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

Day, M.

CHAPTER 11: AFTER JUNE FOURTH 1989: IN THE SHADOW OF DEATH[621]

There was little poetry written by China's avant-garde poets related directly to the massacres of students and other civilians in Beijing and Chengdu on June 3, 4, and 5 in 1989. In all China, the only well-known immediate and direct response was by Liao Yiwu. It ultimately led to his arrest and that of several other poets in March 1990. Otherwise, there was relative silence in Sichuan and the rest of the country at the time.

The silence of most avant-garde poets should not be held against them. In fact, it can be seen as proof of their serious artistic interests and the apolitical nature that had been nurtured by these poets partially as a reaction against the much more engaged poetry of their immediate predecessors, the Misty poets in general and the *Today* poets in particular. A perusal of canonical western anthologies of modern poetry, such as *The Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry*, also reveals a paucity of politically engaged poetry, with the exceptions of a few poems by Yeats, Sandburg, MacDiarmid, Hughes, and Wright, among others. Nor was there a 'real' war that could produce poets such as Sassoon and Owen. Rather, given the political and economic history of China since the Taiping Rebellion (1850-1864),[622] there was perhaps inspiration to be found in poets from outside Western Europe and North America, such as Senghor, Neruda, and Elytis. Liao Yiwu counted these three poets among his favorites, and the forms and techniques of Liao's long poetry had reflected their various influences since at least 1986.

By 1989, Liao was famously unique in his poetical pursuits. Most other avant-garde poets pursued high modernism or other twentieth-century poetical fashions all but exclusively imported from 'the west'. In prison, however, Liao would adapt a new, brief

[621] The sections of this chapter that deal with the poetry of Liao Yiwu, Zhou Lunyou, and Bai Hua are based on a paper – <Chinese Poets and June Fourth 1989 – A Human Response> -- delivered at the University of California, Davis, on 28 June 1995 at the invitation of Prof. Michelle Yeh.
[622] See Spence (1990).

form, perhaps more appropriate to his straightened circumstances. (Liao was released from prison camp in early 1994, and has not written poetry since.)

Zhou Lunyou, on the other hand, was arrested in August 1989 for the crime of "inciting counter-revolution" and administratively sentenced to three years of "education through labor." While his crimes were never spelt out, it was clear that his insistence on continuing to produce *Not-Not* after it had been declared an illegal publication in 1987 was at the root of his troubles. It could be said that Not-Not's pan-cultural theories were indirect challenges to the CCP, but Lan Ma was not arrested. As far as the Ministry of National Security is concerned, they would have been most interested in Zhou as the journal's editor-in-chief, the national scope of the journal, and Zhou's long list of contributors and admirers throughout China. In prison and, later, in labor camp, Zhou would feel moved to address his situation poetically, and that of the victims of massacres, too. Zhou also adapted a new style of poetry, and upon his release from prison camp would return to Not-Not as an advocate of his adjusted ideas.

On 26 March 1989, there was a death that in the years since China's avant-garde poets have elevated to such a level, it overshadows all other deaths, and has been rendered as the most influential poetical event of 1989: this was the suicide of Haizi, the Beijing-based poet who had found favor in Sichuan since 1985.[623] The 'response' to this event in the Second World of Poetry was such that it is worthwhile looking at poetry written by Bai Hua in 1989 commemorating Haizi's death.

There were new unofficial poetry projects planned and rolled out in late 1989. Zhong Ming, together with friends such as Xiang Yixian and Zhao Ye, was able to produce a first issue of *Image Puzzle* (*象罔*) before the year was out. Not long after the appearance of Zhong's journal, Xiao Kaiyu, Sun Wenbo, and Ouyang Jianghe brought out the first issue of *The Nineties* (*九十年代*). *Image Puzzle* was a modest journal of 20-pages or so, but *The Nineties* was a larger scale annual of over 100 pages. In January 1990, Xiao *cum suis* also produced a smaller-scale periodical, *Against* (*反对*), seemingly patterned on *Image Puzzle*. All these journals featured work by poets from other parts of the country as well as Sichuan.

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[623] Haizi has been discussed in previous chapters with regard to his contributions to the 1985 *Modernists Federation* and *Chinese Contemporary Experimental Poetry*, and *Han Poetry* in 1986 and 1988.

The first issues of these journals are indicative of the poetry written in the second half of 1989 and – as with the journals themselves – of changes within the Second World of Poetry in Sichuan and China. This work demonstrates the muted response by China's avant-garde poets to the summer's political events, and, in effect, a dedication, or re-dedication, to art for art's sake during the latter half of 1989.

Liao Yiwu and <Slaughter>

As noted, however, there was one notable exception, one poet who responded immediately to the massacre in Beijing and addressed the full horror of the event. For writing <Slaughter> (屠杀),[624] for circulating a dramatic reading of the poem in audiocassette form, and for producing a video version of another poem, <Requiem> (安魂), in early 1990, Liao Yiwu, together with six collaborators[625] in the latter deed, was arrested on 25-26 March 1990 – one year to the day of Haizi's suicide. Following the release of the others in February 1992, Liao was charged and sentenced retroactively to four years in a labor reform camp near Chongqing.[626]

The impetus to write <Slaughter> was rooted in an emotional experience during a first visit by Liao to Nanjing after the Grand Canal Poetry Conference in May 1988.[627] While touring the old and new sights of the city, Liao was struck by what he perceived as the simultaneous physical and spiritual 'slaughter' of Chinese civilization. Earlier in 1988, Liao had completed the long poem <Idol>, the second part of a planned trilogy tentatively known by the name of the first poem, <Bastard>. While the first two parts

[624] See Day (1991), (1992a), and (1992b) for English translations. For the Chinese original see Liao's e-book *The City of Death*, as well as a dramatic CD reading of the poem by Liao, at: www.sino.uni-heidelberg.de/dachs/leiden/ . The first two parts of <Slaughter> are not included in Liao's e-book. Also, the name of the poem is altered to < The Great Slaughter> (大屠杀) in Liao's book *Living Testimonies* (2004) and its earlier e-book version *Catastrophe* (*天劫*). For the Chinese original of <Requiem>, mentioned below in the text, see Liao (1995a) and Liao's e-book *The City of Death* at the web-address above.

[625] Wan Xia, Li Yawei, Liu Taiheng, Ba Tie, Gou Mingjun, and Zeng Lei.

[626] The most accurate and detailed account of these events can be found in Chapter One in Liao (2004), also available online in *Catastrophe* at: www.sino.uni-heidelberg.de/dachs/leiden/ .

[627] May 3-10 in Huaiyin and Yangzhou in Jiangsu province and organized by *Poetry* and local branches of the Writers Association, this meeting of over 70 poets and critics was officially entitled the National Contemporary New Poetry Discussion Conference (全国当代新诗研讨会). For more details, see Tang Xiaodu (1988).

primarily dealt with literary and linguistic issues in a metaphysical, surrealistic manner, <Slaughter> would adopt a similar form in dealing with the aforementioned massacre.

However, before that was to occur, in the autumn Liao enrolled in a 'writers class' (作家班) at Wuhan University.[628] In March 1989, he was expelled from the program on trumped up charges of hooliganism, and, after a brief visit to Beijing with Li Yawei, Liao returned to Fuling in April. Liao finally began writing <Slaughter> in May.

Since 1986's <The City of Death> Liao had been singing dirges for Chinese civilization. During the first two parts of <Slaughter>, he cries as much for himself as for others over his inability to leap with his imagination and creative ability beyond the travails of Chinese social and spiritual circumstances:

> Cry! Cry! Cry! Cry! Cry!
> The only person this century to squander his tears
> The only person this century to soar beyond mankind
> to obstruct the tide of history
> The only person this century with the courage to
> Crycrycrycrycrycrycrycrycrycrycry!
> The only person this century to profane against his own mother, hate his own blood, curse his own species, mutilate his own friends, shit, soul. Man of the fields. Crycrycry! Shattered myth, a wild beast that should be sliced into a million pieces, in the end your own tears will drown you!
> …..
> All you can do is reminisce and think, and in reminiscing and thinking waste away
> You have no choice but to live as a parasite on a people, a home, a fatherland, a mother, a workplace, a way of thinking, a train ticket, and one fate
> No room for choice, like a novel of realism
> Time, place, characters, motives, desires, and each sentence, all meticulously plotted
> Don't dream -- ! Don't dream -- ! Don't dream -- !
> These damned nights, even my insomnia is planned by a director

Fatalism, self-doubt, and despair seem to lead the speaker to question his own motives and his significance as a poet:

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[628] In the mid-1980s, many universities began offering special one-year courses to writers who had not received a university degree. Many now-successful writers had missed whatever opportunity they had had to attend university at the end of the Cultural Revolution, and this method allowed both the writers and universities to profit. Universities believed having well-known writers in residence, and as graduates, would confer prestige upon the institution.

> Are you Xiangyu?[629] Are you Qu Yuan? Are you a hero who after a thousand and one twists and turns descends upon the world of humankind?
> Too bad nobody knows you. The fasting, petitioning students don't know you. The capital under martial law and the soldiers don't know you. The woman who spent last night with you doesn't know you.
> The door of the home you just stepped out of moves far away to avoid you – you don't even know you.

This is reminiscent of the tormented, alienated character of "I" in <The Allahfaweh Trilogy>. However, at the same time, it is also possible to read this as Liao's response to the suicide of Haizi, a poet he admired and identified with. Part two of <Slaughter>'s four parts concludes with the I-speaker (or "the real you") observing the results of China's contemporary cultural disaster:

> The real you is refused entry to a hotel because of your accent, stares eagerly at 'Tailang', 'Gangcun', 'Songjing'[630] embracing your sisters as they climb the steps and enter a room, loosen clothes and undo belts, cherry blossoms and ancient rhythms induce dreams, and your sisters call out softly "Thank you for your attentions" after being seduced and raped by foreign currency, jewelry, furniture, and top-quality woolen fabrics
>
> Now three hundred thousand bitter souls in the War of Resistance Against Japan Museum[631] shout in alarm 'the devils have entered the city', in our hallucination three hundred thousand bars revolve, run wild, shatter, like horse hooves sweeping past amidst gun smoke

In <The Allahfaweh Trilogy> and elsewhere, Liao had made the point that one's race/people/nation was one's fate. "The real you" is to be found there and must share in China's contemporary depravity and degradation. On the night of June 3 and the morning of June 4, Liao's sentiments were confirmed and further deepened by the massacre in Beijing he heard reported on short-wave radio.[632] These events – the killing of unarmed

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[629] The general of the Chu army that was annihilated by Liu Bang, who went on the found the Han Empire (206 B.C.E.- 220 C. E.) following the dissolution of the Qin Empire (221 – 207 B.C.E.).
[630] Japanese surnames as pronounced in Mandarin.
[631] This museum is located in Nanjing, where it is claimed Japanese soldiers killed 300,000 people over a seven-week period from 13 December 1937 when the city was first occupied by the invaders.
[632] The author was present and translated from English for Liao the live broadcast from Beijing on the BBC World Service – the Chinese service was blocked. The BBC had continuous live broadcasts from a number of radio-equipped jeeps stationed at strategic points around Beijing.

Chinese civilians by the People's Liberation Army – shaped the conclusion to <Slaughter>. Part Three of the poem opens with[633]:

> Another sort of slaughter takes place at Utopia's core
> The prime minister catches cold, the people must cough; martial law is declared again and again
> The toothless old machinery of the state rolls toward those who have the courage to resist the sickness
> Unarmed thugs fall by the thousands! Ironclad professional killers swim in a sea of blood, set fires beneath tightly shuttered windows, wipe their regulation army boots with the skirts of dead maidens. They are incapable of trembling
> These heartless robots are incapable of trembling!
> Their electronic brains have only one program: an official document full of holes
>
> In the name of the Fatherland slaughter the constitution! Replace the constitution, slaughter righteousness! In the name of mothers, slaughter children, sodomize fathers! In the name of urbanites blow up cities! **OPEN FIRE! FIRE!**…

<Slaughter> captures the horror and intensity of the massacre through the exaggerated, surrealistic techniques that have been a trademark of Liao's poetry since 1986:

> ... Smash open a skull! Fry the skin on his head to a crisp! Make the brain gush out. The soul gush out. Splash on the overpass. Gatehouse. Railings. Splash on the road! Splash towards the sky where they become stars! Escaped stars! Stars with two human legs! Sky and earth have reversed positions. Mankind wears bright shining hats. Bright shining metal helmets. A troop of soldiers comes charging out of the moon. **OPEN FIRE! ALL BARRELS! BLAST AWAY! IT FEELS SO GOOD!** Mankind and stars fall. Flee together. Can't make one out from the other. Chase them up to the clouds! Chase into the cracks of the earth and into their flesh and waste them! Blow another hole in the soul! Blow another hole in the stars! Souls dressed in red shirts! souls with white belts! Souls wearing running shoes doing gymnastics to radio! Where can you run to? We will dig you out of the flesh. Scoop you out of the air and water. **OPEN FIRE! BLAST AWAY! IT FEELS GOOD! SO GOOD! ...**

Liao goes on to stress the hopelessness of the situation, a topic he had been writing about in his various elegies for Chinese civilization during the previous three years:

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[633] The original audio-cassette reading of the poem and the version published in Liao's e-book *The City of Death* opens with a dedication of <Slaughter> to the 200th anniversary of the French Revolution, the 70th anniversary of the May Fourth Movement, and "those who have died in the politically motivated massacre of 3 June" (六三惨案的死难者).

> ... Freedom feels so good! Snuffing out freedom feels so good! Power will be triumphant for ever. Will be passed down from generation to generation for ever. Freedom will also come back from the dead. It will come back to life in generation after generation. Like that dim light just before the dawn. No. There's no light. At Utopia's core there can never be light. Our hearts are pitch black. Black and scalding. Like a corpse incinerator. ...
>
> ... All the time forward, there must be a place to rest. There must be a place where sounds of gunfire and explosions cannot be heard. We so wish to hide within a stalk of grass. A leaf. Uncle. Auntie. Grandpa. Granny. Daddy. Mummy. How much farther till we're home? We have no home. Everyone knows. Chinese people have no home. Home is a comforting desire. Let us die in this desire **OPEN FIRE, BLAST AWAY, FIRE!** Let us die in freedom. Righteousness. Equality. Universal love. Peace. In these vague desires. Stand on the horizon. Attract more of the living to death! ...

Liao makes it clear that these hopes are not new – and neither is the slaughter. Throughout the twentieth century, the empty promises of these slogans and catchwords have been attracting countless thousands of Chinese to their deaths. Then, far off on the horizon, their images are erected by Liao as martyrs to lure the gullible on to certain death. Tears are all that are left to Liao and the reader.

In the fourth and final section of <Slaughter>, Liao utilizes imagery from <The Songs of the South>, traditionally held to be the work of Qu Yuan, and in particular that of one poem, <The Summoning of the Soul> (招魂), in which one soul, said to be that of a king, is urged to return to its old home. In the original, the singers/shamanesses describe the horrors that await the soul in any direction it might travel. They also describe the comparative comfort of the soul's former residence. However, in Liao's poem, the butchers are everywhere, there is no escape, no hope. Even the sun – a traditional emblem of power, of the Son of Heaven, and, more recently, of Mao Zedong – offers no comfort and is in league with the butchers. Faced with this reality the only course of action is terrified paralysis and tears:

> The butchers come from the east of the city, from the west of the city, from the north and south of the city
> Metal helmets glint in the light. They're singing…..
> The sun rises in the east, the sun rises in the west, the sun rises in the north and south
> Putrid, sweltering summer, people and ghosts sing…..

Don't go to the east, don't go to the west, don't go to the north and south

We stand in the midst of brilliance but all people are blind
We stand on a great road but nobody is able to walk
We stand in the midst of a cacophony but all are mute
We stand in the midst of the heat and thirst but all refuse to drink

People with no understanding of the times, people in the midst of calamity, people who plot to shoot down the sun
You can only cry, you're still crying, crycrycrycrycrycrycrycry! **CRYCRY! CRY!**

…

In this historically unprecedented slaughter only the spawn of dogs can survive.[634]

The relative silence of avant-garde poets, the necessity of compromise that basic survival forces on Chinese poets and intellectuals, the need to find the "golden mean" in the face of physical and spiritual horror, seemingly ensures the continuation of the pervasive slaughter that Liao, in this and previous poems, describes as afflicting Chinese civilization on a near continuous basis over the centuries.

Possibly it was this silence which drove Liao to write <Requiem> in January 1990. Previously, Liao had come under investigation by the national and local security bureaus when a copy of <Slaughter> and Liao's recorded reading of it were discovered in October in Shanghai. His name was not on the manuscript or audiocassette, but Liao's individual style of poetry was easily recognizable. Liao was ordered not to leave Fuling until the investigation was complete, and he began making plans to flee the country. In his recent book *Living Testimonies* (*证词*; 2004), he relates how his fears and frustrations found him listening to Mozart's <Requiem> and, while doing so, writing a poem that later took the same name – a poem, which like Mozart's music, strove to soothe the souls of the poet/composer and the departed.

Liao's <Requiem> was as much a companion piece for <Slaughter> as it was for all his long poems written since 1985. Familiar names appear: Xiang Yu, Qu Yuan, Jing Ke,

[634] The ending of this poem carries echoes of a poem written by the poet Huang Xiang of Guiyang, who in April 1976 wrote <No You Have Not Died> (不 你没有死去) in commemoration of deaths incurred on Tian'anmen Square on April 5 when the Gang of Four had memorialists of the recently dead Zhou Enlai forcibly cleared from the square. Huang's poem is, however, somewhat more upbeat than Liao's. In a show of strength and defiance, Huang has his protagonist(s) "… Rather die than give in" to the "wild beasts". See Andrew Emerson (2004): 113-116.

Ruan Ji, Xi Shi, *The Book of Songs*, the people of the lands of Ba, Zhao, and Chu, and Han – the name of the uniting empire now synonymous with Chinese people and culture. Liao seeks within the poem, and himself, to guide all the ghosts of Chinese history to their resting place:

> Listen, the summons is coming so near, so far. Far. Someone asks: How do you write the characters of the Han? And then there's the sound of a billion heads hitting the ground. The dusk drifts down like snow. Sleep, sleep, the summons is so distant, so distant. Rest, children. Aren't you tired of play? Throw aside this toy-like orb and rest. Rest, rest, rest…..

This brief twelfth and final stanza of the poem also marks the conclusion of this form and subject of poetry for Liao. Given this, and Liao's situation in Fuling, what led him to organize the production of a video in part based on a dramatic reading of this poem in March?

In *Living Testimonies*, Liao implies that inspiration came by way of a visit from the Nanchuan poet Gou Mingjun, recently released from a two-month stretch in prison for harboring the fugitive Chengdu student-protest organizer, Pan Jiazhu, a member of the Wholism group. Liao relates that, towards the end of February, a letter was sent by Wholism poet Liu Taiheng in Chongqing in the name of the "Mountain City Film Center" to Liao's work unit in Fuling inviting him to take part in the making of a movie. Without clear permission to do so, Liao left for Chongqing, where he was met by Liu, Li Yawei, Ba Tie and Zeng Lei, the video's cameraman and a PLA officer resident at the No. 3 Military University in the Chongqing suburb of Shapingba. Two days later, the poets ran into Wan Xia who, in Liao's account, arrogated the role of director.

Liao, however, does not go into details about the film, and neither do Wan Xia and Li Yawei in their interviews in Yang Li's book *Splendor*. Various reports indicate that the film was a collage of scenes featuring newsreel footage of notorious world leaders, such as Stalin and Hitler, Mao Zedong reviewing Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution, TV news footage of demonstrations in China during May-June 1989, and new footage shot on the streets of Chongqing using amateur actors.[635] The soundtrack is said to have

[635] These include Li Ming (1995) and conversations the author has had with various individuals with insider knowledge of the events.

consisted of dramatic readings of <Requiem> and a part of <Slaughter> by Liao Yiwu, and readings of avant-garde poetry by other poets, presumably Li Yawei, Liu Taiheng, and Wan Xia.[636]

On 25-26 March 1990, immediately after the video was completed, the police detained Liao Yiwu, Liu Taiheng, and Zeng Lei in Chongqing, and Li Yawei, Wan Xia, Gou Mingjun, and Ba Tie in other parts of the province – all but Liao would be released from custody nearly two years later, in February 1992. Zhou Zhongling, Shi Guanghua, Song Wei, Liang Le, and Xiao Kaiyu, among others,[637] were detained and questioned for varying periods.

The last poetry Liao would write was a series of shorter poems composed during his four years in prisons and labor camps.[638] Since his release in February 1994, he has devoted his time to writing prose, editing, and recording interviews in the manner of Studs Terkel with what Liao terms the "underclass" (底层) of contemporary Chinese society, an activity seemingly inspired by Vaclav Havel and Charter 77 in pre-1989 Czechoslovakia.[639]

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[636] Liao does confirm that the closing credits were a dedication to 39 contemporary avant-garde poets:
Zhou Zhongling, Gou Mingjun, Shi Guanghua, Song Qu, Song Wei, Hu Dong, Ma Song, Bai Hua, Ouyang Jianghe, Zhai Yongming, Lan Ma, Yang Li, Haizi, Xi Chuan, Luo Yihe, Chen Dongdong, Meng Lang, Yu Yu, (Huang) Beiling, Lü De'an, Yu Jian, Han Dong, Ding Dang, Xiao Jun, Wang Yin, **Liu Tao, Jimu Langge,** Hei Dachun, **Er Mao, Liang Le,** Xue Di, Song Lin, Zhang Xiaobo, Ma Gaoming, Wang Jiaxin, Lu Yimin, Daozi, **Zhao Ye**, Guo Lijia. (Sichuan poets in bold type.)
This list cannot be read as a serious nomenclature of the best avant-garde poets in China, if only because the first name on the list is that Zhou Zhongling, a fiction writer, and the second that of Gou Mingjun, a minor local poet. These two were close friends of Liao, and their names may have been his only contributions to the list. The rest of the list reads like a collection of names put forward by Liu Taiheng, Li Yawei, Wan Xia, and the critic Ba Tie. It is of interest to note the names of well-known Sichuan poets left off: Zhou Lunyou, He Xiaozhu, Shang Zhongmin, Sun Wenbo, and Xiao Kaiyu. As has been noted, there was personal animosity among Sichuan's avant-garde poets, and their exclusion here seems to be the result of that.

[637] Such as Yu Tian, Xiaoxiao, Zhong Shan, Bai Yunfeng, Zhu Ying, Liu Xia, Wu Bin, Liu Yuan, Zou Jin, Wei Haitian, Li Ao, Kuang Hongbo, Sun Jiangyue, and Liao's wife Axia. The author of this study was eventually expelled from China for his involvement (the distribution of <Slaughter> and financial assistance given to Liao) in late October 1991.

[638] This has been published in an unofficial booklet *Love Songs of the Gulag 1990-1994* (*古拉格情歌*) and in e-book form on the DACHS website under the title of *Ancestral Land of Criminals* (*犯人的祖国*), with an introduction by Liu Xiaobo.

[639] Liao edited two issues (1997 & 1998) of the unofficial journal *Intellectual* (*知识分子*) in which translations of essays by Havel feature prominently. Havel's writings are still banned in China. In addition, Liao has had three books, including one on the *Today* poets, banned not long after official publication in China. *Living Testimonies* was published in New York by a Chinese-language press in early 2004. Liao's

Liao is, in some respects, a casualty of his era. The power of his imagination and diction, and his unusual sensitivity, allowed his star to rise quickly in the early 1980s. These qualities are the same ones which must have drawn him to the poetry of Blake, Neruda, and Dylan Thomas, with whom, on the surface, he appears to have much in common.

Liao's refusal to cooperate with and conform to the CCP literary establishment both in and out of prison (while incarcerated he twice attempted suicide) led him to become a political dissident, as his various activities and his name on a number of human rights petitions in recent years attest. His case is extreme. The experiences of another well-known Sichuan poet, who also served time in China's gulags, indicates another possible response to the fall-out in the realm of the arts in the aftermath of 4 June 1989.

Zhou Lunyou's Prison Poetry

Zhou had been the editor-in-chief of the unofficial poetry journal *Not-Not* and oversaw the publication of four issues before 1989 – the two 1988 issues being published in Hubei following an official ban on the journal in Sichuan in 1987.[640] While not overtly political, the journal published several theoretical articles of a dadaesque-cum-deconstructive nature that amounted to assaults on conventional linguistic usage per se, and hence were threatening to a regime that attached as much importance to politically correct usage, as does the CCP. Not-Not could be seen to subvert the Party's attempts to establish a 'spiritual civilization' along its preferred lines.

Zhou did not participate in student demonstrations that occurred in Xichang in May 1989, but later in the month did travel to Beijing and Chengdu on what he called "study tours" of the situation in those two cities.[641] Upon returning to Xichang in early June,

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interviews with members of China's underclass are published on Chinese-language websites based in the US on a monthly basis.

[640] Zhou told the author about being visited in spring 1989 by police officers who asked for copies of the journal.

[641] Personal communication upon meeting Zhou on Tian'anmen Square in late May and in Xichang in late July, when Zhou said he was being watched by security forces.

Zhou discovered that his wife Zhou Yaqin had been arrested on June 5 for protesting against the bloody suppression of peaceful protests in Beijing and Chengdu.[642]

Although Zhou did not involve himself in any political activities during April, May, and June 1989, given his situation, it came as no surprise to himself when the authorities detained him on August 18 in Xichang, a few days after his wife's release from custody. Zhou was never officially arrested or charged, and, after seven months in a local prison, he was administratively sentenced to three years in a labor-reform camp on the slopes of Mount Emei in western Sichuan, having been deemed guilty of the then ubiquitous charge of "counterrevolutionary incitement." In September 1991, Zhou was released for 'good behavior' eleven months early.

During Zhou's imprisonment, he wrote a series of poems that can be best appreciated as personally necessary responses to his plight, as tools for survival. One of these poems, written on 12 April 1990, while Zhou was still imprisoned in Xichang, appears to be a commemoration of the events of the previous year.[643]

<Watching a Candle Being Lit> (看一支蜡烛点燃)[644]

Nothing is crueler than this
To watch a candle ignite, and then die out
…

This candle is symbolic of hope and life, as a light in the darkness. It can also be read more specifically as symbolizing the protest movement.

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[642] On June 5, Yaqin had gone to market with the two characters 哀悼(mourning) written on a t-shirt she was wearing. She was arrested that night and held without charge for two months.

[643] The former CCP Secretary General, Hu Yaobang, who had been forced to resign as a result of student demonstrations in January 1987, died on 15 April 1989 and this touched off the first student demonstrations in Beijing, eventually leading to the massacres in June.

[644] This poem and the two that follow were first published in the "resumed publication" (复刊) number of *Not-Not*, which appeared in summer 1992. Zhou's collection goes under the name of <Knife-Blade Twenty Poems> (刀锋二十首), and includes 14 poems written during his incarceration. In 1993, Zhou was awarded the "Rougang Poetry Prize" and 3,000 RMB for this series of poems. Established in 1992 by the Fujian poet-entrepreneur Rou Gang in 1992, sums of 2,000 to 5,160 RMB were awarded on an annual basis (except 1999) until 2000. Winners include An Qi (1995), Pang Pei (1997), and Yang Jian (2000). See Rou Gang (2001).

I didn't see how the candle was lit
Only remember one sentence, one gesture
The candle flame leaps from this eye to that
More hands are lifted up in the candlelight
At the light's core is the blood and fat of youth
Beams of light in all directions
The entire sky is filled by the face of a dove
…

The symbolism is obvious. Hope spreads until it is everywhere and in all people. But then there is:

…
A thin sound of thunder treading over yellow skin
I never saw how the candle flame died
Only felt the graceful breaking of those arms
The exquisite fracturing of more arms
Wax tears cover the stairs
Death creates the coldest landscapes out of summer
After a brilliant twinkle the candle has become ash
Objects shot through by candlelight staunchly darken
…

So those at the "light's core," those who had reached out for hope, have their arms broken off – in effect, they die for their hopes. Thus, finally, "... In darkness, I can only, silently, send up this smoke," not hope, just a poem, just a memory of the dead.

Later, in October 1990, now an inmate at the prison camp, in <A Situation Composed of Stones> (石头构图的境况), Zhou describes his situation there, but at the same time also may be describing his plight in the larger prison that China has become for himself and many others at that time:

This is a situation I have never before entered deeply into
It takes violent hold of you. Atop a colossal stone
Rocks containing iron pile up coldly
And form into columns and wall
…

The “colossal stone” might be Mount E, or it might be China. “Rocks containing iron” appear to refer to those who act as camp guards and the prison itself. Later it becomes clear that the stones are also personifications of his fellow inmates (in either prison):

…
This isn’t some kind of game of the imagination
At the cost of your life you are on the scene
For all of three years, you must accept these stones
Become one component in this arrangement
Only through murder can you experience that intensity
Forcing itself in on all sides
Compelling you to become small, smaller
Until you skip into a stone and become a form of a thing

Break open a stone and there’s still a stone
From wall to wall. From the soul out to the eyes

You have to love these stones, stone people
And stony things, love and be intimate with them
Nod a greeting, sometimes the bumps will leave your head bleeding
Heavier stones on top, occupy commanding positions
You can’t look up at them but can sense them at all times
Always so indubitable and brutal
They can smash your body to pieces at any time
…

“Heavier stones”? Not merely the guards or camp wardens, but perhaps also those stones that are the CCP and its leadership in Beijing.

In a situation such as this, how does a poet survive?

…
To penetrate a tiger and not be eaten by it
To penetrate a stone and not become a stone
To pass through burning brambles and still be your old self
Requires perseverance. You must hold fast to yourself
…

It is through writing poetry like this that Zhou is able to persevere. And, by extension, perhaps it is because they do not continue to write poetry that many other poets in far

more comfortable situations were not. Zhou commemorates his pain, his struggle; he dwells in it, writes of it, and, thus, does not become a stone:

The iron stones continue to pile up around you
In the arrangement of stones you light a candle
Illuminating each of your wounds more brightly

The poem itself proves that the poet is not yet stone. The poem is hope, is life.

Critics in China, such as Yuan Yong, address the pressure of the stones and time in the poem, drawing parallels with the myth of Sisyphus. The poem is seen as a demonstration of Zhou's ability to 'transcend values', the characteristic of the genius, or cultural hero, in Zhou's essay <Anti-Values> (1987). Understandably, when treating these poems, Chinese critics gloss over the details, stressing the importance of "background" but not addressing it themselves, or making brief reference to Zhou's term of penal hard labor, leaving it to the reader to supply the necessary details or to read between the lines.[645]

In a poem written in February 1991, Zhou recognizes the double-edged nature of perseverance, the possibility of it being transformed into tolerance and forbearance of the intolerable and unbearable. And this, given the humiliation and suffering inflicted on one in, for instance, a labor camp, may lead to insensitivity – in other words, you may ... "skip into a stone and become a form of a thing" as in <A Situation …>:

<The Image of the Tolerant> (忍者意象)

Eat Eastern philosophy and attain the Dao of Laozi and the Yellow Emperor
The chrysanthemum[646] of antiquity enters into your bone marrow
Subdue the hard with the soft endure all humiliations
But don't believe they humiliate accept his every blow
But don't feel their weight let him laugh
Exist outside your body as a butterfly
You feel the holiness of this wrong decisions are in the hands of others
You can only give in the words are in other people's mouths
Speechlessly you listen attentively allow the attacks to expand
They touch on the soul again a face hangs
Peacefully your thoughts turn to the unfathomable

[645] See Chen Chao ed. (2002): 1138; Yuan Yong (2001).
[646] The chrysanthemum is a symbol of perseverance, of the maintenance of personal purity while all about you wallow in iniquity and corruption.

The image of the tolerant is a tortoise
It draws its head back into its belly allows people to trample it underfoot
You find pleasure in this ponder the suffering of mankind
One hundred times yield a hundred times admit your guilt
One hundred times crawl under the crotch of others
Swallow your last tooth into your stomach
Water is hurt by the stone water surrounds the stone
The beauty of forbearance issues forth brilliance from the inner depths
At crucial moments think of Han Xin[647]
And your conscience is set at ease the word tolerate is a knife in the heart
The heart drips blood and still you talk and joke gleefully

Oh, the mighty Tolerant!

The stunned silence that fell over China in the wake of the massacre can be better understood in light of this series of poems.[648] Zhou enunciates some of the reasons: The weaker succumb to the weight of the stones, adapting to the conditions of life in the society they must live in, and many of the stronger fall victim to traditional avenues of escape (Daoism, Buddhism, and so on). Moreover, Zhou returns to his attack on values commonly held in China, a restatement of the thesis he first explicated in <Anti-Values>. Ultimately, these poems are also indicative of a shift in Zhou's poetical focus, away from a deconstruction – or, in Zhou's terms, 'structural change' – of poetry's own traditions, toward external reality, with poetry as a possible medium through which structural changes in consciousness may come about. There will be more to be said on this and the return of *Not-Not* under Zhou's editorship in the following chapter.

[647] Han Xin was a general under Liu Bang, the founding emperor of the Han dynasty (206 B.C.E. - 220 C.E.). In his youth, Han was often humiliated and tormented by others: e.g., he was forced to crawl beneath the crotch of others. In other words, accept humiliation today and believe that you will get your own back tomorrow.

[648] Other poems written by Zhou while still in prison are: <The Great Bird of the Imagination> (想象大鸟; 17/12/1989), <The Meaning of a Fruit-Pit> (果核的含义; 10/5/1990), <Transformation of Syntax Completed on the Knife's Edge> (在刀锋上完成的句法转换; 6/1/1991), <The Everlasting Wound> (永远的伤口; 8/9/1990), <The Subject's Loss> (主题的损失; 15/1/1991), <The High-Stepping Crane and Midget Horse of the Painter> (画家的高蹈之鹤与矮种马 12/11/1990), <Chairman Mao Says> (毛主席说; 20/9/1990), <From the Concrete to the Abstract Bird> (从具体到抽象的鸟; 1/12/1989), <In a Mood to Detest Iron> (厌铁的心情; 19/10/1990), <A Sword's Inscription> (剑器铭; 7/1/1990), and <Third Generation Poets> (第三代诗人; 28/2/1991).

Haizi: A New Martyr for the Avant-Garde

With few notable exceptions, avant-garde poets in China were stunned or frightened into silence after the events of 3-4 June 1989. Later, once they had recovered their wits, many poets found other areas into which to channel their energies. Arguably, it is this phenomenon that Bai Hua addresses in the following poem:

<In Memory of Zhu Xiang> (纪念朱湘)[649]

I noticed your form at a glance
a figure raving in the autumn wind
but so serene in a book

A solitary seemingly unintelligent drinker
a martyr of fathomless sensitivity
before dying he drinks another large cup
bows his body down and enters into that long, inevitable sleep

I know, since you were a child you've practiced the martyr's bearing
your green spring had its fill of roving through gossip
but your songs can only belong to heaven

Ach, why did this exemplar only come to light at death
and then leave us busy memorializing
busy talking, corresponding
busy with all that, up until 1989

Apart from the final line, what possible relation does this poem bear to the massacres?

First, one must know who Zhu Xiang is. Some will know him to be a poet who wrote good verse during the 1920s and 1930s.[650] A smaller number of people will know that he committed suicide in 1933 at the age of 30. And an even smaller number will know that he did so by jumping into a river.

Knowing all this, the poem takes on some very odd undertones.

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[649] First published in the unofficial journal *Modern Han Poetry* (*现代汉诗*), 1991 Summer issue: 40.
[650] Ironically, the similarities between Zhu and Bai are striking: both are lyricists, university instructors, and accomplished English speakers and translators.

First, there is no evidence to suggest Zhu Xiang is remembered as a figure "raving (谵狂) in the autumn wind."[651] This is an image commonly attributed in modern China to Qu Yuan,[652] said to have lived in the third and fourth centuries B.C.E., who tradition holds to be China's first known, or named, poet.[653] According to this tradition, consumed by frustration and sorrow because of the foolish ways of his king and the corrupt state of the kingdom (Chu), Qu is said to have drowned himself in a river. However, there is no record of Zhu Xiang taking such a degree of interest in politics, just as there is no evidence that he killed himself for political reasons.

Line two of the third stanza would also seem to indicate Qu Yuan. In Qu's classic poem <Encountering Sorrow> (离骚), the poet records a complaint about "roving through gossip" in the court – gossip which ultimately resulted in loss of the king's favor and his suicide. It is also possible that Bai Hua is again referring to Qu's claim to have been raised to proper moral conduct and a position at court, when he writes of "the martyr's bearing." Qu Yuan has, in fact, become an "exemplar" for Chinese poets since the 1920s.

Given all this, what can be made of the second stanza? Bai writes an idealized portrait of death far removed from suicides and rivers. What poet would not like to die in such a relaxed fashion after a couple of large cups of wine? "But your songs can only belong to heaven": The poet is dead and the poetry he has left behind would seem to have little to say to those who remain on earth. This brings to mind the mythology related to the death of Li Bai, another wanderer denied an expected post as an official, who is said to have drowned while drunk, reaching for the reflection of the moon on water. Li is also said to have been an immortal temporarily exiled on earth.

Now the irony of the final stanza is readily apparent. Is this really an "exemplar" worthy of the name? And were poets truly "memorializing", "talking, corresponding" about Zhu Xiang "up until 1989"?

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[651] See Luo & Liu & Luo (1985) for reminiscences by acquaintances. Also, see Haft ed. (1989): 276-284; and McDougall & Louie (1997): 64-67. This is also a familiar romantic image, attributed to Shelley, but appropriated from Shakespearean figures such as King Lear and Hamlet. Zhu was a loner and a wanderer, and some of his poems are apparently influenced by the work of Qu Yuan, Wen Yiduo, and Guo Moruo (see note below).

[652] See Schneider (1980): 112-114, etc., on how Wen Yiduo and Guo Moruo made Qu Yuan fit a self-image of poet-hero / genius-messiah in New Culture romanticism during the 1920s.

[653] Early collections of poetry, such as *The Book of Songs*, do not list the names of authors.

There is no evidence to suggest Zhu Xiang's suicide has been an issue of poetical or other debate since the 1930s (he was the only major poet of his generation to commit suicide). There is even less likelihood that poets of Bai Hua's generation (in their 30s and 40s in 1989) would concern themselves with him, and there is no record of Bai Hua having ever written in verse or prose about Zhu. So, whose suicide is Bai Hua really talking about? Qu Yuan's certainly, and possibly Li Bai's death, but there is another suicide to which the final stanza may also be referring – that of Haizi, who, at twenty-five years of age, threw himself under a train on 26 March 1989.

However, the poem's last line indicates that poets were "busy with all that, up until 1989". If "all that" means discussions about Zhu Xiang or suicidal poets, this is not true – or it is true, but only for Qu Yuan, Sylvia Plath (since her work appeared in Chinese translation in 1985), and perhaps Li Bai – as Bai Hua well knows. In fact, the large-scale "memorializing" of Haizi did not really start until *after* the massacre, and continued into 1990 and 1991, although Haizi's friend and fellow Beijing poet Xi Chuan did write essays about his friend in April and May 1989.[654] However, Bai Hua's poem was written in February 1991.[655]

Given that all the talk of suicidal poets is said to end in 1989, the poem can be read as a cry of 'Enough already!' from Bai Hua. Like Zhu Xiang, in Haizi we have another poet who ends his life before the age of 30 for reasons that no one is quite certain of. While they were both fanatically devoted to poetry and disappointed by life, if not also the lack of fame they may have felt their poetry deserved, can Bai truly consider them to be exemplars? There seems to be irony, perhaps unintentional, in suggesting a suicidal poet is any sort of exemplar, or "model" or "good example" as is the meaning of the Chinese word (榜样) used by Bai.

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[654] For an account of these matters see Maghiel van Crevel's <Thanatography and the Poetic Voice: Ways of Reading Haizi> (2004).

[655] This is the date given on the poem's first publication in *Modern Han Poetry*. However, in Bai's later collection (1999), the date of composition is given as November 1989, at approximately the same time as Bai wrote <Wheat: In Memory of Haizi> (麦子：纪念海子). It is possible that Bai – out of fear of trouble with the authorities – deliberately postdated the poem in 1991. Still, as the date on the original publication was given as February 1991, this reading of the poem would have been valid at the time, and remains so today. It is also possible that the date was changed to 1989 from 1991 for the 1999 collection (published in Taiwan – a nearly identical collection was published in China in 2002, without the date of composition).

That irony takes on even heavier undertones when it is remembered that, in 1989, there was a massacre of hundreds, if not thousands, and countless others suffer continuing anguish. Since that time many of China's avant-garde poets devote their energies to eulogizing what by comparison may seem a pointless suicide, apparently ignoring the murders of uncounted numbers of idealistic youths and innocent bystanders.

Memorializing Haizi up until the massacres in 1989 would have been a human response, a relevant response. Afterwards it appears to become something else entirely: escapism, self-indulgence, and a self-willed further marginalization of avant-garde poetry in its continuing attempt to remain aloof from politics in China.

There is, however, another possible reading of this poem, given by Michelle Yeh in her 1996 essay <The "Cult of Poetry" in China>.[656] Yeh holds that "… the poem attempts to … find precedents for Haizi in Zhu Xiang and, through him, Qu Yuan, Li Bo [Bai] and others." The poem is here seen as an attempt by Bai Hua to place Haizi amidst a "'genealogy' of poets as heroic martyrs in the discourse of the 'cult of poetry.'" In her reading of the poem, Yeh sees no irony and takes the date 1989 as no more than an evocation of Haizi's suicide.

Such a reading, however, ignores the fact that almost all readers in China would immediately link "1989" with the massacres in Beijing and elsewhere. And Bai, by writing that China's poets were "busy with all that, up until 1989" – "all that" meaning the memorializing, talking, and corresponding about suicidal poets – seems to be disavowing "all that".

Whatever Bai's intentions, a reading that does mobilize the memory of June Fourth appears plausible. In *The Left Side*,[657] Bai makes no comment on this poem, relating how he had never met Haizi and they had only corresponded once, but how much he admired him as a poet. It is unclear whether this admiration came about after or before reading the many memorializing essays written in 1989 and since – Bai wrote his memoir in 1993-1994. Bai says that more than once he tried to write an essay in memoriam of Haizi, but abandoned each attempt, as "… death is a real thing, it makes speech difficult. I chose to face the dead with silence…". When Bai did write a poem in Haizi's memory in

[656] Yeh (1996b): 64-66. There are differing Chinese language versions of this article in Yeh (1997), (1998a), and (1999), the last of which was published in China.
[657] Bai Hua (1996a): Part 5, Chapter 2.

December 1989, <Wheat: In Memory of Haizi>,[658] despite its title, like <In Memory of Zhu Xiang>, this is not just a poem written for Haizi:

Wheat, I face you
I let hang a painful pair of hands
Wheat, a badge on the left of my chest
I ask you to stop your crazy growing!

Wheat! Wheat! Wheat!
The North will bleed because of this
See, from Anhui right into my hands
Right into the heart of the ancestral land
A grain of spirit is being swiftly transmitted

Who gave the order to fast
Wheat! Wheat! Wheat!
A tear strikes the top of a head of hunger
You lead the fasting into the 168th hour

Wheat, our wheat
Ah, wheat, the earth's wheat!
In a vast sky stars shine
The South sobs in its flesh

Please declare it! Wheat, the next step, the next step!
The next step is sacrifice
The next step is not a banquet

This is a remarkable poem. The last stanza amounts to a call for revolution, and not a poetical one. Wheat, the title of the poem, as Bai points out in *The Left Side*, is a favorite image of Haizi, and the reference to Anhui is referring to the fervent spirit of Haizi, a native of that province, and his poetry. However, the third stanza appears to refer to the poet Luo Yihe, a Beijing native, and a good friend of Haizi, who died on 31 May because of medical complications caused by fasting on Tian'anmen Square (at the time Luo was a student at the Lu Xun Literature Academy).[659]

The revolutionary tone of the poem is reinforced by Bai's use of a quotation from Mao beneath the poem's title:

[658] First published in the inaugural issue of *The Nineties* (1989) under the title of <Wheat>.
[659] As told the author in August 1989 by Tang Xiaodu and other reliable sources.

Because there is sacrifice, there are loftier aspirations
the courage to make the sun and the moon change into a new day

Furthermore, the final line of the poem is a rewriting of Mao's well-known dictum: "Revolution is not [the same as] inviting guests to a meal."[660] Bai may have been inspired to write this poem by the deaths of Haizi and Luo Yihe, but the poem seems to be more a memorial to the spirit of wheat, or North China, and all the victims of the massacre in Beijing. Bai also seems to contrast these fierce, driven northerners, now stars in the sky, to the laidback, cultured, rice-eating South, which can do no more than silently sob within its fleshy existence. In this poem, Bai is not only praising the northern fighting spirit, but, in the final stanza, seems to be calling for further similar actions.

As Bai Hua stated, the first response to the massacre by the majority of China's avant-garde poets was a silence resulting from amazement and horror. The uncharitable might consider this cowardice, however it should be remembered that the consequences of public speech at that time would have been as real and as terrifying as the massacre itself; Liao Yiwu is a case in point. In addition, China's avant-garde poets had been struggling to divorce poetry from politics since the end of the Cultural Revolution, and in doing so had effectively divorced themselves from China's social realities. The so-called Misty poets were the last poets to attempt to speak for their generation (high school graduates who were sent to live in the countryside during the Cultural Revolution), if not for all the people of China. With the importation of the great "I am" and every conceivable poetical 'Ism' from the west during the 1980s, by 1989 few poets felt any close link to 'the people' or even to others of their generation. As a result, it comes as no surprise that few elegies for the massacred were forthcoming (however, some were written 'for the drawer'[661]), and that, instead, interested readers were treated to poems and essays on the suicides or deaths of poets known personally by the authors. Presumably, there was art to be found in these 'poetic' deaths, while there was only politics in the deaths of the massacred. Thus, on the surface poetry does become little more than the correspondence

[660] A received version of this is "Revolution is not a dinner party."
[661] A further example of this phenomenon are two surrealistic lyrics written in 1989 by Zheng Danyi and published for the first time in Spring-Summer 1992 issue (#5) of *Modern Han Poetry*: <One Summer, One Summer> (在一个夏天，在一个夏天); and <Funeral Song> (挽歌).

and chatter between poets that Bai Hua refers to in the last stanza of his poem on Zhu Xiang / Haizi – a form of self-willed marginalization. It is necessary to note, however, that poems on 'personal' suicides are often thinly veiled references to 'public deaths' (June Fourth), and that these tactics are forced upon the authors by political repression.

New Journals and a New Poetry

Image Puzzle

In Sichuan during the latter half of 1989, three new unofficial journals were prepared for publication: *Image Puzzle* (*象罔*), *Against* (*反对*), and *The Nineties* (*九十年代*). More will be said about these publications and their poetry in the next chapter; here, however, the first issues of these journals will be examined for indications of how the poets who edited and contributed to them reacted to the events of early June in Beijing, Chengdu, and Chongqing.

About *Image Puzzle*, Zhong Ming, its editor, has even less to say than about 1982's *Born-Again Forest*. In his only substantive comments on the journal,[662] Zhong states that in planning the journal with Zhao Ye in Chengdu, they set themselves the goal of "countering the corruption of the poetry scene." Zhong and Zhao, as one of the founders of the original group of self-styled Third Generation poets in 1982, saw the need to pull poets and poetry up out of an excessive concern with life's trivialities.

This goal seems vague, but Bai Hua, whose two short poems opened the first issue of the journal,[663] was immediately struck by the beauty and simplicity of the journal's layout.[664] The journal is in a simple black-and-white photocopied format with small photographs and drawings scattered throughout the text. The title page of the first issue features an English text from Hamlet:

Hamlet: How is it with you, lady?

[662] Zhong (2002): 23-24.
[663] <The Drinker> (饮酒人) and <A Walk in the Country in Spring> (踏青).
[664] Bai Hua (1996a): Part 4, Chapter 5.

Xiang Wang (*象罔*)

Invisible Men[665]
Queen: Alas, How is't with
you, that you do bend
your eye on
vacancy,

(A drawing of a naked, longhaired woman in motion with a robe billowing above her)

whereon do you look?[666]

The English translation of *Xiang Wang* *象罔*, given here as *Invisible Men*, is related to a story from *Zhuangzi* (*庄子*), which is reprinted on the inside page before the table of contents: the legendary Yellow Emperor loses a magical black pearl on a trip to the Kunlun Mountains and asks his most intelligent and able courtiers to find it for him. All are unable to do so. Finally, he asks "the vacuous Image Puzzle" (虚无的象罔) and is surprised when he does find it.

The implication is that the black pearl is symbolic of poetry and the humble Image Puzzle, or Invisible Man, is the only one capable of recovering it. If this is so, these Invisible Men (Zhong Ming, Zhao Ye, and Xiang Yixian, who Bai says came up with the name) are far from humble. The other contributors to the first issue were the Sichuan poet Liu Su, Shanghai's Chen Dongdong, and Zhang Zao, still resident in Germany. Half the twenty pages of the journal are given over to poetry, the other half to translations of prose by Kafka and Borges and an informal essay (随笔) by Zhong Ming – one of a series of nine he wrote during 1989 on Chinese mythological creatures.

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[665] Presumably, this is Zhong's favored translation of *象罔*. In fact, English was only used three other times on the journal's title page. Issue #2 (the Pound issue) was also entitled *Invisible Men*, but *#9* was *A Study of Chinese Poetry* and #11 *A Study for Chinese Poetry and Empire / Southern Poetry Review*, a title echoing *The Southern Poetry Chronicle* (*南方诗志*), founded in 1992 and edited by Chen Dongdong in Shanghai. Two other issues had German titles – *Der Unsehbare* – and the remainder had the Latin titles: *Persona Invisible* and *Homo Invisus*.

[666] In Zhong Ming (1998): 903, a copy of another version of the title page in German is shown. The layout is the same, but the German text reads: Singe, singe, nur und lob / und ruhme sie / *Der Unsehbare* / sag mir mit wem du gaest [sic] und / ich werde dir sagen / erlaubt ist was gefallt [sic]. There were also Latin texts for the Latin-titled issues referred to in the previous footnote.

This approach to the production of a journal seems a continuation of the line of journals that started in 1982 with *The Born-Again Forest* (a collection largely made up of disciples of Misty poetry), followed by *Day By Day Make It New* (1985), the non-Wholism half of contributors to *Han Poetry* (1986-1988), and *The Red Flag* (1987-1989). The second issue of *Image Puzzle*, which Bai Hua remembers as being entirely devoted to translations of poetry and prose by Ezra Pound (in particular an essay on the murderous quality of capitalism), confirms such a supposition. In *The Left Side*, Bai states his belief that this issue, and the journal as a whole, raised issues of "poetical morality" and a "spirit of devotion" to poetry which were necessary injections of strength into the then quiet avant-garde poetry scene. Bai remembers this "spirit of Pound" drawing admiring letters from Xi Chuan in Beijing and Chen Dongdong in Shanghai. This spirit was linked with Zhong's overall interest in aestheticism, and a rejection of poetry that did not meet his standards – effectively most of the Not-Not poets, who were now without a journal, the Macho Men poets, and individuals such as Liao Yiwu. Seemingly, the readership of *Image Puzzle* was restricted to those poets felt by Zhong Ming to be responsible aesthetes.

An example of this aestheticism is a poem by Xiang Yixian from *Image Puzzle*'s first issue:

<The Hand of God> (上帝的手)

Now please close your eyes
I'm saying – let the darkness swallow you
No matter what, this is our own concern
A matter that really cannot be told

No! Not only these: wind or a herd of horses
I'm indicating another kind, you already feel
another type of light, absolute and empty
passing through you in a bewitching form

Stones politics and even death
A shattered illusory hand
The soundless restless hand of an explosion
O! Now it appears on the crown of a head

Lonely eagles restrict lean lungs

Their fall, sharper than poisoned arrows
more splendid, the shadowy drawn bows
more shadowy are the shooters

But it, only it, the immortal summons
and refusal, is still seen on the crown
this pose of unparalleled hollowness
becomes our dream of the future

Who can describe that lengthy broad face
And who can touch that flying flame
See! It slowly sways
slowly rises hides away

Please listen closely
Can you hear? Wind or a herd of horses
running mating
startling soundly sleeping infants

O! The sobbing tender night
After the dark flower garden fades away
I know, who took it away
I know who took ours away

Coming after Bai Hua's two poems on traditional poetical subjects – drinking and spring (both written in March 1989) – and Xiang's on the death of a famous courtesan (貂蝉), this poem is somewhat disquieting. The subject matter is still that of death, and the imagery and symbolism (darkness, wind, horses, eagles, a flower garden) is typical, but the introduction of "politics", "explosions", "poisoned arrows" and "shooters" strike sharp discordant notes. In the last stanza, the "dark flower garden" (dimly seen hopes, ideals, beauty) is taken away by someone, but is it really god? In 1989, Chinese readers would instead be tempted to read into this the CCP and PLA. Furthermore, the proper translation of the *Shangdi* 上帝 in the title is Emperor of Heaven, or "the emperor above", and this could easily be understood as Deng Xiaoping or Li Peng, or, more generally, the top leaders who ordered the massacre.

The dark overtones and pregnant ambiguity are also present in the following poems by Zhao Ye and Liu Su. These poems make it seem that Bai Hua's spring 1989 poems were carefully selected by the journal's editors as representative, or symbolic, of the carefree

normality of poetry, if not life, before 3 June. And Zhong's editorial intent in 1989, at least, does not seem so purely aesthetical after all.

The Nineties and Against

Not two months after Zhong Ming mailed out the first issue of *Image Puzzle* in October 1989, the first issue of *The Nineties*, also out of Chengdu, joined it. A more substantial journal (nearly 120 printed pages), *The Nineties* eschewed the aesthetic appearance of *Image Puzzle*, having a plain yellow cover with the Chinese characters of the title and the year (1989) on the cover page, a brief comment by the editors on the inside page, and the table of contents, followed by nothing but poetry.

Of the three poets most intimately involved in the production of the journal and its sister publication *Against*, only Sun Wenbo has commented on it in any detail.[667] The other two were Xiao Kaiyu and Ouyang Jianghe. Sun claims he was only responsible for printing the journal and Xiao did all the real editorial work (contacting poets, soliciting poetry). Ouyang is not mentioned. However, in *The Left Side* Bai Hua states that the three poets together put out the journal.[668] Certainly, Ouyang Jianghe's poetry features just as prominently in *The Nineties* and *Against* as Sun's and Xiao's. At the time, Ouyang was the better known of the three poets, provincially and nationally, but what influence he had on editorial policies can only be guessed at.

Sun's relative reticence and Ouyang's silence with regard to involvement in these journals, and those previous (*The Red Flag* in Sun's case, and *Han Poetry* in Ouyang's), is somewhat mysterious – and the same could be said about Xiao Kaiyu's and Zhong Ming's silence with regard to the 1989 journals. In recent years, these poets – with the aforementioned singular exception of Sun – have shown little interest in claiming the cultural capital that having produced unofficial avant-garde poetry journals would grant them. Why this should be so is a question subject to speculation, and may be bound up in the poetical polemic that broke out in 1998 between the self-styled "intellectual" and

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[667] Sun Wenbo (1999a).

[668] See Bai Hua (1996a): Part 4, Chapter 4. The author spoke separately with both Ouyang and Zhong Ming on several occasions in late June and early July 1989 in Chengdu. Both spoke cryptically about poetry projects they were planning. Zhong Ming in his memoirs, *Spectator* (1999), also speaks vaguely of a disagreement with Ouyang at this time – they had previously been close friends.

"popular" poets. Sun, Xiao, and Ouyang were in the Intellectual camp, while many former Not-Not and *Them* poets, often described as members of the Third Generation, were "popular".

In fact, the idea of the "intellectual" in poetry first appeared in essays published in the first (1988) issue of *Tendency*, then based in Beijing and edited by Lao Mu, Huang Beiling, and Chen Dongdong, and contributed to by Ouyang Jianghe and Xi Chuan. In an interview with Yang Li in 2001, Ouyang accepts that he coined the term "Intellectual Writing" in 1993, but that Xi Chuan first brought up the idea in conversation with Ouyang and Chen Dongdong in 1987 at a Youth Poetry Conference organized by *Poetry*.[669] However, Ouyang attempts to disassociate himself from the term (and the late-1990s polemic) by stating that he never went to university, while he considered Xi Chuan and Chen to be "university" poets – apparently in reference to their perceived status in 1987. As previously noted, in 1988 Ouyang wrote articles extolling the poetical virtues of Chen and Xi Chuan, among others, many of whom became prominent contributors to *Han Poetry* in 1988 and now to *The Nineties* and *Against*.

Sun claims Xiao gave *The Nineties* and *Against* their names. He states that upon printing *The Nineties* in December 1989, they felt that the selection of poetry in that journal was not as complete or as up-to-date as it should be, so they decided to produce a smaller, photocopied journal that would appear at regular, briefer intervals, as *The Nineties* was to be an annual publication. In doing so, *Against* seems to have been patterned on Zhong Ming's *Image Puzzle*, also photocopied and produced at 1-2 month intervals (during 1990). Likewise, a lack of money limited circulation numbers – Sun claims only 100 copies for each issue of *The Nineties* and financial assistance from contributors and readers. In addition, like Zhong Ming, Sun claims that the purpose of the journals was to reinvigorate the silent avant-garde poetry scene. As in the early 1980s and 1987, from June 1989, editorial boards at official journals and publishing houses were not welcoming the avant-garde into print.

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[669] See Yang Li (2004): 444, and van Crevel (1999) for the 1998-2000 polemic. In written form, the term "intellectual spirit" first appears with regard to the drive and responsibility of poets in the editors' (Xi Chuan and Chen Dongdong) forward to the inaugural issue of the unofficial journal *Tendency* (Beijing, 1988: 2).

Sun also claims that he and Xiao were very selective with regard to the poetry chosen for inclusion in their journals. A glance at the table of contents of the first issues of their two journals and that of the 1988 issue of *Han Poetry* indicates how selective. In fact, there were only three new contributors, and only in *The Nineties*: the previously unknown Harbin poet Zhang Shuguang; the recently deceased Luo Yihe; and the American-Chinese poet Ha Jin, who is famous as an English-language novelist in the U.S.A.. Otherwise, the list of contributors to *The Nineties* and *Against* is indistinguishable from *Han Poetry*'s: Xi Chuan (in *The Nineties*), Sun Wenbo (both), Ouyang Jianghe (both), Bai Hua (*The Nineties*), Chen Dongdong (*The Nineties*), Wan Xia (*The Nineties*), Haizi (both), Xiao Kaiyu (both), and Shi Guanghua (*Against*).[670]

Both *The Nineties* and *Against* had brief editorial comments – written by Xiao Kaiyu, according to Sun Wenbo – on the first inside page before the table of contents. The <Editors' Explanation> (编辑说明) in *The Nineties* sets out the journal's "poetical principles" of "nobility (高尚), beauty, and song (歌唱)", with the caveat that "… opposition to traditional elegance (文雅) is still necessary." The 'principles' seem a rebuke of Not-Not, and a continuation of hostilities between the Not-Not poets and the poets of *Han Poetry* in Chengdu, while the opposition to traditional elegance seems directed against *Image Puzzle*.

All this is restated, if in other words, in the <Preface> (前言) for *Against*. This opens by claiming for the journal the desire "to maintain Valéry's pursuit of the unattainable ideal of pure poetry." There follows an explication of the meaning of the journal's title by listing what it is against: all that is old-fashioned, pedantry, sentimentality, flabbiness, and "a reluctance to part with oneself." The purpose of opposing such elements in poetry is "creatively to bring new content and rhythms into poetry." Finally: "Now, probably nothing can be as important, as urgent as expanding fields of vision, [and] nurturing a positive, healthy concept of aesthetics…".

Although brief, broad, and vague, these comments make *The Nineties* and *Against* more exclusive and combative than *Image Puzzle*.

[670] There were also translations of poetry by Rilke and Milosz in *The Nineties*.

Another difference between the new Sichuan journals can be found with regard to their editorial treatment of the deaths of Haizi and Luo Yihe. Although Zhong Ming did write an essay in memory of Haizi in 1989,[671] he did not publish it in *Image Puzzle*, or any poetry by Haizi and Luo Yihe, or poetry written to commemorate them. On the other hand, the first issue of *The Nineties* carried three poems by Luo Yihe,[672] a commemorative poem written for Luo by Xiao Kaiyu,[673] eight poems by Haizi[674] and Bai Hua's <Wheat>. Furthermore, the first issue of *Against* carried two more poems by Haizi[675] and a commemorative poem for him by Ouyang Jianghe,[676] and the third issue of the journal opened with two more of Haizi's poems.[677]

The contents of *The Nineties* and *Against* are of the variety Ouyang Jianghe approved of and had advocated in his earlier essays on the subject. Aside from the translated poetry of Rilke and Milosz, the names of Croce, Dante, Milton, Bunin, and Mozart appear in the titles of poems in *The Nineties*. Excluding the poems by and for Haizi in *Against*, of note are a poem dedicated to Pasternak by Shi Guanghua and three other poems dedicated and meant as encouragement to friends (the Sichuan artist He Duoling, Xiao Kaiyu, and Xi Chuan) by Ouyang Jianghe. However, the poem that would have most drawn the reader's attention, given the journal's title, would have been Xiao Kaiyu's:

<Mao Zedong> (毛泽东)

A reduction in color and all unnecessary over-elaboration on the model
makes the great figure of correct content
partial to silvery gray — the color of clouds — and indigo
— the color of seas — the pure qualities of
vast things. He likes this kind of country.

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[671] <Intermediary Zone> (中间地带), published in *Today* in 1990 #1, the inaugural issue of the overseas edition of the unofficial journal that produced 9 issues in 1978-1980.
[672] <Great Distance> (修远), <Thoughts for Beauty> (为美而想), and <A Black Puma> (黑豹).
[673] <骆一禾>.
[674] <Wheatfields> (麦地), <In Mozart's "Requiem" it Says> (莫扎特在"安魂曲"中说), <September> (九月), <Swan> (天鹅), <A Han Farce> (汉俳), <A Hawthorn> (山楂树), <Diary> (日记), and <A Poem Dedicated to the Night> (黑夜的献诗).
[675] <Prairies of Gold> (黄金草原) and <Autumn> (秋天).
[676] <The Final Sprint> (冲刺).
[677] <Why are Flowers Red Like This> (花儿为什么这样红) and <A Poem Dedicated to the Last Night and the First Day> (最后一夜和第一日的献诗).

Like a badge the sun appears on the brow,
appears in a sea of people.
Above the reflection is an atmosphere amid innumerable steel smelters
building a bright, diaphanous square flooded with limitations by the limitless
around the purplish gold, but actually earthen city walls and moat.

The papers cheer the triumph of ideals
Tidewaters rowdily swell up
From billions of hearts a hurricane blows promoting the scope of depression on the faces of flags
These waves of red sails lead seawater to rise,
ascend, and in the sea there're only wrecks and the sea bottom.

He lies in a swimming pool full of ancient texts
in a refitted room, gazing at the air
spitting out complex phrases,
indecipherable profundities contained in the burs of stiff sounds of speech
the warrior's language comes from the battlefield of the spirit, who can understand?

This poem could be taken as a companion piece to the earlier <Empire>,[678] a poem showing the influence of Liao Yiwu's poetry and Ouyang Jianghe's <Suspended Coffin>, where Xiao describes a nation shrouded in darkness, death, and decay. Here its emperor, and creator, is described. Xiao illustrates the whimsical nature of Mao (the colors of his suits, and thus all suits), the founding of the PRC (the sun/Mao appearing on the Tian'anmen Gate), the Great Leap Forward (steel smelters), the Cultural Revolution (the hurricane and red sails), the disasters that follow, and ultimately reveals the source of it all as a capricious wordsmith – somewhat similar to a poet.

By 1989, a new, a-political Mao cult had sprung up in China, in Guangdong province in particular where taxi drivers and others would mount pictures of him in prominent locations, believing they brought luck and wealth.[679] Xiao's poem may or may not be meant as a corrective for the revisionist nostalgia surrounding Mao that was beginning to appear in Chinese culture at the time. However, there is no doubt Xiao was utilizing popular images of Mao (declaring the establishment of PRC in 1949, reviewing Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution, 'at home' in the Forbidden City) and these were

[678] First published in the 1988 issue of *Han Poetry*.
[679] For more on this subject see Jeremie Barmé (1999): 320-324, and Barmé ed. (1995a).

all centered on, or near, Tian'anmen Square.[680] Furthermore, all Chinese are aware of the huge portrait of Mao at the top of the square over the entrance to the Forbidden City as a symbol of the continuing power and legitimacy of the CCP. Mao, and his legacy, had overseen the events on Tian'anmen in April, May, and June 1989 in more ways than one.

This poem by Xiao Kaiyu is exceptional. More common, as noted of poetry in the journals dealt with above, were meditations on death and other subjects that lent themselves to forms of philosophical lyricism, examinations of the minutiae of everyday life, and allegorical readings. The difficulties of Zhou Lunyou, Liao Yiwu, and other Sichuan poets in the nine months that followed the massacres could only have meant further encouragement of reticence and self-censorship, if not silence.

It seems fitting to conclude this chapter with a text that addresses this situation. In 1990, Ouyang Jianghe wrote the following poem on the nature of the square – Tian'anmen, the central square in Chengdu, or any other city in China – and its harsh presence and ominous significance in the imaginations of poets, intellectuals, and all other people in China at the time. Strikingly, Ouyang utilizes imagery similar to that of the imprisoned Zhou Lunyou in <A Situation Composed of Stones>, in stanzas 3-5 of this poem written in Chengdu two weeks before Zhou's:

<Crossing the Square at Nightfall>[681]
(傍晚穿过广场; Sept. 18, 1990)

I do not know were a square of past ages
begins, or where it ends.
Some people take an hour to cross the square,
some a lifetime—
In the morning it's children, in the evening people in the dusk of life.
I don't know how much farther you must walk in the twilight before you can stop your steps?

In the twilight how long must you survey
before you can close your eyes? When a fast-moving auto
opens its blinding lights
in the rearview mirror I saw the flash of the faces
of those who once crossed the square on a bright morning.
In the evening in buses they leave.

[680] The official residence of top party leaders is in a section of the Forbidden City just off the Square.
[681] First published in the 1992 issue (#5) of the re-formed *Not-Not*.

A place that no one leaves is not a square,
nor is a place where no one falls.
The departed come home again, but the fallen are forever fallen.
A thing called stone
quickly piles up, towers up,
unlike the growth of bones needing a hundred years' time.
Also not so soft as a bone.
Every square has a head built of stone

making the empty-handed people feel the measure
of life. To look up and think with a huge head of stone,
not a simple matter for anyone.
The weight of stone
lightens responsibility, love and sacrifice on people's shoulders.

Perhaps people will cross the square on a bright morning,
open arms and tenderly embrace in winds from every side.
But when the night falls, hands grow heavy,
the only body emitting light is the stone in the head.
The only keen sword that stabs at the head quietly drops to the ground.

Darkness and cold are rising.
Surrounding the square tall structures put on the latest fashion of china and glass.
All grows small. The world of stones
lightly floats up in the world reflected in the glass,
like an oppressive notion scrawled in children's workbooks
that can be ripped out and kneaded into a ball at will.

Cars speed past, pouring the speed
of running water into a huge system of concrete with muscles and bones of iron,
in the shape of the horns bestowed on silence.
The square of past ages vanishes from the rearview mirror.

Disappears forever –
a square covered by acne in its green spring, in its first love.
A square that has never appeared in the accounts and notices of death.
A square that bares its chest, rolls up its sleeves, tightens its belt
that wears patches and energetically scrubs with both hands.

A square that through young blood runs outside its body,
that licks with its tongue, strikes stone with its brow, and covers itself with flags.

A square of daydreams that has vanished, no more exists,
stops in the morning as if there has been a night of heavy snow.
A pure and mysterious thaw

shimmers in turn in eyes and conscience,
a part grows into a thing called tears,
a part grows hard inside a thing called stone.

The world of stone collapses.
A world of soft tissue climbs up to the high spot.
The entire process like spring water leaving minerals through a draw pipe
going distilled into an airtight, beautifully packaged space
Riding an express elevator I rise in the umbrella stem of a rainy day.

When I return to the ground, I look up and see a circular restaurant
opened like an umbrella revolving in the city's sky.
This is a cap grown out of wizardry,
its size does not agree
with the head of the giant piled up out of stone

The arms that once supported the square are let down.
Today the giant relies on the support of a short sword.
Will it stab something? For example, a fragile revolution
once stirred up on paper, posted to walls?

There has never been a power
that could glue together two different worlds for long.
In the end a repeatedly posted head will be ripped away.
A repeatedly whitewashed wall
has a half occupied by a girl of mixed blood baring her thighs.
The other half is enticing ads for the installation of prosthetics and the regeneration of hair.

A pram quietly parks on the evening square,
silent, not related to this world soon to go mad.
I guess the distance between the pram and the setting sun
to be farther than a hundred years.
This is an almost limitless yardstick, sufficient to measure
the length of the confined era that passed over the square

The universal fear of house arrest
brought people off their perches to gather in the square
changed the lonely moments of a lifetime into a fervent holiday.
And in the depths of their dwellings, in the silent eye-catching ceremony of love and death,
a square of shadows empty without a sign of life is treasured,
like a tightly sealed room for penitence it is only a secret of the heart.

Must one pass through the darkness of the heart before crossing the square?
Now in the dark the two blackest worlds combine as one,

the hard stone head is split open,
in the dark, keen swords flash.

If I could use the mysterious black night chopped in half
to explain a bright morning trampled to the ground by both feet –
if I could follow the flight of stairs swept by the dawn light
and climb up onto the shoulders of the giant standing high on the summit of
nothingness,
not to rise, but to fall –
if the epigraph engraved in gold is not to be a eulogy,
but to be rubbed out, forgotten, trampled –

Just as a trampled square must fall on the head of the trampler,
those people who crossed the square on that bright morning,
sooner or later their black leather shoes will fall on sharp swords,
as heavily as the lid of a coffin must fall on the coffin.
As long as it is not me lying inside, and also not
the people walking on the blade of the sword.

I never thought so many people could cross the square
on that bright morning, dodging loneliness and immortality.
They are the survivors of an era of black confinement.
I never imagined they would leave or fall in the evening.

A place where nobody falls is not a square.
A place where nobody stands also is not.
Was I standing? How much longer must I stand?
All in all those who fell and me are the same,
we were never immortal.

Critics such as Tang Xiaodu and Yixing have hailed this poem as a rewriting, and repossession, of the 'square' as a place of open public discourse, a place of continuing resistance to tyranny within and without the mind.[682] Ouyang's affected, initial neutrality and careful, convoluted writing style ultimately resolves itself into a form of adamant spiritual resistance, and identification with those who are, or were, capable of physical resistance. In the end, all must cross the square if they are to survive the "era of black confinement" into which, initially, others have cast them, but from which, now, they must struggle to free themselves.

[682] Yixing (2000); Tang (2001): 107-108.

The following chapter will document the struggle for this spiritual freedom within the Second World of Poetry by Sichuan's avant-garde poets before a new, relatively liberal era would dawn in 1993.