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

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CHAPTER 9: *HAN POETRY, THE RED FLAG,* and *THE WOMAN'S POETRY PAPER*

Individual poets such as Zhai Yongming, Ouyang Jianghe, and Liao Yiwu attained the confidence, or positions of relative prominence, to feel free of the need to work within groups in Sichuan's Second World of Poetry during 1986-1989. Still, groups of various forms did develop, or continued to exist, in this period. As noted previously, in 1984 the brothers Song Qu and Song Wei and Shi Guanghua founded the Wholism group and espoused a related aesthetic theory. This group grew slowly, however much of the poetry in their journal *Han Poetry* (*汉诗*) was contributed by outside poets who happened to have work compatible with Wholism at the time of editing. Also, the work of such non-aligned poets as Zhai, Ouyang, and Liao appeared in *Han Poetry*. In fact, aside from long essays on Wholistic theory in each journal, *Han Poetry* seemed a continuation of the line of all-province journals, which began in 1985 with *Modernists Federation* and *Chinese Contemporary Exploratory Poetry*.

The contributors to *The Red Flag* (*红旗*) in Chongqing, on the other hand, were a loose collective, or poetry circle, primarily consisting of local like-minded poets with gradually changing membership. They did not publicly espouse elaborate aesthetic theories or claim to be a group, their journal simply being a vehicle to broadcast their poetry. The journal proved to be a successful launching pad for a number of Sichuan poets, including Sun Wenbo, Xiang Yixian, and Zheng Danyi, as well as an outlet for new poetry by well-known Second World poets such as Bai Hua.

There were many other lesser-known poetry groups with unofficial journals and papers in Sichuan during 1986-1989. One such poetry paper, which had a national impact at the time (1988-1990, three issues), and has since revived as a poetry journal and on the Internet, is *The Woman's Poetry Paper* (*女子诗报*), the first all-women avant-garde

poetry forum in China, out of Xichang. Paradoxically, editor Xiao Yin wanted a forum for woman poets in order to dispel what she and other participants considered the condescending and 'protective' treatment of woman poets in China at the time (and traditionally).

Meanwhile, the editors of the major Sichuan journals, *Not-Not* and *Han Poetry*, continued to invite contributions from well-known avant-garde poets in other parts of China. It seemed they were the only unofficial poetry journals in China that had national aspirations, or fully understood that most avant-garde poets throughout the country belonged to a Second World of Poetry separate from the official poetry realm and its journals. The one exception to this rule during 1985-1989 was the second issue of *Continent* out of Shanghai in 1986. Aside from Song Qu and Song Wei, Hu Dong,[436] Zhai Yongming,[437] Liao Yiwu,[438] and Gou Mingjun, the majority of the Sichuanese poets in *Continent* were contributors to the new *Not-Not* journal: Yang Li,[439] He Xiaozhu,[440] Ma Song,[441] Li Yawei,[442] Shao Chunguang, Shang Zhongmin,[443] Er Mao,[444] and Liu Tao.[445]

The Not-Not group and their journal first appeared in summer 1986. Not-Not aspired to the creation of a 'school' complete with poetic theory and accompanying works. This aspiration was similar to that of Wholism, but Not-Not was on a larger scale and enjoyed greater success. Their four journals and two papers were meant for national distribution, and key members of the group were able to draw in several out-of-province members, in addition to well-known poets, as contributors, if not group members. In fact, the group was a continuation of the spirit of The Third Generation, as defined by Yang Li and Li Yawei (and Macho Men), who were found in the <Third Generation Alliance> section of *Modernists Federation* in early 1985. Now other like-minded poets, such as Shang

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[436] <Story> (故事).
[437] Three poems from <Woman>: <Life> (生命), <A Night Scene>, <Autumn>.
[438] One of the poems from <The Great Cycle>: <Allahfaweh's Funeral Dirge>.
[439] <The Man Watching Water> (看水的男人), <Going to See the Water> (看水去), <China Fish> (中国鱼).
[440] <A Beard in a Dream> (梦中的胡须), <The Other Side> (另一面).
[441] <Summer> (夏天), <Telling Stories> (讲故事), <A Mood> (情绪).
[442] <A Murder in 1985> (85 年谋杀案), <Unconscious Days> (无意识的日子), <A Hermit> (隐士).
[443] <Karl Marx> (卡尔 马 克思).
[444] <Underground Poetry 1; 2; 3> (地下诗).
[445] <It's not Raining Today> (今天不下雨).

Zhongmin of the University Student Poetry group, joined them. Yang Li was arguably the group's star poet, the star theorist was Lan Ma (Wang Shigang), and Zhou Lunyou was the key activist and editor, who also made important poetical and theoretical contributions. Arguably, Zhou, with the help of other group members, made Not-Not the most controversial and best known Second World poetry group and unofficial poetry journal in China during 1986-1989. Given the size and importance of the group and its journals, Not-Not will be dealt with separately in the following chapter.

Han Poetry

From its origins in Muchuan in 1984, the ideas at the core of Wholism as developed by the brothers Song and Shi Guanghua had to wait for over two years to be explicated in their own unofficial poetry journal: *Han Poetry: A Chronicle of the Twentieth Century – 1986* (*汉诗：二十世纪编年史—一九八六*). By 1986, the membership of the 'group' had risen to six, with the additions of Wan Xia, Liu Taiheng, and Zhang Yu, and was to rise to seven with the further addition of Pan Jiazhu before the journal's second and final issue in 1988.

However, the size of the group belied the size of the journal. Originally, in May 1986, the editors (all the group members) had planned a large print run, and 180 pages, for *Han Poetry*. However, as with Liao Yiwu's 1987 *Modern Poetry Groups of Ba and Shu*, the journal was confiscated at the print house in Qiongxia and only 50 photocopied versions were circulated.[446] Finally, a printed version out of Chongqing, with a much smaller print-run and 'only' 120 pages (still the thickest unofficial poetry journal in China prior to 1989) did appear in December 1986 – unsurprisingly, the editors could not raise the necessary funds to print the entire originally planned 180-page issue. In a brief note, they explained these problems and promised themselves, the contributors (most of whom would have also been financial contributors to both versions of the first issue), and the readers that they would make up the loss of 60 pages in a second issue in 1987.

[446] According to an interview with Shi Guanghua in Yang Li (2004): 417.

However, 1987 was a bad year for this sort of activity, to which Liao Yiwu's experiences sufficiently attest. The second issue of *Han Poetry* did not appear until December 1988, and was subtitled *A Chronicle of the Twentieth Century – 1987-1988*. At 132 pages, financial problems would have been as great as the political ones. A third issue was planned for 1990. The manuscripts were collected and all that was lacking were sufficient funds, but Wan Xia and Liu Taiheng were arrested in March 1990 because of their involvement in Liao Yiwu's poetry-video project, and plans for the journal were cancelled.[447]

There are clear indications of a line of continuity between *Han Poetry* and *Modernists Federation* and *Chinese Contemporary Experimental Poetry*. In Chinese, the sponsor, or organizer, of both issues of the journal is listed as the China Situational Literature Research Organization (中国状态文学研究机构), the research groups and offices of the earlier journals now becoming an 'organization'. However, in the English-language table of contents at the back of both issues of *Han Poetry*, there is also a listing for the Sichuan Young Poets Association (printed in English as "The Association of young poets of sichuan, china" [sic]), a now defunct organization; but, as Zhou Lunyou previously noted, a letter of introduction from the Association made it possible to initially find a printing house in Sichuan. The table of contents of the 1986 issue of *Han Poetry* is also reminiscent of the two journals from 1985. It is divided into five parts, and the list of contributors, aside from the brothers Song and Shi Guanghua (who lead off both issues of this journal), consists of Haizi, Liao Yiwu, Liu Taiheng, Zhang Yu, Zhou Lunyou, Daozi, Zhai Yongming,[448] Bai Hua,[449] Ouyang Jianghe, Sun Wenbo,[450] Zhang Zao,[451] Wan Xia, Yang Li, Li Yawei, and Zhao Ye.[452] The only new Sichuan poets here are two of the new members of Wholism: Liu Taiheng and Zhang Yu. Also, aside from parts three and four of Haizi's <But Water, Water> (但是水，水), the only other non-Sichuan contribution is from Daozi – previously the translator of the poetry of Plath and Ginsberg in 1985, but

[447] Ibid.
[448] From the series <Peaceful Village>: <The First Month>, <The Sixth Month> (第六月), <The Seventh Month> (第七月), <The Ninth Month> (第九月), and <The Twelfth Month> (第十二月).
[449] <A Man Who Watches the Air> (望气的人), <Li He> (李后主), <Books> (书), <Dusk> (黄昏).
[450] A selection of <Sonnets> (十四行诗): #1, 2, 6, 8.
[451] An eight poem sequence: <The Drama of Autumn> (秋天的戏剧).
[452] Two sequences of four poems: <River> (河) and <Allan> (阿兰)

now represented by a long poem of the Wholism tendency.[453] Otherwise, the names are familiar, but the space given to their work is overall much greater than had previously been the case. Other well-known Sichuan avant-garde poets absent from *Han Poetry* (such as Lan Ma, Shang Zhongmin, He Xiaozhu, and Liu Tao) were published in the 1986 first issue of *Not-Not*, and Yang Li, Zhou Lunyou, Wan Xia, and Li Yawei had work in both journals, although the work of Liao and Zhou, for example, was written in 1984 and 1985 respectively.

The final section in both issues of *Han Poetry* was a new twist for unofficial poetry journals: entitled <Chinese Poetry Research> (中国诗歌研究) and at 32 pages in length in the 1986 issue, it consisted of three essays by Shi, the brothers Song, and Ouyang Jianghe respectively. Allowing essays on poetry to occupy almost a quarter of the journal was a new phenomenon shared with the *Not-Not* journal. The tenets of Wholism were, finally, publicly available in long essays by its founders. On the other hand, Ouyang's essay was a reprint of his comments on contemporary poetry first published in *Day By Day Make It New* in 1985.

The 1988 issue of *Han Poetry* followed the same pattern – a small number of contributors (19 again) each given a lot of space, and now almost a third of the journal was given over to essays on poetry (40 of 132 pages). The main contributors were the members of the Wholism group, with the addition of Pan Jiazhu who contributed poetry and an essay. Shi Guanghua and the brothers Song did the same, and Yang Li, still an editor of *Not-Not*, again contributed poetry.[454] Ouyang Jianghe also contributed poetry[455] and an essay, as did the free agent Xiao Kaiyu,[456] and there was poetry by Bai Hua,[457] and the new free agent Li Yawei,[458] who had ceased to contribute to *Not-Not* after the

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[453] <The Poles> (极地), the second part of <The Legend of the Heavenly Wolf Star> (天狼星的传说).
[454] The series <Quotations and Birds> (语录与鸟): <Bird the First> (鸟之一), <Bird the Second> (鸟之二), <Bird the Third> (鸟之三), <Beyond the Bird> (鸟之外), <Behind the Bird> (鸟之后).
[455] <All Day> (一天), <Day By Day Make It New> (日日新), <A Girl Out of School> (放学的女孩), <October> (十月), <The Dance of the Skeleton of Wisdom> (智慧的骷髅之舞).
[456] The first part of <Empire> (帝国): <Songs of Praise> (歌赞); a brief idealistic essay on the calling and purpose of poetry and the ability of poetry to change the individual and the world: <The Simple Stone Path in Front of My House> (我房前的简单石径).
[457] <Pain>, <A Warning>, <In the Qing Dynasty>, <Youth> (青春), <I Sing of Growing Bones> (我歌唱生长的骨头).
[458] The series <Heaven> (天): <Bird> (鸟), <March> (三月), <Shore> (岸), <Feathers> (羽), <Alcohol> (酒), <Song> (歌).

1987 No. 2 issue of that journal (although he was still listed on the editorial board of the 1988-1989 No. 3 and No. 4 issues).

What was new in the second issue of *Han Poetry* was a great increase in poets from outside Sichuan, from two to six. Haizi was still a contributor,[459] but of the five new names, four had not appeared in previous unofficial journals in the province. Nanjing's Han Dong[460] was the familiar name from the prior appearance of his work in *Chinese Contemporary Experimental Poetry* in 1985, while new to Sichuan's Second World were Chen Dongdong,[461] Wang Yin,[462] and Lu Yimin[463] from Shanghai, and Xi Chuan[464] from Beijing.

The inclusion of the work of the last poets indicates that Ouyang Jianghe had a large amount of influence on the editors of *Han Poetry*. Earlier in 1988, Ouyang had written officially published essays in which he had specifically praised the work of these poets and held it up, as well as his own, as models of proper modern Chinese poetry practice. This impression is reinforced by the editors' decision to publish Ouyang's essays on just this subject in both issues of the journal: the aforementioned 1985 essay on the perceived crisis in Chinese modern poetry in the 1986 issue, and <Sylvia Plath and the Metaphysics of Death> in the 1988 issue. It seems odd that the poetry of Ouyang, Zhang Zao (in both issues), and Bai Hua (also both issues) – the three main contributors to, and editors of, *Day By Day Make It New* in 1985 – and Zhai Yongming and Sun Wenbo (both 1986 only) should appear in a journal otherwise dominated by the poetry and poetics of Wholism, or work that was arguably of that tendency. The fact that Ouyang, Bai, Zhai, Sun, and Zhong Ming would also appear as a grouping with the name of <Five Lords of Sichuan>

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[459] A selection from <The Sun> (太阳): <The Ministry of Sacrifices> (祭祀).
[460] <I Hear Cups> (我听见杯子), <Already Impossible> (已永不可能), <Days Together with Whales> (和鲸鱼们在一起的日子), <Nanny> (保姆), <A Salute to Shoes> (向鞋子敬礼), <Despair> (绝望).
[461] The seven-part <The Scene and Miscellaneous Words> (即景与杂说).
[462] Six poems from the series <Home of the Spirit> (精灵之家): <The Dancer> (舞蹈者), <The Dead> (死者), <The Sleepwalker> (梦游者), <The Gardener> (园丁), <The Binocularist> (窥镜者), <The Patient> (病人).
[463] Seven poems from <1988 Poetry Notes> (一九八八年诗记): <January 7> (一月七日), <February 24> (二月二十四日), <March 14> (三月十四日), <June 23> (六月二十三日), <June 24> (六月二十四日), <July 1> (七月一日), <June 12> (七月十二日).
[464] Six selections from <The Visit> (造访): Parts 1, 2, 4, 7, 8, 9.

(四川五君) in Xu Jingya's <Grand Exhibition> in October 1986,[465] indicates that *Han Poetry* was also a platform for Ouyang and this circle of poetry friends, both in Sichuan (in 1986) and in the rest of the country (in 1988). However, the subordination of these poets to Wholism poets was made clear by the forewords in both issues of *Han Poetry*, the placement of the poetry of the Song brothers and Shi Guanghua at the front of each issue, and the long essays on Wholism that closed each issue.

The title of the journal itself is somewhat strange: *Han Poetry*. The word *han* is the name of the first great dynasty of unified China (206 B.C.E. – 220 C.E.) and is also taken to refer to the people of the Han race (汉族), although the Han dynasty was, in fact, a multi-ethnic empire similar to Rome's. Wan Xia says that the choice of *han* 汉 for the title was made because the Wholism poets used the Han Chinese language (汉语) to write, and to emphasize the point that they "weren't a western thing."[466] Presumably, the choice was meant to reflect a more Sino-centric orientation on the part of Wholism's poetry as opposed to the western influences evident in much of China's New Poetry, especially since the end of the Cultural Revolution. It was also a return to cultural origins.

Subtitling the journal a *historical chronicle* of the twentieth century is also somewhat confusing. Are not history and poetry separate intellectual endeavors? Opening the cover of the 1986 issue of the journal in search of elucidation, the reader will first see, on the upper-left, a *Taiji* 太极 diagram, said to represent the origin of all created things, with the yin and yang principles as its primary constituents. The Taiji is a pictorial symbol of the essence of virtue and perfection in heaven and earth, men and things. The eight diagrams encircle this symbol, which denotes the evolution of nature and its cyclic changes. In *Han Poetry*, the text beneath the diagram relates how it was developed during the Han dynasty as a representation of the secret learning held within the *Book of Changes*, said to have been written by King Wen (1231 – 1135 B.C.E.), the founder of the Zhou Dynasty (11th

[465] In an explanation of the name, in <A Grand Exhibition> as it appeared in book form in 1988 (Xu Jingya et al. ed.: 374), a letter from Liao Xi in Hongkong argues for the name "seven lords of Sichuan", because of a collection of their poetry and a forward written by Ouyang Jianghe that was to be published there. However, Ouyang has said that it should have remained "five lords" as Sun and Liao were just friends and wrote badly at the time: see Yang Li (2004): 460. Zhai Yongming, for her part, considers the name a joke, as she felt excluded by the word "lord", which she feels has a solely masculine meaning: see Yang Li (2004): 483.

[466] See Yang Li (2004), Chapter 4.

century – 256 B.C.E.), and meant as an explanation of the eight diagrams and their use in divination and geomancy. The text goes on to relate that the Taiji diagram was nearly lost at the end of the Han dynasty, known only to hermits in the kingdom of Shu (western Sichuan); during the Song dynasty (960-1279) interest in *The Book of Changes* grew again and the diagram was only then recovered. This may explain the choice of the name *Han*.

On the opposite page, there is another diagram. It is not apparent what this is until the text below it is read: Halley's Comet, which appeared in the autumn of 1986.

The foreword opens with this sentence: "The most profound contribution of modern Chinese poetry is in its self-aware manifestation of a form of life consciousness."

What follows is one of the most optimistic outlooks on contemporary Chinese poetry ever written. The writers claim they can see Chinese poetry passing beyond realism and surrealism, no longer trapped within the restrictive phenomena of these old Isms, which are limited to reflecting in poetry the loneliness (atomization) and subjective snares of life. They go on to claim that contemporary poetry displays a direct connection between man and existence and the limitless openness of life situations (生命状态). They declare this poetry has healed, or transcended, the fracture and the antagonism between humanity and existence, and regained the sublime optimism of the ancient Chinese (Han) and Greek cultures (presumably referring to the holism of Parmenides in the sixth century B.C.E., and not the atomism of Leucippus and Democritus in the fifth century B.C.E.). This poetry is a confirmation of humanity and nature, a realization of life's harmony, unity, and clarity, and mankind desires this "after experiencing the age of analytical, instrumentalist culture."

This stated optimism indirectly explains the opening Taiji diagram (the reintegration of humanity with nature) and Halley's Comet (the arrival of a new age). A more detailed and explicit explanation is found in Shi Guanghua's essay <Abstract: Wholistic Principles> (提要：整体原则), which attempts to relate how *The Book of Changes* takes on significance in contemporary Chinese literature and life.

Shi's essay is followed by another from the brothers Song, <Poetry Existing as Life> (作为生命存在的诗歌), which states the meaning of the title and the basic premise of Wholism: "With regard to poetry existing as a concrete state of life, we believe in its

completeness. Because it is complete, we believe it then simultaneously transcends the limited spiritual existence of concrete states of life." This wholeness is found in the work of poets who have a consciousness of the wholistic nature of life, of which the writers of Wholism believe there are many. Again, there is the apparent belief that poetry readers, suffused with the spirit of Chinese culture as expressed through *The Book of Changes*, Daoism, etcetera, will not fail to understand and be inspired by the work of China's young poets, and this will lead to the birth of a new and better culture.

Reading this, a western reader might be reminded of the beliefs of western holistic philosophers, such as Spinoza and Hegel, who, like the ancient Greek Parmenides, had visions of the unity of all things. Hegel – widely read in China – believed that nature consists of one timeless, unified, rational and spiritual reality, and that the nation state is a quasi-mystical collective, an invisible and higher reality, from which participating individuals derive their authentic identity, and to which they owe their loyalty and obedience. All modern collectivist political thinkers – including Karl Marx – stress some form of higher collective reality, which nearly always came at the cost of minimizing the importance of difference, the part, and the individual. Given this, it is possible to conceive that the founders of the Wholism poetry group, and the many intellectuals throughout China who made study of *The Book of Changes* a major fad from 1984 on, were still attached to some of the ideals of Mao Zedong's variety of Marxism, and had now latched on to Daoism (if not also Chinese variants of Buddhism, such as *Chan* 禅 – or *Zen* in Japanese) and *The Book of Changes* as a new source of national pride and cultural renewal.

There are also similarities to western New Age philosophies and life-styles, under categories such as "wholistic living" and "wholistic health", often influenced by aspects of Asian culture (such as Zen, yoga, aspects of Chinese medicine), that began to appear in the west in the 1950s and 1960s. The title of the *Han Poetry*'s first poem by Song Qu and Song Wei seems to confirm this: <The Great Saying of Yes> (大曰是). To a western reader this title may be reminiscent of God's eternal "Yes" in reference to the resurrection of Christ as an affirmation of the value of Christ's life and work, as well as Nietzsche's (also popular in China) enigmatic description of the child as an innocence and forgetting, a new beginning, a game of creation, a self-propelled wheel, a first

movement, a sacred Yes. However, of more direct relevance to <The Great Saying of Yes> is the Daoist sage, or Zen master, who says "Yes" with a laugh to anything and everything in the universe, even though at its core it is a faceless *hundun* 混沌 (the chaos before the world was formed, in Chinese mythology). At the same time, there are also forms of negativism and quietism connected to Daoist sages, in particular Laozi and Zhuangzi, who made great use of paradox and were recorded as frequently answering questions from acolytes or lay people in the negative *fei* 非, or 'not'.[467]

However, to an attentive Chinese reader the title of Song Qu and Song Wei's poem would also appear to be a play on words. 'The Great' (大) is in the position of subject, the verb is 'to say' (曰), and 'yes' (是) is, in fact, the verb 'to be', which has the meaning of 'yes', but also extends to mean 'the truth'. In this reading, the title may mean that the sages and classics of the past, such as *The Book of Changes*, or present, speak the truth. Another possible reading is related to the homophone *dayue* 大约, meaning 'probably' or 'approximately', thus rendering a title that could, with humor, be read as 'probably true' in relation to the poem that follows. The five-part prose poem itself is a distinctively Chinese creation based on the language and ideas of *The Book of Changes*, a difficult read for anyone not previously steeped in that text and traditional Chinese cultural beliefs. Essentially, the poem relates the story of the relationships between humanity and the universe, and the great cycle in which humanity plays a part. It is the unwitting nature of this human role, and the existence and truth of this cycle as revealed in *The Book of Changes*, which the Song brothers attempt to disclose through their poem.

Wholism is not a foreign idea in western arts. In an article written as an adjunct to an art exhibition entitled "Wholism" in Eugene, Oregon, in November 1992,[468] Sabrina Siegel argues that the project of Wholism is:

> …the augmentation of the individual's power to live in the world, through the practice of expressing and inciting active affections.

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[467] In fact, it seems that it is directly to this other side of tradition that the Not-Not group appealed in their choice of name, 非非. It could also be argued that this choice of name was influenced by the Wholism group's optimistic take on Chinese tradition. There is, however, no admission of this by the key members of Not-Not.

[468] http://www.emory.edu/ALTJNL/Articles/Wholism/Intro.html (2/4/2004)

This program is based on the ideas of Spinoza as interpreted by Gilles Deleuze and Max Scheler and stresses an immanent mode of art whereby "… all aspects of a work are processed by the body, gaining fuller significance and meaning through sense in this way… so, a work exists primarily as a lived experience/expression of the viewer (just as its origin was such for the artist)." Here there seems to be a connection to the ideas on life consciousness (生命意识) and situationalism literature (状态文学) expressed by the brothers Song and Shi Guanghua, whereby the individual is held to be capable of embodying, and thus expressing in words, both the life of the individual and of the whole universe, or the nation. The poet's work is to become the conduit of life, the tool that renders life immanent through objective use of language. Thus, with regard to the poetry of the brothers Song, the critic Chen Chao writes "the language makes itself immanent."[469] The complexity of the poem is the complexity of life, but there is a "simple" key to that in the form of ancient Chinese thought, such as the Taiji chart and the Eight Diagrams of *The Book of Changes*.

The Poetry of Han

The first issue of *Han Poetry* features several other long poems of the Wholistic tendency, including Haizi's <But Water, Water>, Liao Yiwu's <Happy Land> (乐土), Liu Taiheng's <Living Things> (生物), Zhang Yu's <Land of Ba> (巴土), and Daozi's <The Poles>. In 1988, the number of such difficult works was reduced to that of the Song brothers' <Down the Southern Way: A Poetical Record of the Idle Life> (下南道：一次闲居的诗记), Wan Xia's <Air • Skin and Water> (空气•皮肤和水), a series of 26 poems dedicated to Pan Jiazhu, who in turn wrote <Book of Prayer> (祈祷书), and Haizi's <Sun> (太阳).

Instead, in 1988, there was a shift towards series, or cycles, of relatively short poems. In this regard, the first issue of *Han Poetry* had only a selection of five poems from Shi Guanghua's <Snow Before the Gate> (门前雪) and six poems of Wan Xia's under the title <Hidden Dreams> (隐梦). By 1988, the number had grown to include two such

[469] Chen Chao ed. (1989): 659.

series by Song Qu and Song Wei to open the journal's poetry, followed by a selection of short poems by Shi Guanghua, Liu Taiheng, and Zhang Yu. At the same time, the Wholism essays by Shi Guanghua and Pan Jiazhu in the last section dealt with theology, ontology, phenomenology, teleology, and aesthetics, most of it specifically western. The Song brothers in their <Book of Teachings> (导书), the first part of <A Possible Transcendence – A Theory of Wholistic Art> (可能的超越—整体主义艺术论), also deal with these same subjects by relating them to *The Book of Changes*, the Taiji, and the Eight Diagrams, and attempting to demonstrate the superior wisdom of traditional Chinese culture.

It is precisely this last element which led critics such as Xu Jingya to praise the writing of Wholism, if only because of their optimism and their belief in Chinese traditions instead of western. Writing in November 1986, Xu himself does not share this optimism, but sees these poets as attempting to re-link with pre-1919 (May Fourth Movement) traditions of ancient China, resurrecting a lost national literary archetype, and feels such efforts worthy of praise and support.[470] However, as with other critics, such as Xiang Weiguo,[471] Xu feels that the long poems, through their length and complexity, militate against the very simplicity and naturalness of the tradition the Wholism poets seek to extol and promulgate. Possibly it was criticism such this that led to a decrease in the number of long poems in the 1988 issue on *Han Poetry*.

The shorter poems lend themselves better to inclusion in anthologies and publication in literary journals, as with the following poem of Shi Guanghua's from the 1986 issue of *Han Poetry*:

<Hearing Winter> (听冬)[472]

On water, pale winter plums quietly
listen to the low voice of falling snow. Beyond sparse shadows, a touch of the moon
a stretch of withered reeds whistling up a song
it's a look back by the departed, it's a telling of loneliness
poured out to discordant drums[473]

[470] Xu Jingya (1989): 186-188.
[471] Xiang Weiguo (2002): 118-119.
[472] Anthologized in Chen Chao ed. (1993).

but a deep winter awaiting a return takes water as a boat
takes the breaking of a quiet string as the source of peace

and when water falls, stones appear. I think
with blood to write the remoteness of high mountains, tears drop into old wine[474]
even if it's a dream of departure, an epigraph inscribed on bone
take the sole awakening
as a time to watch clouds rise
a time to watch rain wash bamboo

So, I will come treading on snow
sad days of decline are a promise to my heart
if suddenly we meet, then rap an earthen jug for music
let the returnee be at the gate, the flowers be bright
then start the limitless years
in the depths of waiting build a home and wash the body
and look up at the sky and think, behind each weed
enter into an ancient lingering death ____

The critics Chang Li and Lu Shourong see Shi Guanghua as more of a nature poet than Song Qu and Song Wei.[475] Shi does choose to exploit nature imagery – much of it reminiscent of that found in classical poetry – to express his lyrical longing for a golden age and its traditions. However, Shi's poetry in particular can be seen as an elegy for an absent beauty or tradition – the poet acts as a guardian over its deathbed, and what he writes are poems on this death. Moreover, this exploration of death, somewhat paradoxically, brings an element of the modern into Shi's poetry, given the continuing obsession of avant-garde poetry with the subject.

The short (and long) poems of Song Qu and Song Wei, on the other hand, are more centered on the world of people, as in the first poem of their series of ten poems <Home Words> (家语) in the 1988 issue of *Han Poetry*:

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[473] "Discordant drums" 乱更 may also be translated as "chaotic change"; 更 may mean the drums that marked time in ancient China, or 'change'.
[474] "Old wine" *qingjiu* 清酒 refers to wine given as a sacrificial offering in ancient China.
[475] Chang & Lu (2002): 207-209.

<Waiting for Guests> (候客)[476]

A person who came to see me before crossing the sea
today whips his horse past my gate
in his hand he carries an appointment as official for the South
and turns in at a mountain in back inclining to the west
I am without words to shout at him
I can only tie up clashing blades under the eaves
and hang out a door lamp
then dust with my sleeves, do a little arranging of a room
and quietly wait for him to come back
these are overcast days
I scoop out rainwater collected yesterday
silently sit by the fire, warm wine
or painstakingly decoct Chinese medicine
shortly the sky turns dark, wind strikes the drapes
at this moment a person who intends to see me
should come and raise my home's door curtain
and casually play with me a banal game of words

The critics Chang Li and Lu Shourong see the Song brothers as having moved away from their transmission of ancient cultural traditions via languorous, dreamlike long poems to an attitude more reminiscent of the pure simplicity of life expressed by the poetry of Chinese literati during the Ming and Qing dynasties.[477] They correctly identify the imagery and tone, but fail to see the present-day import of what the Songs write here. Who is the former acquaintance that has gone overseas and now returns as an official, residing in a mountain inclining to the west? It would seem to be a criticism of poets, like Ouyang Jianghe perhaps, who have turned to western traditions as the new poetical authority in China (a mountain can be a symbol of authority and power). The hanging of blades indicates some hostile feelings, but there is still the hope that the prospective visitor will return to his former friendship, or allegiance. While the I-speaker waits for this person to return, he gets on with his life in simple – and therefore, in the context of this poem, ostentatious – Chinese ways, or in the way of the retired literati of antiquity. Poetry as a banal word game is also part of the domestic tradition the Songs and Shi are attempting to revive.

[476] Anthologized in Chen Chao ed. (1993).
[477] Chang & Lu (2002): 206-207.

As a founder of Macho Men, the life of the literati would not have interested Wan Xia. Bai Hua records in *The Left Side*[478] that in 1986 Wan, while studying *The Book of Changes*, still retained a lively interest in the lifestyle of knights errant. His interest in ancient thought seemingly inspired the following poem found in the 1986 issue of *Han Poetry*:

<A White Horse> (白马)[479]

The imagined white horse scatters its fragrant hooves with dignity in a wood
her hair lays flat over the tail
its whiteness leads to transparence

I wait for you to return stamping on flowers
as if on a long trek through your palace
the white horse is the hand nearest your lips
you enter the wood
but you're not a horse

It's also not a woman who rolls up the curtains at the lattice window
the bolt of bleeding silk is still fluttering by the water
once you awake from a dream it will die in another
in another dream
white is not a lofty color
a white horse is not a woman with four naked limbs

Turn your back to the atmosphere
only now the clip-clop of hooves fills the thick shade
the imagined fruit beneath a rainbow is sure to have no body
how can the confusion of facades fail to be your horses

In antiquity, white horses were sacrificed to the gods and to seal oaths of allegiance.[480] However, there is a favorite linguistic-philosophical saying that "a white horse is not a horse" (白马非马), which has frequently been rendered as calligraphy down through the centuries. This is a play on the meaning of the word *bai* 白, which, aside from 'white', can also mean 'pure', 'clean', 'blank', 'a wrongly written Chinese character or a mispronounced syllable', leading to a further extended meaning of 'a waste', or 'for

[478] Bai Hua (1996a): Part 4, Chapter 2, 4.
[479] Also in Chen Xuguang ed. (1994b): 105.
[480] See the *汉书；王陵传.*

nothing'. Furthermore, in the minds of readers familiar with both Chinese and western traditions, there may appear to be an association with Plato's thoughts on the "idea" of "horse-ness" being distinct from "white-horse-ness".

Wan's choice of white horse(s) as the subject of a poem indicates he is playing with words, writing about the poetical imagination, and engaging with Chinese cultural traditions. Yet in each stanza Wan deliberately encourages sexual interpretations through use of female imagery and vocabulary, only to later deny these implications (last line of the second stanza, last line of the third stanza), making the reader aware of the promiscuous nature of the imagination when faced with a confusion of empty, or white, facades of words requiring its active input. At the end of the poem, it is these facades themselves that are identified as the white horses on which we all travel through poetry, and, by implication, through life.

According to Bai Hua, Shi Guanghua's primary requirement of the poetry published in *Han Poetry* was that the subject matter found its inspiration in Chinese culture, and not the western literary tradition.[481] Wan Xia's poem certainly met this requirement, although, like the Song brothers and Shi himself, he used westernized poetical forms and free verse. This also helps to explain why so much poetry that did not come under Wholism proper was included in both issues of *Han Poetry*.

This included poetry by Zhou Lunyou in the 1986 issue of *Han Poetry*, by which time Zhou had already helped to organize the Not-Not group. <Man-Sun> (人日) was written in July 1985. However, Zhou continued with his earlier over arching theme of portraying irrational life experience from the individual's point of view, as in <The Man with the Owl> (1984) and the <White Wolf Valley> poems (1984-1985). <Man-Sun>, dealing with man and his imagination as creator, concludes with a conversation between the I-speaker and Zhuangzi, and then the lines: "Zhuangzi is merely thoughts of the butterfly / The butterfly is merely Zhuangzi's wings." These remarks appear to be a satiric comment on the fascination of roots-seeking poetry with Zhuangzi and ancient belief systems similarly devoted to interpretations of reality, by way of oracle bones and *The Book of Changes*, which Zhou also refers to within the poem. "The roots of the tree are rotten, but its leaves are still fresh ..... [My] rootless drifting starts here." The culture at the base of

[481] Bai Hua (1996a): Part 4, Chapter 4.

these beliefs and symbols already being dead, they can offer no more than inspiration for continued irrational flights of the imagination. “Let the content disappear, all that remains of the entire world is sacred abstraction. / Yet I live concretely.” In 1984-1985, it seems that Zhou was still searching for a personal answer to this paradox. In the next chapter, the answer he and his fellow Not-Not group members settled upon will be dealt with in some detail.

Ultimately, even the openly skeptical poetry of Zhou Lunyou could be included in *Han Poetry*, given that many of the issues he dealt with relating to consciousness – when not clearly Freudian – were issues familiar to Chinese intellectuals from ancient Daoist and Chan Buddhist-influenced texts.

The Red Flag

In his brief comments on the poetry of Chongqing-based *The Red Flag* (*红旗*), Bai Hua compares it’s poetry to that of Chengdu, saying that Chongqing is a city of tragedy, of production and hard work, which produces a form of heavy lyric poetry; while Chengdu is a city of comedy and anti-lyricism rooted in commerce and a leisurely lifestyle.[482] Although simplistic, there seems to be some truth in this. Historically, as the provincial capital, Chengdu has been a wealthier, better regarded city than Chongqing, and Chongqing is now a major port on the Yangtze river, and during the twentieth century has been built up into one of the China’s largest industrial and manufacturing centers. Because of its location at the confluence of the Yangtze with other major rivers in a mountainous region, Chongqing was chosen by the Nationalist Party as its capital in 1938, and remained so until the end of the War of Resistance against Japan (1937-1945). This led to frequent bombing raids on the city. It is likely that the sense of Chongqing being a city of tragedy was produced at this time, when many major poets and novelists (such as Ba Jin, Mao Dun, Wen Yiduo, Mu Dan, and Zheng Min), who had moved to Chongqing when the capital was relocated there, wrote lyrical patriotic works and pieces describing the suffering and resilience of the people of the city at the time.

[482] Bai Hua (1996a): Part 4, Chapter 4.

In 1987, a number of local poets came together to create a new journal which would be devoted entirely to lyric poetry: they were Bai Hua, Fu Wei, Xiang Yixian, Pan Jiazhu (then writing under the pen-name of San Lang[483]), and Sun Wenbo. <Introductory Remarks> (导言) at the front of the first issue is the only prose piece in *The Red Flag*'s four issues. It immediately states that contemporary modern Chinese poetry is in a state of crisis, a view previously espoused by Ouyang Jianghe, but also shared by Bai Hua as the foreword to 1985's *Day By Day Make It New* clearly indicates. As with Ouyang, there is an implication that the multiplicity of poetry groups proclaiming various Isms is somehow a danger to poetry. Paradoxically, the writer(s) of the foreword then claim they are not in a position to judge this.

The remainder of the introduction reads like a manifesto similar to that of a poetry group. The belief that poetry must move people is the central tenet – poetry must cut into the streams of life and consciousness; it should not be imitative, but honed from the poet's years, flesh and blood, youth, and strong emotion. In further remarks strongly reminiscent of Bai Hua's foreword in *Make It New*, poetry is said not to be a "method," but an emergence of life's internal regulations, and that technique is the true test of a poet. As in *Make It New*, there is no explication of what is meant by these remarks, yet nor is there any proposed exemplar, such as Ezra Pound was held to be in the earlier Chongqing-based journal.

There is an apparent comment on, or response to, root-seeking poetry and the poetry of Wholism: "modern poetry in the Han language is the painful result of the clash between the predetermined tide of Oriental culture and contemporary life." This implies a rejection of the immersion in past Chinese culture practiced by some poets and a call for balance between the present and the past, and thereby for a more direct contemporary relevance in poetry.

At the conclusion to the foreword a necessary explanation of *The Red Flag*'s title is given. The image of the red flag is synonymous with the CCP's struggle for survival during the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s during the civil war with the Nationalist Party, as a symbol of nationalism and resistance during war with Japan, as a symbol of

[483] Pan would begin to publish under his given name in 1988, when he moved to Chengdu and joined the Wholism group.

independence and victory in 1949, but also as a symbol of the strong emotions raised by Mao Zedong among the Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution. *The Red Flag* was also, however, the name of a monthly magazine, which was once the CCP's most influential theoretical organ, until its closure by the CCP leadership not long after this unofficial poetry journal came into existence. (It is presumed to have been closed for being a redoubt of Maoists critical of Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms.) It was these conflicting, possibly tragic, strong emotions that inspired the choice of *The Red Flag* as the name of the journal: "Modern Chinese poetry is necessarily the elegant blood-stained demeanor of this generation of our nation's elite. Therefore we are called *The Red Flag*." On the first page of the journal, before the table of contents and the <Introductory Remarks>, the excerpted lines from a song popular among Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution further reinforce this reading:

> The wind and clouds suddenly change, the warlords start up again. Surging toward the world
> all is in turmoil, when a yellow mast appears once more.
>
> The red flag leaps over the Ding River, straight down to Dragon Rock and up to Hangzhou.
> Gathering up stretches of speckled gold, really busy distributing fields and land.

This song is meant as praise for the role of the CCP under Mao's leadership, for subduing the warlords and bringing social justice to the oppressed multitudes, and reflects the revolutionary fervor of the Red Guards. Given the results of the Cultural Revolution, particularly for those educated youths and former Red Guards who were forcibly rusticated during the 1970s, there is a sense of tragic irony, disappointed expectations, and bitter-sweet childhood memories in these lines.

Overall, the introductory comments seem to have been inspired, if not written, by Bai Hua. However, in his comments on *The Red Flag* in *The Left Side*, Bai makes no mention of taking part in the organization of the journal, nor is there mention of his considerable poetical contributions to the first three issues. Possibly Bai did not wish to deflect attention from the other organizers, wanting to maintain the pose (in his book) of an aloof outsider. Moreover, the first two issues, aside from the plain cover, had the same typeface

and page-layout as *Make It New* – a clear indication it had been set and printed by Bai's friend Zhou Zhongling, the co-editor of *Make It New*, at his printing house in the Chongqing suburb of Beipei.

In any case, the first forty-page issue of *The Red Flag* had Bai Hua's contribution of three poems placed sixth in the table of contents.[484] The list of contributors read as follows: Sun Wenbo, Fu Wei, Lin Mang, Guo Yubin, Wang Yonggui, Bai Hua, Xiang Yixian, and San Lang (Pan Jiazhu). Lin Mang, a resident of Beijing, seems the odd one out here, as most critics consider him a Misty poet.[485] Pan Jiazhu was a native of Anhui province, but had been resident in Chongqing since 1983. All the other poets were residents of Chongqing and its many suburbs, with the exception of Sun Wenbo, then living in Chengdu. The appearance of poetry by Wang Yonggui, a name familiar from *Make It New*, further bespeaks the influence of Bai Hua on the journal's editorial direction.

In recent years Sun Wenbo, now a resident of Beijing, has become prominent in the official literary realm as a poet and critic. However, in his many prose essays, he makes only passing reference to *The Red Flag*, merely acknowledging that the journal (without using its name) led to the first official publication of his poetry[486] and a realization that poetry was his vocation in life, and stating that he and Fu Wei had organized the journal (but not necessarily implying that they were alone in doing so).[487] As his poetry,[488] and that of Fu Wei, led off the first issue of *The Red Flag*, it is reasonable to assume that they were key organizers of the journal. The tone of the journal, as advertised in the introduction, is set by Sun's poetry:

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[484] <Responsibility> (责任), <Conscience> (良心), <Silhouette> (侧影).

[485] For example, see Tang Xiaodu ed. (1993b) and Chen Chao ed. (1989).

[486] In the unpublished essay <How I Became My Self> (我怎么成为了自己), 2001: 7. For example, the poem <Cattails> (蒲草), first published in the fourth issue of *The Red Flag*, was officially published in the December 1989 issue of *Poetry*. Maghiel van Crevel believes this may be a reference to the publication of Sun's poetry from this journal in *Thumb* (*大拇指*), a poetry journal in Hongkong. However, the earliest official publication in China of a poem by Sun the author can find is with Sun as a member of the <Five Lords of Sichuan> group in the third part of Xu Jingya's <Grand Exhibition> in the 24 October 1986 issue of the *Shenzhen Youth Daily*: <The Story of the Girl Lu Mei> (少女陆梅的故事).

[487] In the essay <The Story of Fu Wei> (傅维传) , in the first issue of the Beijing-based unofficial journal *New Poetry* (*新诗*), Jiang Hao ed., March 2002: 75.

[488] Sun's other poems are <Autumn> (秋天) and <Sundown> (黄昏).

<A Space for Conversation> (一席之地)

At this moment, in Chongqing
a person sets out
he hears sounds swallowing each other up
he imagines the glories of the Tang
Li He walking on a post road
-------- he suffered an early demise

A turmoil of buildings, brave girls
the Han nation pricks him into poetry
he's already learned safety's in solitude
learned to incessantly bid adieu
when even more ears assault him
his ears hear misery

A surge of years
the road still long
but that vague prized and lone language
today has yet to arrive
he's now declining in age
sun setting road ending, alone rambling in this space for conversation

The journal itself is "a space for conversation", but it is, as promised in the introduction, talk of pain – the pain of loneliness, of loss, of unfulfilled longing, and of incapacity that fills this poem. Sun Wenbo sites the poem in modern Chongqing, but then brings in Li He, a poet of the Tang dynasty. "He" is the poet, Li He, and all poets – although comparing oneself, or other contemporary poets, to Li He seems pretentious and precious. Furthermore, the appearance of Li He and the emotions dealt with in the poem are reminiscent of Bai Hua's 1984 poem <Precipice> (see Chapter 6), and Sun's poem seems a rewriting of Bai's. It is also possible that Sun, in Chengdu, wrote the poem in honor of Bai, with Bai imagined as the poet wandering the streets of Chongqing.

The second issue of *The Red Flag*, now with 42 pages, was again led off by Sun Wenbo's poetry,[489] only now his contribution was followed by Zhao Ye, another poet from Chengdu, previously published in *Modernists Federation* and the 1986 issue of *Han Poetry*. Poetry by Wan Xia also appears in *The Red Flag* for the first time[490] – one of his

[489] <1987> (一九八七), <The Square at Midnight> (午夜的广场), and <Puppets> (傀儡).
[490] <A Girl and a Horse> (女孩和马) and <A Mirror in the Snow> (雪中的镜子).

best-known poems, <A Fragrance of Lü Bu> (吕布之香), would appear in the fourth issue – as would the work of Zheng Danyi (under the pen-name of Sangzi),[491] Bai Hua's friend Zhang Zao,[492] and Peng Yilin, a Chongqing poet familiar from *The Born-Again Forest* and *Make It New*. Now, except for Zhang Zao, in Germany since 1986, and Zheng Danyi, who had returned to Guiyang to work as a teacher in 1986 after starting his career as a poet while a student at university in Chongqing, all the contributors were resident in Sichuan. Sun Wenbo and Fu Wei would be the only poets with work in each of the four issues of *The Red Flag*, with Bai Hua's contributions ending with the third issue in 1988 when he moved to Nanjing to teach.[493] Still, the web of relationships that made the journal possible are clear, stretching from Bai Hua's involvement in unofficial journals since 1982 to recent university days when Fu Wei and Zheng Danyi, working together as poetry activists, met Bai Hua through mutual acquaintances, such as Zhang Zao, then a graduate student in Chongqing.

The stress on tragic lyricism continued in the second issue of *The Red Flag*. A poem by Xiang Yixian, the young poet who would come to national attention a few months later by winning the top special-prize and 1,000 Yuan in *The Poetry Press*'s 1988 Exploratory Poetry Prize Competition, is illustrative of another strand of this tendency (if not Bai Hua's influence) among Chongqing poets at the time:

<A Reminiscence> (怀念)

Nightfall just now approaches
everywhere exquisite, matchlessly pure
in a vase the slivers of a garden
by the window falling petal by petal

All time passes through your heart
you dwell inside a tiny delicate forest
remembering the water that has flowed through your fingertips
happiness forever belongs to a future day

A late bell is ringing in a distant place

[491] <Yet Another Spring> (又一个春天), <A Tree in Autumn> (一棵树在秋天) and <The Days> (日子).
[492] <A Housefly> (苍蝇), <The Death of Grandmother on the Mother's Side> (外祖母之死) and <The Sixth Method> (第六种方法).
[493] In the second issue they were <Pain> and <A Victim> (牺牲品).

I linger long sitting on a wooden chair
elegant and handsome, afraid of touching the sensitive spot
the faint wisp of a lute of olden days fills the room

and emits a lemony bouquet
twilight shadows slowly descend
the visage in the vase
long-since indistinct

For a young man not much older than 20 at the time, Xiang's seeming sensitivity and experience of life is remarkable. Or is it the influence of local poets, like Bai Hua and Zhang Zao, and classical poetry? In any case, Xiang's poem is a tastefully observed, evocative avoidance of a pain hinted at by the "sensitive spot" and "happiness forever belongs to a future day."

In 1988, the third issue of *The Red Flag* shrank in size to 30 pages and had only five contributors: Fu Wei, Zheng Danyi, Zhang Zao,[494] Bai Hua, and Sun Wenbo.[495] Yet, while the quantity of poetry may have been reduced, its quality was arguably enhanced.

Zheng Danyi uses his given name for the first time and his contribution increases from two to eight poems.[496] The following is the first of his eight poems and an example of the lyrical style fostered by the journal, as well as Zheng's unique voice:

<Getting Happiness in the Hands of the Soul>
(取悦于心灵的手)

I get happiness in the hands of the soul, you should be well-behaved. Should be like a girl, a banana in August
or a cat hidden in a clothes closet napping
you're already at the crux of it, stepping into a flowery boat, you've witnessed
rivers and mountains, wine and the styles of a caste

[494] <Goodbye, Witzburg> (别了，威茨堡), <Song of an Assassin> (刺客之歌), <The King of Chu Dreams of Rain> (楚王梦雨), <A Chinese Summer House> (中国凉亭) and <The Triumphant return of Ping Pong> (凯旋的乒乓球).
[495] <A Winding City> (曲城), <An Organ> (风琴), <Prejudice> (偏见), <The West Wind> (西风) and <1988> (一九八八).
[496] Not including the translated poem, they are <Cups> (杯子), <An Autumnal Song for Yaya> (一首献给亚亚的秋歌), <A Girl's Desire> (一个少女的心愿), <How Many Ears of Souls have Heard> (有多少灵魂的耳朵听到), <Shirts of Summer> (夏天的衣衫), <A Bird that has Come into the World> (来到世上的鸟) and <Growing Up, Forever Growing Up> (成长，永无休止的成长).

In this world which day after day is being
sent to the grave, let us make a pact
let wars, precious swords all keep the innate promise
let rose bushes all dig out their
treasured handkerchiefs. Provided I live for one day

O, living a day is so tough
passing through this interminable daytime
interdependent with a pigmy for survival, a thing in a sack of skin
put them on, the pure white gloves
light it, a secret fire in the furnace

But you should be well-behaved, should be gentler with me
with my faults. Because
we're all characters in the same tragic play
marching on the road to extinction
You are the cup, the human path, the tongue freezing in the wind!

Here is a vision of the martyred poet, martyred by civilization, the world he lives in, finding solace in the cup (alcohol), in common humanity – the lonely voice of the sensitive soul trapped in the physicality of life.

However, the true quality in this issue of *The Red Flag* is found in the five poems by Bai Hua. All have been anthologized, and three frequently so. The latter three are <The Beauty> (美人), <For Mandelstam> (献给曼杰斯塔姆), and the following poem:

<Jonestown> (琼斯敦)[497]

The children can start
this night of revolution
night of the next life
night of the People's Temple
The rocking center of the storm
has already tired of those yet to die
and is anxious to carry us off in that direction

The enemy of our hallucinations
makes repeated assaults on us
our commune is like Stalingrad

[497] For example, all three of these poems can be found in Tang Xiaodu ed. (1992): 11-15. The other two poems were <I Sing of Growing Bones> (我歌唱生长的骨头) and <Youth> (青春). "Jonestown" refers to the site of the mass suicide in Guyana of 914 American citizens, members of a religious cult led by Jim Jones, on 18 November 1978.

the sky is full of a Nazi smell

the vortex of hot blood's moment has arrived
emotions are breaking through
fingers are being jabbed in
glue is thrown across all the classes
the patience of vain hopes does battle with reaction

Through spring until fall
sexual anxiety and disappointment spread everywhere
bared teeth gnaw on unapproachable times
the yen for munitions in boys' chests explodes
the taboo on eccentricity rips and bites back our tears
See! The ravenous mob is now incensed

A girl is practicing suicide
due to her madness, her beautiful hair tending to get sharper and sharper
laid so tenderly across her helpless shoulders
it is a sign of her being seventeen
the only sign

And our spirits' symbol of first love
this dazzling white father of ours
happy bullets score direct hits on his temples
his naïve specter gushes still:
faith cures, religious "bushido"
the beautiful body of a coup d'état

The mountain of corpses has already stopped rehearsals
a loud voice in an unheard-of silence swears an oath:
pass through crisis
drill your thoughts
make a sincere sacrifice

Confronted by this white night of the concentrated betrayal of flesh
this last white night of humanity
I know that this is also my night of a painful bumper harvest

In *The Left Side*, in his only comments on the writing of this poem and <The Beauty>,[498] Bai Hua precedes excerpts of these poems by listing the personal anguish of five of his young acquaintances, a mix of university lecturers and students. There are suicides and

[498] Bai Hua (1996a): Part 4, Chapter 7.

unwilling departures to distant parts of China (as dictated by the state[499]). Bai appears to infer that these individuals are caused to suffer by the "Nazi smell" of CCP China.

While the poem is ostensibly about the little-known or understood (in China) mass suicide in Jonestown in 1978, the introduction of Stalingrad and the Nazi smell in the second stanza, and the religious overtones, generalize the poem's topic line sufficiently to allow a Chinese reader, of Bai's age in particular, to make the necessary connections to link what is written to the religious-like hold Mao Zedong had over the Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution and the events that occurred at the time, and the price those youths and millions of others were made to pay in its aftermath (rustication, for example).

In general, critics in China avoid any form of in-depth analysis of this poem and its crush of painful imagery, aside from the observation that this was not the norm in Bai's poetry.[500] Bai's own comments above may be a factual account of the original impetus for the writing of the poem, but this does not make the poem any less political and, thus, dangerous. The intensity and density of the imagery must be put down to the strength of Bai's emotions and experience.

The first official publication of <Jonestown>, as well as <The Beauty> (a poem on death) and <For Mandelstam>, throws an even more political light on the poem. Zong Renfa, the *Author* editor, was able to arrange for the publication of these three poems and two others in the September 1989 issue of that journal.[501] The subsequent frequent, uncommented-upon appearance of these three poems in anthologies during the 1990s and beyond, speaks to both the quality of the three poems and their political nature.

The fourth issue of *The Red Flag* may have been prepared in 1988,[502] but was probably published in 1989. Fu Wei had established a close friendship with Chen Dongdong in

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[499] Until the 1990s, upon graduation university students were assigned employment by state review boards, and, unless one was very well connected within the CCP, such assignments were beyond the control of the individual. This was also the case with university entrance exams, in which students were allowed to indicate personal preferences with regard to schools they wished to attend, but had no control over their eventual allocation.

[500] See Chang & Lu (2002): 239-240. <Jonestown> and <For Mandelstam> are mentioned in passing, with the focus placed on <A Boy of Winter> (冬日的男孩), a relatively innocuous, but well-written poem commemorative of Bai's thirtieth birthday.

[501] Pp. 30-33. The other two poems were <I Sing of Growing Bones>, also in the third issue of *The Red Flag*, and <A Boy of Winter>.

[502] There are no introductory comments in any issues except for the first. The only date in the fourth issue is that given that of 4 July 1988, as the date of completion for Wan Xia's poem.

Shanghai by this time,[503] and the typeface and the page layout very closely resemble that of the first issue of *Tendency* (*倾向*), a joint publication involving a number of overseas Chinese poets with Chen as one of the editors. This issue of *The Red Flag* had dwindled to less than 20 pages. Fu Wei, Sun Wenbo,[504] and Wan Xia are the only contributors from Sichuan. Zhang Zao[505] was no longer the sole overseas poet, now being joined by Yan Li, a former member of Beijing's *Today* group and the *Stars* group of artists was resident in New York since the early 1980s, who was promoted by Chen Dongdong and contributed four poems.[506] There were also two poems from the well known Beijing poet Xue Di,[507] and there was a new addition to the journal in the form of translated western poetry – the translation by Dong Jiping, a poetry contributor to *Make It New*, of a series of six poems by the modern English poet David Gascoigne.

Aside from a few paragraphs on *The Red Flag* in Bai Hua's *The Left Side*, the existence of this journal has gone largely unremarked by critics both within and without Sichuan. Considering that it was the initial proving ground within the Second World of Poetry of Sun Wenbo and Zheng Danyi, poets who would rise to positions of prominence on the official poetry scene during the 1990s, and the first home to some of Bai Hua's best poetry, this is an oversight which required the foregoing rectification.

However, it is more difficult to claim, as Bai Hua does, that Chongqing is a natural home to tragic lyricism. Not all contributors to *The Red Flag* were residents of the city

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[503] The author met Fu Wei in Shanghai while visiting Chen Dongdong during the summer of 1989 and was given this impression, which is further strengthened by the appearance of the journal. According to notes on page 187 of the inaugural 1993 issue of the US-based Chinese language literary journal *Tendency*, there were three issues of Chen's *Tendency* published in China (1988, 1990, 1991). Huang Beiling, later the editor of the US version, is listed as a co-editor of the first issue, along with Chen, Lao Mu, and the Shanghai poet Zhang Zhen. Chen is listed as the sole editor of the second and third issues. According to a further note on page 190 of the American *Tendency*, Chen's Shanghai *Tendency* was officially banned by the local police in January 1992. While there was no announcement by Huang Beiling that his *Tendency* was a continuation of the Shanghai journal of the same name, Chen Dongdong was one of the main contributors to the first issues of the journal and was later listed as a poetry editor.

[504] <Cattails> (蒲草), <The Scent of a Eucalyptus Tree> (桉树的气味), <Mud> (泥土), <Night, Sleep Carries Me to Another House> (夜晚，睡眠把我带到一所房子) and <Sub-Zero> (零度以下).

[505] <Asher and the Nameless Knight> (爱尔莎和隐名骑士), <Romeo and Juliet> (罗密欧与朱丽叶), <Leda and the Swan> (丽达与天鹅), <The Lord of Mount Liang and Zhu Yingtai> (梁山伯与祝英台) and <Magnolia Tree> (木兰树).

[506] Yan Li also contributed to the first issue of *Tendency*, which is further indicative of Chen's influence on Fu Wei in the editing of this issue of *The Red Flag*. Yan's poems were <Religious Inspiration> (宗教启示), <Peaceful Days> (和平的日子), <The Journey of Life> (人生之旅) and <An Exhortation> (劝).

[507] Selected from his poetry series <Internal Struggle> (内心挣扎): <Toad> (蜍) and <Mayfly> (蜉).

(Sun Wenbo was living in Chengdu – which Bai claimed to be a home to poetry of reason and logic – at the time, and Zhang Zao in Germany) nor were poets such as Pan Jiazhu or Zhang Zao natives of Sichuan, although both did reside in Chongqing for three to four years during the 1980s. Rather, the poetry of the journal seems to be influenced by the poetical concerns of Bai Hua and, to a lesser degree, Zhang Zao.

There are no simple explanations for any of the poetic activity in Sichuan, but there was a large number of people who felt an intense desire to write poetry and a large community of Second World poets in which it, and the poet, could circulate. The poetical influences from within the province, and from the rest of China and beyond, were accessible to all within this community, and there was no reason for any one poet to be influenced for a long period by any one poet or Ism as he or she mastered the craft and found a distinctive voice. This is one of the reasons many group journals were not long-lived in Sichuan. Most importantly, *The Red Flag* effectively provided a forum for poets and poetry not suited, for whatever reason, to journals such as *Han Poetry* and *Not-Not*.

The Woman's Poetry Paper and Xichang

In the winter of 1988, the first post-Mao women-only avant-garde poetry journal in China, *The Woman's Poetry Paper* (*女子诗报*), entered the Second World of Poetry in Xichang. In 1987 and the first half of 1988, an aspiring Xichang poet by the name of Xiaoyin[508] began a self-funded tour of poets she admired, seeking education and advice. She started with local poets such as Zhou Lunyou and Xu Xinghe (a poet operating in the official circuit), before moving on to Chengdu, where she met Wan Xia, Sun Wenbo, Yang Li, Shang Zhongmin, and Xiang Yixian. She also traveled to Mianyang to meet Yu Tian, and even left the province and traveled to Xi'an to visit Zhao Qiong and Daozi. Upon returning to Xichang, Xiaoyin gathered several like-minded friends and began to prepare a poetry paper for publication. Her assistant editor was Zhongyin, and other local

[508] Xiaoyin is the penname currently used by this poet. She has also published under the names Yuan Cun and Xiao Xiaoying.

women poets who participated were Shan Nan,[509] Aman,[510] Hailing, and Jieying.[511] While the paper was only published three times before it was banned (in 1988, 1989, 1990[512]), its list of contributors was impressive and nationwide: the better known among them being Li Qingsong and Tanshi of Jinzhou in Liaoning province,[513] Anqi of Zhangzhou in Fujian province, and Shi Wei of Nanjing.[514] There were also several well-known woman poets from other parts of Sichuan who contributed: Liu Xiaozhou from Xindu,[515] Xiaoxiao from Leshan,[516] Jin Xiaojing (previously better known for her love poetry) of Chengdu, Hongying of Chongqing,[517] and Huazhi of Luzhou.

The fact that so little has been written about this poetry paper, and that so few names of these female poets are known outside of China, tells its own story. It was, in fact, a reaction against the loneliness and suffering exhibited in the poetry of Zhai Yongming, Tang Yaping, and Yi Lei, and their poetry's positive reception by many critics during the mid-1980s[518] that led Xiaoyin to publish *The Woman's Poetry Paper*. As Xiaoyin tells it, the "black windstorm" (黑色风暴),[519] which swept through women's poetry in China in the mid- to late-1980s, was an accusation thrown at a misogynist society, but the accusers were often women who appeared in their poetry as victims of abuse, or as self-abusers.[520] She felt that this position of effectively being a "pet" for men was pandering to the image that male poets and critics wished to see at the time, and felt that the officially published praise (from male critics) this poetry received led many female poets, who were only beginning to write, to compete in imitation of the apparently 'acceptable' form. What

[509] Also published under the name Gao Chongxiu.
[510] Also published under the names Xiao Wencui and Wencui; deceased in a 1992 traffic accident.
[511] Now resident in Kunming.
[512] A fourth issue appeared as a supplement in the Anhui journal *Breeze* (*微风*) in 1994. In 2002, now living in Maoming, in Guangdong province, Xiao Yin reestablished the journal in its printed form and organized a dedicated website and chat room at the web address in the footnote below (moved to different location in 2004).
[513] Now resident in Beijing.
[514] Now resident in the USA.
[515] Now resident in Germany.
[516] Now resident in Beijing.
[517] Now resident in the UK.
[518] See, for example, Li Xiaolin's essay <Zhai Yongming's "Disease" Consciousness> (翟永明的"疾病"意识) in Zhai (1994) and Part 3 Chapter 6 in Xie & Liang (1993) entitled <Admiration of Girls or Love Spreads Warm Feelings to Everybody – Stream of Consciousness and "Black Consciousness"> (姑娘们欣赏或者恋爱对谁都施以脉脉温情—意识流与"黑色意识").
[519] The "black" comes from the poetry of Zhai and Tang directly, and from that of Plath indirectly.
[520] See interview with Axiang at Xiao Yin (2003).

Xiaoyin and other participants in *The Woman's Poetry Paper* aspired to was poetry that was avant-garde, but featured a diluted consciousness of sex.

The manifesto of the paper, which has been adapted for the group's current website,[521] says it all:

> *The Woman's Poetry Paper* refuses male protection, sees the male-chauvinist society as shit.
> *The Woman's Poetry Paper* wants [to create] through writing a central discourse on woman's poetry that goes beyond gender.
> What *The Woman's Poetry Paper*, past and present, is doing is: establishing a comprehensive structure for woman's poetry.

Xiang Weiguo is one male critic who has taken Xiaoyin and *The Woman's Poetry Paper* seriously and written on the paper's poets and poetry in recent years.[522] He points out that the very title of the paper stresses gender and suggests that Xiaoyin may believe that the collective female nature of the enterprise will allow it to act as a "detox" center for woman poets, a place where they will not be judged, or negatively prejudged, as a woman by male poets and editors. This may allow greater freedom for woman poets to write as they like for publication within the context of *The Woman's Poetry Paper*, but it will be some time before gender is stripped from the list of prejudices running rampant through society beyond its confines.

As a poet, Xiaoyin had a history in the Second World of Poetry in Sichuan. In 1982, upon graduating from high school, she and some other female poets put out a single issue of an unofficial journal called *The Trekkers* (*跋涉者*). However, because of work and marriage (of her friends), Xiaoyin did not write poetry again until 1987. In her interview with Axiang on *The Woman's Poetry Paper* website, Xiaoyin states that one day in early 1987 two local poets, Wenjun and Shan Nan, walked into her office and proposed putting out an unofficial journal. This one was called *OOO Poetry Tide* (*OOO 诗潮*) and was mailed out to several well-known poets in Sichuan and beyond. Soon there were letters praising Xiaoyin's poetry from poets such as Wan Xia, Shi Guanghua, Zhou Lunyou, Yang Li, Lan Ma, Liu Tao, and Xiao An (all, except Wan Xia, members of Not-Not), and

[521] See http://asp.6to23.com/nzsb/xuanyan.index.html (12/17/2003).
[522] See Xiang Weiguo (2002): 208-215; and Xiang (1994).

many of the woman poets who would later contribute to *The Woman's Poetry Paper*. These letters of encouragement provided an impetus for Xiaoyin's new project. Xiaoyin says she asked advice of Zhou Lunyou on the layout of the first issue of the paper, and, on Zhou's advice, patterned the layout of the inside, second and third pages on Xu Jingya's 1986 <Grand Exhibition>, calling her version <The Woman's Poetry Scene 1988> (女子诗坛). Wan Xia mailed in a poetic series by Xiaoxiao,[523] and the Beijing poet He Shouwu sent Xiaoyin poetry by woman poets in the north.

The following poem is indicative of Xiaoyin's avant-garde poetics and a sufficient reason for the enthusiastic response to her poetry by members of *Not-Not*:

<Affairs on the Water> (水上的事)[524]

A boat passes on a boat
you stand on that end of the island
affairs on the boat
you won't know even if I say
in back of the island is water
in back of the back of the water
still it's water
affairs in the water
I won't know even if it's said
you are you
I am I
you are not an island
I am not a boat
affairs on a boat
you won't know even if I say
in back of the back of the island
still it's water
affairs in the water
I won't know even if it's said

As Xiang Weiguo points out, this poem seems to be dealing with the relative and limited nature of affairs between people and things, and how the effect these two aspects have on each other throws up an unlimited aspect in which nothingness produces things and vice versa in a never-ending cycle. This harks back to Daoist philosophy based on the writings

[523] Xiaoxiao's series was entitled <The Woman Under a Tree and Poetry> (树下的女人和诗歌).
[524] Xiang Weiguo (2002): 209-210.

of Laozi and Zhuangzi. Xiaoyin's stress on "say", drawing attention to verbal production, or the inability thereof, further highlights this aspect, and this is an interest shared with members of the Not-Not group, in particular Zhou Lunyou and Yang Li.

Jin Xiaojing, in the first issue of *The Woman's Poetry Paper*, chose to tackle controversial subjects which related to women, but not exclusively so. The following lines are from <Abortion> (人工流产):[525]

> Not wanting you isn't because I don't love you
> Not wanting you is precisely because I love you too much
> …..
> You are my eternal night
> the sole witness
> to the love it is a life-and-death labor to make real
> …..
> Now, we must go
> to receive
> the parting of blood and flesh and bone

This is not a subject male poets could write about, and a subject male readers (and editors) would find difficult to fully appreciate. Setting aside the moral and political aspects of this subject in contemporary China, Jin focuses on feelings, both emotional and physical, which men may never know, and which are, therefore, the exclusive territory of women. It is expression of this sort of difficult female life experience that was arguably denied publication opportunities in China before the existence of *The Woman's Poetry Paper*.

There was even more of an overlap between *The Woman's Poetry Paper* and *Not-Not* than the possibly formative influences of Xichang natives Zhou Lunyou and Lan Ma on the poetry of Xiaoyin. Hailing, a native of Xichang and a contributor to *The Woman's Poetry Paper*, was also a contributor to the second and fourth issues of *Not-Not*. The latter issue was published at approximately the same time as the first issue of *The Woman's Poetry Paper*. Hailing's contribution to that issue of *Not-Not* consisted of a series of six poems entitled <On a Bridge and an Evening> (晚上与桥上).[526] Xiaoyin's

[525] Xiang Weiguo (1994): 4.
[526] *Not-Not* 1989: 123-124.

interest in publishing avant-garde writing by woman poets led to such overlap and the publication of poems such as this:

<Imagining Going to View Flowers in the Time of Ice-Cliffs Hundreds of Feet High>
(想到已是悬崖百丈 冰的时候去看花)

Imagine there are ice-cliffs hundreds of feet high
The heart aches

Extended hands are already laid waste

Short quick steps of small feet moving closer from afar
In a hut unable to come out
In the wind blasted grass sways

When imagined
a hidden orchid is fragrant

I'm not able to withdraw my hands

In the small yard the autumn wind is pressing
Someone is viewing the flower

In ancient times poets all viewed flowers on bright moonlit nights
Don't look at my wasted hands

So the flower is forever blooming in dreams
When the moon's in the center of the sky someone departs
It's exactly two o'clock in the morning then
I think, tonight somebody will not sleep.

This is the fourth poem in Hailing's series, and the only one that seems to deal with women's issues. It is also the only poem of the six in which an I-speaker appears: the first poem centers on "he", a male reader of <The Autobiography of Simone [or Simon]> (西蒙自传), who consequently loses track of time; "she" appears in the second poem, a scene set in cold, dark, and windy autumn as flowers die; in the third "someone", who could be "that (female) person" (伊人), is in the yard on a windy night beneath the leaves of a Chinese parasol tree; in the fifth poem there is "someone" and a "fisher", again in autumn as flowers die; and, finally, there are only "night walkers", who are gone from a

bridge by a blossoming plum tree, leaving the light from an oil lamp on a curtain, and a wind blowing blossoms.

Overwhelmingly there is quietude, decline, darkness, and a sense of timelessness. The fourth poem above stands out not only because of the appearance of an I-speaker, but also because of its apparent setting in an ice age. The “short quick steps of small feet” are a traditional literary reference to a woman with bound feet, and the term “hidden (or imprisoned) orchid” (幽兰) may be a reference to a woman, as could any reference to a flower. With this understanding, the walls of ice and the “hands” of the I-speaker take on greater significance. The suggestion that these hands (the hands of a woman poet?) are ignored by poets of ancient times (the man in the first poem at present?), could mean that the true state of women (or this woman) is ignored, while they (he) prefers to fantasize about some feminine ideal (the flower forever blossoming, or locked away with bound feet). The wall of ice may be the barrier between the I-speaker (Hailing as a woman and poet) and these somebodies (有人), or men (as woman were traditionally not held to be fully-fledged ‘people’ [人], but objects), who appear in this poem and throughout the series.

Hailing, like so many other woman poets, is frequently overlooked in China, and therefore outside the country as well. Xiaoyin and her efforts with *The Woman’s Poetry Paper* have been similarly ignored. She and her first poet-friends, such as Hailing, were lucky enough to live in the hotbed of poetry that was Xichang in the 1980s, and, after encouragement from Not-Not, were able to put out *The Woman’s Poetry Paper*. This paper ultimately allowed Xiaoyin and other woman poets throughout China to learn of each other and to establish links and friendships that flourish to this day (lately, thanks to the internet).

Today it is still the big names of woman’s poetry (Zhai Yongming, Tang Yaping, Yi Lei, etc.) that receive most of the attention, but, as with male poets, there are scores of other poets also worthy of regard and praise. It is difficult to overstate the number of poets practicing their art in China and the volume of poetry involved.

However, the apparent need to create short, manageable lists of poets and poetry of quality by Chinese and foreign critics, has made it too easy to not read widely and

independently beyond work recommended by other critics, activist poets, and editors, official and unofficial. Given the amount of unseen avant-garde poetry that circulated within the Second World of Poetry during the 1980s in particular, the critic's task of reading widely must also include an effort to access unofficially published journals and individual collections. Yet, even here, the good judgment of Second World editors and collectors must be relied upon. All editors and critics have their personal biases, and good readers (and critics) must include among their tasks the necessity of identifying what these are, as well as being aware of their own.

This leads to the issue of canonization and how it is achieved in a complicated poetry scene such as China's. The lack of studies such as this one and the relative inaccessibility of Second World poetry materials from the 1980s in particular, has made it possible for a small number of critics and activist poets to achieve undue influence over the formation of such a canon in the 1990s and 2000s. As a result, following on from officially orchestrated polemics directed against avant-garde poetry in general during the 1980s, the 1990s and more recent years has seen polemics between different groupings of contemporary avant-garde poets and sympathetic critics as they argue over the power to form acceptable canons.

Yet, almost all Chinese critics agree that the Not-Not group and its poetry are worthy of comment. Unknown as the group is outside of China, the question must be: why?