wounds
but not all wounds bleed
otherwise hair and the smell of a sword would not flow over my body
a sudden meeting on an itinerant blade seems so keen
a calm demeanor loses you your shadow, but it is the shadow itself that shifts
a stone has only to be set in a treetop to spill the flesh of fruit
if you do not believe then make the flower buds fall and cover the deep courtyard
regretfully all this is too marvelous for words

You imagine yourself a nun in white
as a narcissus of one night in the slow leak behind you
in an insolvable riddle worries pent up like a swan
as soon as the moonlight dragged over the dirt is thrown off like a shirt
your body swells up into night
inside candles and loneliness shine, a pair of censers too
you strike at the bars in the lines of a poem with the middle of the night
cause vacuous lovers' complaints to fill the little boxes
make one blossom bloom into the dance of all flowers
the more you pick the more there are, in a quiet night everything is a riot of falling flowers

At dawn you have a chest full of heartache, a head cold and white
makes it seem you see stretches of March's white pear blossoms fly up
what falls on your face is a tear, what falls into the wind flute is a soul that cannot be summoned

First off, to the Chinese reader there are several obvious images from classical Chinese literature interspersed throughout the poem: the "itinerant blade" (游刃) seems an allusion to a knight errant, and the sword itself is symbolic of wisdom and penetrating insight in Buddhism and victory over evil in Daoism; the stone in a tree is an ancient practice believed to ward off evil spirits, and the tree itself was held to be the home of local gods; twice there are references to falling flowers, possibly symbolic of women conquered, or "killed"; there are candles and censers, followed by a "lover's complaint" (闺怨), props typical of classical poetry; the narcissus is forced into blossom for the lunar new year as it is thus believed to bring good luck; the pear blossom could be symbolic of an actress, but is also used as medicine prescribed for fever; and, finally "wind chimes"

[300] First anthologized in Tang & Wang ed. (1987).

(or “wind flute”, 风笛, which could be a reference to fellatio) and “a soul that cannot be summoned” (不招之魂). This last allusion is to the practices of ancient shamans as in a poem in *The Songs of the South* [301] entitled <Summoning the Soul> (招魂) in which a poet in the guise of a shaman attempts to call back the soul of a departed king/lover (i.e., someone who values his talents).

While this is an impressive list of symbols and allusions, the poem itself deals with sexual love – as the lover’s complaint and the flowers clearly indicate – from the perspective of a male poet identified in the second stanza as being the you-speaker of the poem. Now the western-Freudian identification of phallic symbols comes into play with regard to the sword/blade, the tree, and the wind flute. The you-speaker’s problem with one woman/flower becomes a problem with all. And the wound/pain the poet writes about is related to frustrated sexual desire for an apparently unattainable, or possibly unwanted, woman who is perhaps there on the bed lying with her back to him (ergo the silhouette, or the view of somebody’s back, in the title).

Overall, Ouyang Jianghe has mixed classical poetical imagery with Freudian elements in a new way to express a modern poetical topic. This is yet another change in writing style for the poet. In *Born-Again Forest* (1982), Ouyang wrote Misty-influenced poetry speaking for a collective “we.” In *Modernists Federation,* he is part of the roots-seeking fad and views the ruins of Chinese culture under the influence of Eliot and St. John Perse in the first part of the prose poem <Suspended Coffin>. In <A Night in Your Silhouette>, Ouyang moves inside the individual to explore complicated emotions and psychology. This degree of change in poetical form and technique over such a brief period is remarkable in China. Yet, a few other accomplished poets went through comparable transformations over a similar period of time (Liao Yiwu and Zhou Lunyou are striking examples within Sichuan). This speaks both to their personal, earnest quest to create poetry of lasting value and significance, and to the atmosphere they enjoyed and the encouragement they received.

[301] A collection of poems said to have been compiled by Liu Xiang, some of the poems are from the state of Chu and may date from the fourth century B.C.E.. Many of the poems – if not all – are attributed to Qu Yuan.

Bai Hua's poetry is also sensitive to his environment, if less prone to stylistic change. He does admit to being influenced by Zhang Zao's passion for Pound and classical poetry (as Ouyang may also have been) in 1984, writing in *The Left Side* that he promptly introduced "history" and "Li Bai" into his poetry as a result.[302] This appears to be in reference to <Spring>, the first of Bai's poems in *Make It New*, in which Li Bai makes a sudden appearance in the fifth stanza – a stanza entirely devoted to Tang poetry – and the presence of "the draw-bridge of antiquity" in the final stanza. None of the other four of Bai's poems in the journal show such direct influence, although <Precipice>, written during the same period and previously published in *Modernists Federation*, features a courtesan and the Tang dynasty poet Li He.

The following poem – the last poem in *Make It New* – Bai Hua has called his personal favorite of all the poems he has ever written[303] for purely biographical reasons that cannot be known to a casual reader. Nevertheless, there are qualities in the Chinese-language version of the poem that recommend its inclusion here:

<Summer's Still Far Away> (夏天还很远)[304]

Day after day passes away
something approaches you in the dark
sit for a while, talk a bit
see the leaves fall
see the sprinkling rain
see someone walk along the street, cross it
Summer's still far away

Really fast, vanishing as soon as it's born
on an October night all that's good enters in
too beautiful, entirely unseen
a huge calm, like your clean cloth shoes
by the bed, the past is dim, warm and gentle
like an old box
a faded letter
Summer's still far away

[302] Bai Hua (1996a), Part 3, Chapter 4.
[303] Ibid., Part 5, Chapter 6.
[304] This is also Bai's first officially published poem, in the February 1986 issue of *New Observations* (*新观察*); anthologized in Tang Xiaodu ed. (1992). This poem seems to be one of many inspired to some degree by Shelley's <Ode to the West Wind>: If winter comes, can spring be far behind?

A chance encounter, you probably don't remember
it was a little cold outside
the left hand was tired too
all the while it was secretly moving to the left
remote and thoroughgoing
that single silly thought of you
Summer's still far away

Never again, losing your temper or loving passionately at a touch
gather up the bad old habits
year after year depressed
the small bamboo building, a white shirt
are you in the prime of life?
it's rare to reach a resolution
Summer's still far away

The title of the poem speaks to the distance and coldness with which the you-speaker confronts, and is confronted by, the world. One notable aspect of the poem only partially reflected in the translation – as with most translations of Bai's poetry – is the musical quality of the original Chinese. The title of the poem is still there as the last line of each stanza, acting as a refrain, but in the second stanza Bai introduces partial end-rhyme: lines 3 and 4 end with *–jue* and *–xie*, and lines 7 and 8 with *–jian* and *–yuan*. The third stanza marks the arrival of full end-rhyme: again, lines 3 and 4 end with *–juan* and *–bian* and lines 6 and 7 (in a seven-line stanza) with *–nian* and *–yuan*, resulting in an ABCDEDC scheme in which D is strengthened by proximity and the initial C is a clear echo of the last syllable of each stanza. The echo is strengthened by the implied relationship in the meaning of these syllables: *yuan* 远 means 'distant' and *juan* 倦 means 'weary'. The fourth stanza is more complicated, mixing full and partial end-rhyme, which results in an ABCBCDE/C scheme. The Bs are *–guan* and *–shan*, while the Cs are a repetition of the same syllable, *-nian*, meaning 'year', a partial rhyme with the poem's concluding *–yuan* that becomes even closer if the concluding 'n' is pronounced clearly and the word is stressed, as it should be.

Without going through every musical device Bai uses, another more visibly obvious one is the sight and sound of the character *yi* 一, meaning 'one' in most instances and looking like a short, straight line. It occurs twice in the poem's first line, twice again in

the third, and once more in the sixth line of the first stanza. There are a further three instances in the second stanza (lines 1, 6, 7), three more in the third (lines 2, 4, 6), and only two in the last (lines 3, 6). At the same time, there are several syllables ending with the same eerie, mournful sound of *–i* scattered throughout the poem (two in the first stanza, three in the second, five in the third, and five in the fourth). There are also instances of the *i*-sound appearing in other syllables, such as *–jin*. Finally, there is internal rhyme with the *–bian/–nian/-jian* end-rhymes already identified (two in the first stanza, two in the second, five in the third, and three in the fourth). From the transliteration of the title above, it can be seen that the syllable *–tian* is one of these.[305]

More could be said about the use of initials (such as *h-*, which appears twice in the title) for example; however, it is already sufficiently obvious how much care Bai Hua takes with this poem, and this care is something of a clue as to its personal importance. In Part 1, Chapter 1 of *The Left Side*, after explaining that all the poems he has written with summer in the title are somehow about his mother, Bai states that <Summer's Still Far Away> was the only poem written for his father. Summer is in the title, but not in the poem, except through negative inference, as an indication of its absence. His mother had a quick, fiery temperament and tone about her, which is identified with both 'the summer' and 'the left' in Bai's poetry, while his father was something of the opposite, a gentlemanly, tender-hearted, conservative type, born in October and declared a political 'rightist' in the 1950s. Bai says he has tried to capture some of all aspects of his father's life in the poem – the far-off summer is in the Chongqing of the 1940s (his youth, before meeting Bai's mother). While a reading of the poem without these biographical details is rewarding, an awareness of them leads to a richer reading, bringing in the aspect of a son's emotionally charged subjective understanding and observation of a father.

As indicated by the <Editor's Words>, Ouyang Jianghe's comments on the contemporary poetry scene, Zhang Zao's translation of Carl Jung, and the poetry of these two poets and Bai Hua – as well as the inclusion of Bei Dao's two poems, if not all the

[305] See Jing Wendong (1999) for an e-book that details aspects of the Sichuan dialect of spoken Mandarin and how it is used in avant-garde poetry. This issue is of importance in better understanding the great popularity of Li Yawei's poetry in Sichuan, but Li is not a major subject of Jing's study. However, Li was also very popular on university campuses in Northeast China during the 1980s. Because of the relative popularity outside the province of Sichuan avant-garde poetry in general – most of which is written in Mandarin Chinese – this issue is not dealt with in this study, except to note specific instances of diction used in poetry that is not found in standard Mandarin Chinese dictionaries.

poetry in the journal – *Make It New* seems to have been a conscious effort to set technical standards for the poets of Sichuan (including themselves), whether with regard to the use of tradition, imagery, form, or rhythm/musicality. The choice of a slogan by Ezra Pound as the journal's title indicates these poets believed they, together with Pound, shared a common spirit and pursued a common goal: the renovation of modern poetry. While their intentions may seem laudable to the neutral observer, in the eyes of other Sichuan poets *Make It New* may have appeared as a challenge, as a restatement of the aloofness and sense of superiority and correctness some (such as Yang Li, Wan Xia, and Li Yawei) saw in the poets of *The Born-Again Forest* in 1982. The republication in *Make It New* of poems by Wu Shaoqiu and You Xiaosu would have reinforced such opinions. But was there a reaction?

***Experimental Poetry*: A Final Joint Action**

If there was a response on the part of poets such as Wan Xia and Yang Li, it was to ignore *Make It New* and to continue as before, as in *Modernists Federation*, but with some refinements and stressing the experimental stage of China's avant-garde poetry at the time. In September 1985 in Fuling, members of the Young Poets Association produced their second, and final unofficial poetry journal: *Chinese Contemporary Experimental Poetry*.

Fuling is about six hours down the Yangtze river from Chongqing, not far from the borders of Hubei, Hunan, and Guizhou. Li Yawei was from this region and had been dispatched by the Young Poets Association to Fuling in December 1984 to establish a branch there. However, the impetus for the new unofficial journal came primarily from two people: the local poet-entrepreneur Lei Mingchu and Liao Yiwu, newly arrived from Chengdu to become the editor of the local official literary journal.

The Literary Wind of Ba Country (*巴国文风*) was an 80-page journal that appeared twice annually in 1985 and 1986, and featured poetry, fiction, prose, folk literature, and literary criticism, contributed by writers primarily from eastern Sichuan (of which *Ba* 巴 is the name of a pre-Qin-unification (221 B.C.E.) kingdom that existed in the area). Not

long before his move to Fuling, Liao was invited to become a member the provincial branch of the official Writers Association, the result of his mentorship under well-known official poets at *Stars* and the award of important literary prizes. Liu Shahe, a mentor of Liao and possibly Sichuan's most famous poet at the time, contributed his calligraphy for the journal title.

Furthermore, these events are part of the explanation why Liao's name does not appear in *Modernists Federation* and in *Experimental Poetry* as an editor/organizer, despite the fact (as previously reported by Yang Li, Wan Xia, and Li Yawei) that he was a key figure in the genesis and production of both unofficial journals. Apparently, Liao was cautious about official reactions to this unofficial activity at the time. However, as an official literary editor he was able to get some of his friends' poetry officially published and paid for:[306] the first issue of *Ba Country* included work by Li Yawei, He Xiaozhu, Yang Shunli, and Wu Jianguo, all of whom also had work in *Experimental Poetry*. Liao did not have sole editorial responsibility for *Ba Country*,[307] but in the section of the journal headed Theories of Literature and Art (文艺理论) Liao was able to have the first installment published of his own lyrical, surrealistic creative notes, <Emmanuelle's Music> (曼纽尔的音乐) and a translation of Freud's <Creators and Daydreams> (创作家与白日梦). The second issue of *Ba Country*, published in December 1985, would see more poetry by He Xiaozhu and Wu Jianguo, as well as the official publication of Zhang Zao's translation of Jung's <On Poets>. The first issue appeared in June, just as poets from other parts of Sichuan were gathering in Fuling to begin to prepare *Experimental Poetry*.

At the top of the first page of *Experimental Poetry*'s table of contents, below the title of the journal itself, is the list of sponsors, followed by that of the editors. The tenuous semi-official nature of the journal was based on the two 'sponsors': the Sichuan Knowledge Developers Association Fuling Branch (essentially a branch of the Young Poets

[306] There was not a lot of money involved by today's standards, possibly as little as 3-10 Yuan for each 20-lines of poetry; however, even by this measure, the publication of Li Yawei's <Endless Road> (穷途), a poem of over 120 lines, would have netted Li at least 20 Yuan – which was not an inconsiderable amount in 1985. It is likely Liao would have worked to have him receive the maximum payment. For more on the subject of literary manuscript payments during this time see Link (1999): 129-138.

[307] The other 'responsible editor' was Peng Linxu, a friend of Liao's. However, their editorial activities would have been under the supervision of the area cultural bureau chief.

Association earlier established by Li Yawei) and the Sichuan Correspondence University Fuling Correspondence Center (四川函授大学涪陵函授中心). The Correspondence University was itself a project of the Knowledge Association and its branch in Fuling was being run by Lei Mingchu. Lei used his position to finance *Experimental Poetry*, and, together with another local poet, Yang Shunli, acted as the journal's editor-in-chief. Again, with a name reminiscent of the May Fourth period in 1920s China, the editing of the journal is stated to have been carried out by the Chinese Contemporary Experimental Poetry Research Office, and it is clearly noted that the journal is for internal circulation only. The six individuals said to comprise the editorial board were Lei and Yang, He Xiaozhu (another Fuling poet), Li Yawei, Chen Daixu, and Chen Yueling (a native of Chongqing, also on the editorial board of *Make It New*). According to Li Yawei's account,[308] however, Liao Yiwu and Wan Xia, who had been invited to Fuling by Liao, made the most important editorial decisions. Wan's reasons for not having his name appear as an editor are not clear. Possibly his reticence is due to the clash over *Modernists Federation* with Zhou Lunyou earlier in the year. The absence in *Experimental Poetry* of names of establishment figures like Luo Gengye and Fu Tianlin indicates a change in editorial approach, in that there was no apparent attempt to seek official approval.

However, Li Yawei claims he clashed with Liao and Wan about the inclusion of poetry by Bei Dao and Haizi, for example, who Li felt were not 'anti-cultural' enough, not part of the Third Generation. Yet, there were other out-of-province poets in the journal of whom Li apparently was able to approve: Yu Jian, Han Dong, Meng Lang, Yu Yu, Guo Lijia, Shao Chunguang, Xiaojun, and Che Qianzi. Guo Lijia and Shao Chunguang were honorary Macho Men from China's northeast, and their poetry had also appeared in *Modernists Federation*. Yu Jian of Kunming had also appeared in *Modernists Federation*, but here Han Dong and Xiaojun joined him: Han was the editor-in-chief of the Nanjing-based unofficial literary journal *Them*, and both Yu and Xiaojun were important contributors to the journal. Meng Lang and Yu Yu were both natives of Shanghai and contributors to and organizers of *Continent*, *On The Sea*, and *The South* (*南方*), three major unofficial poetry journals that had recently appeared in Shanghai. Che Qianzi, a

[308] Yang Li (2004): 218, 250, 256-257.

native of Suzhou, was also an occasional contributor to these journals. The inclusion of the work of these poets is a clear demonstration of the growing nationwide network of relationships between like-minded avant-garde poets throughout China, all still largely out of view for the vast majority of the nation's poetry-reading public.

Like *Modernists Federation* before it, *Experimental Poetry* was another handsomely designed 80-page journal. It was divided into six sections, with ten of the 39 contributors from out-of-province, and another translation of foreign poetry from Daozi to conclude the journal: Allen Ginsberg's <Howl>. There is, however, no section devoted to Misty poetry, as the first section of poetry in *Modernists Federation* had been. Bei Dao – the sole representative – is now moved to the third section, on the second page of the table of contents, and the titles of the four poems selected indicate the interests of the journals editors: <In the Bronze Mirror of Dawn> (在黎明的铜镜中) and <Echo> (回声) share some of the qualities sought by Wholism, and the titles <The Art of Poetry> (诗艺) and <The Life of an Artist> (艺术家的生活) speak for themselves. The last two in particular are indicative of Bei Dao himself exploring what were for him new poetical areas of interest.

It could be argued that Ginsberg was the journal's response to *Make It New*'s Jung: if a poet is some sort of seer or shaman with a line to the soul of all humankind, then 'we' accept Ginsberg as an exemplar of such a one. However, the first paragraph of comments "in lieu of a preface" (代序) on the front-inside cover read as if they were written by Shi Guanghua, Song Qu, and Song Wei, the leading exponents of Wholism:

> The river of phenomena is a stretch of luminescence, but the calm of eternity is hidden deep beneath the ripples on the water. Our world is like this, and *Chinese Contemporary Experimental Poetry* attempts to reveal just this.

However, their poetry – <The Escape from an Ending> (结束之遁) by Shi and <The Human Stele> (人碑) – is located in the fourth and fifth positions in the journal, after the work of Liao Yiwu, (Ouyang) Jianghe, and Zhou Lunyou, in that order.

Further reading of this lyrical preface, titled <The Reward of Eternity> (永远的酬劳), indicates that there is an interest that seems to go beyond those of tradition-centered

Wholism and moves closer to the ideas put forward by Jung: "… a life, as the time of a process, must sooner or later conclude. Before this happens, the greatest happiness is in doing one's utmost to lay bare one's experience and knowledge of human life, passing through changes and grasping the true essence of creation, expressing the art of the state of life can never be concluded."

After this sweeping statement, the conclusion of the preface – while remaining true to Jung's beliefs regarding poets – veers off toward a position statement that claims a unique place for the poetry in *Experimental Poetry* within China, and adopts the rebellious poetic stance of Ginsberg's <Howl>:

> It's time, friends, although the transcending of narrow nationalism and rationalism has only just begun. When you pull back your footsteps from the roots-seeking in a northern China which spans the infinite, southern landforms suffused by mysterious sorcery will firmly grasp you. Those cliffs like broken arms spasmodically rising, those cities and people on rivers that have returned to simplicity and truth, all are permeated by a rebellious atmosphere smelling of alcohol. The sun leaps above the sharp, deep valleys, flashing light that is tentative, novel and weird; it is a symbol of all half-human-half-gods from antiquity till today, it is a symbol of organic poetry.
>
> Rebellion is a tradition of the South, we cannot cast off this intense quality which borders on strongly held partiality.
>
> We prophesy [for] the great river of Chinese poetry that had its source in the North but will come to fruition in the South, a real master craftsman of true art can come out of the ranks of this generation. The river god Gong Gong 共工 will blow on his iron pipes, standing on the murky waves he will put his panthers out to pasture!

What began meditatively ends in an atmosphere of menace and mystery, which supposedly characterizes the land of Ba and the Yangtze and the rivers flowing through it. Liao has often spoken of the effect Fuling and its environs had on him, his view of the world, and his poetry when he arrived in 1985.[309] While poets such as He Xiaozhu, Yang Shunli, and Lei Mingchu were natives of the area who might have also been capable of waxing lyrical about their homeland, this emotive style of prose is clearly that of Liao Yiwu, a deeply affected newcomer from the great plain on which Chengdu is situated. The master craftsman (or –men) to whom Liao refers is also the title of his poem that leads off the journal. This need for a master craftsman (巨匠) is an echo of Ouyang

[309] In conversation with the author, but also in his lyrical prose essays on his writing: <Emmanuelle's Music>.

Jianghe's call for a great master in *Make It New*, and Part Three of Ouyang's <Suspended Coffin> follows Liao's poem.

In the summer of 1986, this shared interest would find Liao and Ouyang briefly uniting under the group name of New Traditionalism (新传统主义) and submitting a manifesto-like essay (written by Liao) and poetry to <A Grand Exhibition of Modernist Poetry Groups on China's Poetry Scene 1986>.[310] Their call was for a renovation of the Chinese tradition in poetry, for the individual re-creation, or creative use, of tradition, and not a simple attempt to return to philosophical, religious, or aesthetic traditions, which they saw was being done by others. Despite the differences in their individual poetics, it is clear that both Liao and Ouyang shared a desire to lead others onto what they deemed was a better path forward, and that they also both felt they had the ability to do so.

Yet, the poetry in *Experimental Poetry* was not all of such a flavor, and the much longer postscript on the inside-back leaf considers this. There is a statement that there is no single standard of aesthetic appreciation or form of aesthetics, and that each individual poet can find an independent spiritual world and intellectual insignia within the Chinese language. "… Therefore, the altar of poetry is not an altar of sacrifice. Each poet has the possibility of becoming a link in the chain of tradition – if his resistance to pseudo-tradition has enough courage and power! The transformation of poetry is not limited to technique: it is a transformation of aesthetics, a transformation of cultural psychology." This appears to be a response to Bai Hua and Zhang Zao's stress on technique in the <Editor's Words> in *Make It New*, suggesting an emphasis on technique alone is not nearly enough. Which begs the question: which tradition, or traditions, needs renovation? That of New Poetry and its past and present practice? Or all of Chinese poetry? It is clear from the foregoing that some avant-garde poets were no longer interested in roots-seeking within this or that poetical or cultural 'problem' in contemporary China, but wanted to create a new culture and poetry out of the old, one with southern characteristics. What unity there was existed in a varying use of the Chinese language – paradoxically for Sichuan's poets, their written language is the northern variant of spoken Mandarin – and, perhaps, certain cultural-psychological tendencies towards resistance to, and reaction

[310] Xu et. al. ed. (1988): 144-151.

against, northern cultural domination. The concluding paragraph of the postscript is a statement of difference on behalf of all Southern poets:

> The other significance of this experimental collection is that it is an important representation of the creative capabilities of young southern poets. They are all grounded in the following belief:
> The culture of the Chinese nation is the complementarity of the South and the North; and the particular nature of the South is absolutely not the shallow considerations and muted recitations of literati and scholars; because of its towering landforms, complicated characteristics, hidden dragons, and crouching tigers, in its arteries there reverberates a noise far grander than orthodox rational culture.

What remains to be seen is how the poetry in the journal measures up to these claims for southern poetry and poets. First off, there is the problem of the presence of northern poets. There are, in fact, only four, and the inclusion of Guo Lijia and Shao Chunguang may be excused due to their honorary status as Macho Men. The poetry by Bei Dao and Haizi[311] is more problematic: Liao Yiwu was fond of the poetry of both, but their presence also seems to highlight their differences with the poetic techniques and aesthetic sensibilities on display – both appearing more lyrically restrained and technically conservative than the poetry surrounding them.

There will be no attempt to offer a detailed portrait of all the poetry in *Experimental Poetry*. Much has already been said of the various styles practiced by the journal's contributors. The Macho Men are here again in force: aside from Guo Lijia and Shao Chunguang, there is also poetry of Li Yawei, Ma Song, and Er Mao. Yang Li is represented by a new existentialist-influenced work: <Twelve Moments and a Quiet Scream> (十二时刻和一声轻轻的尖叫). Wan Xia's ambitious <King of Owls> (枭王) is an attempt to annotate the mysteries of yin and yang via absurdist imagery and direct sensory perception – an indication of his increasing interest in the ideas of the Wholism group, which he would later work with. Bai Hua and Zhang Zao are also well represented, despite objections the editors may have had against their stress on technique. Liu Tao and Li Yao are back among a group of six female poets, and Lu Fu, Hu Xiaobo, Shenzi, and Wang Fan are representatives of the University Poets Group. Yang Yuanhong and Yang

[311] Haizi is represented here by a brief piece of prose poetry: <The Source and the Bird> (源头与鸟).

Ran are both represented by long poems of the Wholistic tendency, also in the first section of *Experimental Poetry* together with the poetry of Shi Guanghua and Song Qu and Song Wei.

The great influence of Liao Yiwu on the composition of this journal is evident in the order in which the poets and their work appear. A poem of Liao's opens the journal and the first section is dominated by the work of the Wholism trend, but these poems follow the work of Ouyang Jianghe and Zhou Lunyou whose work have more in common with Liao's poem than with the Wholistic poems. Haizi and Yu Jian are the only non-Sichuan poets whose names can be found on the first page of the table of contents. The second section of the journal is – with the notable exception of Yu Jian – composed of local eastern Sichuan poets: Li Yawei, Yang Shunli, He Xiaozhu, Chen Yueling, Lei Mingchu, Wu Jianguo, and Er Mao. Given that Liao had recently moved from the west to the east of the province and that he was an editor of the area's official literary journal, it is not surprising that he and the other (all local) editors should have favored such a layout. All other poets were on the second page of the table of contents and in the second half of the journal. This situation would not have displeased the poets from outside Sichuan, but might have been seen as a slight by the likes of Yang Li, Bai Hua, and Zhang Zao, among others. The fact that Bai Hua has little to say about this journal or *Modernists Federation* in *The Left Side*[312] may be an indication of his unhappiness. Zhong Ming also ignores both journals in *Spectator* (1998a), and his poetry only appears in *Modernists Federation*. All things told, Zhong and Bai did not amount to much as 'spectators' with regard to the events covered in this and the previous two chapters. Perhaps this is a case of saying nothing if one has nothing good to say, or damning others with faint praise.

Liao Yiwu, Ouyang Jianghe, and Zhou Lunyou

The first eight pages of poetry in *Experimental Poetry* are given over to the first part of Liao Yiwu's <The Master Craftsman> (巨匠). Begun in the summer of 1985, the poem eventually ran to five parts and was not completed until 1987. In fact, this poem is the

[312] Bai Hua (1996a), Part 4, Chapter 2 is devoted to Wan Xia's activities and art 1980-1990.

beginning of the second cycle of poems Liao wrote that year, and this – and trilogies – would remain his preferred poetry form until the summer of 1989.

Earlier, during May and June 1985, Liao completed <The Great Cycle> (大循环),[313] a cycle of eight poems, which is closely connected to <Lovers> written the previous year. <Cycle> was an exploration of the life that lies beyond death at the core of all being. On the title page of the mimeograph version of this poem, Liao dedicates it to the Wujiang river, "my place of rebirth." He indicated the inspiration he received from his new environment by infusing natural and cultural images of the land of Ba, of which Fuling had been the capital, throughout this poem and much of his later poetry, including <The Master Craftsman>.

The title page of <The Great Cycle> also features four lines from Dylan Thomas's sonnet, <When All My Five and Country Senses See>:

> My one and noble heart has witnesses
> In all love's countries, that will grope awake;
> And when blind sheep drops on the spying senses,
> The heart is sensual, though five eyes break.

Apparently it is with the heart that Liao now seeks to observe the life of man, for, as Thomas intimates, it is the most acute sense of all: it will still love when the senses warn of the pain and torment that life (and love) may bring.

In <The Great Cycle>, Liao attempts to portray the cycle-like transition that is the life of the individual. The series of incantations and images that Liao presents, manifest a dramatically positive attitude towards inescapable death while, at the same time, revealing the state of physical misery and spiritual ignorance of the contemporary human condition. Such apparently contradictory stances, hallmarks of both Thomas and Whitman, would be evident in all Liao's subsequent poetry. As with Thomas and Whitman, such contradictions (if differing in substance) would reap negative criticism,[314] just as would Liao's emotive use of language and interest in metaphysical issues, which

[313] Three parts of which are anthologized in Tang & Wang ed. (1987). Originally, Liao's 1986 poem <the City of Death> was selected, but it was dropped due to political pressure. [Private communication]. More on this in following chapters.
[314] See Xie & Liang (1993): 145-156.

led critic Tang Xiaodu to identify Liao's lack of "a consciousness of history" as a weak point in his poetry.[315] In the first poem of the cycle, <The Cycle Pillar> (循环柱), Liao introduces the sexual imagery and drive which powers these poems and which will play a similar role in much of his later poetry:

…..
The proud city has fallen low, shades of night move into place, the oceans of the unconscious surge mistily at its island top
-- that tall triumphal column standing at the center of the square damply signals a great achievement at the last with the epoch of empire building as a backdrop, launch the glorious seizure by force
The blood of man bedecks revelry's totem, odes to the age are merely synchronous choral cries
An ordinary human face is cast into a strange bronze, dividing equally with Death the autumnal scenery of the world of man

Congregation of spirits! Unified entity of heaven and hell
My tormented hallucinations are the only hope

…..
Great heaven-piercing devilish pillar, its base is the latent maternal body, the darkness before my birth
…..

After this powerful beginning, <The Great Cycle> gradually falls off. If <The Cycle Pillar> presents the reader with an image of a rigid, forceful penis (alternatively, this could be yet another, far more subversive take on the memorial stele in Tian'anmen Square, as seen in poems by the Misty poet Jianghe and others), then the final two poems of the cycle offer the concluding images and sensations of the sexual act:

…..
The water is underfoot, the flaring old lunatic licks your essence clean away
Take pity on Death!
…..

It is a wearing experience, as life must be when, as Liao puts it, "upper limbs are gods, lower limbs are beasts." And could this "old lunatic" be a reference to Mao? Or just the

[315] Tang (2001): 238; this article was written in March 1985, but in conversation with the author in the late 1980s, Tang and others repeated the same criticism.

aged poet-speaker? The first two lines of the first poem indicate the latter: “A golden season, a ramrod-straight rainbow towers up at the confluence of rivers / as a symbol of my green spring”. In any case, a series of wriggles, roars, and assaults by penis symbols is a continuous thread throughout Liao’s later poetry. Other content, including an even more basic strain – death – is often hung upon, is an adjunct to, or is inherent in this one. Liao divides his poetical self into two antithetical opposites, god and the devil, a pure essence and an equally pure bestiality, within his later poetry.

Over the course of <The Great Cycle>, where this tendency first appears, the poet-speaker attempts to sublimate and conquer pain, solitude, and death as he strives to pass beyond individual, earthbound sensibility, toward the deeper, universal truths of life. In later poems, the poet-speaker will adopt the persona of a prophet of the local ancient culture of the Wulong people, Allahfaweh, to play such a role. In this poem, the prophet’s name appears for the first time in <A Dirge for Allahfaweh> (阿拉法威的丧歌), the sixth poem of the cycle.

What was surprising at the time in 1985 was the almost immediate official publication of this poem in its entirety in the Lanzhou-based *Poetry Selections Monthly* (*诗歌选刊*). The sexual imagery that suffused <The Great Cycle> made it unpublishable in the larger nationally circulated journals at the time. Liao Yiwu’s contacts with avant-garde poets in Lanzhou, as a result of his participation in *The Same Generation* in 1982, seem to have paid off here, just as correspondence with other poets in that unofficial journal led to some of their poetry appearing in both *Modernists Federation* and *Experimental Poetry*. Unfortunately, while *Poetry Selections* was born as a new official journal into the liberalizing politico-cultural climate of 1985, its ‘excessive’ liberalism meant that it was closed during the cultural crackdown that began in January 1987. However, other journals – such as *Guandong Literature*, *The Plains Literature Monthly* (*草原文学月刊*) out of Hohhot in Inner Mongolia, and the literary monthly *Mountain Flower* (*山花*) of Guiyang – the latter two publishing several poems of the brothers Song Qu and Song Wei, and Shi Guanghua in 1985 – were enacting similar liberal editorial policies, and many more would follow their lead in 1986.

The artistic aims of <The Master Craftsman> are much the same as those of <The Great Cycle>. However, here the focus is no longer upon the individual, but on all of mankind

as the poet-speaker sets out to write a history of human existence. Liao attempts to raise the individual's internal contradictions to the level of the nation and of all mankind. Through the life experience of an individual, he attempts to reveal higher sets of contradictions and the even higher balance between them, the tragedy of death and the sublimity of life, and the extremities of yearning and weariness, which are what Liao's poet-speaker apparently believes to be the basic qualities of life in its collective, universal form. The life of humankind, civilization, and nature are of a similar pattern that reaches beyond the death of any one individual (or nation, or culture).

The first part of <The Master Craftsman> consists of six poems: an untitled prefatory poem, followed by <The First Poem of the Master Craftsman: On the Sea> (巨匠的第一首诗：海上), <Food> (食物), <Carnival Season> (狂欢季), <A Folk Song> (歌谣), and <A Look Back> (回顾). An omniscient speaker who introduces the Master Craftsman proclaims the prefatory poem: "When you come to, the daylight begins to come full circle." 'Full circle' is a rendering of a Chinese Buddhist term for death, *yuanji* 圆寂. Arriving as it does in the poem's first line, the reader may be forgiven for suspecting another poem of the Wholism school. However, by the fourth line there is an apparent intrusion of Chinese reality, in the form of a seeming reference to the Cultural Revolution period:

> The century in which you cling to life has been effortlessly wrecked ----- a ray of
> dusky light shows the deep mystery to the future
> the flower garden has disintegrated, the human body has declined to a
> fossil, shells of rocks emit the sound of shattering glass
> as if loudly singing the immortal song of things

This 'flower garden' appears often as a euphemism for China, which is traditionally referred to as 'the Land of Flowers' (花国). The flowers are often representative of the arts in general, and mean as much in one of Mao's old slogans, 'let a hundred flowers blossom' (百花齐放), which is still used by the CCP cultural establishment. It is perhaps for this reason that the poem following Liao's is the third, and concluding, part of Ouyang Jianghe's <The Suspended Coffin: A Pocket-size Flower Garden> (悬棺：袖珍

花园; 1984). That both poets are writing about the 'waste land' they felt contemporary China to be is made clear by Liao:

> Offer a silent tribute to the decline of a civilization! The glistening of gold sand
> is the epitome of sleepless cities, hollow grasses beat out the music of bottles
> disseminating the bouquets of alcohol
>
> You frequent bars and in dreams travel the earth, frequent women and slowly soften
> Auspicious snow of early winter slowly arrives, seasonal banners like goose feathers
> set off amusingly against heavy, dark constructs of sheet steel
> A fairy tale! The hope of humankind! The jubilant spider web is a lucky sign
> can heal the wounds of a king, the injuries of a prostitute who's been through it all
>
> This is the so-called era of art, tradition transforms snakes into sacred objects, theories
> of roots-seeking are in vogue
> Heaven and humankind as one envelops this vast region, a surreal sound summons
> the nomad:
> Come back Come back, liberty without a grave is the utmost nihilism!

This is social commentary on events in the sub-field of contemporary China's avant-garde poetry. Here, unlike Ouyang, Liao's poet-speaker holds out some hope through 'you', who becomes the conduit for all creation through all time – in effect 'you' becomes a poetical version of Jung's Poet, of Nietzsche's Superman:

> The emotions of humankind begin in you and end in you You this master craftsman of a generation resisting laceration! Hands and feet rigid like chisels Along cliffs engraving words Ten thousand thousand years will bring the turn of your touch to be expunged Your heartbeat pumps out syrup The plants of the new world will be sweet A shell rips through your chest Write Write[316] You this living machine that's lost all individuality Under all restraints Never having belonged to yourself
>
> Write Write

'You' is possessed in the fashion of Jung's poet and is compelled to write all that is in his soul, beginning with <On the Sea>: "We come up from the sea but where does the sea come from". This refrain is repeated verbatim five times in the poem. In between the

[316] This and the concluding injunction to "Write Write" were changed to "Speak Speak" when Liao rewrote the poem in 1989. Earlier that year Liao had begun to record dramatic readings of parts of his long poems and apparently made the change for this reason.

people of the sea – fish-people becoming fishers – live on boats on a sea that resembles land and is described as a “yielding square of glass.” Hooligans easily erase the traces of this people’s culture from the glassy, reflective surface, and the people flee their violence:

> The brave have all been drowned
> All that remain are a pathetic few cowards as witnesses to the immortal act of poetic perfection
> Earth! Earth! Earth! We must by any means get ashore
> We must by any means get ashore

However, being ashore proves no better. The ‘we’ for whom the Master Craftsman speaks and writes suffer further travails, primarily self-inflicted, details of which are recorded in a surrealistic lament in the next three poems. Finally, in <A Look Back>:

> Not knowing where our bodies reside, our
>
> fields of vision all mixed together like mirrors, unable to say who casts light on whom.
> Innumerable phantasms unfurl among us
> practicing one after another myth of Kuafu chasing the sun. Icebergs suspended upside down exceptionally voluptuous
> breast milk bursts forth, raising several well-known sources
> Have we arrived here merely to erect an adventurer’s milestone?

Is this ‘we’ all humankind, all Chinese, or just all poets who write roots-seeking poetry, such as Yang Lian, Haizi, and the Wholism poets? All three readings seem possible, but the latter reading is reinforced repeatedly throughout the text by Liao’s Tibetan Buddhist imagery, his uses of Chinese mythology, even having ‘us’ here to do no more than adopt “a willful, purely responsive demeanor of Zhuangzi” – all images and attitudes frequently found in the poetry of roots-seeking.

> People who have lost the way! You make every effort, yet the beliefs that sustain life are eliminated because the road has ended
> You turn your back on your home, yet ultimately sink into incurable homesickness
> …..

And so, in the end, all are left to lament what is lost, although Liao seems to indicate that many are not aware this is what they are doing – stubbornly living and writing poetry for the dead, who died within their now-missed traditions.

In this poetry Liao appears to take to himself the role of a preacher reading out a liturgy over the corpse of Chinese traditional culture, while attempting to reveal, and thereby personally transcend, the irrational, often violent and self-destructive drives and psychology of humankind that have led to the impasse 'we' are now faced with.[317] The critics Chang Li and Lu Shourong comment on the ironic nature of identifying Liao as a roots-seeking poet, for history as it appears in Liao's cycles and trilogies is the record of a succession of sufferings, both spiritual and physical, ultimately leading, or pointing, to a nihilistic conclusion.[318] The outstanding feature of this poetry is an underlying sense of inescapable original sin which undermines all human undertakings, as individuals and, consequently, as nations.

The poem which follows <The Master Craftsman>, Ouyang Jianghe's <A Pocket-size Flower Garden>, reinforces this message. The title itself bespeaks the shallow, handy convenience of an idealized conception of Chinese culture. Like Liao, Ouyang portrays this culture as dead, but, unlike Liao, he gives the appearance of being thoroughly detached and objective through the use of an ironical omniscient speaker who clinically describes the 'reality' of this fantastical garden, a 'garden of desire' – but a necrophilious desire – for 'you' who wish to possess it:

> Each inspiration is the same inspiration.
>
> Inside another death, the flower garden is everything. The dream-omen of butterflies of uncertain origin is all but a withering fall without flowers, a burning with no fire. An eye full of disorder empty of everything, suddenly the garden has no body. An empty coffin absolved of its body is suspended alone in another astrological array.
>
> The smile that confuses the arrangement is laid on Jupiter's head, like lightening, like an incision that carves deep in, so the seasons suddenly reverse their spin. In the eyes that cannot open is the sleeping soul of the first ancestor bird, whenever it wakes it is leveled into the earth's surface, the folds of fish scales appear willy-nilly across the injured sky.
>
> The entire generalized flower garden where no flower can bloom is metaphysical, as

[317] See Ba Tie (1986) for the most detailed treatment yet published of Liao's poetry during 1984-1986.
[318] Chang & Lu (2002): 205.

soon as you wait to be suspended you are hung up forever. The rapidly shifting faces of people are weird, invisible flowers mingle, indistinguishable; willfully pluck a blossom and at the same time you pluck a human head. So, the flower garden is an excessively exaggerated red.

…..

So, an incisive look will reveal humankind to be wholly faceless, appearing as everything but being nothing. Suddenly, it attaches its bodies to those unpenetrated formless forms, those soul-reviving black arts that knead clay into flesh and turn water to blood, today's future is collected among the apparently waxen figures of posterity. Suddenly, what is grasped becomes a hand, what is heard becomes sound, water that does not run is blood or glass, or a pool of silence.

So, the sole mass body will form within individual conceit. Clothes of every color and pattern mix by way of tattooed torsos. Human heads and the heads of beasts mix by way of knife blades that flash as one. Food and hunger mix through a purifying fast. The flower garden and the suspended coffin mingle through transmigration.

So, this inspiration will be the only inspiration: people who bury flowers also bury themselves, placing yourself in a flower garden is to put yourself in a suspended coffin. No boundary exists.

This sole inspiration arrived on the day of birth, and remains only to leave on the day of doom.

Some critics, such as Xiang Weiguo,[319] render a straightforward reading of <The Suspended Coffin> in its entirety, seeing it as a meditation on the life/death cycle and ancient beliefs in the transmigration of souls, the coffin symbolic of physical death, and the flower garden symbolic of the soul or the mind. In other words, harking back to ancient cultural archetypes, to an age when language, body, and the thinking mind were a unity. T.S. Eliot located the occurrence of this dissociation of sensibility in Europe in the seventeenth century. The clash between body and soul was fought out in the poetry of Metaphysical poets, such as Donne, Marvel, and Herbert, their work informed by a set of beliefs that despised the body, its sensual apparatus, and its desires. Liao Yiwu, however, would seem to have a greater interest in this area. Frank Kermode, working on *fin-de-siécle* imagery, writes in *The Romantic Image* (1957) of the western poet's imagined nostalgia for "the body that thought, not deputing that function to a Cartesian mind", and this 'nostalgia' may have been one of the impulses which led Ouyang and Liao to write these poems. If so, then their poetry is no roots-seeking on a national cultural level, but

[319] Xiang (2002): 120.

on a universal human level – a search for the genuine origins and unity of humankind before the onset of politicized 'culture', of history. It seems possible that the real interest of these poets was to encourage readers (and other poets) to walk again, in the words of René Char,[320] in the "great spaces of the self", to discover for oneself the meanings of life and death.

The import of Liao Yiwu's preceding poem is reinforced by Ouyang Jianghe's, and then hammered home once more – in quite a different fashion – by the three poems by Zhou Lunyou that follow. These are <The White Wolf> (白狼), <My New Moon> (我的新月), and <The Valley of Wolves> (狼谷), which is also the name of a poem series written in 1984-1985. Zhou presents monologues of the unconscious mind to express psychological abnormalities resulting from pressure on the Self/Ego from the Super Ego and the Id – as he also had, in another form, in <The Man with the Owl> in *Modernists Federation*. Half of the poems in the series are linguistic analyses of western surrealist and abstract art works, and the other half are poetic experiments with Freudian theory using symbols of the unconscious, as in <The White Wolf> below. Taken together, the series renders up to the reader the psychic form of a split personality in order to describe the internal conflict that Zhou presumably experiences.

The white wolf is dancing the foxtrot Drawn-out howls
on the ridge of the roof I am never able to dodge
its long long tail Waving a riddle as if it's
reminding me of something hinting at something
Not one stalk of grass is growing on the bald
pastureland for the flock of sheep I can't keep my
hair Yet it still stares at me that way Stares
Have you passed this sort of night Shaking the
snowflakes the frostwork or a moonlight-like
white coming in from your earliest consciousness
Think about it Not yesterday Not last year Earlier
and still earlier imagine this sort of a night In a
place you love where you're a child
It's a house Really dark Distantly I see that white wolf
take a bite of me through the ceiling Kept at a
distance by a thick wall it wounds me Each written
character comes to bite me Every single sentence

[320] Char (1992): XV.

comes to bite me and leaves teeth marks behind
Once more you try to remember what you saw that
night Snow-white walls float up into the air
Four chalk-white walls drift up Your cradle
is like a boat Imagine that you are an infant
suckling at your mother's breast What did you
see at the moment you opened your eyes Now
you push open that door You walk in
Lamplight knocks me over The zebra-striped roof
sways An impression A beautiful shape The
white wolf has come up from the sea up onto the
shore The whole world starts to rock becoming
a pliable body Isn't the cradle being pushed by
that pair of hands Mommy isn't by my side
Now please use your own hands and gently peal off the
sea's skin The animal beneath won't bite That
two-headed beast will definitely not bite you
This evening mother has been gobbled up by it
Now please try to push the two heads apart with
your hands Don't say whose face you see
The white wolf fox-trotting on the ridge of the roof is far
off The long tail has broken off in the wind inch
by inch becoming hummingbirds flying up and
down An ancient pagoda is planted at the center
of a lake inundated by blue light Who will garner
those ripe wind-chimes Those sweet tinklings
are about to sprout and leave that swamp are
going to bud and push up out of that bog

Zhou Lunyou's interest in Freudian symbolism comes as no surprise given his earlier poetical inclinations and the interests of his brother, Zhou Lunzuo, who was actively studying similar subjects at the time. As the traditional Chinese symbolic meaning of the wolf (cupidity and rapaciousness) was not far removed from that of the wolf in the west, the choice of subject was appropriate. What is new in China is the sexual imagery (the 'two-headed beast', for example). Again, here is the conflict between body (sexual desire) and mind (formative memory, etc.) within Freud's concept of an inaccessible, shapeless, and timeless cauldron that is the individual unconscious. (Liao's interests seem similar, but are apparently influenced by Jung's reworking of this concept with regard to all humankind through cultural archetypes.)

Zhou's experimentation with poetical form would also have come across as something of a shock to most contemporary Chinese readers. The translated text above incorporates capitalized letters as a (not entirely necessary) guide for the reader of English, but the Chinese language's regular subject-verb-object sentence form plays a somewhat similar role in the original. In addition, the individual stanzas are more blockish, even square, in appearance in the Chinese than in the English – something much easier to do given the nature of Chinese characters. Such experimentation in form is familiar from Surrealist verse of the 1920s and 1930s, in particular the technique of automatism as first practiced and advocated by André Breton and Philippe Soupault in *The Magnetic Fields* (1919). While apparently using Freudian sexual imagery, it can also be argued that, like the Surrealists in his use of dream-like language and sequences, Zhou is attempting to go beyond Freud. For the hope behind the surrealist project was to afford the dream(s) an ontological reality superior to waking consciousness by way of poetry in the form of a spontaneous outburst of imagination. For a Surrealist poet, the world is a matrix of surprising analogies that brings all things and ideas into interrelationship. The recognition of these interrelationships, or *correspondances*, is grasped intuitively by the mind, and every one of these destroys the false oppositions of logic and allows a brief glimpse of the *surréel*.[321]

Zhou's ontological interest would be extended in 1986 as he gathered like-minded poets together to form the Not-Not group and worked to produce a journal by the same name. The surrealist project would prove to be of increasing importance to Liao Yiwu. His poetry, already influenced by the work of Thomas, would be further influenced by Ginsberg's practice, Dali's double images, deliberately delusional imagery, and other materials in the reshaping of the world in search of a unified expression of the continuity between events in the conscious and unconscious worlds. Zhou's interests would move toward the deconstructionist aspects of Surrealism, the repudiation of the adequacy of all bodies of belief, and particularly of systems, and these interests would in turn bring him together with Yang Li and his existentialist poetics in 1986.

[321] See Browder (1967): 74-88, for more on Breton and automatic writing.

In Conclusion

While there is much more that could be said about the texts included in *Experimental Poetry* – for example, on Shi Guanghua's poems on death from the perspective of Wholism, on He Xiaozhu's sequence of poems incorporating traditional imagery and folklore of the Miao-nationality to which he belongs – there is much of a sameness with the Sichuan poetry of *Modernists Federation*. In *Experimental Poetry*, the new nature of the poetry is certainly more immediately obvious, given the exclusion of an initial section of Misty poetry; and there has been a conscious effort to include like-minded poets from other parts of China. As such, the journal emanates a self-confidence and unity of purpose, which seems lacking in the appearance and editing of *Modernists Federation*.

Experimental Poetry would also be the last-but-one attempt to bring the various poetry groups and individuals in Sichuan together in one journal – the last would be Liao Yiwu's endeavor to do so in the spring of 1987, after the official crackdown on bourgeois liberalism in the arts that began in January of that year. It was precisely this atmosphere of 'bourgeois liberalism' (in CCP terms) that militated against such large-scale unofficial activity.

Now there were to emerge strongly led, well organized groups and small, cohesive groups. As well as demonstrating an overall recognition of their status, or non-status, as poets vis-à-vis the official poetry scene, the previous chapters also reveal the growing gap between two general groupings in Sichuan: those poets who were familiar with the high modernist fundament of Misty poetry and accepted this western tradition as a path and guide to the future development of the art; and those who reacted against the purportedly authoritative (and thus restrictive) tenets of the first group and in so doing found themselves aligned with similar poets in the west, such as Ginsberg. Some individuals, such as Liao Yiwu, found their inspiration in Whitman and other sources outside, or predating, the canonized modernist tradition, and the woman poet, Zhai Yongming, located a source of inspiration that was gender-specific in Sylvia Plath. Much of this was also influenced by a general impetus for a return to origins, not only among poets, but also among Chinese intellectuals in general, as they attempted to repair damage done to Chinese culture during the Cultural Revolution period. This phenomenon is evidenced by

increasing interest in the pre-Han dynasty mystical *Book of Changes*, Daoism, Buddhism, Freudianism, and the theories of Carl Jung. Hand in hand with this, in the Third Generation of the Sichuan avant-garde there were position-takings and the fight for recognition within the avant-garde itself. The Third Generation was the first grouping of newcomers consciously seeking to differentiate themselves from what they perceived as an attempt to impose orthodoxy on a newly emergent avant-garde, and the Macho Men were the first group of these newcomers to achieve recognition. In turn, *Make It New* was the first journal, if not group, to implement restrictive editorial criteria, and, coming after Macho Men publications and popularity, can be seen as a reaction against a perceived threat to the standards contributors to the journal held dear. In any case, comments and actions by Wan Xia, Yang Li, and Li Yawei, among others, were portentous of future splits and groupings.

In sum, the years 1982-1985 can be viewed as the formative stage of the Second World of Poetry in Sichuan. The next three chapters will deal with how the position-takings and poetry of these individuals and groupings developed within the Second World, and now also on the official poetry scene, in the years 1986-1989.