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

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CHAPTER 8: MOVING INTO THE PUBLIC EYE: A GRAND EXHIBITION

The events within the Second World of Poetry in Sichuan and the rest of China during 1985 paved the way for avant-garde poetry to achieve a significant breakthrough with regard to official publication in the following year. From early 1986 until the summer of 1989, an ever-increasing number of avant-garde poems appeared in major official journals. There was a break in this 'success' during much of 1987 due to a crackdown on 'bourgeois liberalization' that followed nationwide student protests in December 1986. However, 1988 and 1989 saw even more avant-garde poetry being published in both official journals and – in a new development – officially published, multi-author anthologies.

Sichuan's, and China's, avant-garde poets continued to experiment and produce unofficial journals, only now an increasing number of critics, many of them of the same age as the poets, began to write journal-articles about their poetry. By the summer of 1989, it appeared that the Second World of Poetry had seen off the criticism, indifference, and ignorance that had earlier greeted the work produced within it. While their poetry was not as popular as humanist-oriented Misty poetry had been in the late 1970s and early 1980s, by 1989 it seemed as if there was public acknowledgement and acceptance of the individualization of poets and their poetry within a society and culture which – like avant-garde poets and poetry – had been fragmenting, modernizing, and seeking to adapt to rapidly changing circumstances.

Individual poets who had previously gone largely unnoticed adopted varying public positions and pursued different careers. Their choices were often determined by their previous postures and continuing connections to the Second World of Poetry, as well as their personal circumstances – or, in Bourdieu's term, their habitus. In this chapter, after examining the circumstances of the avant-garde breakthrough into the realm of officially

published poetry, individual studies of three outstanding individuals – Zhai Yongming, Ouyang Jianghe, and Liao Yiwu – will demonstrate some of the difficulties and successes of newly emergent avant-garde poets and poetry in Sichuan, and China, during 1986-1989.

Public Acceptance of Modernization and Marginalization

Liberalized editorial policies because of the new, more relaxed CCP cultural line inaugurated by Hu Qili and the CCP Secretary General Hu Yaobang during late 1984 and 1985 led to an increase in official publication opportunities for Sichuan's avant-garde poets in 1986. This trend was aided by the recruitment to establishment journals of younger, more adventurous sub-editors, such as Tang Xiaodu and Wang Jiaxin at *Poetry*, Zong Renfa at *Author* (moving there from *Guandong Literature* in late 1985), and Zhu Yanling at *Flower City* (*花城*), a bi-monthly, nationally distributed literary journal out of Guangzhou. Poets sought out these younger, more open-minded editors, and they, in turn, also sought out poets once someone of their acquaintance presented them with a manuscript they admired. As was now the custom, poets would mail or personally deliver manuscripts, private collections, and unofficial journals in which their work was published, to friends and editors, and these poems would then be shared with their friends.[322]

Sichuan poets such as Liao Yiwu, Wan Xia, Zhou Lunyou, Li Yawei, and the brothers Song Qu and Song Wei spread their own and Sichuan's poetry throughout China through their travels and correspondence with other poets and with literary editors. Already in 1985, this activity had resulted in the publication of avant-garde poetry by Song Qu and Song Wei, Shi Guanghua, and Liao Yiwu in official literary journals.

Liao Yiwu, Zhou Lunyou, and Zhai Yongming, for example, were previously well-known due to their 'training' under the tutelage of elder establishment poets at *Stars* in Chengdu and the subsequent publication of their earlier, pre-1984 poetry in official

[322] The author initially became acquainted with China's avant-garde poetry through manuscripts, private collections, and unofficial journals passed on by friends who were former classmates (such as Zhu Yanling), editors (such as Tang Xiaodu), intellectuals (such as Liu Xiaobo), and artists (such as A Xian).

literary journals. Liao and Zhou in particular would subsequently use these contacts and acquaintances to their own advantage, but would also recommend the work of other avant-garde poets whom they admired.

Another key factor was the rapid increase in the number of official literary journals and papers and publishing houses in China during the 1980s. This was not surprising considering that all such periodicals had been closed during the Cultural Revolution period. In October 1979, there were only 50 literary periodicals in all of China, but this number had grown to 110 by April 1980.[323] The number of journals continued to increase until 1987, when there was a cull in numbers during the crackdown on 'bourgeois liberalization'.

Liao Yiwu's *Literary Wind of Ba Country* in Fuling was closed in 1987 after only two years in operation, as were *Poetry Selections* in Lanzhou and *China Literature* in Beijing, to name but three. With much controversy, in mid-1986 the latter journal was notified it would be closed at the end of that year: this indicates that the CCP's more conservative elements took advantage of the political climate in January 1987 to enforce further closures they might have previously only hoped to achieve. The closure of *China* also showed how dangerous it was (and is) to be too avant-garde in Beijing, the center of political power. Altogether, these and other journal closures in early 1987 frightened editorial boards everywhere in the country into more conservative publication policies for a brief period. Given the fact that the poetry of Liao Yiwu and Yi Lei of Tianjin, as well as the avant-garde fiction of the artist-writer Ma Jian – all published in the 1987 no. 1-2 issue of Beijing-based *People's Literature* – was singled out for national criticism by Deng Xiaoping himself,[324] it was clear to all literary editorial boards that avant-garde literature was best avoided for the time being.

The nationwide student demonstrations, which led to the campaign against bourgeois liberalization and the resignation of Hu Yaobang on 16 January 1987, were triggered by demonstrations on December 5 and 9 in Hefei, Anhui province, in protest against the manipulated results of university and municipal elections. These protests quickly spread to universities throughout the country, and did not halt until prominent, inspirational

[323] Link (1999): 179. Many other relevant issues, such as readership, CCP controls and censorship, and systemic reform, are also dealt with in Link.
[324] See the editorial self-criticism published in the March 1987 issue of *People's Literature*.

intellectuals and writers such as Fang Lizhi and Liu Binyan were stripped of their CCP membership in early January.[325] The political campaign would continue until the Thirteenth CCP Congress in October 1987, when the new CCP Secretary General Zhao Ziyang called for unity and stability within the party.

A statistical analysis of the publication of Sichuan avant-garde poets in a limited number of nationally circulated literary periodicals during 1986-1989 indicates that there was a drop-off in publications by these poets during 1987. During the period in question the work of 25 Sichuan avant-garde poets dealt with over the course of this text appeared on 200 instances in 15 nationally distributed literary journals examined by the author.[326] This number breaks down to 70 instances in 1986, 35 in 1987, 56 in 1988, and 39 in 1989. 1987 and 1989 were years severely effected by political turmoil and reactionary cultural policies. The number for 1987 was boosted by seemingly unaffected, continuing publication in noticeably liberal official journals such as *The Plains Literature* of Hohhot and *Guandong Literature* of Liaoyuan. The figure for publication of avant-garde work by Sichuan poets in 1985 was limited to the seven instances (not including work published in *The Literary Wind of Ba Country*) involving the poetry of the brothers Song Qu and Song Wei, Shi Guanghua, and Liao Yiwu, and the dramatic increase in 1986 is phenomenal.

Publication opportunities were likewise increased for avant-garde poets from elsewhere in China. A representative list of 40 such poets[327] shows that they were published on 275

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[325] Spence (1990): 723-727.

[326] The author had the privilege of unfettered access to the extensive collection of Chinese literary periodicals held in the Asian Studies Library at the University of British Columbia in 1992-1997, during which time these figures were compiled. These journals were *Poetry*, *Stars*, *Author*, *The Plains Literature*, *Flower City*, *Shanghai Literature*, *People's Literature*, *China Author* (*中国作家*) of Beijing (bi-monthly), *October* (十月) of Shanghai (bi-monthly), *Beijing Literature*, *Tibet Literature Monthly* (*西藏文学月刊*) of Lhasa (becoming a bi-monthly in the 1990s), and *Youth Literature Monthly* (*青年文学月刊*; not including 1988) and *China Literature*, both of Beijing. The author also has his own collection of *Guandong Literature*, comprising all of 1987 and 2 relevant issues for 1988 (the journal alternated between 'popular' and 'serious' literature on a monthly basis), and a collection of *The Poetry Press* of Hefei from the no. 78 issue of 12 December 1987 to the no. 94 issue of 6 August 1988 (at this time in a four-page newspaper format published at approximately 10-day intervals).

[327] This list was drawn up by the author and is meant to be roughly representative of the most accomplished avant-garde poets during the period in question: Mo Mo, Yu Yu, Zhang Xiaobo, Wang Yin, Lu Yimin, Che Qianzi, Chen Dongdong, Song Lin, Yu Xiaowei, Mo Fei, Xiaohai, Wang Xiaolong, Han Dong, Zhang Zhen, Meng Lang, Yang Ke, Hai Nan, Yu Jian, Lü De'an, Tang Yaping, Da Xian, Niu Bo, Wei Wei, Xue Di, Xingtian, Luo Yihe, Lao Mu, Xi Chuan, Haizi, Guo Lijia, Li Hong, Ding Dang, Zhu Lingbo, Xiaojun, Lu Lu, Wang Xiaoni, Daozi, Longzi, An Ranzi, and Shao Chunguang.

instances in the same journals during 1986-1989. Together with the number for the Sichuan poets, this yields 475 instances of publication for avant-garde poets and their work.

A comparison of some of the figures for the official journals in question indicates the relative conservativeness or liberalness of editorial boards throughout the period in question. The three poetry journals' figures tell their own story: *Poetry* had 28 instances for Sichuan poets, 61 for others (1986-1989); *Stars* 41 and 22; *The Poetry Press* (for 12 issues 1987-1988, then in a single sheet, four page format) 6 and 23. Aside from 1986, the *Stars* editorial board was evidently not enamored of the new avant-garde trends of Sichuan poets, much less experimental poetry in general. (In 1986 alone, there were 30 instances of publication for Sichuan poets and 20 for out-of-province poets.)

The big 1986 breakthrough for avant-garde poetry was marked by the publication in October of <A Grand Exhibition of Modernist Poetry Groups on China's Poetry Scene 1986> edited by Xu Jingya, which appeared simultaneously in *The Poetry Press* and the *Shenzhen Youth Daily* (these instances of avant-garde poetry publication were not factored into the figures given for the year 1986), and marks *The Poetry Press* as the most liberal of these periodicals.[328] In an apparent response to <A Grand Exhibition>, the November issue of *Stars* was a special issue given over entirely to the poetry – there were no manifestos – of China's poetry groups and societies.[329]

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[328] In fact, early in 1985, an arguably greater 'exhibit' of contemporary avant-garde poetry had been published semi-officially by the May Fourth Literary Society at Beijing University. The *New Poetry Tide Poetry Collection*, edited by Lao Mu, consisted of two volumes and 814 pages, but due to its university-funded, semi-official status never circulated far beyond Beijing university campuses and the homes of poetry contributors and editors, and their friends. While well over 500 pages were given over to the *Today* poets (the entire first volume), other Misty poets and a few exemplary pre-1949 experimental poets, there were nearly 300 pages for avant-garde work by newcomer poets from all parts of China, including Zhang Zao, Zhai Yongming, Ouyang Jianghe, Bai Hua, Liao Yiwu, Song Qu and Song Wei, and Shi Guanghua. However, being semi-official, the anthology had limited circulation, and, while the new experimental work of 1983-1984 collected within it is of great interest, there were many more recent poetry groupings and poetry available to Xu Jingya in 1986. Lao Mu was also the editor of a simultaneously published companion book to the anthology entitled *Young Poets Talk Poetry* (*青年诗人谈诗*), a collection of writings on poetry (180 pages) by some of the poets whose work is in the anthology. Among these, there are articles by the Sichuan poets Bai Hua, Zhai Yongming, Shi Guanghua, and Song Qu and Song Wei.

[329] At this time, Sun Wenbo, Ouyang Jianghe, and Zhai Yongming belonged to what was called The Present Poetry Society (现在诗社), and, as well as a brief manifesto-like statement, four of their poems were selected: Sun <The End of Love> (爱情的终结); Ouyang <Interlude> (插曲); and Zhai <Terminus> (终点) and <Wait and See> (观望).

Li Yawei's <Su Dongpo and His Friends> was also selected. However, he is not listed as belonging to any group. There is only a notation that the poem was selected from <Chinese Contemporary Experimental

<A Grand Exhibition> proved to be controversial in both official and unofficial poetry circles during the rest of 1986 and, especially, 1987. Divided into three parts, each laid out over two newspaper pages; Xu had difficulty doing justice to any one poetry group, not to mention the exhibition itself. In total, 65 poetry 'groups' were represented by a manifesto and at least one poem (in one case, only a manifesto). To make matters worse, 25 of these groups were in fact individuals. While Sichuan was well represented by 13 'groups', four of them were individuals (such as Hu Dong, Xiao Kaiyu, and Yang Yuanhong) and one was Shang Zhongmin's *University Student Poetry Group*, discussed previously. As a result, nearly 50% of the available space was occupied by manifestos, and led to the editing down of lengthy poems (such as Liao Yiwu's <Lovers> and Li Yawei's <The Chinese Department>). Many avant-garde poets felt the editing and layout of the exhibition belittled their efforts as individuals and as groups.[330] In 1989, Li Yawei and Liao Yiwu, in officially published comments,[331] stated that serious avant-garde poets had already "returned to their desks" by 1986, and that the so-called poetry movements and Isms that sprang up in that year were effectively acts of self-aggrandizement on the part of individuals or groups of poets. During the next 12 months after publication of the exhibition, numerous articles appeared in *The Poetry Press*, *Poetry*, and *Stars* that were either critical of the entire exhibition, individual poems or manifestos, or of all three. Still, the exhibition did get 'names' and poetry out to a larger public in a form that was difficult to ignore. In total, 21 of Sichuan's avant-garde poets had 25 of their poems published there.

Poetry>, the unofficial journal published in Fuling in 1985. This was also the case with Zhou Lunyou, whose <Wolf Valley> was selected from the same journal, as was Li Yao's <Elopement> (私奔).

Poetry from the first issue of the Zhou Lunyou-edited *Not-Not* (June 1986) was also selected, but only that of female contributors: Liu Tao's <Music Note 『5』> (音符『5』); Shao Chunguang's <Proof of a Wild Nature> (野性的证明); and Yao Cheng's <An Operation in the Wrong Place> (错位的手术) and <Coffeeshop> (咖啡厅).

Well-known poets of the Third Generation from other parts of China were also selected. <For Yao Fei> (给姚霏) by *Them*'s Yu Jian was taken from his earlier period as a student at Yunnan University, when he was a contributor to *Gingko* (*银杏*). Han Dong, the editor of *Them*, is represented by <This Wind> (这阵风), but the poem is attributed to <Chinese Contemporary Experimental Poetry>. Another *Them* member, Xiaojun is represented here by <Everyday Life> (日常生活), but the poem is taken from a Sichuan unofficial poetry paper, *China Contemporary Poetry* (*中国当代诗歌*).

[330] Private communication with several poets.

[331] See *Author*, July 1989, p. 67, in <A Four-way Conversation on Avant-garde Poetry> (先锋诗歌四人谈), featuring Liao, Li, Ba Tie, and Gou Mingjun, recorded in March 1989 at Gou's home in Nanchuan.

Furthermore, journals such as *Guandong Literature*, *The Plains*, *Author*, *China Literature* (during 1986 before it was closed), *Shanghai Literature* (in 1988-1989), *People's Literature*, and *China Author* gave surprising amounts of space to avant-garde poetry, even though they were comprehensive literary journals carrying mostly fiction. Other similar journals, such as *Beijing Literature*, *October*, *Tibet Literature* and *Youth Literature*, rarely did so, which identifies them as among the more conservative of literary periodicals in China already in 1986.[332]

A further phenomenon involving official literary journals was the sudden, unexpected appearance of large sections devoted to avant-garde poetry in issues of otherwise fiction-only, or locally oriented, journals. *Chang'an Literature Monthly* (*长安文学月刊*) is a journal normally devoted to fiction only, but the October 1988 issue featured 10 pages of avant-garde poetry by poets such as Tang Yaping, Ouyang Jianghe, Meng Lang, and Xiao Kaiyu, as well as six poems by Allen Ginsberg translated by the husband-and-wife team of Daozi and Zhao Qiong. As residents of Xi'an, the latter two had arranged the publication of this small collection.

A similar instance in March 1988 involved the new, local official periodical *Ba Mountain Literature Monthly* (*巴山文学月刊*) of Daxian, a city to the north of Fuling in eastern Sichuan (possibly a replacement for *The Literary Wind of Ba Country* which was closed in 1987), and was organized by the Beijing-based poet Da Xian, who was invited to play this role by a friend working as a sub-editor at the journal.[333] The journal gave over 25 pages to the resulting collection, which included work by Da Xian himself, Zhai Yongming and He Xiaozhu of Sichuan, Chen Dongdong and Wang Yin of Shanghai, Xi Chuan of Beijing, and Han Dong of Nanjing, among others.

These examples and the author's survey of several literary journals are just a glimpse at the full reality of the situation at the time in China. There were many more poets writing and publishing avant-garde poetry, and there were well over 100 literary journals and papers in which they could have their work published.

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[332] The figures for all these journals, broken into publication instances for avant-garde poets from Sichuan/the rest of the country (all 1986-1989 unless otherwise noted): *People's Literature* 9/18; *Author* 20/28; *The Plains* 20/29; *Flower City* 3/6; *Shanghai Literature* 13/12; *China Literature* 14/13 (1986 only); *Guandong Literature* 21/27 (8 issues, 1987-1988); *Beijing Literature* 0/2; *October* 0/4; *Tibet Literature* 0/4; *Youth Literature* 2/7; and *China Author* 4/17.

[333] Personal communication.

In addition, during this period, there was an increasing interest on the part of publishing houses to prepare and publish multi-author anthologies that included, or were wholly devoted to, China's new avant-garde poetry. Previously, Tang Xiaodu and Wang Jiaxin's anthology *Chinese Contemporary Experimental Poetry Selection* was mentioned as the first of these. The editors prepared the manuscript during 1986, but changed political circumstances in 1987 led the editorial board of the publishing house to request changes in the manuscript. This resulted in the removal of a number of poems (for instance, Liao Yiwu's <The City of Death> was replaced by selections from <The Great Cycle>[334]). Despite these difficulties, 19,500 copies of the anthology were published in June 1987. Tang experienced even greater difficulties with a further anthology he compiled in 1988-1989.[335] Because of the political climate following the 4 June 1989 massacres, this anthology was not printed until July 1992, with a surprisingly large print run of 30,500 copies. As such, it was one of the first harbingers of a new liberalized cultural policy in China at the time.

<A Grand Poetry Exhibition> was updated and published in book form under the editorship of Xu Jingya, *cum suis*, in September 1988 by Shanghai's Tongji University Publishing House. This volume's print-run of 3,000 was more typical of other avant-garde poetry anthologies at the time, and, in fact, during the 1990s and up to this day. Xu and his fellow editors apparently made some attempt to rectify the shortcomings of the 1986 <Exhibition>, increasing the number of poems for what they deemed important poetry groups in the original collection, and appending a 163-page poetry anthology consisting of the post-Exhibition work of some of the original contributors.[336] However, the decision to place the Misty poets (a member of which Xu is considered to be) at the head of the book – in 1986 they were at the head of Part 3 of the <Exhibition> – would have done little to change the opinions of its critics among avant-garde poets. The members of Sichuan's Not-Not might have been pleased to find themselves promoted from first in Part 2 of the <Exhibition> to number two in the book, following the Misty

[334] Personal communication from Tang.
[335] Tang Xiaodu ed. (1992).
[336] After the disappointment and anger caused by the original 'exhibition', some poets refused further participation. These included Liao Yiwu, Yang Li, Zhou Lunyou, Lan Ma, and Han Dong, among others. The author was witness to refusals to participate in the book at the spring 1988 Grand Canal Poetry Conference in Jiangsu province.

poets, even if the Misty poets were not an active ‘group’ with a manifesto and publications such as theirs.

Another anthology of some note was *The Third Generation Poets Exploratory Poetry Selection* (*第三代诗人探索诗选*), edited by Xi Ping and published in Beijing in December 1989 by the China Literary Federation Publishing House (中国文联出版社) with a print-run of 6,300. At 634-pages in length, this was the largest anthology of avant-garde poetry published during the 1980s. However, it consists of a haphazard selection of poetry of uneven quality from various unattributed, unofficial poetry journals that appeared throughout China during 1985-1987. Over 400 poems by 175 poets can be found here.

A final phenomenon in the literary publishing world worth noting was the appearance during this period of a relatively large number of what are called ‘appreciation dictionaries’ of poetry ranging from the classical to the modern. In such a volume, poems are selected by an editor (or editors), who then writes a brief article about each poem, analyzing its qualities, thus justifying the poem’s selection and aiding the reader’s appreciation of the work. In 1988 at least two such anthologies focused primarily on Misty poetry were published with large print-runs: the first, *Chinese Modern Misty Poetry Appreciation and Analysis* (*中国现代朦胧诗赏析*), was published by Flower City Publishing House (花城出版社)[337] in Guangzhou in April with a print-run of 46,060, and included poetry from the 1920s up to a very few conservative selections of post-1984 poetry; the second is entitled *Misty Poetry Famous Works Appreciation Dictionary* (*朦胧诗名篇鉴赏辞典*) put out by the Shaanxi Teachers’ University Publishing House (陕西师范大学出版社) in Xi’an, had a print run of 20,000, and consisted of a selection of 22 Misty and post-Misty poets.[338] Although single representative avant-garde works of Zhai Yongming[339] and the brothers Song Qu and Song Wei were included, the poem by Liao Yiwu is from his pre-avant-garde phase.[340]

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[337] Zhang Yaxin & Geng Jianhua ed. (1988).
[338] Qi Feng, Ren Wu, & Jie Er ed. (1988).
[339] <The Black Room> (黑房间), the first poem from the 1986 series <People Live In The World> (人生在世).
[340] The official prize-winning <The Great Basin>.

The best of these 'dictionaries' was edited by Chen Chao and published August 1989 in Shijiazhuang by the Hebei People's Publishing House (河北人民出版社), and had a print run of 15,000. Within the *Chinese Exploratory Poetry Appreciation Dictionary* (*中国探索诗鉴赏辞典*), the last 206 of its 664 pages (in unusually small type-face) were devoted to post-Misty avant-garde poetry, the rest covering the development of China's New Poetry up to that point.[341] The work of 12 of Sichuan's avant-garde poets (34 poems, including the full text of Liao's long <City of Death>) is among that of a total of 41 poets selected by Chen from all parts of the country.[342]

The foregoing events signal the success of China's Second World of Poetry in infiltrating and occupying a significant sector – effectively the avant-garde sub-field – of the official poetry scene before the summer of 1989. This success was in part due to continuous networking by avant-garde poets in their quest to seek out like-minded individuals in the official poetry world.

By all standards, among the most successful of these avant-garde poets, a relatively large number came from Sichuan.[343] The remainder of this chapter will examine the poetry and career trajectories within the avant-garde sub-field of Zhai Yongming, Ouyang Jianghe, and Liao Yiwu during 1986-1989.

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[341] This book was republished in two volumes with a print-run of 5,000 in 2002 by the same publishing house, with the addition by Chen of a few poets – such as Zhang Zao – and new poetry for some of the formerly selected poets – such as Zhou Lunyou and Bai Hua. The other changes are to the title, now prefaced by the words *Twentieth Century* (*20 世纪*), and the addition at the end of the second volume of a 45-page chapter devoted to the explication of frequently-used terminology related to modern poetry.

[342] In order of appearance, they are Zhai Yongming, Liao Yiwu, Tang Yaping, Yang Li, Li Yawei, He Xiaozhu, Ouyang Jianghe, Bai Hua, Zhou Lunyou, Shang Zhongmin, and Song Qu and Song Wei.

[343] In the aforementioned analysis, instances of official publication in 1986-1989 for some individual Sichuan poets were as follows: Liao Yiwu 20 (1986: 10; 1987: 2; 1988: 2; 1989: 6), Xiao Kaiyu 20 (8/1/9/2; Xiao's case is unusual and will be commented on in Chapter 12), Zhai Yongming 18 (7/4/5/2), Ouyang Jianghe 15 (6/1/5/3), Zhou Lunyou 14 (6/0/5/3), Li Yawei 13 (5/3/2/3), Song Qu and Song Wei 11 (4/4/2/1), Yang Li 11 (1/2/5/3), Shi Guanghua 10 (6/1/3//0), Shang Zhongmin 10 (5/1/4/0), He Xiaozhu 10 (4/3/3/0), Sun Wenbo 6 (2/1/1/2), and Bai Hua 6 (2/2/0/2).

The Poetry of Zhai Yongming

The poetry of Zhai Yongming was last discussed in Chapter Six when her series of twenty poems called <Woman> was said to herald the rise of women's avant-garde poetry in China. However, while poems from the series appeared in *Modernists Federation* and at least one unofficial journal outside Sichuan in 1985, it was not until 1986 that the poems of <Woman> began to appear in official literary journals. Before this, while Zhai's name might have been familiar to readers of *Sichuan Literature* and *Stars*, there was little in her poetry to suggest readers outside of Sichuan might remember her name. As the critic Tang Xiaodu relates, upon first meeting Zhai in 1983, a friend introduced her to him as "Sichuan's little Shu Ting" (the famous Misty woman poet). [344] Poems from <Woman> were first published in early 1986 in *The Poetry Press*, followed by six in the September issue of *Poetry*, and a further two in the October issue of *China Literature*.[345] In addition, in late 1986, the Lijiang Publishing House of Guilin made *Woman* one of a series of avant-garde poetry collections, including Zhai's book with those of other poets such as Shi Zhi and Duoduo. This was the first officially published poetry collection for most of the poets selected. Moreover, in 1987 poems from this collection still could be found in the May issue of *Shanghai Literature*[346] and the June issue of *Guandong Literature*. With this unprecedented success, there also arose the beginning of a polemic over the nature of women's poetry, a polemic that continues to this day – and Zhai Yongming's name and the poetry of <Woman> is invariably part of it. During the course of 1986-1987 the poetry of women such as Tang Yaping,[347] originally

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[344] Tang Xiaodu (2001): 215.

[345] The same two poems previously published in *Modernists Federation*.

[346] Interestingly, the editors felt the fact that these four poems were from <Woman> should be disguised, and claimed they were from a series called <From Start to Finish> (始终). Apparently, in early 1987, Zhai's <Woman>, like Liao Yiwu's <The City of Death> and Yi Lei's <An Unmarried Woman's Bedroom>, was felt to be too 'dark', 'negative', and 'lewd', and the title of the series was already too well known to get through the censors (in fact, the editorial board). For more on censorship and the functions of editorial boards see Link (1999).

[347] Tang is mentioned in relation to the first appearance of Third Generation poets in Sichuan in 1982 in chapter four, when she was a student at Sichuan University in Chengdu. Zhai mentions Tang as one of her visitors during her stay in hospital while writing <Woman> in 1984, although Tang did eventually move to Guiyang to begin working in television that year. The influence of the poetry of Sylvia Plath and Zhai is evident in Tang's <The Black Desert> (黑色沙漠), a series of twelve poems written in 1985 dealing with darkness and the night of being a woman in a man's world, although Tang's poetry is more physical than Zhai's. Ten of the series' poems were first published in *The Modern Poetry Paper* (*现代诗歌报*) in March

of Sichuan and a friend of Zhai, and the Tianjin poet Yi Lei[348] would become part of the developing school of women's poetry. However, the details of this polemic are beyond the scope of this study.[349]

There is more to Zhai Yongming than <Woman>, although it is sometimes difficult to see this in what critics say about her poetry before 1992. The result of this concentration on one series of poems has led to a neglect of Zhai's maturation process as a poet during the rest of the 1980s. While some of the same imagery and metaphysical interests of <Woman> remain, Zhai turns to new, more autobiographical, more reality-based subject matter, only now she has the confident, new vision of the poet-creator that she began to work out for herself (and other women poets) over the course of <Woman>'s 20 poems.

Zhou Zan has written that <Woman> being the groundbreaker for women's poetry in China, she is inclined to treat it as Zhai's maiden work of poetry.[350] By doing so, critics gloss over the artistic and psychological difficulties Zhai had to surmount to achieve her breakthrough: moving from Misty poetry in terms of subject matter and technique into the avant-garde with respect to both, and being very much out on her own as a female poet challenging the traditionally male-dominated spheres of Chinese poetry and poetry criticism.

At times biography is important to a full understanding and appreciation of a poet's work:

> …but actually while writing <Woman> (1984), <Peaceful Village> (静安庄; 1985) and <People Live In The World> (人生在世; 1986), for all of three years I lingered long-term in dirty hospital wards; often late at night, after ten o'clock, I'd

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1986, put out by the cultural department of Jiaojiang in Zhejiang province. The series found a larger readership and attracted controversy when two of the poems and a poetical manifesto were published in Part 3 of <A Grand Poetry Exhibition>.

[348] Yi Lei gained fame and notoriety for the publication, and subsequent criticism, of a sequence of 14 poems entitled <An Unmarried Woman's Bedroom> (独身女人的卧室), published in the 1987 combined 1-2 edition of *People's Literature*.

[349] In English, there is little work on this subject to date. See Tao (1996) and Jeanne Hong Zhang (2002) and (2004). In Chinese, see Chen Xuguang (1995a), Meng Yifei (2000b), Shen Qi (1994b), Zhang Huimin (1995), Zhao Siyun (2002a, b, c, d), Zhou Zan (2003) and (2002d), and any recently published critical survey of Chinese modern poetry, such as Xie & Liang (1993), Chang & Lu (2002), Li Xinyu (2000), and Xiang Weiguo (2002); also see Li Xiaolin's <Zhai Yongming's "Disease" Consciousness> (翟永明的"疾病"意识) in Zhai (1994).

[350] Zhou Zan (2002d): 2.

endure cold winds sitting on a bench writing outside the ward ….[351]

In her many non-fiction essays, Zhai only once mentions such concrete, and seemingly vital, biographical details for this crucial period in her poetical development – in an essay published in the February 1996 issue of *Author*. However, critics continue to ignore, or overlook, these biographical details and instead dwell on the influence of Plath, and metaphysical and generalized women's issues.

It was not Zhai Yongming who was ill, but her mother. Between 1983 and 1987, Zhai spent long periods of time living with her mother in the hospital – the longest being a five month period in 1984 – and visiting her on an almost daily basis when this was not the case. Finally, in 1987, Zhai stayed with her mother during the last few weeks of her life.[352]

The nature of Zhai Yongming's mother's medical problem is not important to the appreciation of Zhai's poetry, but her attachment to her mother, the nature of the environment Zhai lived in, and how she adapted to it is. <Woman> can be seen as a reinvention of herself as a poet in a world apart from that of other Chinese poets, men and women. No longer was she influenced by male-dominated poetics, such as that of the Misty poets. Aside from visits by friends bringing and talking poetry, she was left alone with her emotions and uncomfortable environs, and her poetry reflected these creative and existential difficulties.

After <Woman>, in 1985 Zhai wrote another series of poems, <Peaceful Village>, this time consisting of 12 poems, or twelve months as she titled them. As a 19 year-old in 1974, like millions of others after high-school graduation, Zhai was sent to live and work in the countryside. These poems are rooted in the three years Zhai spent there, a place that she has called one of her spiritual homes.[353] Zhai called Peaceful Village this because there she recognized the existence of the irreversible arrangements of fate. The same is true of being a woman, or, in Zhai's terms, of possessing the "consciousness of black night." Residing in hospital wards, she would also have become much more conscious of,

[351] Zhai (1997): 196-198.
[352] Conversation with Zhai on April 28, 2004, in Aarhus, Denmark.
[353] Zhai (2002c): 8.

and sensitive to, the grimmer realities of life and death. These were the themes of the poetry she wrote at this time.

No longer living in the countryside, indeed long years removed from it, and written after <Woman>, her 'view' of <Peaceful Village> would not be realistic, much less a paean to or a castigation of country life. The first poem sets the tone for what follows:

<The First Month> (第一月)[354]

As if it had always existed, as if all was already in order
I arrive, the noise has nothing to do with me
it settles me into a south-facing wing

My first time here I happened upon a pitch-black night
everywhere there were footpaths resembling faces
pale and lonely, the cold wind blew
at a moment like this the fields of corn are stirred up
I arrive here, I hear the hollows from the double-fish star
and the endless trembling of a night full of feelings

Tiny haystacks scattered and solemn
The sole fragile cloud, solitary as a wild beast
approaches on tiptoe, reeking of foul weather

Those who I come across become hearts worth knowing
the long fishing rods slide across the water's surface, oil lamps flicker
the hoarse barking of dogs gives one pause

Yesterday the sound of a great wind appeared to comprehend it all
don't let in the black trees
in every corner murderous thoughts take up their places
enduring the moments spread over your body
now unfettered I can become the moonlight

In their dreams a married couple hears the patter of pre-dawn rain
By the stone mill black donkeys discuss the tomorrow
There, land of mingled dark and light
you know all its years like the palm of your hand

I hear a cock crow
and the windlass of a well

[354] Another translation of this poem and the rest of the poems in the series can be found in Tao Naikan & Tony Prince (1999).

The I-speaker is removed from, even above, all she surveys. The use of terms like 'the first month' and the 'double-fish star' (Pisces) throw the poem into the slow, cyclical rhythms of the traditional lunar calendar, the agricultural calendar, a timeless form of life before industrialization, the idealized life of 'heaven and human as one' (天人合一). And this, in turn, calls for closer attention to the details of human relations with others and with nature, both internal and external.

The critic Tao Naikan has tied the pervasive darkness of this series in to Zhai's intent to represent the village as a spiritual wasteland, which ultimately rejects the I-speaker just as the I-speaker rejects it. [355] A close reading of various elements in the series leads the critics Huang Lin and Jeanne Hong Zhang to see Zhai highlighting the fate of women "under the yoke of history and tradition."[356] The poems are written from a woman's standpoint, but they go beyond it by dealing with the totality of 'village' life as observed and experienced by a young woman just reaching physical maturity. Yet, it could also be argued that this mental and spiritual maturity was achieved in the hospital many years later, and Zhai's memories of village life were now re-envisaged through a new, matured prism of consciousness: her recently discovered 'consciousness of black night'.

The first, sixth, seventh, ninth, and twelfth poems in the series were published in late 1986 in the unofficial Sichuan journal *Han Poetry*; the first, third, seventh and twelfth were first officially published in Tang Xiaodu's and Wang Jiaxin's 1987 anthology of experimental poetry; and the whole series was published for the first time in the April 1988 issue of *People's Literature*. While the series can be approached as a successful effort in women's poetry, it is possibly more profitably read as a poetical return by an urbanite, drawing on highly selective memory, to a unique social experiment set in the countryside of Cultural Revolution China. No matter what else Zhai may have learned and experienced during those three years, the writing of this series of poems – while not making up for all that may have been lost (time, education, etc.) – is real proof of some 'profit' from the experience.

Zhai's 1986 series of eleven poems, <People Live In The World>, has never received as much attention as <Woman> and <Peaceful Village>. However, the following poem,

[355] Tao (1999).
[356] See Huang Lin (1995): 100-101; and Chapter 6 in Jeanne Hong Zhang (2004).

the first in the series, after being first published in Part 3 of <A Grand Exhibition> on 24 October 1986 in the *Shenzhen Youth Daily*, has been much anthologized and analyzed by critics:[357]

<The Black Room> (黑房间)

As a rule all crows under heaven are black, and this
intimidates me, they have so many
relatives, their numbers are legion, hard to resist

But we are indispensable, we four sisters
we are the snares in the black room
slim and graceful, walking to and fro
appearing to have winning lottery tickets in our grasp
But I intend to work mischief, my heart is harsh
On the surface I maintain a girl's pleasant disposition
while retracing my daily defeats

We are fair maidens of renown awaiting proposals in our boudoir
smiling resentfully, racking our brains
for ways to make ourselves more attractive
Young and beautiful, like raging flames
Very single-minded snares, baked black
(Which of the wavering countenances of good men with sharply-
ground teeth and ramrod straight gaze, which of the boundary-
crossers and calculating plotters shall be my brothers-in-law?)

At night I feel
crises lying low all around our room
the cats and mice are all awake
we go to sleep, seeking dreams
the license numbers of strange hearts, in the night
we are women ready to fall like ripe melons

A confusion of phoenixes, male and female, so on and so forth
we sisters four, daily-new monthly-changeable
Marriage, still at the core of choosing a mate
The bedroom light dispirits the newly-marrieds
Risk it all on one throw, I say to myself
Home is were you start off

[357] For example: Qi Feng et. al. ed. (1988); Chen Chao ed. (1989); Tang Xiaodu ed. (1992); Cui Weiping ed. (1993).

Tao Naikan has translated the title of this series as <Living in the World>. In so doing, the irony of Zhai Yongming writing these poems while in hospital is lost. Instead, Tao sees these poems merely as a "domestic inspection of women" and "a realistic examination of contemporary urban people," and ultimately claims that in dealing with "reality" (and not "her dream") Zhai "falls into platitude, commonplace idiom and loose discourse."[358] Both Chen Chao and Ren Wu in their analyses of the poem place the stress on the work 'black' in the title and within the poem, and appear to treat it as if it were simply one of the poems of <Woman>.[359] There is truth in this, in the continuity of Zhai Yongming's poetry during this period, but the irony and cynicism they all speak of appears to be much deeper than they realize. The generalized aspect of all women's existence in a male-dominated world cannot be denied, but neither can Zhai's existence at the time within a dirty (black) hospital room possibly shared by three other women, all recovering from, or succumbing to illness. The self-mockery and irony is even more evident in the following poem, the ninth in the series:

<At This Very Moment> (此时此刻)

Living in the world, without sons without daughters
becomes a harmful business as days go by
The mirror is loyal but loathsome
Facing me
The perfect moment for a born widow arises

A long face, buck teeth, the attitude of she who knows her place
At this moment, I've taken a bead on a certain matter
What do I want to do? Don't know
but I'll shock everybody

Most of the time I disappoint them
like a glass of milk, but turned clear
The matchmaker often to's and fro's, important looks on her face
At this moment, there's a war in the east
People, biped and erect
are doing what animals won't
Soccer fans are more brutal because of the weather

[358] Tao (1996): 157.
[359] See Chen Chao ed. (1989): 475-477; and Qi Feng et. al. ed. (1988): 222-224.

A large portrait, cold as a commoner
Fall back on your natural talent, suspended in my room
Speechless, an omen for a body of communicable disease
On the way to the hospital, I discover
in the storm, leaves have already forgotten yesterday's foundations
Bright as wine, pearls of water disappear slowly
Things are like this: unchanging and indeterminate

At this very moment, I'm walking among people dressed for the occasion
hands tucked into sleeves I pass, dressed up like a good citizen
exactly the image of a vigilant woodpecker tut-tutting aggressively
One lives in the world and ridicules oneself:
At such an extravagant age, it'd be better to marry

If the possibility of "my room" and bed being located in a hospital is allowed, then this marriage of which the I-speaker speaks, and for which the "matchmaker" works, may be, in fact, death. Here also is a direct reference to the hospital, and the I-speaker's uprooting – in a storm, which may be illness – from what might have been her previous 'normal' or 'common' life, leaving her suspended, apart from it, in a position to comment on it. And Zhai has been doing just that in <Woman>, <Peaceful Village>, and in the series called <People Live In The World>, too.

In 1987, after spending a few weeks in a hospital room with her dying mother and another patient with nervous problems, Zhai Yongming returned home after her mother's death and at one sitting, shut away in her own dark little room, wrote the series of seven poems that make up <Death's Design> (死亡的图案).[360] As Zhai tells it in her 1996 essay <Writing While Facing the Soul> (面向心灵的写作), she then put the poem in a drawer. In many ways this 1996 essay appears to be an attempted corrective with regard to the readings of poetry critics up to that time, who relate all the poems of her hospital-years to Sylvia Plath, issues of women's poetry, and the metaphysics of life and death, to the neglect of the poet's situation at the time of writing. The seventh and final poem in the series (below) is a graphic description of her mother's death and Zhai's emotional response, yet critics fail to see the horror in the details and consider the possibility, or consequences, of Zhai being a witness to it. More common is the attitude of Si Cheng in

[360] Zhai (1996a).

<Death: As Life Itself> (死亡：作为生命本体),[361] where Si draws on the philosophy of Heidegger and uses Zhai's series to demonstrate how death can be turned into an aesthetical confirmation of life. Yet the poetry itself is built from intimate details of life and death, while the analysis of it is restricted to philosophical and metaphysical generalizations. Too often, such criticism seems little more than a demonstration of a critic's grasp of such metaphysics.

As the action of putting the poem in a drawer indicates, at least until 1996, Zhai attempted to keep her personal life private. The poem eventually did come out of the drawer. Five of the poems in the series were first published in the inaugural Spring 1991 issue of the unofficial journal *Modern Han Poetry* (*现代汉诗*), followed by a slightly different selection in the 1992 edition of *Not-Not*[362] -- a re-launch and fifth issue of this unofficial journal after the editor, Zhou Lunyou, had been released in late 1991 following two years served in prison and then labor camp in western Sichuan. This special post-4 June 1989 situation (the first issue of *Modern Han Poetry* went into circulation near the date of the anniversary) seems to have been the key to Zhai's drawer:

<The Seventh Night> (第七夜)

Tonight I get a taste of death
discover its fearful knowledge
Sitting in a deserted room
I think of you, you make me shudder

Wild hair, your eyes emit alarming power over me
and look disdainfully on the human world; you gather your cries
Your feet shift on the earth; your flesh won't be forgotten again
In a corner of the room it breaks out of its encirclement
A white hospital gown twists tightly around my breath
Gray mice scatter
their limbs sicken me!
Their long-time custodian couldn't foresee
the misfortune that arose suddenly

A true-living mother has brought snow down upon me

[361] Si Cheng (1994).
[362] Four poems from the series were first officially published in Cui Weiping ed. (1993); the whole series was first published in the now bi-monthly *Tibet Literature* 1994 No. 2; and the whole series appeared again in an officially published anthology of avant-garde poetry edited by Zhou Lunyou ed. (1994d).

She makes me revel in the color of death with her, silent
makes me tell you: not with the tongue
but a lacerated body, a clothes-hanger in the shape of a cross
The eyes drop into invisible misery
You understand what assassination is, you once told me
When I was twelve, I had shed my first blood
shaking all over, lying in your icy embrace
I understood how death would come – summon me then depart

Feet bare, you dig into your flesh with both hands, one after the other
Lips sealed tight but a voice says:
Death is still here, still active
passing through prefabricated stone panels, revealing itself still on the four walls
Endless, exchanging secrets of the apocalypse with me
The night's straw mat and a sudden growth of courage
leaks a ray of light into my heart through a black window
If I were you and you were me, how much time would there be
to let us see the final parting, all that's been abandoned
You deceived me, I've been there
Any signs of people are rare, the air there buried me
and to this day won't allow me to break free of your shadow
All night I think of you, my mother
Because of you I now know: the graves of the dead are in the living!

In the context of the journals in which it first appeared, and given *Not-Not* editor Zhou Lunyou's recent release from labor camp and the poems he wrote there devoted to his circumstances and the 1989 massacres (14 were published in *Not-Not* of which three also appeared in *Modern Han Poetry*), Zhai's poems can be read in a political way, although she may not have realized this at the time. Therefore, there was even more reason to write her 1996 essay, stressing the intensely personal reasons for writing this series and the three preceding ones. In hindsight, Zhai goes on to say in the essay that in writing <Death's Design> she was finally able to transcend the subject of death in her poetry and directly exchange it for "the pursuit of life" (求生). With this change of subject, Zhai states that the influence of Sylvia Plath's poetry, an exaggerated confessional tone, and certain aspects of vocabulary and technique also began to vanish from her poetry after 1987. Zhai's subsequent poetry bears out these claims, but critics have located the change later, in 1992,[363] possibly because they were not aware that <Death's Design> was

[363] For example, see Zhou Zan (2002d) for more on how the image of Zhai Yongming and critical impressions of her poetry have been distorted by her seminal 1984-1986 works. Critics such as Cheng Bo

written in 1987 and not 1992. Published without a date of writing, readers could assume that the series was recently written, as the rest of the poetry in the 1992 journals was. This assumption – placing Zhai's poetry together with Zhou's highly political verse – could lead to the misreading of Zhai's series of poems. Conversely, the apparently serious nature of the new issue of *Not-Not* and that of the poetry contained therein (not only Zhou's) may have triggered Zhai's decision to take <Death's Design> out of the drawer.

The following poem demonstrates Zhai's new approach to poetry as a "pursuit of life":

<The Red Room> (红房间)

The days change me, lead me home
I'm not so picky about everything anymore
Sitting in the red room, I lower my head
A hopelessly tangled ball of thread
flows out of mother's hand to my end of the room

You sigh for me, suffer for me
but I saw the true face of this pain long ago
Endure the love that commoners must endure
because my heart's already a bird startled by the mere twang of a bow
When I make my comeback, and sit here
as always, I still sense its rich potential

And it's the red room that causes your delivery pains
and spurs you to go on improving
It caused my birth, it made me
retain old blood ties willingly
beneath my mother's supine body

And in this room
is the sound of my words
Blood flows from my body to my end of the room
Eyes like fish, an odd disposition
A head swollen like a stele's inscription in the mist
absolutely motionless, I emerge from the womb and go

The days change me, make me go home
Sitting in the red room, I see my true likeness

(2002) date her interest in what they call 'narrative poetry' to this time, ignoring the post-1987 work of Zhai's that is clearly informed by similar interests.

in your eyes
your nameless suffering is a near-pure poison
endless admiration, clothing overstocked with dust
a spacious body of flourishing fruit, pendulous
its exterior starting up endlessly
there's a heart within, difficult to control
It's me, light of hand and foot
arriving punctually, leaving on time too

The color black has gone and death is no longer the issue, and these have been replaced by red, the color of blood, birth, life, and – in Chinese tradition – happiness. The room has now turned from black to red.[364]

Possibly Zhai chose the familiar theme of a room and a change in color to draw the attention of critics to the change in her poetics. <The Red Room> is a womb (a mother), home to the birth of a child (the I-speaker), and addresses the child's inevitable attraction to the womb-mother-home and the converse need to leave, to seek freedom from the smothering closeness of the womb-mother-home. There is also the clear implication that the I-speaker returns home for marriage (another red room in Chinese tradition), an act that would necessitate such a return. Additionally, it is likely that Zhai wrote this poem not long before, or after, her own marriage.

This poem is emblematic of the start of Zhai Yongming's shift from being a poet sensitive to suffering and death – in a hospital and in life – to being a poet more sensitive to the difficulties and joys of life – even if her Plath-influenced confessional tone remains. Many poems written during this period (1987-1989) were officially published and did not appear in the Second World,[365] but it was not until the mid-1990s that critics began to notice the change in Zhai's poetics. Perhaps this was due to the still prevalent avant-garde artistic interests in death and Plath, but that is a topic beyond the scope of this study.

[364] Also, in 1988, Zhai Yongming had a series of poems published in *The Poetry Press* under the title <The Green Room> (绿房间).

[365] In 1988, upon the recommendation of the *Stars* editor and poet Sun Jingxuan, Zhai was one of the first Second World poets to be hired as a writer for an official literary institute. During 1988-1990, she wrote for the Nishi Literature Federation in Sichuan, and, to some degree, this is reflected in the quality of her work during this period, none of which can be found in officially published anthologies of avant-garde poetry. See bibliography and Zhai's interview in Yang Li (2004): 474.

The Poetry and Poetry Criticism of Ouyang Jianghe

The name Ouyang Jianghe first began to appear in China's Second World of Poetry and the official realm in 1986. Before this, as previously noted, Ouyang had been known by his given name of Jianghe, the same as that of the better-known *Today* poet from Beijing. There had been, however, one exception: in the two-volume *New Poetry Tide Poetry Collection* published semi-officially by Beijing University's May Fourth Literary Association. Here, in an anthology that included 30 poems by Beijing's Jianghe, possibly at the request of the editor, the name Ouyang Jianghe appears for the first time.[366] This collection was published in early 1985, and yet Ouyang still went by the name of Jianghe in the three unofficial poetry journals produced in Sichuan that year.[367] Presumably, the Sichuanese readers of these journals would have known who he was, but this would have been by no means true of readers outside the province. However, 1986 was the year that Ouyang Jianghe's poetry began to regularly appear in the pages of Beijing's *Poetry*,[368] necessitating the permanent adoption of this pen name.

During the years 1986-1989 Ouyang established himself not only as a first-rate avant-garde poet, but also as a poetry critic of some note. In 1986, the editors of the Chengdu unofficial journal *Han Poetry* felt that Ouyang's 1985 essay <Random Thoughts on Modern Poetry>, originally published in *Day By Day Make It New* out of Chongqing, was worthy of republication. The 1988 edition of the same journal carried another article written in 1987: <Sylvia Plath and the Metaphysics of Death> (普拉斯与死亡玄学). In this article, Ouyang again demonstrates his grasp of not only the poetry of Plath, but his wide interests in foreign poetry in general, by incorporating into his text the comments, or poetry, of Nadezhda Mandelstam, Martin Heidegger, Octavio Paz, and Dylan Thomas.

In <Random Thoughts on Modern Poetry>, Ouyang had voiced concern over the future of Chinese poetry due to what he felt was an undisciplined, unserious approach to writing

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[366] Ouyang has three poems in Volume 2: <A White Love> (白色之恋), <Curriculum Vitae>, (履历), and <A Night in Your Silhouette>.
[367] *Modernists Federation*, *Day By Day Make It New*, and *Chinese Contemporary Experimental Poetry*.
[368] Two poems in the January issue and four in the July issue, as well as the publication of Part 3 of <The Suspended Coffin> in the October issue of Beijing's *China Literature* and the publication of another poem in Part 1 of <A Grand Exhibition> on October 21 in *The Poetry Press*. Ouyang would also have further poetry and critical essays published in *Poetry* in November 1987, and June and August 1988.

poetry by some avant-garde poets. In June 1988, Ouyang made further contributions to related polemics but now in official forums in the pages of *Poetry* and *The Poetry Press*. <Looking at China's Poetry Scene from Three Points of View> (从三个视点看今日中国诗坛) in the June issue of *Poetry* is in much the same tone as the 1985 article, and is essentially critical of the phenomena brought to the attention of the wider poetry-reading public by <A Grand Exhibition> in 1986. Here, however, he is more to the point, identifying what he calls an amateur approach to writing poetry, lowering the level of poetry to that of diary writing, a home to miscellaneous emotions of no import, and the apparent disappearance of all authoritative models or exemplars: "… as far as any nationality is concerned, having everyone writing poetry or having no poets are similarly lamentable [states]". Ouyang then proceeds to observe a thoroughgoing, generational change in the thoughts and feelings expressed by poets through their poetry, comparing the *Today* poets Shu Ting and Bei Dao to Zhai Yongming and Bai Hua respectively, and throwing in the names of Zhang Zao, Chen Dongdong (of Shanghai), Xi Chuan (of Beijing), Zhong Ming, Lu Yimin (of Shanghai), Wan Xia, Han Dong (of Nanjing), and Yi Lei (of Tianjin) as examples of other poets whose works demonstrate a shift in the poetry of the times. Finally, Ouyang praises the "professional" attitude towards writing poetry exemplified by Yang Lian, his retreat from writing the roots-seeking poetry that won him public favor in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and his conscientious decision to go deeper in search of poetry of greater value, even if there are few other poets who do so. In the end, Ouyang returns to his call for "important individuals and works" to demonstrate what has been destroyed and what rebuilt in the ongoing literary revolution. However, there is no call for great poets or "master craftsmen", such as Pound, Yeats, and Eliot, as this is now a "post-modern" age in which poets must decide if they write poetry to meet the demands and tastes of consumers, or if they take responsibility for poetry itself and learn to bear the resulting loneliness. In essence, Ouyang is asking for the institutionalization of the avant-garde sub-field and both affirming and approving the resultant marginalization of poetry in China's contemporary culture.

In the 6 March issue of *The Poetry Press*, Ouyang's article <More On Colloquial-language Poetry> (也谈口语诗) shared a page with three other articles[369] on the same subject, all written in response to an article by the Sichuan poet-critic Yang Yuanhong that had castigated "Third Generation poets" and their supposed characteristics of "non-sublime" (非崇高), "non-cultural" (非文化), and "non-lyrical" (非抒情) poetry. In brief, Ouyang came out strongly in favor of Yang's critique, naming no Chinese names but those of foreign exemplars of the use of colloquial language in modern poetry, namely Pound, Eliot, Plath, Lowell, and Larkin – all English-language poets.

By taking sides and drawing up a list of poets he approved of, Ouyang was consciously placing himself in the fierce, on-going polemic that he himself had had a role in getting started in 1985. His two articles placed Ouyang Jianghe in the middle of a nationwide public controversy over colloquial-language poetry, with Yang Yuanhong (representing Sichuan's Wholism poets) and Ouyang Jianghe – and, also, *Poetry* – on one side, and the Not-Not poets (and the poets of Nanjing's *Them*) on the other. Furthermore, Ouyang had implicitly likened colloquial-language poetry as practiced by Third Generation poets to the sort of poetry that was written at times during the Great Leap Forward period (1957-1959) when the CCP considered and encouraged all people to be amateur poets. Holding up foreign poets as exemplars and praising a small coterie of like-minded 'serious' poets also won him few friends, but certainly helped to firm the battle lines between now-rival groupings of poets and styles of poetry within the avant-garde. Furthermore, by borrowing from western avant-garde tradition a list of consecrated poets with whom he linked himself and a brief list of 'approved' others, other poets could see this as a position taking, an attempt to take a position superior to their own. At the same time, this apparent attempt to rein in the unruly elements of the avant-garde appears close to a position with which the CCP's literary establishment might concur – if they would accept any sort of avant-garde at all.

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[369] The other three articles are: <Colloquialization: The Double Error of Contemporary Poetical Exploration> (口语化: 当代诗探索的双重迷雾) by San Lang – the pen name of Wholism member Pan Jiazhu, maintaining a somewhat neutral attitude toward Yang Yuanhong's earlier article – Yang had once been a member of Wholism; <Modern Poetry: The Self-awareness of Language> (现代诗:言语的自觉) by Kang Hua and Wei Guo, against Yang; and <The False Witness of Language – on the Mistakes in the Citation of Evidence in 'Colloquialization: the Decline and Devaluation of Modern Poetry' [by Yang Yuanhong]> (语言的伪证–谈 "口语化：现代诗的沉沦与贬值"的引证错误) by Zhou Lunyou, against Yang.

On May 3-10, 1988, at the Grand Canal national contemporary poetry conference organized by *Poetry* and the Writers' Association in Jiangsu province, Ouyang joined other avant-garde poets and critics together, for the first time, with older establishment literary figures. However, instead of repeating his criticisms, Ouyang wrote and presented an article – <Confrontation and Symmetry: Chinese Contemporary Experimental Poetry> (对抗与对称：中国当代实验诗歌)[370] – which instead looked to the strengths of experimental poetry and some of its practitioners: such as Liao Yiwu (who also attended the conference), Zhai Yongming, Zhong Ming, Bai Hua, Zhang Zao, Chen Dongdong, Xi Chuan, Niu Bo (of Beijing), Lu Yimin, Wang Yin (of Shanghai), Shi Guanghua, Haizi, Wan Xia, Yang Lian, himself, and – very surprisingly – Yang Li and Zhou Lunyou (also at the conference). These last two poets were specific targets of the articles Ouyang and Yang Yuanhong had published not long before in *The Poetry Press*. Admittedly, in Ouyang's article-presentation Yang Li's name was only mentioned once in passing and Zhou was also referred to only once, and then only with regard to his 1984 poem <The Man with the Owl>.[371] This amounted to something of a temporary peace offering, as the avant-garde poets and critics[372] wished to present a unified, peaceful front to the influential establishment critics and poets,[373] who had few good things to say about avant-garde poetry, as well as to those who were considered open-minded.[374] There were minor arguments outside the official conference venues, but only one within the conference, and that was not an internecine squabble within the avant-garde.[375]

The animosity of others toward Ouyang and his 'approved' poets was recorded in an unofficially circulated discussion printed by the *Not-Not* group in April 1988. Entitled <Third Generation Poetry: A Clarification of Chaos> (第三代诗：对混乱的澄清),[376] the

[370] Wu Sijing ed. (1993): 256-269.
[371] Ibid.: 259.
[372] Aside from Ouyang, Liao Yiwu, and Zhou Lunyou, the other avant-garde poets and critics were Yang Lian, Lao Mu, Li Jie of Shanghai, Ba Tie, Zong Renfa (editor of *Author*), Han Dong, Che Qianzi, Tang Xiaodu, He Xiaozhu, and Gou Mingjun. Zong, Han, He and Zhou can be regarded as representatives of the Third Generation groupings at the conference.
[373] These included Qian Guangpei, Zheng Min, Wu Kaijin, Kong Fu, Chen Zhongyi, Yang Guangzhi, Wang Liaosheng, Zhao Kai, Ye Lu, Zhang Zhimin, Yang Yimin, and Liu Zhanqiu.
[374] These included Zhang Yaxi, Chen Chao, Tang Qi, Cheng Guangwei, Yi Mingzhu, and Sun Jilin.
[375] The author was also present at the conference. The only disturbance was a brief argument between Zheng Min and Liao Yiwu, who reacted very badly to her generalized criticism of avant-garde poetical practice at one (the last, as it turned out) of the symposiums he was asked to attend.
[376] This document is held in the author's personal collection of unofficial publications.

Not-Not poets Shang Zhongmin, Yang Li, Lan Ma, and Zhou Lunyou recorded their discussion in Chengdu on April 28, and in May Zhou carried the resultant eight-page document to the conference in Jiangsu province. On page 3, first Yang, indirectly, and then Shang, directly, took issue with Ouyang's English-language inability and repeated insistence on setting up English-language poets as models of colloquial language poetry in China. Shang went even further in stating that Ouyang, in writing <The Suspended Coffin> (1983-1984), had copied the poetical forms and language of St.-John Perse, a French poet, as translated by the poet Ye Weilian (William Yip). (At this point in the document, Zhou interjects that Yang Lian also had modeled his poetry on the same translation by Ye.)

Fittingly, Ouyang's reference to English-language exemplars of colloquial language poetry in his article in *The Poetry Press* and his comment in <Confrontation and Symmetry> that the image, or idea, of 'home' in his poetry is often transformed into some sort of surrogate,[377] such as language, leads into the following, much anthologized poem of his:

<Between Chinese and English> (汉英之间) [378]

I reside in a pile of character parts,
between the casual looks of this and that form.
They stand alone and penetrate, limbs rocking and unsteady,
a monotonous beat like shots from a gun.
After a wave of sound, Chinese characters grow simple.
Some arms, legs, eyes fall away,
but words still move on, stretch out, and see.
That kind of mystery raises a hunger.
Moreover, it left behind many delicious days,
let me and my race eat it, pick over it together.
In the accent of this place, in a local dialect gathered up like a crystal,
in classical and modern Chinese mixed into one speech,
the figure of my mouth is a circular ruin,
teeth sink into an open space
and do not collide with a bone.
With this kind of vista, this kind of flesh, Chinese feasts over the land.
I finished eating my portion of days, then ate the ancients', until

[377] Wu Sijing ed. (1993): 267.
[378] First published in the November 1987 issue of *Poetry*. Anthologized in: Tang Xiaodu ed. (1992); Zhou Lunyou ed. (1994d); and Chen Xuguang ed. (1994b).

one evening, I go to stroll on the English Corner, and see
a crowd of Chinese round a Yank, I surmise they
want to move into English. But English has no territory in China.
It is merely a class, a form of conversation, a TV program,
in university a department, tests and paper.
On the paper I feel the strong likeness of a Chinese to a pencil.
Light strokes and vague outlines, the life of a worn eraser.
Having experienced too much ink, glasses, typewriters
and the weightiness of lead,
relaxed and smooth, English rolls up on a corner in China.
It accustoms us to abbreviations and diplomatic language,
also western food, forks and knives, aspirin.
This type of change does not involve the nose
and skin. Like a daily morning toothbrush
English moves over the teeth, making Chinese white.
Once I ate books ate the dead, therefore

everyday I brush my teeth. This concerns water, hygiene and contrast.
This produced a feeling for the mouth, a taste for speech,
and the many differences in the language of everyday use.
It also relates to a hand: it stretches into English,
The middle and index fingers spread apart, simulating
a letter, a victory, a kind of
fascist experience of yourself.
A cigarette drops to the ground, extinguished when only half smoked,
like a part of history. History is a war that suffers
from a stutter, earlier it was the Third Reich, it was Hitler.
I do not know if this madman shot English, shot
Shakespeare and Keats.

But I do know in the Oxford dictionary there is the English of the nobility,
also the English of Churchill and Roosevelt armed to the teeth,
its metaphors, its objective reality, its aesthetic destruction,
exploded at Hiroshima and Nagasaki.
In Japanese I see piles of Chinese characters become corpses –
but beyond language, China and England-America make a pact.
I read this part of history, and feel very suspicious.
Between history and me I do not know which is more preposterous.

More than one hundred years. Between Chinese and English, what actually happened?
Why do so many Chinese migrate into English,
work hard to become white people of a yellow race, and see the Chinese language
as a divorced wife, see it as a home in a broken mirror? What
actually happened? I live alone secluded in Chinese,
in a dialogue with a great many paper people, daydreaming of English,

> and see even more Chinese climbing up into it,
> changing from a person of pictographic likeness to a phonetic linker of sound.

Cheng Guangwei has noted that in the last stanza, after 'materializing' himself in language, the poet has discovered the tragic nature of human existence, trapped as we are between the material and the spiritual.[379] Thus, Ouyang himself embodies the contradiction, stuck in the Chinese language, unable to speak English (at this time he could read a little), relying on translations, conscious of being colonized, and yet holding up English-language poets as exemplars.

Ba Tie has identified the I-speaker's condition in the poem as post-modernist.[380] Language (or languages), life, and history come together in the poet and the individual unconscious and collective consciousness. And this is brought about by the pure analytical tools of a Cartesian logic familiar from <The Suspended Coffin>, as the reader follows the development of the speaker and language from the complicated, primarily written form of classical Chinese, to the simplified modern Chinese based on the spoken language, to 'a phonetic linker of sound' (拼音[381]的人). And so, the poem is both a construction and a deconstruction of the language(s) of the poem and the poet himself.

It is this last aspect that Ba Tie holds makes the poem post-modernist. What post-modernism is, however, is never adequately explained. Terry Eagleton defines it as a style of culture that is said to reflect the historic shift from old style capitalism to "the ephemeral, decentralized world of technology, consumerism and the culture," and in culture this is seen:

> …in a depthless, decentered, ungrounded, self-reflexive, playful, derivative, eclectic, pluralistic art which blurs the boundaries between 'high' and 'popular' culture, as well as between art and everyday experience.[382]

While some aspects of this definition may be applicable to Ouyang's poem, it is certain that, in 1987, China was still on the road to establishing a 'capitalist' economy and that

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[379] Cheng Guangwei (2002): 183.
[380] Ba Tie (1989b), also in Chen Xuguang ed. (1994).
[381] *Pinyin* 拼音 being the phonetic writing system taught to children – to master pronunciation – when they first enter school in China, and the way most western languages are written.
[382] Eagleton (1996): vii-viii.

Ouyang had no interest in blurring the boundary between ‘high’ and ‘popular’ poetry. In fact, in Sichuan such blurring was only of interest to Macho Men and some Not-Not poets. To this day, the term ‘postmodernist’ in the context of China only takes on meaning if Chinese facsimiles of contemporary western art are under discussion and this work is compared to western work of a similar nature. Given the political and illusory nature of ‘postmodernism’ and ‘postmodernity’, as expressed by Eagleton in *The Illusions of Postmodernism* (1996) for example, it is not clear what value this term has in a discussion of western poetry, not to mention Chinese. The use of such western terminology is indicative of the thirst of Chinese avant-garde artists and critics to enter onto the world stage and to be seen as up-to-date or authoritative within China – authority now being acquired from western practice, and attention, and not from the favor of the CCP cultural apparatus or Chinese cultural tradition.

The other poem discussed in Ba Tie’s article, also written during the summer of 1987, is usually paired with <Between Chinese and English> in anthologies. Here Ba Tie sees the I-speaker as playing the part of a producer and not a creator, and Ouyang as undertaking an exercise in a form of artistic, or philosophical, thought that is, in effect, a linguistic experiment resulting in the elimination of individual style or character:[383]

<The Glass Factory> (玻璃工厂)[384]

1

From sight to sight, between is only glass.
From face to face
separation is invisible.
In glass, matter is not transparent.
The whole glass factory is a huge eyeball,
in it labor is the blackest part,
its day flashes at the core of things.
Things adhere to the very first tear,
like a bird in a stretch of pure light sticks to its shadow.
In the way of darkness you take in rays of light, then make them tribute.
In a place where glass is everywhere,
already glass is not itself, but is

[383] In Wu Sijing ed. (1993): 285.
[384] Both poems were first published in the November 1987 issue of *Poetry*. Anthologized in: Tang Xiaodu ed. (1992); Zhou Lunyou ed. (1994d); Chen Xuguang ed. (1994b).

a kind of spirit.
As if everywhere there is air, air is nearly nonexistent.

2

In the neighborhood of the factory is a large sea.
Knowledge of water is knowledge of glass.
Solidified, cold, fragile,
these are all the price of translucence.
Transparency is a mysterious visible language of waves,
when I say it I have already separated from it,
separated from the cup, the tea stand, the dresser mirror, all this
concrete matter produced on an assembly line.
But I am also situated in a siege of matter,
life is filled by desires.
Language leaks out, dries up, before light penetrates.
Language is to soar, is
openness facing openness, lightning against lightning.
So much sky is beyond the body of birds in flight,
and the reflection of an isolated island
may be the gentle scratch of light on the sea.
Whatever cuts across glass is lighter than a shadow,
deeper than an incision, harder to exceed than the blade of a knife.
A crack is nowhere to be seen.

3

I came, I saw, I spoke.
Language and time all muddy, dirt and sand all descend,
a patch of blindness spreads out from the core.
The same experience also occurs in glass.
The breath of flames, the heart of fire.
So-called glass is water altering attitude within flames,
is two types of spirit coming across each other,
two forms of destruction entering the same eternal life.
Growing into a frosty sub-zero combustion,
like a truism or a feeling,
obvious, clear, refusing to flow.
In fruit, in the depths of the sea, water has never run.

4

So this is the glass I see –
still a stone, but no longer solid.
Still a flame, but never again warm.
Still water, but never soft nor passing on.

It is a wound but never bleeds,
it is a sound but never passes through silence.
From loss to loss: this is glass.
Language and time are transparent,
we pay a high price.

5

In the same plant I see three kinds of glass:
In material, decorative, and symbolic state.
People tell me the father of glass is a chaos of stone.
In the void of stone, death is not the end,
but a changeable primeval fact.
Stone is smashed, glass is born.
This is real. But there is another truth
leading me into another state: from height to height.
Within that truth glass is merely water, already is
or just becoming hard, has bone, water that cannot be spilled,
and flame is a bone-piercing cold,
moreover the most beautiful is also the most fragile.
All that is sublime in the world, and
the tears of things.

Along with other critics, Ba Tie sees a 'modernist' impulse to this poem, in that Ouyang attempts the creation of purified art out of commodified reality.[385] The postmodernist aspect of the poem is unintentional, an unconscious effect, a demonstration in an imagined universe of the objectified reality of commodity (or poetry) production, which is there for the reader (and the poet) to discover as a byproduct of the reading (and writing) of the poem.

Other critics do not see so much in this poem. Cheng Guangwei considers it a meditation on death.[386] Chen Chao views the poem as a meditation on the need to maintain self-awareness in a modern industrialized society lacking any form of spiritual home.[387] However, it seems that instead of bemoaning the spiritually destructive nature of the world one lives in, the poem demonstrates the importance of freedom of will and self-realization. Glass functions as a symbol of a form of life that is born out of death, the

[385] Wu Sijing ed. (1993): 284.
[386] Cheng Guangwei (2002): 183.
[387] Chen Chao ed. (1989): 592-593.

clash between human life and existence forming the highest form of self-realization, and this realization leaves one's spirit as clear, bright, and sharp as glass.

Alternatively, in another possible reading, the recent horrors of Chinese history and the continued, dehumanizing industrialization and commoditization of a contemporary society in which individual choice is not yet fully respected can be internalized and rationalized to the apparent benefit of the individual.

However the poem is read, Ouyang's masterful command of the language and his own thought processes are used to deconstruct another object. During 1986-1989 Ouyang wrote many such poems (most of them much shorter) about objects, with self-evident titles such as <Handgun> (手枪), <An Apple Tree in Sunlight> (阳光中的苹果树), <A Strawberry> (草莓), <Flower Vase, Moon> (花瓶，月亮), <Box> (箱子), <Stairs> (楼梯), <Typewriter> (打字机) and <A Small Knife> (小刀). By 1989 Ouyang was a well-known, respected, even admired, poet and, as has been demonstrated, something of a conservative controversialist as a critic.

The Activities and Poetry of Liao Yiwu

Liao Yiwu was another Sichuan avant-garde poet who moved into a position that allowed a national platform for his poetry and views on the subject in 1986. Unlike Ouyang Jianghe, who seemingly aspired to the status of critic and authoritative voice with regard to the fit writing of avant-garde poetry, Liao was more concerned with promoting the virtues of Sichuan's avant-garde poets and the unique styles of that poetry. In this, his central, if backstage, role in the Sichuan Young Poets Association finds a logical extension. Liao's was one of the most prominent names among avant-garde poets in all China during 1986-1989.

Aside from poetry, during the summer of 1986 Liao had three important essays on poetry officially published. The first was written in November 1985 and published in the April 1986 issue of *Stars*.[388] Entitled <Calling into Question "The Nature of Modern Epic

[388] Republished in the June issue of *Criticism Selections Monthly* (*评论选刊*).

Poetry" – with this essay respectfully asking the advice of Teacher Xie Mian> (“现代史诗性”质疑—谨以此文就教谢冕老师), Liao questioned the true value of supposed epic poems such as <The Sun and its Reflected Light> (太阳和它的反光) by Jianghe of *Today* fame, and the critical approval given this work by pro-Misty critics such as Xie Mian. Essentially, Liao's point was that work of this nature was highly imitative, influenced by Elytis, Neruda, Dylan Thomas, Senghor, and other well-known and oft-translated poets of the western poetic tradition. Instead of looking to Chinese mythology (or Tibetan, in the case of Yang Lian and <Norlang>) and rewriting these stories under the influence of the modern western epic tradition, or incorporating lines from classical poets, as Jianghe had done with lines from poems by Tao Qian,[389] Liao advocated an incorporation of the spirit of Chinese mythology, a spirit he saw as one of resistance, rebellion and self-sacrifice in the face of natural or social travail. The legends of ancient Greek mythology, on the other hand, were replete with human feelings, with sympathy for the plight of man, and Liao implied that rewriting Chinese mythology in such a way was a continuation of the Misty poetry project and inappropriate to China's present reality and traditions.

In an article published in the 21 August 1986 edition of *The Poetry Press*,[390] Liao returned to this theme. He highlighted the work of a number of Sichuan's avant-garde poets as harbingers of a move away from imitative westernization of contemporary poetry and toward a return to the ruins of China's traditions and the contemporary fate of the nation. That Liao was now championing the pluralism and originality of Sichuan's avant-garde poetry is made clear by the essay's title: <The Thought Tide of Modernism in Ba and Shu[391]> (巴蜀现代主义思潮).[392] Aside from himself, Liao briefly discusses the work of Ouyang Jianghe, Shi Guanghua, Zhou Lunyou, Li Yawei, Lan Ma, and the critic Ba Tie. Two months prior to the publication of <A Grand Exhibition>, Liao is one of the first to publicly mention the large amount of poetry that was being created and

[389] Also known as Tao Yuanming, famous for poetry on drinking and rural life.
[390] No. 47.
[391] *Ba* is the traditional name of eastern Sichuan and *Shu* that of the west of the province.
[392] Liao wanted this article published under the pen name of Allahfaweh, which was misprinted by the editors as Arafat (阿拉法特), as in the Palestinian leader. Was this a tasteless joke by the editors, casting Liao as the leader of an uprising of Sichuan poetry?

circulated “underground”, “among the people” (民间) in China in recent years, and which was only now beginning to surface. He goes on to state that the period of “passive reception of the western literature and arts thought-tide should be concluded”, and confidently concludes that the poetry of this new generation of post-Misty poets should now strive to influence the west with their own work.

In hindsight, this call seems naïve in the extreme: Sichuan poets were unknown outside of China at the time. However, given the poetical experimentation that had been occurring in Sichuan during the preceding three years, and the yet limited understanding of the state of culture outside China, such braggadocio may be excusable. Being allowed to have such opinions printed in official periodicals must also have encouraged such thoughts. The real problem was Liao’s apparent belief that the cultural establishment had liberalized to such an extent that they would accept the avant-garde arts as equals of the conservative, officially-sanctioned forms of traditional arts and the favored modern arts that served to promote ‘economic modernization and reform’ in the CCP-controlled public realm. The backlash would arrive in January 1987.

Liao’s work appeared in Xu Jingya’s October 1986 <Grand Exhibition> in *The Poetry Press* and the *Shenzhen Youth Daily* under the banner of <New Traditionalism>.[393] However, what appeared in the <Exhibition> as a manifesto was actually a somewhat abridged version of a preface Liao had originally written for a collection of poems and one piece of short fiction by ten Sichuan avant-garde poets, which the editors of *China Literature* had asked him to prepare early in 1986.[394] In the October 1986 issue of the periodical, Liao once again attempted to publicize the success of Sichuan’s Second World of Poetry. Aside from the preface and a poem of his own – <Lovers> — there was a short story by Xiao Kaiyu[395] and poetry by Ouyang Jianghe, Zhai Yongming, Wan Xia, Li Yawei, He Xiaozhu, Shi Guanghua, Zhou Lunyou, and Gou Mingjun.[396] It is apparent that Liao tried to select work that was both impressive in its own right and representative of the individual poet’s quality. Some works were chosen from Sichuan’s unofficial poetry journals: Liao’s own and the two poems from Zhai Yongming’s <Woman> were

[393] *China Literature*, 1986 no. 10: 128.
[394] Personal communication.
[395] <Decline> (沉沦).
[396] Published as a group.

from *Modernists Federation*; Part 3 of Ouyang Jianghe's <Suspended Coffin>, the six selections from Shi Guanghua's poetry series <Escape from an Ending>, and Zhou Lunyou's <White Wolf> and <Wolf Valley> were from *Chinese Contemporary Experimental Poetry*; and Wan Xia's <Red Tiles> was from the December 1984 issue of *Macho Men*. One of the six poems by He Xiaozhu had been recently published in *Not-Not*, but three had been published in the summer of 1985 in the inaugural issue of the Liao's Fuling-based official journal *Literary Wind of Ba Country*, just as the four poems by Gou Mingjun had been published in the winter 1985 issue of that journal, and Li Yawei's <The Cornered Beast> (困兽) had been recently published in the summer 1986 issue.[397]

However, in Xu Jingya's <Grand Exhibition>, this preface was presented as a manifesto, and Liao and Ouyang appeared to be members of a group that did not in fact exist – much as Macho Men had ceased to exist as a group by this time but was still presented as one by Xu. Liao's original concern, however, had been to highlight what he believed was the possible beginning of a new literary tradition within Chinese poetry, drawing upon Sichuan's avant-garde poets as an example. Understandably, Liao was incensed over Xu's editing.

Entitled <The New Tradition> (新的传统), in *China* Liao's preface recorded many of his basic attitudes toward tradition in poetry and the role of the poet in China's new age. Again, as in the earlier essay on epic poetry, Liao rejected outright what he saw as a tendency among former *Today* poets, such as Yang Lian and Jianghe, and other avant-garde poets to return to the discarded cultural traditions of past centuries in search of enlightenment, just as poets of past eras had done:

> The art of today is in essence a re-enactment of this sort of behavior. We

[397] As noted in Chapter 7, in 1985 Liao used the first two issues of this local literary journal to forward the careers of various avant-garde poets resident in eastern Sichuan. In 1986, he continued this practice. The summer 1986 issue opened with a translation of Sylvia Plath's <Silence 21> (沉默二十一), there was also a short story by Zhou Zhongling, two poems by Li Yawei – the other being <The Blind Tiger> (盲虎) – two poems by He Xiaozhu, and a second installment of Liao's creative diary <Emmanuelle's Music>. The final, winter 1986 issue opened with an essay on the art of Plath's *Ariel* poems and an essay by Bai Hua about Dylan Thomas' poetry, followed by five brief pieces of experimental fiction by Haizi; there were also four more poems from Gou Mingjun, a long poem by Er Mao, and four poems by Wu Jianguo. The journal was closed in early 1987.

> [write] annotations on mythology, reach deductions based on *The Book of Changes* pursue the sense of history in contemporary poetry, do our utmost to exaggerate the effects of literature; in appearance concerned about our country and our people, in our bones all yearning to restore ancient ways. Those yearning to enter make general surveys of the realm of poetry and ten thousand voices converge into one; those who retreat take on the airs of immortals and finger valises in peach blossom gardens. Using modernist methods to express a feudal consciousness of reminiscence is one of the obvious characteristics of current so-called 'national' poetry.
> …..
>
> We deny all that the old tradition and the modern 'pigtail brigade' impose on us, we oppose channeling artistic feeling toward any religion or system of ethics, we oppose the castration of poetry. ..... As a creator of art – the poet, no matter if it be present suffering, blaspheming against oneself, tearful howls and taunts when there are no alternatives, or songs in praise of life, issuing challenges to death, affirming an adventurous spirit or the courageous questioning and dissection of the quality of one's own people, his life experience, his contradiction-bound body should be a unique history of art, a special tradition [in his own right]. For at the same time that he exposes himself, he also reveals both the confusion and destiny he holds in common with the age.
> …..

<The New Tradition> was more than a preface to a disparate collection of Sichuan poets who may or may not have shared Liao Yiwu's sentiments (which perhaps explains why *China* chose to publish it apart from the collection). Rather, it reads like Liao's personal observations on the current situation of Chinese poetry and a statement of personal intent and belief – a manifesto perhaps, but a very personal one.

Liao's essay points up the troublesome use of the term *tradition*. It would seem that the tradition which Liao is claiming as his own here has much in common with the spirit of western modernism and avant-garde art. The 'new' tradition is an attitude towards art that consists of a breaking away from established rules, traditions and conventions, fresh ways of looking at man's position and function in the universe, and experiments in form and style. In addition, Liao appears to lay claim to the 1920s May Fourth Movement's attitude of totalistic iconoclasm. Yet, just as with those writers and activists, while borrowing heavily from western sources, he also consciously and unconsciously remains within Chinese tradition. Liao's later poetry features reference and allusion to Chinese history and literature, even to the point of echoing the language and, to some degree, the

form, and topics of classical poets. (An obvious example is <Questioning Heaven> (天问) in Part 5 of <The Master Craftsman>.[398])

Liao's declaration appears to be old news, but in the context of Chinese poetry in 1986, and bearing in mind what Liao was writing was intended for publication in a major establishment literary journal, his words were provocative and offer insight into the attitudes of many avant-garde poets with regard to the perceived 'establishment'.

<The New Tradition> was written shortly after Liao had completed a long poem, <The City of Death> (死城). Liao's pledges of "the destruction of old forces" and "the merciless judgment of oneself" apply more accurately to <The City of Death> than to <Lovers> or any of the other poems published together with it in the pages of *China* in October 1986.

<The City of Death> is one of the longest avant-garde poems to have been officially published in China. The full six parts of the poem have a Chinese character count of 4,250. Most of the poem is written in prose verse, somewhat similar in form to the work of St.-John Perse and Ouyang Jianghe in <The Suspended Coffin>. Only the final, brief section of the poem is rendered in free verse.

This is the opening paragraph of the poem in its officially published version:

> **6891 AD, a giant bull circles the brown [Sichuan] basin. Near death, Allahfaweh, prophet of Ba People Village, points to the ground and says: "This city will hem you in, no matter whether god is dead or alive."**[399]

Liao has reversed the year in which the poem is written, and by doing so creates an appropriate setting for his prophet (Allahfaweh) and himself, the poet, uttering words supposedly relevant in both the present and future. The reference to Nietzsche is ironic, given that the prophet denies the possibility of a superman escaping the nation and culture into which he, or she, is born.

Part 2 of the poem concludes as follows:

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[398] This long poem is patterned on a poem by the same name in the ancient collection *Songs of the South* , poems supposedly by Qu Yuan and compiled by Liu Xiang. Anthologized in Tang Xiaodu ed. (1993).
[399] Written beneath the title of the poem on the cover page. Bold type was called for by the author in the original manuscript.

….. Winter of 1966. Chang E[400] elopes with an infidel. An angry Hou Yi[401] shoots ten suns blind. The civilization of this people of illusions is committed completely to the flames. Some poet wrote:

"When the wisdom of man attempts to surpass the wisdom of the creator
their day of judgment is at hand
……"

Those lines in the tongue of tadpoles enchant me: god is dead. Who will manipulate the chess pieces hanging in the air? A ferocious echo. I'm devoured by my own voice. Like worn clothing, the flesh and skin pealed off my bones of their own accord. My brain itches. The ants go in and out. Summer sea of 1986. Gloomy world of man. Nietzsche returns from his tour of the Milky Way. A sacrificial Liao Yiwu is just about to immolate himself in front of a mob. Policemen carry him from dreamland to the insane asylum.

The unconscious of the individual and of the nation to which he belongs are both intertwined and in opposition to each other within <The City of Death>: for example, the imprecations of the I-speaker directed at Allahfaweh, the degenerate archetypal father figure; the incestuous feelings of the I-speaker for Nü Wa 女娲, the archetypal mother figure; and the unconscious entangled relationship between the three. This relationship is reflected within the language of the poem by the poet's resistance to and separation from traditional culture (Han Dong's "spirit of the classics" in Chapter 1, and Confucianism and Chinese traditional culture in general) and a similar relationship between the poet's diction and traditional linguistic literary form (both classical forms and post-1949 realism of whatever form).

The "Winter of 1966" line is eliminated from all officially published texts of the poem as it amounts to a clear reference to the Cultural Revolution, then just beginning. The implications of the following lines are clear: Chinese culture descends into chaos as it is smitten with an "infidel", namely Nietzsche, or his Superman in the guise of Mao Zedong, and the millions who were inspired by him to act as they did during the following ten year period. Liao implies that the resultant hysterical schizophrenia continues to this day, and, furthermore, is embodied by himself, or his selves – the poet Liao Yiwu and the cultural prophet Allahfaweh.

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[400] 嫦娥 The Chinese goddess of the moon.
[401] A legendary figure that shot down nine of ten suns with arrows, thereby saving the world. Hou is also said to be Chang E's suitor.

Of importance to a full appreciation of <The City of Death> are the blood ties, or sexual relationships, between the I-speaker, Nü Wa, and the imaginary cultural prophet, Allahfaweh. Allahfaweh first appeared a year earlier in Liao Yiwu's 1985 poem <The Great Cycle>. There he was a totem symbolic of the primitive powers of nature inscribed upon 'the cycle pillar', which in turn was symbolic of the intertwined nature of man, as beast and god. In <The City of Death>, Allahfaweh continues to act as a cultural icon and a symbol of primitive vitality. He makes his second appearance in part one of <The Master Craftsman> where he emerges as the prophet of the evolutionary pattern of human existence. He is a shaman of the spiritual universe, a cultural prophet of great creative power, an archetype of the collective unconscious as well as the guiding force in the poet's unconscious.

However, in <The City of Death>, Allahfaweh also takes on the roles of father ("daddy of my imaginings") and a con artist (a brothel customer). He drops out of the sky into a hellish world of man and occupies a place in it. Concentrated in his figure are a devilish nature, a source of lies and sexual abuse**,** sorcery, authority, and brutality. The I-speaker, as his "indirect seed" in the dark city of death deep within the subconscious, participates in the entire process of his depravity**.** When the I-speaker is born because of a magical reaction to his presence, the I-speaker is already old and feeble because he is an apparition bearing the original sin of an entire race's culture upon himself. The I-speaker is unable to rid himself of this national blood relationship and can do nothing but write monologues of the soul about the decline and loss of self as a form of atonement for his (nation's) crimes.

These Freudian undertones are strongest at the conclusion of Part 4, where Nü Wa appears as the object of sexual abuse in a scene into which Allahfaweh lures the I-speaker:

> Silently I count the inns I've overnighted in during my life. From one to a hundred. Remote ancestors. Progenitors. Great-grandfathers. Mothers. The made-up opera faces of each dynasty all flash through my mind. At the end I discover Allahfaweh, the prophet of Ba People Village, showing his green hand. Disguised as a customer groping his way into an underground brothel
>
> **YOUR HAND SIGNALS AROUSE MY PASSION SURVIVING TREES OVERGROWN WITH VINES SEARCHING FOR LONG-DESIRED BRAMBLE THICKETS PIERCE CRACKS IN THE**

EARTH PIERCE DOOR LINTELS PIERCE BED SHEETS PIERCE FORESTS AND GRASSLANDS A CONCEALED UNIVERSE OF AMBER'S ELECTRICAL WAVES FLOW ON FOREVER STIR UP THE BLOOD CYCLE TWO MIGHTY BOWS SHOOT AT EACH OTHER TWO SEMICIRCLES BITE INTO EACH OTHER OUTSIDE TIGHTLY WRAPPED SUMMER UNUSUALLY HOT SPRAY HEAVENLY BODIES SPEED UP IN THEIR TURNING THE WHITE DOG SWALLOWS THE ELEPHANT THE ROOF TILES BREAK STARS INTO PIECES ALL MANKIND FALLS INTO HELL ALL HELL FALLS INTO HEAVEN SMASHING OUT GOD'S BRAINS WHO'S DANCING MODERN DANCES IN THE GREASED PAN ASS GYRATING LIKE ISADORA DUNCAN'S LOUD APPLAUSE YOU'RE DEITY YOU'RE DEMON YOU'RE A TANG-DYNASTY DIEHARD OR COFFEE SHOP WAITRESS ALL LIVING THINGS ARRANGED IN A ROW ABOVE THE EVERLASTING ABYSS UNCROSSED LEGS FORMING AN ENDLESS URINE-SOAKED CORRIDOR OF HISTORY WAITING FOR THE TERRIFYING PILLAR OF FLESH TO BE RAMMED STRAIGHT IN!

The soil has been tilled my girl your entire body drunkenly limp ovaries and seed in turmoil I say I love you I love you I love you until I suddenly recognize you as my mother until I lift away your ninth layer of skin and discover Nü Wa sobbing hiding within the eardrum-shattering thunder I seize the filthy genealogy and howl wildly I desperately thrash my lower torso like a swarm of bees the curse of eighty-eight generations of forefathers stings me. I shout: "Allahfaweh! You seducing thief!"

The prophet falls back slipping into the inner room. Flashing a green hand

The Oedipal import of these lines seems to constitute a denial of the traditional cultural belief in the mutually nurturing relationship between the yin and yang principles, a belief championed by Sichuan's Wholism poets. Liao is apparently also attacking the worship of the cultural archetype of the mother (Nü Wa) as well as the willful self-deception of roots-seeking poetry.

Liao deliberately uses literary forms and a poetic diction that clash with Chinese traditional conventions, while at the same time incorporating other traditional elements. The poem thereby estranges and alienates those who approach the text with traditional expectations (i.e. sequential time line, realism, controlled emotions, selflessness, rationalism, etc.). One aspect of this, which has only ever appeared in the original manuscript and the poem's initial instance of official publication in *People's*

Literature,[402] was Liao's decision not to use numbers, characters or letters to demarcate each of the six parts of the poem, but to use symbols, or pictographs, of his own devising. For example, one of these looks like a man with arms, legs and a circle for a head, another like a wheel consisting of a large circle with a small circle at its core and four straight lines radiating out from the small circle dividing the inner space into four near-quadrants. The symbols are hand-drawn and draw attention to the theoretical origins of Chinese characters as pictographs. Somewhat surprisingly, Liao's attempt to lead readers to think about the nature of Chinese characters by use of these symbols has been almost entirely missed by critics. However, in an article in the June 1987 issue of *Poetry*,[403] the establishment critic Qian Guangpei does comment on the symbols (without mentioning the name of the poem or the poet – a common practice among establishment critics), but does not understand them and sees no useful purpose for them. Possibly as a consequence of near-universal incomprehension, <The City of Death> and the two other long poems that make up the trilogy have always been, and still are, officially published without any form of division markers, leaving the reader facing hundreds of line divided into paragraphs of varying length spread out over 5-10 pages – depending on the size of the type.[404]

<The City of Death> and Liao's later long poems present themselves as a personal commentary on, diagnosis of, and, at times, a prescription for the illnesses of the Chinese soul. But as the poet predicted in his preface to the poem, <Written Before the Gates of The City of Death> (写在死城的门前), his words would not be welcomed:

> ...This [poetry] is obviously a cry far removed from rational and sublime human nature. However, an artist's sincerity is found in that he doesn't take pleasure from this world, and in that he willfully searches out the entire developing story of a people or even all of mankind. He jabs at its fatal weaknesses and at the cost of his life sounds a warning signal. He reveals the roots of the collective sickness, which under the domination of primal, supernatural forces causes people to mutilate and kill each other and themselves.

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[402] Instances of the poem without the symbols can be found in: Chen Chao ed. (1989); Tang Xiaodu ed. (1992); Wang & Xiao ed. (1993); Chen Xuguang ed. (1994b).
[403] See Qian Guangpei (1987).
[404] For a full translation of <The City of Death> see under 'Liao Yiwu' at: http://www.sino.uni-heidelberg.de/dachs/leiden/poetry/ .

> Manifestations of anxiety, crisis, despair and rebellion ensure this City of Death won't receive a ready welcome, and Liao Yiwu's value lies precisely in this fact. Once a poet achieves universal public acclaim, his artistic life is done for.[405]

Critics have likened this poem to Dante's <Inferno>, all hell without hope of a purgatory or heaven,[406] seen Liao being inspired by Heidegger's ideas on the decline of civilizations,[407] or seen similarities between Liao's poetry and the profane nature of Ginsberg's and Dali's wild, all-encapsulating artistic efforts.[408] Many contemporary critics adopt a neutral attitude and have little to say, or, as is the case with Xiang Weiguo,[409] like the poem but refer the reader to an in-depth analysis of <The City of Death> in an article by Ba Tie.[410]

In 1986, Liao's poem was welcomed by many poets and writers, such as the Hunan author, Han Shaogong, who went so far as to refer to <The City of Death> as "China's <Waste Land>" and who late in 1986 made use of his contacts in Beijing to arrange for the poem's publication in the pages of *People's Literature*, China's most influential establishment literary periodical at the time.[411]

In January 1987, <The City of Death> was published in the combined issue 1-2 of *People's Literature*, but without its preface, thus serving to render an already very complex poem more incomprehensible than it otherwise might have been. This probably was a result of direct references to the Cultural Revolution and the implication that the consequences of it were still wreaking havoc in contemporary China. In any case, all direct references to the Cultural Revolution were removed from the poem (such as mentions of the year 1966, Zhang Chunqiao and Li Weidong – Cultural Revolution leaders).

In February 1987, Liao began to suffer the consequences of <The City of Death>'s publication in *People's Literature*. The anti-bourgeois liberalization campaign which

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[405] Published on pp. 30-31 in the unofficial journal *The Modern Poetry Groups of Ba and Shu* (*巴蜀现代诗群*), 1987.
[406] Xie & Liang (1993): 151.
[407] Chen Chao ed. (1989): 502.
[408] Chang & Lu (2002): 206.
[409] Xiang Weiguo (2002): 120-121.
[410] *Author*, February 1989.
[411] Based on verbal accounts from Liao, Li Yawei, and Xiao Kaiyu, all of whom were friends with Han and frequent visitors to his and Can Xue's Hunan homes during 1985-1988.

began after the forced resignation of CCP Secretary General Hu Yaobang in January 1987 focused on the contents of *People's Literature* and on Liao's poem and three other literary works in particular. Almost immediately, Liao was ordered to "cease work and make self-criticism" (停职检查), and Sichuan's cultural authorities permanently closed down his small establishment literary journal in Fuling, *The Literary Wind of Ba Country*, not long thereafter. Over the course of the next few months, a public campaign of criticism was waged against <The City of Death> in the official literary media where a number of articles appeared attacking the poem for being overly obscure, depressing, obscene and generally not suited to the social needs of the CCP's 'new China' (similar articles began to appear again in 1990).[412]

Liao, however, took the situation in stride. He refused to cooperate in his "self criticism" and was essentially left to his own devices while still drawing his regular monthly paycheck at the Fuling District Cultural Bureau. In writing <The City of Death>, Liao seems to have been emboldened by his publishing success to follow his own personal muse, perhaps believing that his status was so high that he could now do as he wished. Moreover, late in 1986, Liao had undertaken the task of editing an underground poetry journal under his own name for the first time.

Undaunted by political events at the time, in February 1987, Liao pressed on with the task of collecting what he considered to be the best of Sichuan's as yet officially unpublished avant-garde poetry of the preceding year for *The Modern Poetry Groups of Ba and Shu* (*巴蜀现代诗群*). His decision to incorporate "modern poetry groups" in the title of the journal seems to have been intended as a riposte to Xu Jingya's <Grand Exhibition> of the same, perhaps intending to show Xu how <The Grand Exhibition> should have been presented. In a preface entitled <Return Home> (重返家园), Liao called to China's avant-garde poets and other artists to look into their souls for inspiration and to cease dreaming of entry into the literary establishment. He was openly critical of Xu Jingya's <Grand Exhibition> for appearing as a mere circus act which further encouraged young poets to abandon artistic principles in a mad rush toward the limelight, status, acceptance by the establishment, and fortune. Their false hopes and expectations would be smashed, however, when the "everlasting hand" of authority closed the door to

[412] See, for example, Bai Hang (1987).

poetic orthodoxy upon them (a reference to the events which began to unfold within the literary establishment in February 1987 when the article was written).

In early May, *The Modern Poetry Groups of Ba and Shu* was ready for the printers. However, the authorities had been tipped off, and late in the night after the 1,500-copy print-run was completed, the police descended upon the small Fuling printing house and confiscated all copies of the journal. The next day Liao was questioned, but not arrested. However, he did not hand over the journal's printing templates (as they had been previously hidden in a local friend's home) and was later able to use them to photocopy a limited number of copies (about 100).[413]

At 110 pages, *Modern Poetry Groups* was somewhat larger than previous unofficial journals in Sichuan (with the exception of *Han Poetry*, which will be discussed in the following chapter). Exactly half the pages of *Modern Poetry Groups* were devoted to poetry, while the other half was given over to a collection of prose essays. As the title chosen for the journal suggests, Liao was again trying to champion Sichuan's avant-garde poetry.

He Xiaozhu, Zhou Zhongling, and the critic Ba Tie are listed as 'guest editors', and the covers of the journal feature reproductions of the covers of the four major unofficial journals published in Sichuan during 1985 and 1986 (two on the front, two on the back): *Modernists Federation*, *Chinese Contemporary Experimental Poetry*, *Not-Not*, and *Han Poetry*. All four of these journals had been officially banned shortly after initial publication, and putting them on the cover of *Modern Poetry Groups* was evidence of Liao's disaffection with the literary establishment.

After the preface and table of contents, the first 25 pages of the journal were devoted to poetry. If there is a ranking according to quality of the poetry as Liao may have perceived it, it seems that this was limited to the first five poets (the journal featured the work of 21 Sichuan poets in total): Ouyang Jianghe,[414] Liao Yiwu, Li Yawei,[415] Wan Xia,[416] and Bai

[413] Personal communication with Liao and other individuals involved.
[414] The first part of the incomplete cycle <Utopia> (乌托邦): <Us> (我们). Also a collection of short poems under the name of <Things> (东西): <A Box>, <Stairs>, <Typewriter>, <A Little Knife>.
[415] <Tough Guy> (好汉), <An Ancient Friend> (古代朋友), <Menopause>, <The Sorrows of April> (四月的忧郁), <Age Spares No One> (年龄不饶人).
[416] The series <Agricultural Matters> (农事): <Beans> (豆子), <Agricultural Matters>, <Recent Death> (新丧), <That Woman> (彼女), <Lake-crossing> (渡湖), <A Little Oriental Woman> (东方小女人).

Hua.[417] Otherwise, in no particular order, Liao included the work of others he might have considered important avant-garde poets – such as the brothers Song Qu and Song Wei as well as Shi Guanghua of the Wholism tendency, Yang Li,[418] Zhou Lunyou,[419] and Zhai Yongming;[420] and less well-known poets, and friends, whom he thought deserved attention, such as Gou Mingjun, Chen Xiaofan, He Xiaozhu, Wu Jianguo, Er Mao, Liu Tao, Sun Wenbo,[421] and Yu Tian.[422]

The essays Liao collected for *Modern Poetry Groups* make it clear that he was attempting to clarify the false impressions which Xu Jingya's <Grand Exhibition> had left about the nature and origins of Sichuan's avant-garde poetry and poetry groups. All Sichuan's major groups contributed essays relating their origins and ideas, and Ba Tie wrote an over-arching survey about avant-garde poetry that included individuals which had not belonged to them, such as Liao himself, Bai Hua, Ouyang Jianghe, He Xiaozhu, and Zhai Yongming.[423]

The neatly bound photocopied editions of the journal still made for impressive reading for those with an interest in avant-garde poetry in China. Liao carefully chose whom to

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[417] <Pain> (痛), <A Warning> (警告), <In the Qing Dynasty> (在清朝).
[418] <The Dance> (舞会).
[419] <Free Squares> (自由方块); a series published less than a month earlier in *Not-Not* #2.
[420] Five more poems from <Woman>: <An Instant> (瞬间), <Night Scene> (夜境), <Nightmare>, <Autumn>, <Anticipation>.
[421] <A Village> (村庄), one of a series of poems in homage to T. S. Eliot; also at this time, together with Bai Hua and other local poets, Sun was preparing to edit a smaller unofficial poetry journal in Chongqing: *The Red Flag* (*红旗*). (This journal will be dealt with in the next chapter.)
[422] Promoted by Liao at the time, and now well known in China, this was Yu's first appearance in a Sichuan unofficial journal: <White Water and Black Mountains> (白水与黑山).
[423] From the Not-Not group there was an essay by Lan Ma outlining the linguistic underpinnings of the group's core philosophy: <The Pre-Cultural Series: Return Language Composition to its Origins No. 1> (前文化系列还原文谱之一). The Wholism group was represented by an article by Shi Guanghua on the group's genesis – <The Origins of Wholism> (整体主义缘起) – and a piece by the brothers Song Qu and Song Wei: <Two Sets of Notes on Modern Poetry> (与现代诗有关的两则笔记). Li Yawei wrote an article explaining the origins and demise of Macho Men: <Macho Men Methods> (莽汉手段), and He Xiaozhu was interviewed about his poetry, opinions on the Sichuan avant-garde, and the gravitation of himself and poets like Li Yawei to the Not-Not group in 1986. This was one of the first such interviews to be published in an unofficial avant-garde journal. Interviews of this type are now a common feature in unofficial journals and related websites and web-journals. The sole contributor from outside the province was Shanghai's Yu Yu who submitted an article on his local avant-garde poetry scene: <As a View on and Criticism of Shanghai Poetry amid China's "Post-Misty Poetry "> (作为中国“后朦胧诗”中的上海诗歌的观望与批判). The centerpiece of this collection of essays was Ba Tie's 23-page article <On "The Modern Poetry Groups of Ba and Shu"> (论“巴蜀现代诗”).

send copies to of *Modern Poetry Groups*, favoring sympathetic critics and editors, such as Zong Renfa, Tang Xiaodu, and Liu Xiaobo.[424]

In the journal, Liao published the preface to <The City of Death> that *People's Literature* had chosen not to publish, a further installment of <Emmanuelle's Music> entitled <On Primitive Emotions> (论原始感情), and the second poem of what he called <The Allahfaweh Trilogy> (阿拉法威三部曲). Liao had completed this second poem, <The City of Yellow> (黄城), during the latter half of 1986 and followed that in early 1987 with <The City of Illusions> (幻城). <The City of Death> had recorded the journey of the individual's unconscious through the ruins of Chinese culture. Standing upon these ruins is <The City of Yellow> (yellow is not just a reference to skin color and earth, but also implies authority and orthodoxy in Chinese tradition), which is an empty, contrived cultural edifice. Following the destruction of these two cities, the entire accumulation of culture down through the centuries becomes a vacant, unreal <City of Illusions>. In <Emmanuelle's Music no. 9: Godliness and Elegies> (曼纽尔的音乐之九：神性与挽歌),[425] Liao says of himself that he "was born onto this earth in order to sing dirges" and these poems are the proof of his words.

<The City of Yellow> was officially published for the first time in that February 1989 issue of *Author*. All three poems of <The Allahfaweh Trilogy> were eventually published together in 1993 in the two-volume *Collected Post-Misty Poems: A Chronicle of Chinese Modern Poetry* (*后朦胧诗全集：中国现代诗编年史*) edited by Wan Xia and Xiaoxiao.[426] However, very little of Liao's post-1987 poetry has been published in the establishment print media.[427]

From February 1987, Liao was in a state of limbo with regard to his post at the Fuling culture bureau – yet still drawing a salary – and was thus able to turn his full attention to poetry and related activities. Due to his earlier success as an award-winning official poet and his friendships with well-known older poets, such as Liu Shahe, Liao was able to live

[424] Personal communications. Reading Liu Xiaobo's copy of the journal in 1987 led the author to contact Liao and travel to Fuling later in the year.
[425] Unpublished manuscript.
[426] Published with a print-run of 4,100 copies in Chengdu by the Sichuan Education Publishing House, these two volumes contain over 2000 pages of poetry by avant-garde poets from all over China.
[427] Liao's self-published books of this poetry are freely available on-line on the DACHS web-site at http://www.sino.uni-heidelberg.de/dachs/leiden/ .

comfortably in Fuling. In early 1988, he set off on an extended trip to various parts of China with Li Yawei and Xiao Kaiyu. Liao returned to Fuling in April 1988 with an even more pessimistic perception of what he considered the two major pressures of the times on the individual and poetry: spiritual exhaustion and rampant consumerism. His immediate response was the poem <Bastards> (杂种), the first of three poems that would make up what Liao was later to title <The Slaughter Trilogy> (屠杀三部曲). Liao now began to tear into poets, poetry (likening the writing of poetry to defecating), and language itself.

In <Idols> (偶象), completed in August 1988 and the second poem of <The Slaughter Trilogy>, Liao continues his assault upon culture, here turning his attention to the idols and icons of poetry and mythology. The cultural significance of poetry and poets is dispatched in the opening and concluding poems of <Idols> (<The Giant Mirror> [巨镜] I & II). Sandwiched between them are a series of four poems equating Mao Zedong with a poet-creator, detailing their wanton acts of creation and destruction.

There was an attempt on the part of both Liao and his admirers to rehabilitate Liao and his poetry 'officially' starting in June 1988, after eighteen months of being banned from official publication. On the front page of the June 21 issue of *The Poetry Press*, it was announced that Liao had won one of ten second-prizes in the inaugural Exploratory Poetry Grand Prize Contest (探索诗大奖赛)[428] for <Why I Weep Bitterly> (我为什么痛哭). The willingness of Liao and other avant-garde poets to participate in such an officially sponsored contest is an indication of how the quest for recognition had begun to move out of the Second World and onto the official poetry scene during 1986-1989. Another short poem of Liao's, <Late Night, Mother or a Chopin Sonata> (深夜，母亲或

[428] Sichuan avant-garde poets did particularly well in the competition. The top, 'special' prize of 1,000 Yuan was won by the previously unheard-of Xiang Yixian, a young poet from Chongqing who had recently begun contributing poetry to the unofficial *The Red Flag*. Yang Li, now a member of Not-Not, was one of the two first-prize winners for <Three Playing Cards Scattered on the Sahara Desert> (撒哈拉沙漠上的三张纸牌) – the other winner was the Anhui poet Gao Yueming. Shang Zhongmin, for <Writing> (写作), and Jimu Langge were among the second-prize-winners. Both these poets were also members of Not-Not, as were two of the third-prize-winners (57 in all): Liu Tao and Zhou Lunyou – for <The Artist and Twelve Sunflowers> (画家与十二朵向日葵). Also, in the fourth category of 'Good Work' prizes are the names of Lan Ma and Yu Tian. Well-known avant-garde poets from other parts of the country to win recognition (out of several thousand participants) included Shen Tianhong (2nd), Huang Beiling (2nd), Xue Di (3rd), and Gu Cheng ('Good Work')! All poems had to be fewer than 100 lines in length.

肖邦奏鸣曲), was published in the July issue of *Stars*. Furthermore, the February 1989 issue of Changchun's *Author* carried the full text of Liao's long poem <The City of Yellow>, and a short poem appeared in *Poetry* the following month,[429] as did a series of eight short prose poems titled <The Long Corridor> (长廊) in the March issue of *Shanghai Literature*. The latter was part of a special twelve-page section devoted to Sichuan avant-garde poets, also including poetry by Li Yawei, Zhai Yongming, Er Mao, Song Qu and Song Wei, Guo Liuhong, Yu Tian, and Zhong Ming.

Another sign of his rehabilitation was the publication of Ba Tie's <A Theoretical Outline of 'The City of Death'> ('死城'论纲) in the same February 1989 issue of *Author* that also featured <The City of Yellow>. Also, at this time, Chen Chao was completing work on his *Chinese Exploratory Poetry Appreciation Dictionary* (published in September 1989) and chose to include the officially published text of <The City of Death>,[430] placing part of Liao's original unpublished preface within his brief explanatory article on the poem.

This resurgence was partially the result of Liao's friendships with editors of official periodicals such as Tang Xiaodu at *Poetry* and Zong Renfa at *Author*, and Liao's publication history at *Stars* and *The Poetry Press*. As previously noted, Tang had, with some difficulty, arranged to have Liao invited to the Grand Canal national poetry conference in Jiangsu in spring 1988. Clearly, the four judges of *The Poetry Press* poetry prize were sympathetic to avant-garde poets out of Sichuan as a whole, and by awarding a prize of any sort to Liao after eighteen months in official literary limbo; they were effectively testing the waters for Liao's rehabilitation. It also helped that the four judges were young avant-garde poets (under the age of 35 at the time) – although Wang Jiaxin of Beijing and Chen Chao of Hebei were also poetry critics.[431]

Despite these efforts of friends and admirers, Liao continued to write poetry that was virtually unpublishable in China and consciously marginalized himself, refusing to make accommodations with the official literary realm into which the Second World of Poetry had been permitted to enter, and in which Liao feared it was being subsumed. A

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[429] <The Great Basin, My Nanny> (大盆地，我的保姆).
[430] As it had appeared in *People's Literature*, but minus the symbols which divided the poem into its six parts.
[431] The other two judges were Qian Yeyong of Anhui and Wei Zhiyuan of Sichuan.

remarkable four-way literary conversation between Liao, Ba Tie, Li Yawei, and Gou Mingjun on this subject in March 1989[432] was officially published in the July 1989 issue of *Author*. Essentially, Liao and Li criticize the officially tolerated public face of the avant-garde (1986-1989) and its willingness to conform so that they might gather rewards in the form of lucre, privilege, and position. There is also criticism (in common with Not-Not) of imitative practices among these poets, but the only poet criticized by name is Yang Lian, who had left China in 1988. They name, instead, some of the foreign writers who are imitated: Eliot, Elytis, Robbe-Grillet, Borges, and Senghor.[433] Liao reiterates his claim that this is indicative of the current universal lack of beliefs, standards, and values. It is poetry, he claims, that is perfectly suited to reflect this cultural apocalypse, that provides evidence of it, reveals the false basis of the new modern myths, and "… this is sufficient reason for me to live, to 'hold out', in language singing dirges!"[434]

In Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated the success enjoyed by avant-garde poets and poetry in breaking into the literary establishment media. There is the unqualified success of Zhai Yongming – a poet who simply 'got on with her work' and was welcomed by the establishment – and there are the efforts of Ouyang Jianghe, who was successfully attempting to maneuver himself into a position of some authority with regard to the 'proper' writing of avant-garde poetry. However, as a counter-balance to this movement toward official acceptance – and in the cases of Zhai and Ouyang, also publishing new work in official publications – there is the extreme example of Liao Yiwu, a poet who achieved early establishment success and then turned his back on it in pursuit of an

[432] Recorded at Gou's home in Nanchuan.
[433] An officially unpublished 5-page mimeograph entitled <Taking a Slap at the Contemporary Poetry Scene> (给当代诗坛一耳光) written by Liao Yiwu, Li Yawei, and Xiao Kaiyu in 1988 was much more direct. In the form of a skit apparently set in the Cultural Revolution during a public criticism session, the three poets mocked just about everyone: in order of appearance these were Ouyang Jianghe, Xie Mian, Bei Dao, Sun Shaozhen, Shu Ting, Gu Cheng, Yang Lian, Jianghe, Xu Jingya, <A Grand Exhibition>, Xi Chuan, Zhou Lunyou, Shi Guanghua, Song Wei, Wan Xia, Zhai Yongming, Tang Yaping, Xiaojun, Liu Tao, Lu Yimin, Wang Xiaoni, Shao Chunguang, Bai Hua, Zhong Ming, Sun Wenbo, Zhang Zao, and Liao Xi.
[434] Liao, Gou, Ba & Li (1989): 72.

idealistic, uncompromising position as a socially responsible, if intensely personal and impulsive, artist.

Zhai Yongming concentrated on her craft during 1986-1989, only very occasionally and reluctantly agreeing to write essays along the lines of her 'manifesto', <The Consciousness of Black Night>. One exception was her contribution of a brief article to a collection of similar essays submitted at the behest of *Poetry* by some of China's best known woman poets on the subject of <Woman's Poetry> (女性诗歌) in the June 1989 issue of that periodical.[435] This could have been the start of an officially sponsored and orchestrated polemic on the subject, but it was aborted due to the nationwide demonstrations that culminated in the bloody suppression of the nationwide peaceful protest movement on 4 June 1989.

Ouyang Jianghe after several polemical essays during the years leading up to 1989 chose to focus more on his poetry in mid-1988. This was possibly due to the negative response within the Second World of Poetry to his attacks on certain quarters of the avant-garde. He may also have realized that he was beginning to appear as a hatchet man for the literary establishment with regard to the disorderly avant-garde.

Liao Yiwu, on the other hand, seemed to be fighting for the Second World of Poetry's continued existence, and trying to prove its continuing, greater value to those poets still residing within it. He held up <A Grand Exhibition> as a negative example of the perverting tendencies of the establishment, of the ego-driven rush by individual poets to relative fame and riches. Contradictorily, Liao wrote short poetry and prose poetry, which were often officially published and praised, at the same time as he was writing trilogies of long poems, which were not. Therefore, his cry for authenticity of spirit and creation, and the claim this was only possible in the Second World, would appear to have been compromised. However, events during the summer of 1989 would force the entire avant-garde back to where they had come from for a period of three years.

As noted in this chapter, the Second World of Poetry continued to flourish during 1986-1989, both despite and because of greater official publishing opportunities – publication in quality unofficial journals was seen as a first step towards recognition in the avant-

[435] Pp. 4-23; essays by Yi Lei, Zhai, Li Xiaoyu, Hai Nan, Wang Xiaoni, Xiaojun, Lu Yimin, and Liu Tao, among others.

garde sub-field at the very least. Liao produced his corrective version of <A Grand Exhibition> with regard to the Second World of Poetry in Sichuan in his *The Modern Poetry Groups of Ba and Shu* in 1987. The Wholism group put out *Han Poetry* in 1986 and 1988, the first issue of *Not-Not* appeared in the summer of 1986, *The Red Flag* appeared in Chongqing in 1987, and a women-only poetry journal – *The Woman's Poetry Paper* (*女子诗报*) – appeared in Xichang in 1988. A study of this activity, and the complicated relationship between the Second World of Poetry and the literary establishment will be the subject of the following chapter.