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

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CHAPTER 12: A STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL

After June 1989 and until 1993, avant-garde poetry appeared to be all but unpublishable by official literary journals and print houses in China. During this period, avant-garde poets produced self-published journals at a rate above that of the late 1980s. The efforts of poets such as Zhong Ming, Xiao Kaiyu, Sun Wenbo, and Ouyang Jianghe, recorded in the previous chapter, were mirrored in Sichuan and the rest of the country during the early 1990s.

Thrown back into a period of repression after one of relatively free and public exploration and experimentation, China's avant-garde poets began to consolidate the experiences of the years since the first public appearance of *Today* in December 1978. Given the nationwide network of relationships that many Sichuan poets now possessed, large group activities, such as the Young Poets Association, were no longer necessary. Instead, individual travel, correspondence, and the attendant circulation of unofficial journals and individual poetry collections played a much larger role than before. Many new unofficial journals featured sizable contributions from poets resident in distant locales; a practice first realized in the ever-growing list of out-of-province contributors to *Not-Not* (1986-1988), which was adopted by the second issue of *Han Poetry* (1988), and, in late 1989, by *Image Puzzle*, *The Nineties*, and *Against*.

After the arrest in 1989-1990 of influential activist poets such as Zhou Lunyou, Liao Yiwu, Li Yawei, and Wan Xia, there was space for other poets to come to the fore, and for new trends and position-takings in the sub-field of avant-garde poetry in Sichuan.

The Public Disappearance of the Avant-Garde

China's avant-garde poets gained unprecedented access to official literary publications during 1986, 1988, and the first half of 1989. Adjusted figures for instances of publication in nationally circulated literary periodicals for the two similar periods of time (42 months) speak for themselves:⁶⁸³

	Table I	
	1986-1989/06	1989/07-1992
Sichuan poets only	= 173	= 53 ⁶⁸⁴
Non-Sichuan poets	= 225	= 75 ⁶⁸⁵
Total all poets ⁶⁸⁶	= 398	= 128

The earlier period includes 12 months when official journals were reluctant to publish avant-garde poetry during the political and cultural crackdown that began in January 1987. However, even during that year the total number of publication instances for Sichuan poets was over half that of the *entire* later period. The explanation, as indicated in the previous chapter, lies in the arrest and subsequent blacklisting of poets such as Zhou Lunyou, Liao Yiwu, Wan Xia, and Liu Taiheng, and in the intimidation thereby of other poets and editors. The arrests of these individuals and the questioning and investigation of other poets are indicative of the harsher political and cultural environment in Sichuan during 1989-1992, and on into 1993.⁶⁸⁷

⁶⁸³ Following the deduction from 1986-June 1989 figures of instances of publication in locally circulated journals, such as *Guandong Literature*, and those periodicals for which figures are not available in the later period, such as *The Poetry Paper*.

Journals consulted: *Shanghai Literature*, *Author*, *Flower City*, *People's Literature*, *Beijing Literature*, *China Author*, *Poetry*, *Stars*, *Sichuan Literature*, *Plains Literature*, *Feitian Literature*, *Tibet Literature*, *East Sea Literature* (东海文学), *Shoots Literature* (萌芽文学).

⁶⁸⁴ Breakdown for individual poets (1989/1990/1991/1992): Liao Yiwu 1/1/0/0 = 2, earlier period = 20; Xiao Kaiyu 2/1/1/1 = 5, e.p. = 20; Zhai Yongming 0/0/1/0 = 1, e.p. = 18; Ouyang Jianghe 1/0/1/0 = 2, e.p. = 15; Zhou Lunyou 0/0/0/0, e.p. = 14; Li Yawei 2/1/0/0 = 3, e.p. = 13; Song Qu, Song Wei 0/0/0/1 = 1, e.p. = 11; Yang Li 2/1/0/0 = 3, e.p. = 11; Shi Guanghua 0/0/1/0 = 1, e.p. = 10; Shang Zhongmin 0/1/2/0 = 3, e.p. = 10; He Xiaozhu 0/1/1/3 = 5, e.p. = 10; Sun Wenbo 1/0/1/0 = 2, e.p. = 6; Bai Hua 1/1/1/1 = 4, e.p. = 6.

⁶⁸⁵ This figure includes 8 instances of publication by the recently deceased Haizi and Luo Yihe.

⁶⁸⁶ The poets included here are the same as those in Chapter 8, approximately 60 in total.

⁶⁸⁷ This is indicated by the notable increase in the number of instances of publication for non-Sichuan avant-garde poets to 46 in 1993 (after 75 in total during the previous 3.5 years). In fact, during 1993, instances of Sichuan poets' publication decreased, as they garnered only 11 instances of publication, a decrease on the average of just over 15 per annum during the previous 3.5 years.

Elsewhere in the official publishing world matters were little different. In January 1990, in Tianjin, the Nankai University Publishing House gave a print run of 10,000 to *After Misty Poetry – A Selection of Chinese Avant-garde Poetry* (朦胧诗后 – 中国先锋诗选), edited by Li Lizhong, Zhang Lei, and Zhang Xu. In July 1992, after almost two years' delay Tang Xiaodu's *The Happy Dance of Corduroy: A Selection of the Best of Post-Misty Poetry* (灯心绒幸福的舞蹈 – 后朦胧诗选萃) was published by the Beijing Normal University Publishing House with a surprisingly large print run of 30,500 copies. However, both anthologies consist of poetry written before 1989. Newer poetry was included in *A Selection of the Work of Chinese Avant-garde Poets* (中国先锋诗人作品选), published in 1992 by the Huaxia Culture Publishing House (华夏文化出版社) and edited by the Anhui poets Axiang and Dong Fanghao, but a small print run and limited circulation left it little noticed. Smaller print runs of 3,000-8,000 would become the norm for avant-garde poetry.

It can be argued that, initially, there were political pressures on print houses and official literary journals to limit access and print runs, but by 1993 economics was becoming the decisive factor in limiting print runs and publication opportunities for avant-garde poets. Deng Xiaoping's trip to the South in February 1992 spurred further economic reforms in China, and these resulted in inflation and management reforms in state-owned companies, such as publishing houses and literary journals. With costs rising and publishing houses now ordered to wean themselves off state subsidies, the days of large print runs and nationwide circulation of potential loss leaders, such as avant-garde poetry, were over. As had been the case with unofficial poetry journals since *Today*, in many cases poets would have to subsidize official publication themselves. The following table bears witness to these changes:

Table II
Publication of Avant-garde Poetry Anthologies 1987-1999

Editor/s	Publishers	Date	Pages	Print Run	Cost
1) Yan, Gao, Liang & Gu	Spring Wind Arts	1987	386	135,501	2.35 RMB
2) Tang & Wang	“ “ “	1987	226	19,500	2.00 RMB
3) Xi Ping	China Literature Fed.	1988	634	6,300	5.35 RMB
4) Xu, Meng, Cao & Lü	Tongji U.	1988	566	3,000	5.20 RMB
5) Li, Zhang & Zhang	Nankai U.	1990	220	10,000	2.65 RMB

6) Niu Han & Cai Qijiao	Anhui Lit. & Arts	1991	270	3,301	3.70 RMB
7) Zhou Jun & Zhang Wei	Nanjing	1991	364	3,000	5.90 RMB
8) Huang Zumin	Shanxi	1992	340	4,000	6.50 RMB
9) Tang Xiaodu	Beijing Normal U,	1992	300	30,500	6.25 RMB
10) Chen Chao	“ “	1993	324	6,000	8.90 RMB
11) Wan Xia & Xiaoxiao	Sichuan Education	1993	2,010	4,100	58.00 RMB
12) Editors	Shanghai Lit. & Arts	1993	320	1,500	6.10 RMB
13) Chen Xuguang	Beijing U.	1994	310	n.a.	7.50 RMB
14) Zhou Lunyou	Dunhuang Arts	“	330	5,500	12.80 RMB
15) “ “	“ “	“	370	“	13.60 RMB
16) Sha Guang	Chengdu Tech. U.	“	480	3,000	8.80 RMB
17) Tang Xiaodu	Beijing Normal U.	1999	350	8,000	20.00 RMB
18) Sun, Zang & Xiao ⁶⁸⁸	People's Literature	“	410	4,000	25.00 RMB
19) “ “ “	“ “	2000	410	“	25.00 RMB
20) “ “ “	“ “	2002	410	“	26.00 RMB

Table II shows a general increase in prices and decrease in print runs. Whereas in 1987-1988, the consumer paid approximately 1 RMB per 100 pages in a book, by 1994, the cost had more than doubled to over 2 RMB, and by 2000 it had more than doubled again to over 5 RMB. This reflects a reduction in subsidies to state-run businesses (but less of a reduction for university presses) and a depreciation of the RMB in purchasing power. However, while the per capita increase in average annual disposable income has grown at a similar rate,⁶⁸⁹ the increasing costs of services that used to be free or offered at nominal prices (health and education in particular) has had the affect of making all but the most popular books and literary journals unaffordable luxury items for most Chinese citizens. This reflects a change in both political and economic policy, as the CCP moves further onto a capitalist profit-oriented path that requires intellectuals and the growing middle class to pay more for education and culture, thereby shrinking access for the less affluent and less well-connected to these fields. In Sichuan – one of the poorer provinces in China but home to 10% of the population – this effect is further magnified. Other aspects include the rapid growth of income inequality in town and country, as China has moved from remarkable egalitarian income levels in the mid-1980s toward an income distribution model similar to that of India, Brazil, and Mexico, for example. This applies

⁶⁸⁸ This is Sun Wenbo, Xiao Kaiyu, and the Beijing poet Zang Di.

⁶⁸⁹ Urban Chinese Disposable Income per capita grew from 1002.2 RMB in 1987 to 6280 RMB in 2000; for Rural Chinese from 462.6 RMB in 1987 to 2253.4 RMB in 2000. See Tables 2-6, 2-7, and 2-9 in CSLS (2003) for the data relevant to this paragraph.

to cities and regions, as well as individuals. Thus, in Sichuan today it is increasingly unlikely that the small towns, which were first homes to poets such as the Song brothers, Li Yawei and Ma Song, will nurture many more such poets in the future.

In discussions about the marginalization of avant-garde poetry, this economic argument is often overlooked. While it may be true that the difficulty of some avant-garde poetry may limit its accessibility, the increase in the cost of books, journals, and education, has also had a considerable role to play. At this time, there is no reliable, accurate method of quantifying the effect of these trends, but it seems safe to assume that, for economic reasons alone, it has become increasingly difficult for avant-garde poets to sustain and increase their readership over the past 15 years.

An argument can be made that literature in general, and poetry in particular, is only ever read by a small percentage of the public, and that no longer having money to buy non-popular books is, therefore, irrelevant. However, the impoverished background of many of the poets dealt with in this text, and the continuing relative poverty of China's intelligentsia – especially outside of the major coastal cities – would seem to negate this argument.

Three of the books listed in the table are indicative of resultant new trends and difficulties in avant-garde poetry publications. Number 8 in the table is the two volume *Collected Post-Misty Poems: A Chronicle of Chinese Modern Poetry*, edited by Wan Xia and Xiaoxiao. This publication was entirely private, paid for and partly subsidized by Wan Xia, who had successfully turned his hand to the lucrative private publishing business after his release from prison in early 1992. The subtitle of the collection is an apparently deliberate echo of that of *Han Poetry*, and a perusal of the contents reinforces such an impression. Of the first 36 poets in volume one, only one is of Not-Not (He Xiaozhu); there are, however, six other *Not-Not* contributors among the 36 poets selected for volume two (Yang Li, Lan Ma, Jimu Langge, Zhou Lunyou, and Liang Xiaoming. On average, fewer poems by Not-Not poets are selected and no mention of the group is made in the brief biographies at the start of each poet's collection, except in reference to Lan Ma's theoretical contributions and the appearance of the group's name in the title of one of Yang Li's poems. Finally, Not-Not poets Shang Zhongmin, Liu Tao, and Xiao An do not appear at all. While this might be understandable to some, the selection by Wan Xia

and Xiaoxiao (Wan's girlfriend at the time) of poets such as Aqu Qiangba, Jidi Majia, Hai Lei, Pan Jiazhu, Sun Jianjun, Li Zhengguang, and Xiaoxiao herself suggests that these omissions were deliberate. For example, Aqu and Jidi are generally considered Misty poets, and the other poets are neither as well known nor, arguably, as talented as Shang, Liu, and Xiao An. Furthermore, Jidi's and Sun's positions on the editorial board of *Stars* bespeak the defensive nature of their selection to an anthology due to be officially published in Chengdu.

The following year, in 1994, Zhou Lunyou took his revenge when he was invited to Lanzhou to edit a series of five books with the title of *Contemporary Currents: A Collection of Post-Modernist Classics* (当代潮流: 后现代主义经典丛书) of which two dealt exclusively with poetry (numbers 10 and 11 in Table II). *The Third Flower of Language in the Midst of Profanity – Post Modernist Poetry* (亵渎中的第三朵语言花 – 后现代主义诗歌) unsurprisingly features none of the Wholism poets so prominent in Wan and Xiaoxiao's anthology, and is effectively homage to the Third Generation – with the exceptions of Zhai Yongming, Ouyang Jianghe, Bai Hua, Zhong Ming, Wang Yin, Lu Yimin, and Lin Xue (out of 39 poets), who are not considered part of the Third Generation by Yang Li and Li Yawei, for example. The title of the second poetry volume, however, speaks for itself: *Opening the Door of Flesh – Not-Not-ism: From Theory to Works* (打开肉体之门 – 非非主义: 从理论到作品). If it seems surprising that a state publishing house could invite a recent inmate of China's gulags to work as an editor, this illusion was shattered a couple of months after publication in 1995, when the public security departments of both Gansu and Sichuan provinces banned distribution of the books. A second series of books was only allowed to be distributed after the editor's name had been changed from Zhou Lunyou to Zhou Lunzuo, and Zhou's name as author of the prefaces was changed to various other names.

Despite financial and political difficulties, it is clear that by 1993-1994 Sichuan's, and China's, avant-garde poetry had found new paths to official, legal, publication, through either financial subsidies from wealthy individuals such as Wan Xia or sympathetic editors at relatively obscure state-owned publishing houses. However, these were still exceptional cases. The Second World of Poetry had by no means ceased to exist.

Unofficial Poetry Journals – 1990-1992

Image Puzzle, The Nineties, and Against

The previous chapter concluded with the story of the genesis of new unofficial journals in Sichuan: *Image Puzzle*, *The Nineties*, and its sister publication, *Against*. These journals and their poets were not the only ones in the province to feel the need to begin planning new journals – although they may have been among the most ambitious, given the nationwide influence they sought to exert through their prefaces, lists of contributors, and selective mailing lists. During the three years after 1989, several large-scale poetry journals were produced or revived, and an even larger number of smaller-scale projects appeared. At the same time, the appearance of other ambitious journals in other parts of China, and increasing communication between like-minded poets across provincial boundaries, meant that Sichuan's avant-garde poetry and poets were in no danger of going unseen and unread by colleagues outside the province.

Between October 1989 and February 1992, Zhong Ming and Zhao Ye edited 12 issues of *Image Puzzle* in Chengdu. Not all were devoted to poetry, as two issues featured the photography of Xiao Quan (#3, #9), and one (#7) was given over to the Zhong's casual essays on Chinese culture. In fact, only the first, sixth, and eighth issues contained poetry by multiple authors, while all others were given over to individual poets: Ezra Pound (#2); Bai Hua (#4); Lu Yimin (#5); Zhong Ming (#10); Zhao Ye (#11); and Wang Yin (#12). Still photocopied and narrowly circulated, the size of the journal ranged between 12-90 pages, with seven issues containing 28-35 pages. In autumn 1992, Zhong Ming became a major contributor to Chen Dongdong's new large-scale Shanghai quarterly *Southern Poetry Chronicle* (南方诗志), where he was joined by other Sichuan poets such as Sun Wenbo and Tang Danhong, as well as Wang Yin of Shanghai and Xi Chuan of Beijing, among others.

Xi Chuan and Wang Yin had also been contributors to Chen Dongdong's previous journal, *Tendency* (倾向: 1988-1991, 3 issues⁶⁹⁰), as had been Ouyang Jianghe. All four made major contributions to *Against* and *The Nineties* out of Chengdu.

While the aesthetic inclinations of *Image Puzzle* remained constant throughout its run, those of *The Nineties* and *Against* were transformed over time – an issue that will be dealt with later. *The Nineties* continued to be produced as an annual through to 1993. No longer, however, did the journal (and *Against*) seem an extension of *Han Poetry*, as poets such as Shi Guanghua and Wan Xia no longer appeared and several new contributors did, including Zhong Ming as well as the Hangzhou poet Yu Gang and the Shanghai poet Meng Lang (both former contributors to *Not-Not*), all in the final issue. Whatever earlier disagreement, or competition, there may have been with Zhong had been smoothed over by 1992, as also indicated by Zhong's and Sun Wenbo's contributions to Chen Dongdong's *Southern Poetry Chronicle*.

Issues of *Against* appeared at monthly intervals through the first eleven months of 1990, photocopied and varying in size from 11-34 pages. There were only three further issues – one per year, the last in July 1993 – and two of these were devoted to translations of foreign poetry (such as that of Pound and Ashberry). Of the eleven 1990 issues, six were collections of poetry by individual poets: Xiao Kaiyu (#4), Ouyang Jianghe (#5), Zhang Shuguang (#6), Sun Wenbo (#7), Chen Dongdong (#8), and Xi Chuan (#9).

It seems that by 1991 the editors of *Against* and *Image Puzzle*, having produced twenty issues between them, had nearly exhausted the poetry at hand, or their finances. At the same time, the initial stated goals of these two journals, and *The Nineties*, had been to stimulate avant-garde poetry in China, or at least certain trends among the avant-garde. By 1991, it would have been clear to the editors that such an effort was no longer required, as the Second World of Poetry was issuing a flood of journals and poetry throughout the country.

One other reason for this may have been the resurrection of *Today* outside China, in Oslo early in 1990. Zhang Zao – the former co-editor of *Day By Day Make It New* (1985) and friend of Bai Hua, Ouyang Jianghe, and Zhong Ming – was listed as a member of

⁶⁹⁰ Much of the 1990 second issue was given over to the poetry of Haizi and Luo Yihe, and memorial essays by various contributors.

Today's editorial board in the first four issues, as one of two poetry editors in the #3-4 1991 issue, and the sole poetry editor in the #2 and #4 1992 issues.⁶⁹¹ With respect to the friends of Zhang Zao, and some of their friends, *Today* effectively became a further outlet for their poetry and essays. By being published in the new *Today* these poets acquired cultural capital associated with the title and its earlier history in Beijing, and exposure and attention among readers of the journal outside China and among sinologists, who at the time had no access to unofficial poetry journals inside China.

This situation highlights the influence of what Xu Jingya *cum suis* named the "Five Lords" poetry group in the 1986 <Grand Exhibition>, which then consisted of Ouyang, Bai, Zhai, Zhong, and Sun Wenbo – although, poetically, Zhang Zao always seemed more of a member than Sun. Through Zhang's residence in Germany (since 1986) and his work with *Today*, this group's poetry, and the contributors to unofficial journals they were involved with – primarily poets championed by Ouyang since 1988 – achieved publication opportunities outside of China that were not available to other avant-garde poets.⁶⁹² This is not to say that the quality of the work by these poets was not deserving, but there was much more happening on the poetry scene in Sichuan and the rest of China, which was unknown to, or ignored by, the editorial staff of *Today* during 1990-1992.

The bulk of the new *Today*'s contributors resided overseas: Bei Dao was editor-in-chief, and Yang Lian, Gu Cheng, and Duoduo – all now living overseas – were other famous names from the original journal who were the central focus of the journal's poetry throughout the early 1990s. Former Sichuan poets Hu Dong and Hong Ying, now-London residents, also featured regularly in *Today* during 1990-1992 and beyond. All

⁶⁹¹ The inaugural issue features two prose essays by Zhong Ming, one of which was devoted to the suicide of Haizi – <Intermediary Zone> (中间地带). Another essay by Zhong Ming and four of Bai Hua's poems appear in the #2 1991 issue, followed by two more of Bai's poems in the #3-4 issue. Two poems by Zhai Yongming appear in the #1 1992 issue, as does a poem by Ouyang and two poems and an essay by Bai. Zhong has a long poem and the first part of an essay published in 1992 #2, and there is a brief essay from Chen Zihong, a contributor to *Image Puzzle*, in the same issue. In #3, Zhong's essay is completed and four more poems by Ouyang appear. Finally, in #4, Zhong has another long poem published, as does Ouyang, and Zhai has two more poems. Otherwise, the only other Sichuan poets to have work published in *Today* during this period were Li Yawei, Zhou Lunyou, and Wan Xia in the 1992 #1 issue, in recognition of their time spent in prison after June Fourth (this is noted in the cases of Zhou and Wan, but not Li). Other central contributors to the three Chengdu unofficial journals and *Tendency* were also published during the first three years of the new *Today* (8 issues), including Chen Dongdong (1991 #1, #3-4; 1992 #1, #4), Wang Yin (1992 #1) and Lu Yimin (1992 #4) of Shanghai, and Xi Chuan (1992 #1) of Beijing.

⁶⁹² Meng Lang and Han Dong were two prominent exceptions, frequently published in early issues of *Today*.

that said, the younger overseas poet Zhang Zao was able to ensure that the new *Today* broadened its poetry selection policies, even if such selections were apparently restricted to the unofficial journals to which he had ready access.⁶⁹³

Chongqing Journals

Meanwhile, in early 1990 in Chongqing, Fu Wei and Zhong Shan produced *Writers' Workshop* (写作间), a journal aesthetically akin to *Image Puzzle* in Chengdu. Previously, Fu had been a co-editor of *The Red Flag* (1987-1989), and the continuity of *Writers' Workshop* with the earlier journal was maintained through a continued stress on lyricism and a common list of contributors, which included Zheng Danyi, Chen Dongdong, Wang Jiaxin, Wang Yin, and Yan Li. This list is also similar to that of *Image Puzzle* (with the exceptions of Zheng and Wang). In fact, the aesthetical inclination towards 'pure' poetry, surrealism, and lyricism is nearly identical. Xiang Yixian and Bai Hua, former contributors to *The Red Flag*, were now contributing to *Image Puzzle*, as was Fu himself (under the pen name Qi Wei⁶⁹⁴). However, Zhong Shan and Wen Shu were two talented, younger Chongqing poets who first gained attention through publication of their work in *Writers' Workshop*. The journal itself was 50 pages in size and elegantly printed, with English and Chinese titles separated by a drawing of western classical statuary on the title page, similar to that of *Image Puzzle*. Translations of work by foreign poets such as Octavio Paz and Hölderlin placed at the end of the journal further reinforce the impression that *Writers' Workshop* was a continuation of *The Red Flag* and a reflection of the first issue of Chengdu's *Image Puzzle*. The second, and last, issue of the journal was published early in 1991.

⁶⁹³ Many of the same poets featured in another large-scale Chinese language literary journal *Tendency*, launched in Cambridge, Mass., in 1993 by Huang Beiling, previously a Beijing resident and one of the editors of the first issue of the unofficial journal of the same name when it was edited in Beijing in 1988. Wang Yin, Chen Dongdong, Meng Lang, Xiao Kaiyu, and Zhong Ming were contributors to the first issue. While in the two 1994 issues, work by Chen Dongdong, Meng Lang, Zhong Ming, Sun Wenbo, Bai Hua, and Wan Xia were included, as well as that of Zhou Lunyou, Zhou Zhongling, and Liao Yiwu.

⁶⁹⁴ Strangely, in both journals, the name Qi Wei appears in the table of contents, but 'Fu Wei' appears with the texts of the poems inside the journals. It is possible that Fu felt a need to disguise his name in the table of contents because of political difficulties arising from his role in the distribution of Liao Yiwu's <Slaughter> in Shanghai. The author gave Fu copies of Liao's text and the voice-cassette reading to distribute in Shanghai in July 1989. In September 1989, the Public Security Bureau discovered the poem, and several poets in Shanghai were subsequently brought in for questioning.

In addition, in Chongqing later in 1991 there appeared another new unofficial journal edited and funded by the poet Pei Gui: *The Chongqing Youth Poetry Annual: 1990* (重庆青年诗歌年鉴: 1990). The work of 49 local avant-garde poets was collected here. Fu Wei and Zhong Shan, the co-editors of *Writers' Workshop*, had work selected for inclusion, as well as many new names, such as Li Yuansheng, Liang Ping, Meng Chenghao, and Hong Ying, who all would become better known in later years. Again, the cover of the journal bore some similarity to *Writers' Workshop* and *Image Puzzle*, bearing both Chinese and English text and a drawing – although the artwork here is not western classical. However, this journal, which was intended as an annual publication, was not reproduced after 1991. Yet, it can be seen as a first local attempt at achieving recognition by newcomer poets, who were being denied access to unofficial journals controlled by a relatively small clique of ‘established’ (within the context of the sub-field) avant-garde poets.

A New and a Renewed Not-Not, and Others

Zhou Lunyou revived his version of *Not-Not* in 1992, after his release from the gulag. However, Lan Ma, Yang Li, and others of the *Not-Not* group, which had effectively disbanded in late 1988, had produced their own follow-on journal in 1990 and 1991: *The Not-Not Poetry Manuscript Collection* (非非诗歌稿件集). The title is indicative of the difference between this journal and the *Not-Not* of Zhou and Lan. This time there were no theoretical essays and no sections with titles indicating the poetry's degree of *Not-Not*-ness. The editors were listed as Lan, Yang, Shang Zhongmin, He Xiaozhu, and Li Xiaobin – the latter being the only new addition. The list of contributors, and the poetry, was also indicative of continuity with the former *Not-Not*, as there was little difference with the previous editorial policy of promoting newcomers and non-Sichuan contributors. The obvious difference was Zhou's absence; otherwise it was almost as if the events of 1989 had not occurred. While the size of the journal remained constant (at 140 pages) with the later issues of the earlier *Not-Not*, the print run was much smaller, on a par with *The Nineties*, *Against*, and *Image Puzzle* (about 100 copies). Although a lack of funding was common among unofficial journals, it was unusual for *Not-Not*, as Zhou had always

been relatively successful in finding money. After 1991, some of these poets – such as Chen Xiaofan and Yang Wenkang – would return to Zhou's *Not-Not*, others would cease to write altogether (Lan Ma,⁶⁹⁵ Shang Zhongmin, and Yang Ping), and Yang Li, He Xiaozhu, and Jimu Langge would devote themselves to business activities, writing little poetry until returning to the fray in the late 1990s.

A somewhat similar fate would befall the Wholism group after the abandonment of the third issue of *Han Poetry* in 1990. This was primarily due to the political fallout from June Fourth (Pan Jiazhu was arrested for having been a protest organizer in Chengdu) and the incarceration and questioning of various members because of the Liao Yiwu-inspired poetry-based video in March (in which Wan Xia and Liu Taiheng had been directly involved).⁶⁹⁶

Meanwhile, in Zhou's hometown of Xichang in 1991, local poets and former contributors to *Not-Not* Xie Chongming, Zhou Fengming, and Yu Qiang produced *Twenty-First Century: Chinese Modern Poets* (21 世纪: 中国现代诗人), a journal that sought to carry on Zhou's work in championing the poetry of the Third Generation. Among its contributors were former Not-Not poets from Sichuan and other parts of the country, including Zhu Ying, Du Qiao, Guo Yi, Liang Xiaoming, and Nan Ye. Others included Yang Ran, Yi Sha,⁶⁹⁷ Axiang, and Yang Chunguang, the last two being newcomer poets from outside Sichuan who would become well known in China later in the 1990s. However, after publication of the journal's second issue in 1992, it was forced to close⁶⁹⁸ – a common euphemism for the journal being officially banned, under the threat of arrest or the loss of employment.

In October 1992, a similar fate befell *Poetry Research* (诗研究), edited by the poet-critic and future Not-Not member Yuan Yong in the county town of Langzhong.

⁶⁹⁵ Lan effectively renounced poetry and denounced the avant-garde in <Moving Toward Being Lost – A Critical Examination of the Avant-Garde Poetry Movement> (走向迷失—先锋诗歌运动的反省) written in 1990, although he was still writing poetry until 1992 at least. See Wu Sijing ed. (1993): 302-307.

⁶⁹⁶ See “Chapter Four: Poets, Tradition, and Particularity” in Flower (1997) for an interesting account of these poets – in particular Pan Jiazhu, Shi Guanghua, and Song Wei – and their activities in 1992-1993, as Wan Xia was preparing his 1993 officially published anthology. Unsurprisingly, the writer, as a sociologist, has almost no knowledge of the local poetry scene, and is fed information – much of it self-serving – by the Wholism group about the state of the avant-garde and their position in it.

⁶⁹⁷ Two of Yi's better known poems were first published here: <Stammering> (结结巴巴) and <Starve the Poets> (饿死诗人). Yi is a native of Chengdu (b. 1966), but moved to Xi'an with his parents in 1983.

⁶⁹⁸ See Axiang (2000).

Contributors to this journal included the *Not-Not* poet Yang Wenkang, Yi Sha, and the Beijing poet Ma Yongbo. However, after publication of the journal's inaugural issue, Yuan had his wages stopped, and the journal ended.⁶⁹⁹

Also during this time, many other smaller journals and poetry papers appeared throughout the province, such as (Zhou) Faxing's *Mount Daliang Poetry* (大凉山诗歌). Having been inspired by Zhou Lunyou in 1984 to become poets, between October 1987 and September 1989 Faxing and Ouyang Yong had edited *Warm Springs Poetry* (温泉诗刊). After it was forced to close in 1989, together with another local poet, Faxing began editing *Mount Daliang Poetry* in June 1990, only to be forced to close again in September 1992 because of political pressure in China following the dissolution of the USSR at the time.⁷⁰⁰

The fate of Zhou Lunyou, *Twenty-First Century*, *Poetry Research*, and Faxing's two journals seems to indicate a provincial policy to crackdown on such Second World activities outside Chengdu and Chongqing. There is a possibility that the crackdown was aimed at rowdy Third Generation and newcomer publications, but this does not explain why Yang Li *cum suis* and their new version of *Not-Not* in Chengdu were left untouched. There is room for conjecture that poets resident in Chengdu and, to a lesser extent, Chongqing had more useful friends in CCP establishment places than any other Sichuan poets could ever have, and this worked for them as an insurance policy that was denied to others.

With this in mind, the revival of Zhou Lunyou's *Not-Not* in 1992, less than a year after his release from labor camp, was remarkable. While the original *Not-Not* was of a comparatively high production quality, this new edition – ostensibly published in Beijing – was even higher in terms of quality of paper and print.

The list of editors on the last page is indicative of how different this *Not-Not* was from its previous incarnation. At the top of the page under the sobriquet of “honorary advisors” are the names of four well-known liberal figures from the literary establishment: Li Zehou, Liu Zaifu, Xie Mian, and Sun Shaozhen. Furthermore, beneath this, as “honorary

⁶⁹⁹ Yuan went into business for himself and in 1994 put out one issue of *Poetry Creation and Research* (诗歌创作与研究), and one of *Subway* (地铁) in 1995. Eventually, in 1998, he united with the editors of the Hubei journal *The Blade's Edge* (锋刃) to produce *Poetry Mirror* (诗镜). See Axiang (2000).

⁷⁰⁰ See (Zhou) (Zhou) Faxing (2003a).

editors-in-chief,” are the names of Tang Xiaodu and the *Today* poet Mang Ke. Evidently, Zhou felt that claiming the journal was sourced out of Beijing and supported by eminent establishment literary figures would offer him some protection from Sichuan’s hard-line cultural authorities. (As will be shown, there was good reason to honor Tang and Mang Ke as the founding forces behind *Modern Han Poetry* in 1991.)

While the 28 names on the editorial committee included those of nine contributors to the old *Not-Not*,⁷⁰¹ there were also names that come as a shock – Xi Chuan, Ouyang Jianghe, and Yang Yuanhong chief among them. Below these lists are still others: Zhou is listed as editor-in-chief, and Liang Xiaoming and Ye Zhou as his assistants; this is followed by the then virtually unknown newcomer Hu Tu listed as “executive editor” and four other young poets⁷⁰² as the “executive editorial committee.”⁷⁰³ Hu Tu is also a Xichang poet and a contributor to the former *Not-Not*, which leads to suspicions that there was not much work on this journal done in Beijing after all. But was the confusion of names a deliberate smokescreen aimed at the CCP cultural authorities alone?

A look at the table of contents shows Zhou’s name in first position with the essay <Red Writing> (红色写作), followed by the poetry of six former *Not-Not* contributors. So, all is normal, very Not-Not, until the appearance of Yang Yuanhong and Ouyang Jianghe, followed later by Zhai Yongming, Mang Ke, Yang Lian, Tang Xiaodu, Xi Chuan, and Wang Jiaxin, among others. This *Not-Not* was clearly not the old *Not-Not*, an issue that seemingly had much to do with Zhou’s experiences in prison and the gulag, and the poetry he wrote there. In particular, the absence of Yang Li as an editor of the new *Not-Not* and of his insistent championing of the Third Generation was another factor in this editorial shift, as one of Zhou’s poems written while in prison camp attests – the cuttingly satiric <Third Generation Poets> (第三代诗人; 28/2/1991).

In fact, a large portion of the poetry in the new *Not-Not* was a selection of work produced in all parts of China and previously published in other unofficial journals during Zhou’s incarceration or since his release. For example, there is work by Yi Sha,

⁷⁰¹ Aside from Shang Zhongmin and Zhou Lunyou, there are Liang Xiaoming, Ye Zhou, Yu Gang, Hai Nan, Li Yawei, Nan Ye, and Liu Xiang.

⁷⁰² Wen Qun, Qiu Zhenglun, Du Qiao, and Yu Tian.

⁷⁰³ In the 1993 edition of *Not-Not* almost all would remain unchanged except this last entry, which was replaced by the title “responsible editorial committee” over the single name of Yang Chunguang.

Du Qiao, Liang Xiaoming, and Nan Ye from Xichang's *Twenty First Century: Chinese Modern Poets*, as well as pieces by Ouyang Jianghe, Yu Jian, Yang Lian, Zhai Yongming, Tang Yaping, and Zhou Lunyou himself that had first been published in *Modern Han Poetry*. In the new *Not-Not*'s <Post-Editing Notes>, *Modern Han Poetry*, a quarterly unofficial journal that first appeared early in 1991, is praised as being the greatest advance in Chinese poetry in recent years. At the same time, it seems as if *Not-Not* was seeking to achieve much the same task as *Modern Han Poetry*, but on an annual, not a quarterly basis. The 1993 #6-7 combined issue of *Not-Not* featured virtually the same editorial board and selection policy for poetry, only now half the journal was given over to theoretical essays by critics not formerly associated with *Not-Not*, such as Xie Mian, Xu Jingya, Tang Xiaodu, Yang Yuanhong, and Geng Zhanchun.⁷⁰⁴ However, *Not-Not* still retained space for the promotion of relative newcomer poets.⁷⁰⁵

Modern Han Poetry

The difference between *Not-Not* and *Modern Han Poetry* was the latter's much wider remit and frequency of publication. Initiated by Tang Xiaodu and Mang Ke in 1991, the journal attempted to create a national focus and outlet for publication and theoretical discussion for China's avant-garde poets during the ongoing period of cultural repression. Together with Bei Dao, Mang Ke had been a driving force behind *Today* in the 1970s and had used the remaining money raised for that journal in establishing *Modern Han Poetry*.⁷⁰⁶ (There is a possibility that Mang was stimulated in this direction by the

⁷⁰⁴ The size of the journal had expanded to 196 pages and there was acknowledgement of it having been published in Hongkong by the Tianma Publishing House (天马图书公司) on the inside front cover. The sale price was listed at HK\$50, but there was a disclaimer stating the journal was not for sale in China and was only meant to be gifted to readers there. There had been no such information in the 1992 #5 issue, although the identical quality of paper and printing indicates it came from the same publishing house.

In any case, *Not-Not* #8 would not reappear until 2000. Now in an expanded (over 400 pages) annual form, it is still published in Hongkong, but by the New Age Publishing House (新时代出版社). After an initial print run of 1,000 copies in 2000, this has expanded to 1,500 since and the sale price rose from HK\$65 in 2000 and 2001, to HK\$75 in 2002. There are apparently no restrictions on the journal's sale in China; the prime difficulty for Zhou and his colleagues would be in gaining access to the state distribution channels.

⁷⁰⁵ In #5, the last 35 pages of the journal are given over to the work of 8 poets; in #6-7, 22 pages for 7 poets, but with Hu Tu, Wen Qun, Yu Tian, and Yi Sha now having graduated from this group to the front portion of texts (effectively 22 more pages).

⁷⁰⁶ From unpublished notes from interviews undertaken by Maghiel van Crevel in July and August 1991.

appearance of the new *Today* in 1990.) Tang, a native of Yangzhou, was one of the most respected, most knowledgeable, and best-connected poetry critics in the country since taking up a post as an editor at *Poetry* in 1982. His job meant that Tang had the then rare ability to travel the country meeting young poets, as well as having privately printed individual collections, manuscripts, and unofficial journals delivered to him in Beijing by post or by the poets themselves.⁷⁰⁷ According to Mang Ke, in 1991 the first two issues of *Modern Han Poetry* had print runs of 300 at a cost of 1,000 RMB. Given the political situation at the time, only two people knew where the printing took place in Beijing. Further money, when needed, was provided by a number of poets then residing overseas, including Zhang Zao and Hong Ying, as well as poets in China, such as Ouyang Jianghe and Tang Danhong.⁷⁰⁸

The summer 1991 (#2) issue listed the journal's five operating principles: 1) *Modern Han Poetry* is a purely literary journal solely seeking to promote and develop "modern Han poetry" (hence the journal's name);⁷⁰⁹ 2) it strives to unearth and collect outstanding works of all styles; 3) produce four quarterly issues (however, from 1992 until it ceased to exist in 1994, only two issues were produced each year, for a total of 10); 4) the editorial committee consists of modern poets; 5) a committee of these editors would select one outstanding poet each year (there were to be only two selected: Meng Lang and Xi Chuan).

Financial difficulties meant the journal was only produced twice a year from 1992 and that the quality of paper and printing was poor in comparison to *Not-Not*. The journal was published clandestinely in different parts of China over the course of its 10 issues, making use of home computers and whatever print technology was affordable. While its size varied from 100 to 170 pages, *Modern Han Poetry* provided a valuable outlet, forum, and resource for avant-garde poets in China during 1991-1993 in particular. In 1994, after the relative liberalization and opening up of official publication opportunities, the need for such a journal decreased, and this, in addition to financial pressures, led to *Modern Han Poetry*'s closure.

⁷⁰⁷ See Tang Xiaodu (2003a) and (2003b).

⁷⁰⁸ This information was provided in *Modern Han Poetry* in issues #6 through #10.

⁷⁰⁹ Maghiel van Crevel's discussions with Mang Ke led him to believe that this 'Han' is in reference to the language and not nationality. Also, see van Crevel (1996): 93.

The list of names on the first editorial committee list indicates poets' widespread interest in *Modern Han Poetry*. The list was primarily for show, and until a reorganization of the journal's editorial practices in 1992, editorial control and oversight remained in Beijing. Mang Ke felt this last aspect was necessary since he and Tang would pay the price for any missteps others might commit.⁷¹⁰ Of the 39 names on the first list of committee members, six were from Sichuan: Zhong Ming, Bai Hua, Ouyang Jianghe, Lan Ma, Shang Zhongmin, and Xiao Kaiyu. For each issue after the first in spring 1991, the "acting editorial committee" (执行编委) consisted of three poets and the editorial work was done in different cities (Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen, and Hangzhou).⁷¹¹

The Autumn-Winter 1992 (#6) edition of *Modern Han Poetry* carried news of an annual meeting held in Hangzhou on 2-3 December (Xiao Kaiyu was the only Sichuan poet to attend). This note stated that there had been complaints about the uneven quality of the poetry selected for previous issues and a perceived weakness in critical essays. To deal with these issues, three editorial groups of three-to-five poets each were established: one in the "north" based in Beijing, one in the "south" based in Shanghai and Shenzhen, and one in the "west" which consisted of Ouyang Jianghe, Xiao Kaiyu, and Zhou Lunyou. The sixth issue had 40 pages of critical writing where there had previously been none in the first three 1991 issues, 25 in the fourth, and none again in the first issue in 1992.

As is clear from the above, Sichuan poets, and Xiao Kaiyu in particular, played a prominent role in *Modern Han Poetry*. A survey of the journal's contents further indicates the continuing quality and influence of Sichuan's avant-garde poets, as their contributions averaged over five per issue over the life of the journal.⁷¹²

⁷¹⁰ From unpublished notes from interviews undertaken by Maghiel van Crevel in July and August 1991.

⁷¹¹ By 1992, the number on the editorial committee had fallen to 37; Lan Ma was no longer involved, but the number of Sichuan poets in the editorial committee rose to seven with the additions of Zhou Lunyou and Zhai Yongming, the latter having recently returned from a lengthy sojourn in the USA.

⁷¹² Issue #1: 45 contributors / 9 from Sichuan; #2: 37 / 8; #3: 41 / 3; #4: 38 / 4; #5: 22 / 1; #6: 28 / 5; #7: 28 / 4; #8: 38 / 6; #9: 29 / 7; #10: 36 / 7.

Total contributions from selected Sichuan poets: Sun Wenbo x 8; Xiao Kaiyu x 6; Zhai Yongming x 4; Ouyang Jianghe x 4; Hong Ying x 4; Zhou Lunyou x 3; Bai Hua x 3; Li Yawei x 3; Zheng Danyi x 3; Zhong Ming x 2; Fu Wei x 2; Chen Zihong x 2; Tang Yaping x 2; Liao Yiwu x 1; Yang Li x 1; Shang Zhongmin x 1; Liu Tao x 1; Chen Xiaofan x 1; Yu Tian x 1; Xiaoxiao x 1; Zhao Ye x 1, Dong Jiping x 1.

Moving Out of Sichuan

During the worst period for official publication of avant-garde poetry in China during 1989-1993 many other unofficial poetry journals were produced throughout the country.⁷¹³ Some were larger, more influential, and longer-lived than others, but few were forced to close by the authorities, as several were in Sichuan. It is doubtful that the exact numbers of unofficial poetry journals published in China at this time will ever be known.

Sichuan's poets could be found contributing to a much larger number of these non-Sichuan journals than at any time in the 1980s. In Hangzhou, the work of Zhong Ming, Zhai Yongming, Xiao Kaiyu, Zhou Lunyou, and Wan Xia could be found in *The Tropic of Cancer* (北回归线), a journal edited by Geng Zhanchun and Liang Xiaoming since 1988.⁷¹⁴ Zhong Shan, Ma Song, Zheng Danyi, and Tang Yaping all contributed to the first issue of *The Big Turmoil* (大骚动) in early 1992, a journal based in Guiyang and edited by Wang Qiang.⁷¹⁵ In 1990, the Nanjing poet Xian Meng produced *Think No Evil: The 1989 Modern Poetry Movement* (思无邪: 89 年现代诗歌运动), for which he selected the recent poetry of Yang Li, Xiang Yixian, Zhong Ming, Fu Wei (Qi Wei here), and Ran Yunfei, as well as a translation by Bai Hua of an essay on Yeats by T. S. Eliot. Zhai Yongming contributed to *The Front* (阵地), a Henan journal founded in 1991 and edited by the poet Senzi. In addition, Zhong Ming, Sun Wenbo, Tang Danhong, and others, contributed to Chen Dongdong's Shanghai-based *Southern Poetry Chronicle*, founded in 1992.

With the cultural liberalization that began to take hold again in China in 1993, some of Sichuan's poets chose to move out the province (if not out of poetry) as well. Part of the reason for this must be put down to the lack of such liberalization in Sichuan. During the mid-1980s, Tang Yaping, Zheng Danyi, Hu Dong (to England), and Zhang Zao (to Germany) had left the province for employment or personal reasons. In 1993, poets such

⁷¹³ A survey of the few publicly available sources and materials collected by the author shows there were at least 34 unofficial poetry publications that appeared outside of Sichuan during this period (there were at least 9 in the province). The editors of the Cambridge, Mass. Chinese language journal *倾向* (*Tendency*) published such information in each issue of their journal. Also, see Axiang (2000) and (2002a), (Zhou) Faxing (2003a), and 'limit poem' (2004) for more exhaustive Mainland Chinese sources.

⁷¹⁴ A total of five issues to date, including 1992 and 1993, and now also a website and web-journal.

⁷¹⁵ In 1993, Wang relocated himself and the journal to Beijing.

as Xiao Kaiyu left for Shanghai and later for Germany; Ouyang Jianghe left for the US in the same year and later settled in Beijing; Sun Wenbo also moved to Beijing; Li Yawei began to split his time between Sichuan and Beijing working in the publishing business; while Wan Xia, Yang Li, He Xiaozhu, and Xiaoxiao all eventually moved to Beijing to do the same. Sichuan is not the center of China's economy or culture, and given the closed-off, conservative nature of the province, both economically and politically, it is understandable that some poets would seize advantages available to them in other parts of China and abroad. The ties with poets in other parts of China developed in the late 1980s and early 1990s through official and, primarily, unofficial publication, correspondence, and an increasing amount of travel, made it easier to make the transition out of Sichuan. What remains is to examine changes in the poetics of those individual poets whose reputations were maintained (such as Zhai, Ouyang, Bai, and Zhou) or enhanced (such as Xiao and Sun) by their work during 1989-1992.

The Poetry of 1990-1992

During the three years in question, like other avant-garde poets in China, those in Sichuan were denied the frisson of competition for public honors that might accrue through prestigious official publication and public polemics of the type that occurred during the 1986-1989 period. Many poets were thrown in upon themselves with only occasional contact and correspondence with others in the avant-garde during the post-June Fourth period of political and cultural repression; the readership of even the more admired, or otherwise successful, poet was restricted to that afforded by the new unofficial journals with print runs of only 100-300.

In Sichuan, polemics, as such, were restricted to the <Editors' Explanations> that opened each issue of *The Nineties* (1989-1992), and the *Not-Not*-like, pro-Third Generation essays published in *Twenty-First Century*, etc. The latter had nothing to add to what had been seen in the 1980s, but *The Nineties* continued to promote a reform-minded editorial agenda in its annual <Explanations> of the import and reasons for the journal's selection of poetry.

Sun Wenbo has listed poets whose work appeared in *The Nineties* who are today publicly acknowledged as outstanding practitioners, as proof of the quality and importance of the journal.⁷¹⁶ This list, however, is somewhat deceptive. While Sun, Xiao Kaiyu, Ouyang Jianghe, Zhang Shuguang, Chen Dongdong, and Xi Chuan contributed work to each of the four issues, and Zhu Yongliang and Wang Jiaxin to all but the first, the work of Meng Lang and Zhong Ming can only be found in the final 1993 issue, along with that of Zhai Yongming, who was not listed by Sun. Moreover, there is continuing debate about the merits of the work by poets such as Zhang and Zhu in particular, if not also that of Sun, Xiao, and Wang. This ties into the polemic between the “intellectual” and “popular” poets that surfaced in the late 1990s.⁷¹⁷ Sun’s article, written in 1999, was part of this argument, effectively presenting *The Nineties* and *Against* as the nursery greenhouse of the Intellectual poets after June 1989. Furthermore, Sun also speaks of the encouragement from readers the editors of *The Nineties* received from the outset. However, given the select nature of the journal’s readership, it would have been surprising if this had been otherwise.

A brief summary of the <Explanations>, which Sun claims were written by Xiao, is instructive. The principles laid out in the first issue, summarized in Chapter 11, were added to and explicated in greater detail in the following three issues. Narration (叙述, which can also be translated as ‘recounting’ or ‘relating’) is first mentioned in the 1990 issue of *The Nineties*. This style was most prominent in the poetry of the Harbin poet Zhang Shuguang, and became an increasingly important feature in the work of Sun, Xiao, and Ouyang Jianghe,⁷¹⁸ thus explaining the prominence given to Zhang’s work in *The Nineties* and *Against*. In 1990, there is little more than a warning to readers (other poets) that “narration” should not become mere “description” (描述). Instead, poems are meant to “appear” or “emerge” (呈现), leading to two new underlying principles for the poetry advocated and collected in *The Nineties*: 1) the use of materials from reality; and 2) an open poetical form. An interest in the “poetry of middle age” (中年写作) is also noted,

⁷¹⁶ Sun Wenbo (1999a).

⁷¹⁷ For more on this polemic see Maghiel van Crevel (2004b).

⁷¹⁸ Perhaps unsurprisingly, given Zhai Yongming’s friendship with Ouyang, “narration” also became a noticeable feature in the poetry of Zhai in 1993. In particular, see <Lily and Joan> (莉莉和琼), labeled as a “narrative poem” in the table of contents of the Spring-Summer 1994 (#9) issue of *Modern Han Poetry*: 10-14.

although this seems more of an issue for Ouyang, Zhang, and Sun – all born in 1956 – than for Xiao (b. 1960), Chen Dongdong (b. 1961), or Xi Chuan (b. 1963).

In the 1991 issue of *The Nineties*, the editors claim the poetry in that issue is centered on “enjoyment” (享受) of life at the time of writing, but that this is also enjoyment of misfortune and pain, a form of pleasure in indifference, silence, and death which hints at fear and expectation. Presumably, this is acknowledgement of the bleak cultural climate at the time in China. There is also a stated emphasis on the “work nature” (工作性) of the selected poetry, and an accompanying expectation of the production of great poetry following entry into middle age and clear-headed elderliness after the angry age of youth of the 1980s. The poets of *The Nineties*, under the banners of “individual writing” (个人写作) and Intellectual Poetry, would further elaborate on these issues during the rest of the 1990s. The fact that they were influencing each other by way of limited-circulation unofficial journals, especially during 1989-1993 when there were few official publication opportunities, is little remarked upon, or only indirectly so, as in Sun Wenbo’s case.⁷¹⁹

Finally, in the 1992 issue, the editors comment on a poetry going “from experience to experience” and an “appropriate experimentalism” in poetry. In the face of rapid change in society, there is a perceived need to reestablish “trancelike (or absent-minded) linguistic contexts” (恍惚的语境). Poets are encouraged to seek the protection of old forms, even old lyrical expression, to attain “stability of sentence forms” (句式的稳定) in poetry. Presumably, this was the reason for selecting poetry by Zhai Yongming and Zhong Ming for this final issue of *The Nineties*, as Zhai was still a fan of irrationality and surrealism in poetry at this time (1992) – although not as “confessional” as her poetry of the 1980s – and Zhong had an interest in developing old forms and lyrical expression. Presumably, the editors deemed this appropriate experimentalism.

A look at a poem by Sun Wenbo from this 1992 issue offers insights into some of what the foregoing <Explanations> attempted to convey:

⁷¹⁹ Some of *The Nineties* poets are among the most published in official literary journals during 1989-1993, in particular Xi Chuan and Chen Dongdong, who both had 10 instances of official publications including three times in 1993. Arguably, this relative success bespeaks both the quality of their poetry and a higher degree of acceptability within the official literary establishment. Others: Xiao Kaiyu 6 (1 in 1993); Wang Jiixin 4; Sun Wenbo 3 (1); Ouyang Jianghe 3 (1).

<Satisfaction> (满足)⁷²⁰

1

He's satisfied in this: from one country to another country.
 Strange faces, novel scenery. He says:
 "I'm like a guest on earth, I'm forever
 like an onlooker, witnessing the life of humankind."

"I've never gone deep into the interior of life. When
 someone wants to open their heart to me, I leave;
 when pain wants to harass me, I evade pain.
 I even don't hate the ugly things I've seen."

Traveling this way, drifting this way, from one continent
 to another continent. He walks an even longer road
 than the Hubble telescope's, there is no city where no
 traces remain of him, but he's not a part of any city.

2

It was fear of love made him leave his own country,
 bury himself in difficult philosophies. One noun
 affects a bundle of adjectives, walking on an avenue in Pittsburgh,
 until gathered beneath the point of an old-fashioned fountain pen.

He uses them as weapons to cope with the world,
 specially as Caesar used his armies. Haughty beauty,
 arrogant wealth all destroyed by him. He
 even knocked open the narrow door of eternity, walked in as if on a stroll.

Afterwards he effortlessly discards his body,
 like a child throws away a leftover fruit pit. But
 what sort of pit is it? Look around,
 how many centuries have passed, and still people search for it!

While not a narrative poem per se, there is a strong narrative element in this poem, as there is in much of Sun's poetry during this period.⁷²¹ The three-quatrain form and regular line length are balanced against the abrupt move into metaphysics in the final two stanzas of the second poem. The placement of the writer/traveler in Pittsburgh may be

⁷²⁰ This poem was originally published in *The Nineties* (1992) as the two-part poem translated here, dated October 1992. However, in Sun (2001b) this version appears as the first two parts of a five-part poem dated as written in February 1992. Given the discrepancy in the dates, it seems Sun may not have been happy with the full version of the poem in 1992.

⁷²¹ For more on this see Maghiel van Crevel (2004a).

meant to serve as a block to readers who might try to identify the “he” in the poem.⁷²² Given what was said in the <Explanations>, this poem seems also to be an example of “enjoyment” of indifference as well as a portrait of an intellectual in middle age. There is no sense of irony, as found in Third Generation poets or Zhou Lunyou. The <Explanations> indicate that the intellectual/writer here described was an exemplar of detachment. Also of note is the appearance of the exile, or self-exile, theme that would become prominent among Intellectual poets as the 1990s progressed,⁷²³ a theme that is closely connected to the increasing marginalization of avant-garde poetry.⁷²⁴

In one of his few pieces of published prose during 1989-1992, <Reading Poetry> (读诗), in which he praises the work of Xiao Kaiyu, Ouyang Jianghe, Xi Chuan, Chen Dongdong, Zhang Shuguang, and Zhu Yongliang,⁷²⁵ Sun notes the appearance of narration as an important element in Xiao’s poetry in <National Holiday 1989> (一九八九国庆节). Sun also raises the issue of Intellectual Poetry, remembering the articles written by Ouyang Jianghe, Xi Chuan, and others during the 1980s.⁷²⁶ He connects that polemic with the emphasis Xiao placed in the summer of 1989 on the work of the poet turning thirty taking on more of the characteristics of work (Ouyang turned 30 in 1986):

Indeed, only when we see poetry writing as more professionalized work will it be possible for writing to take on a clear directional nature, thus casting off impromptu writing and writing as from inspiration.

⁷²² However, Ouyang Jianghe left China for a prolonged stay overseas at this time.

⁷²³ In Sun Wenbo (2001b), the other three parts of the poem explicitly describe the protagonist as an exile who works anonymously as an insurance agent after fleeing revolution in his country, and who had turned from writing poetry to fiction after harsh criticism. Killed in a car accident, his American colleagues discover he is a famous writer, but he did not collect books and lived as an itinerant. The poem ends with: “traveler is the status of man.”

⁷²⁴ For more on this subject see Michelle Yeh (1998a) and (1999).

⁷²⁵ In *Against* #11, November 1990.

⁷²⁶ Ouyang Jianghe addresses all these issues and others in his 1993 article <Post-’89 Poetry Writing in China – Native Land Qualities, Middle Age Characteristics, and the Status of the Intellectual> (89 后国内诗歌写作 – 本土气质, 中年特征与知识分子身份). See Ouyang (1993b). As with similar essays during the 1980s, he champions his friends and favored poets: Xi Chuan, Chen Dongdong, Xiao Kaiyu, Sun Wenbo (understandably these two were new additions to the previous lists), Zhai Yongming, Zhong Ming, Haizi, Luo Yihe, and Bai Hua, although Zhang Shuguang, Meng Lang, Wan Xia, and Zang Di also get favorable, if brief, mention.

This remark seems to also discard much of the lyrical poetry of the classical tradition. In a further echo of Ouyang's writing and *Day by Day Make It New* in 1985, Sun also emphasizes the importance of technique by citing Ezra Pound: "Technique is a true test of a man."⁷²⁷

Before 1989, Sun was more of a student of poetry, modeling his earlier work on the poetry of Eliot and the Symbolists (1984-1986), and the lyricism of Bai Hua and the Romantics (1987-1988). Like Xiao Kaiyu, the work Sun published in *The Nineties* and *Against* shows a maturity and confidence previously lacking. Xiao's poetry of the 1989-1992 period also sees the introduction of elements of realism and narrativity, but simultaneously retains that of irrationality, if eschewing the romantic and epic strains of his earlier poetry. Elements of realism are hidden in texts, usually in the form of found objects and situations that the reader is required to place in an understandable context.

<Ahh, Mist> (呵雾)⁷²⁸

A mountain top? A house? A person?
 please don't breathe out again
 please don't put today to sleep
 please don't open your mouth
 please don't believe in the buoyancy of air

and let down a first well-meaning desire
 let down a hand held out
 a dazzling face
 an intoxicating waist
 a morning light held close too long
 a silently burning scruple

My damp body has already reached noon
 my luke-warm heart is already in middle years
 I watch the mist scatter into a feeble sunlight
 I pass through a thicket of statues
 open a book from which almost all type-face has fled
 encourage a very small dream

⁷²⁷ See Sun Wenbo (2001b).

⁷²⁸ First published in *The Nineties* (1991). This translation published in *Day* (2002).

This seems more of a poem written in the vein of Bai Hua's lyricism, with its elements of surrealism and symbolism, than of the new emphases Sun and Xiao himself had written of. Xiao's narrative skills were on show in longer poems such as <The Commune> (公社)⁷²⁹ and <A Romance Poem> (传奇诗).⁷³⁰

On the other hand, Bai (b. 1956) was mellowing with age, as he moved on to broader, more philosophical topics in his poetry:

<Life> (生活)⁷³¹

Life, you're so broad, like a road
carrying the smell of political power rushing on to a place far-off

The far-off place, where the people of all nationalities sing
about a blue sky and an open square on the top of big lips and high-pitched voices

The square, where endless and dejected farmers are reared
over the four seasons, ferocious beasts and starvation loiter

Everything is far off, nothing is of any importance
life itself, death itself, enthusiasm of itself

Like a little orphaned son sitting alone on the earth
like an undernourished cloud, like oh ...

Like life, just stripping bamboo, destroying rice, killing pigs
like living, only in your sleep, squaring accounts in your sleep

This is not a pretty picture of life, but it effectively captures Bai's sense of life in post-June Fourth China. It is a new, more economical form for his poetry that better captures the brutal, dark intensity of the time. Comparing this to Ouyang Jianghe's <Crossing the Square at Nightfall>, Bai's continuing emotional inspiration is set off against Ouyang's ambiguous, philosophical stance as an observer, or as an explicator of the thought processes of a seemingly neutral 'intellectual'.

A few months later, almost mockingly, the middle-aged Bai writes as if he were an old man.

⁷²⁹ First published in *The Nineties* (1989).

⁷³⁰ First published in *Modern Han Poetry*, Spring-Summer issue (#7) 1993.

⁷³¹ First published in *Modern Han Poetry*, Summer issue (#2) 1990.

<An Old Poet> (老诗人; 1991)

Spring, March, the good feelings of fields and gardens
In another ten days, he'll be fifty

He says there's still a line of poetry torturing him
No, it's a word's nagging at him

His hair is wild, like the fatherland
Again his corpulence agitates the tabletop

Literature, slack and undisciplined literature
The fatherland, he sees it as an after-hours patria

But he says:
because it's vulgar, literature should be restrained
for this reason the fatherland ought to export it

Perhaps, Bai felt old by comparison to younger, self-pronounced middle-aged poets such as Xiao Kaiyu. Alternatively, this could be read as an ironic comment on the statements of his same-aged colleague Ouyang Jianghe and Ouyang's near-continuous urging (since 1985 at least) of Sichuan's, and China's, avant-garde poets to clean up their poetry and master the technique of western modernists such as Pound, Eliot, and Stevens.⁷³²

In Part 4, Chapter 4 of *The Left Side* (completed in February 1994), Bai devotes one section (#4) to *The Nineties* and *Against*. Bai quotes Xiao as characterizing the poetry of these journals as being that “of the restrained, reduced speed and breadth of middle age”, adding that this was in opposition to the lyrical quality of poetry, as these poets sought to expand their vocabulary into the non-poetical – into common life (a direction that has much in common with the poetry of Macho Men and *Them*). Bai makes no direct comment on this – a credo that would seem to denigrate the poetry of Bai himself – aside from stating that the spirit or status of the intellectual was at the core of their work. Bai sees them as using the theories of Barthes and Foucault to dissipate the myth of lyrical power and replacing it with another – the myth of “opposition” of “middle age.” He also

⁷³² Although Bai took part in this together with Zhang Zao in editing *Day By Day Make It New* in 1985, he never repeated the exercise.

sees the realism of which these poets speak as being tinged with theories of post-modernism by Derrida, Lacan, and others.

The rest, and bulk, of the section is given over to a letter written to Bai by Sun Wenbo in explanation of the writing and “reality” of *The Nineties* and *Against* poets. Writing in 1993, Sun says that in 1989 he saw that Chinese poetry was mired in a style similar to that of the world in the 1960s, mentioning the poetry of Larkin and O’Hara as specific examples. Everything was still rooted in symbolism and surrealism. Therefore, Sun and Xiao decided it was time for something both more practical and more philosophical, for what could be called poetry of “experientialism” (经验主义), which resulted in a semi-narrative style of writing. As examples of such poetry by Sun, Bai lists <A Stroll> (散步),⁷³³ <Return to the Countryside> (还乡),⁷³⁴ <Journey on a Map> (地图上的旅行), and <Pictures in the News> (新闻图片),⁷³⁵ all lengthy poems published in Sun’s journals or *Modern Han Poetry*.

Other poets also began experimenting with narrative techniques after June Fourth, such as Ouyang Jianghe. In 1991, Ouyang wrote <The Café> (咖啡馆),⁷³⁶ in which he combines brief observations and snatches of conversation in creating a long poem of metaphysical speculation on life and reality. Then, in 1992, Zhai Yongming, who had just returned from a 2-year stay in the US, wrote <Café Song> (咖啡馆之歌), in what comes across as a lighter, more casual rewriting of Ouyang’s poem, as she combines popular music (the Beatles), conversation, and observation/narration in her poem.⁷³⁷ In fact, as Zhai herself points out, she had begun experimenting with what she terms “dramatic techniques” two years previously with the following poem:⁷³⁸

⁷³³ This and <A Trip on a Map> first published in *Against* #7, 1990, and *The Nineties* (1990).

⁷³⁴ First published in *The Nineties* (1990).

⁷³⁵ First published in *Modern Han Poetry*, Spring-Summer 1993 (#7).

⁷³⁶ First published in *Against* # 13 (September 1991).

⁷³⁷ See Chapter 3.3 in Jeanne Hong Zhang (2004) for more on this change in Zhai’s poetics and that of other woman poets, such as Chongqing’s Hong Ying.

⁷³⁸ See Zhai Yongming (1996a).

<I Spur the Horse, Flourish the Whip> (我策马扬鞭)⁷³⁹

I spur the horse, flourish the whip in the strong, black night
 an ornamented saddle beneath me
 four surging white hooves

treading a narrow winding path a riotous profusion of falling petals⁷⁴⁰
 What century am I moving in?
 What form of life is doing battle?
 A spacious residence I once dreamt
 a true door opened wide
 inside, a sword and halberd laid out a suit of armor
 searching searching for a dead general

I spur the horse, flourish the whip on a convulsing, frozen plain
 the cowhide reins let the day and the night go
 I want to sweep over its length and breadth

pass through gaunt forests
 thunder and lightning nearby
 children wail in the distance
 What mighty, forged axe
 is brandished before me?
 Where does the blood that stains the green uniforms red come from?
 Expectations, expectations of a resounding bugle call
 a life of martial exploits their officers and men arrive
 the combined leadership of black has come

I spur the horse, flourish the whip in heart-rending moonlight
 locked shapes locked bones mine sit sternly in the saddle
 an unchanging, naturally feverish disposition

I've raced past white tents shadows of tree after tree
 under lanterns emaciated men play chess
 a door curtain flies up his commanders enter:
 The enemy! The enemy's in the area
 Tonight is a night of many years ago
 Which of the dying is young and full of spirit?

⁷³⁹ Written in August 1989, this was the last poem Zhai wrote before traveling with her husband to New York for a long sojourn [Zhong Ming (1999): 155]. It was first published in *Image Puzzle* #8, March 1991 and also in Zhong (1999): 156-158. In Zhai (1996a), published in *Stars*, the date of composition is given as "autumn 1990", but this is either a misprint or a deliberate alteration on the part of the poet or the editors. In *Today* [see Zhai (1992b)] the final two stanzas of the poem are missing – either an oversight or deliberate omission in an attempt to protect Zhai because of the political nature of the poem.

⁷⁴⁰ A line from Tao Yuanming's poem <The Peach Blossom Spring> (桃花源), China's version of "the land that time forgot," a farming community unchanged and uncontaminated by outside turmoil over a period of 500 years. The peach trees mark the entrance to the community.

The black shadows of giant birds those of helmets too
 make me quake in fear
 coming toward me are the black shades of souls
 Wait wait for the result of the match
 if a game doesn't end my delusion becomes real

One book a book of a past age
 records these lines of poetry
 On the quiet river surface
 See Here come their long-legged flies!

As Zhai tells it in the 1996 essay <“Café Song” and After> (“咖啡馆” 以及以后), this was the first time she “...used a suggestive dramatic structure to allude to some impressions, a conflict, a period of time.” She does not mention any influences; although her long-standing friendships with both Ouyang and Sun Wenbo make it highly unlikely she had not read their recent work. In his analysis of this poem, another friend, Zhong Ming speaks of “the pressure of the times” forcing Zhai to move away from her previous confessional, Plath-influenced poetry style. Written as this poem was in August 1989, it is clear to what conflict and pressure Zhai and Zhong were referring. The officially published comments of Zhai and Zhong are also good examples of how China’s critics and poets are forced to self-censor and hint at truths, while trusting knowledgeable readers to understand their subtexts.

The poem itself seems to hark back to <The Song of Mulan> (木兰诗), a long narrative poem from the fourth or fifth century C.E., in which a young girl secretly takes her father’s place when he is drafted by the military to fight a barbarian invasion. The darkness and fear in the world is reminiscent of that time, some of Zhai’s earlier autobiographical poetry, and of the atmosphere into which China sank after June Fourth. Finally, as Zhong notes, Zhai ironically rewrites a line from Yeats’ 1939 poem <Long-Legged Fly>: *Like a long-legged fly upon the stream*. In fact, the poem may be an ironical rewriting of the entire first stanza of Yeats’ poem, with Zhai taking on the dramatic persona of Mulan, fierce, yet futile:

That civilization may not sink,
 Its great battle lost,
 Quiet the dog, tether the pony

To the distant post;
 Our master Caesar is in the tent
 Where the maps are spread,
 His eyes fixed upon nothing,
 A hand under his head.
Like a long-legged fly upon the stream
His mind moves upon silence.

Where Yeats apparently shows the actions of men of genius to be silent, slow, and commonplace, like a fly's movements upon a stream, Zhai has made them out to be sinister, as her generals/old men play with the lives of others in a chaotic world, and the flies are a menace to be fled from. In this poem, civilization is portrayed as sinking, if not already sunk. By 1992, however, poems such as <Café Song> are restrained attempts at objectivity and distancing in comparison to <I Spur the Horse>, as its first three stanzas indicate:

Melancholy, nostalgic café
 On Fifth Avenue
 Beneath a streetlight around the corner
 A small iron gate

I sit, leaning against the window
 Slowly sipping the bald owner's black coffee
 "How many people pass by
 Going to work, returning home, and unnoticed by anyone"

We are talking about a lackluster love
 "Yesterday, I wish
 I could return to yesterday"
 A nostalgic song floats in the air⁷⁴¹

Several of Zhai's poems of this period are written as if she were still outside China, New York being her favorite site. The cares and emotions are now everyday, commonplace, as was the original import of Yeats' poem before Zhai rewrote it. Placing her poetry in another part of the world was perhaps a mechanism that allowed Zhai to write again after two years of near-silence.

⁷⁴¹ This is Jeanne Hong Zhang's translation from Chapter 3.3 in Zhang (2004).

Li Yawei

Since 1986, in addition to poems previously noted, Li Yawei had written numerous lyric poems on traditional themes, such as drinking, love, and an idealized countryside life (Tao Yuanming was one of his cultural heroes). In September 1989, Li wrote <We> (我们),⁷⁴² a nostalgic, even elegiac, ballad in remembrance of his friends, the Macho Men poets, and other avant-garde poets of his acquaintance, and how life had changed for them all:

Our camels change shape, when it comes down to it
 Our line is fake now, we are still strugglers
 We cross deserts and streams to learn culture
 We are reflected on to the coast by a mirage
 Plain features, easily forgotten or caressed
 We are drowned by feelings, let loose from the contradictions today
 Happiness, concerned over the final goal, joins up with us
 Brings up the rear in a horse drawn carriage

We are the flowers of our youth, bunched together
 Learning from and confusing each other
 Extending along the vines, often led
 To become part of the masses and experienced men
 Fading away in the desert, and refracted out by the sea
 Three years ago, cheeky and engaged to be married
 We came by boat, inquired into life and death, explored philosophies
 A force that could have split bamboo
 We mastered the essentials, crossed snow-capped mountains and the Ganges
 Into another person's home

We come up from the sea, we must find housing
 We come from the desert, we must have food and clothing
 We come from two sides, enter realms and seek the forbidden, knock at doors asking
 guidance
 Having crossed over winter and ice, we enter the very fiber of the skin
 Holding weapons of despair, the sighing organs
 Comprehend, have a deep understanding of the gist of it
 We come from the antipodes of labor and harvest
 We come from the two sides of flower and fruit
 Through study on our own, we become the people
 Our camels are reflected onto an island

⁷⁴² First published in *Modern Han Poetry* Summer 1991 (#2).

Our vessels are projected into books
 And become phenomena, vague and indistinct
 Mutually replaceable, mutually imagined
 Moving straight onward, creating logic
 We assess the explorations and develop in another direction
 Trickling across creeks, swamps, ascending onto The Great Way
 We have fixed plans and miss the point by miles

We come to the city from the antipodes of food and clothing
 We come onto the street from the two sides of good and bad
 Alone, lean, we meet and want to drink
 We hate the lateness of our meeting, by marriage brought together
 By technology driven apart
 These three years, we learned from the past, fell in love
 Died off in new places, and beg in the old
 Three years later, we go into the West, at the forefront of knowledge
 Clogging the streets, definitions change
 Thinking it through, our numbers increase, we can't be depleted

We come from the antipodes of one and two, carrying poetry and knives
 We meet, and love reduces our number by one
 We pass through a city of pagodas, are miraged out to sea
 Never to return
 Again we come from the antipodes of one and two
 Diligent in our studies, coughing up blood in our youth
 Industrious, self-improving, with talent to spare
 Forever inquiring after learning and childbirth, striking the ovum onto stone

We come to the village from the antipodes of seed and fruit
 Exchange experiences, approve of each other
 We come to the market town from the antipodes of buying and selling
 We disappear in the exchange, become pearls
 Become her floral handkerchief, and she striding out in front of her husband
 The first-loved and remembered by her
 An unending stream of traffic, restraint, we judge others by their appearances

We come up from the surface
 We suffer a sudden interweave on the antipodes of longitude and latitude
 We throw ourselves into weaving, form patterns, raise our heads and attain love
 Wearing flowered clothing we throw ourselves into revolutions, and meet up with The
 Leader
 We wander round, cross borders, and earn ourselves another
 Though we might only be walking on the street
 It's also a product of dreams, nothing is real or unreal
 Anyway you look at it, all are characters of the imagination
 Walking outside, yet sticking precisely to contours of thought

In the last lines of <We>, the speaker seems to find an inner peace of sorts, an accommodation he can live with, and an understanding of the world and his place in it. He details humanity's inability to transcend systems of thought, culture, and civilization, all creations of the human imagination.

And yet "Our camels change shape, our line is fake now / When it comes down to it, we are still strugglers." Maybe this is why Li joined Liao Yiwu *cum suis* in creating the videotape that led to their arrests in March 1990. Appropriately, after Li's release from two-years of incarceration in February 1992, he did not seem at all intimidated. At the same time as he and Wan Xia went into the lucrative popular book publishing business, Li continued to write poetry, if not on the near-continuous basis he did so prior to his arrest in 1990. Below is an excerpt from his first unofficially published work:

<The Red Flag of Nostalgia> (怀旧的红旗; 1992-1993)⁷⁴³

A sequence of 18 poems.

#1

This stretch of dry land is the navy's last giant fin
Masts, flags and unshakable principles are planted on top
The telescope sees the problems brought by leaders and philosophy in the distance
It falls in on itself, examines the reasons why hardship and new-born things arrive
My virtue and heart illness are also spied out by a peach blossom eye on Mars

This stretch of land is an eye that gazes and is gazed upon
It stands up high, sees far, is seen by farther-off alpine yarrow too
Like a ship returning from a distant voyage, the eyes among sailors and crowds
discover each other
All that cannot be clearly seen is death, words written before the revolution

Because the compasses have all been collectively given to whales, as if presenting the
nation to the navy
I'm not speaking of an island nation, at war firing Coke, clothing and contraceptives at
nomadic nationalities
I'm saying that what returns from radar emanations at base areas is resentment and
memory

⁷⁴³ First published in *Modern Han Poetry* Autumn-Winter 1993 (#8). As an indication of continuing political pressures, the series is published under the title <Flag Language> (旗语) in the officially published Wan & Xiaoxiao ed. (1993) and <The Red Years> (红色岁月) in *Author*; Li (1996b). Four poems from the series appear under its original name for the first time in an official publication in Tang Xiaodu ed. (1999).

I'm not speaking of a piece of history, because that piece has errors

Because the compasses were carried to Europe by whales that charged up beaches,
supplied to an inland nation to manufacture clocks

Because a big fish was the first to present its gills to a passing warship

Because history is only time, coup d'états, and making money

I'm saying the colonizers need space and philosophy, need technology and news of
lovers

So what I speak of is the wireless, a carrier wave, and a satellite

What comes back when it fires on a base is Buddhist gatha and Confucian mysticism

Raised up to philosophy, it's enough to occupy the heads of a generation

In its totality, Li writes an autobiographical poem in a flowing, long-lined lyrical form that seems almost elegiac, a remembrance of childhood, old politics, and his old self, and what has made himself, and China, what they are.

Zhou Lunyou

While Li appears to have reached an accommodation, even understanding with life in China, Zhou Lunyou moves in the opposite direction. When he revived *Not-Not* in 1992, the old theories of Not-Not-ism were not entirely abandoned, but a new Not-Not-ism, as in “not-leisurely” (非闲适), had taken priority over all others. To this end, he composed a lengthy manifesto-like document that would serve to rededicate *Not-Not* to its new circumstances: <Red Writing – The 1992 Arts Charter or the Principles of Not-Leisurely Poetry> (红色写作—1992 艺术宪章或非闲适诗歌原则). The first paragraph of <Red Writing>, beneath a heading that read “White Writing and Leisure” (白色写作与闲适), makes Zhou Lunyou's meaning clear:

Chinese poetry has just undergone a period of White Writing. In unprecedented numbers and over a wide range of subjects, the feeble-minded have written many words that have been forgotten as soon as they were read: cowardly, pallid literary works of an indifferent nature, lacking in creativity, and of pretentious superficial refinement. Defeated and scattered in all directions from the center of being. A dispersal without a core. Drifting, rootless words crowding and jostling against each other. In the guises of idle talk, hermits, hippies, ruffians endlessly trivial, insipid and empty. Deliberately avoiding the masters and their works, in fear or without the courage to pursue profundity and power. Passing white turnips off as ivory tusks to

avoid real and fabricated dangers. To the weak rhythms of elevator music, a generation of poets has formed into meandering rows and uses a limited vocabulary to repeatedly and collectively imitate one another and themselves. Persistent repetitiveness and inadequacy have made triviality and mediocrity the universal characteristics of an entire period of poetry.....

Zhou Lunyou may be referring to the post-June Fourth period, but he deliberately fails to be specific, for this “period of White Writing” could be said to have begun in the mid-1980s, a possible reference to the so-called Third Generation and others of the westernizing avant-garde. Zhou points out an undertone of “leisureliness” which runs through much of the poetry of this period and finds it rooted in a near-universal aspiration to, or actual enjoyment of, the life of relative comfort and ease enjoyed by Confucian scholar-officials of old. Zhou sees China’s poets traveling the middle road, the path of least resistance, avoiding all confrontation, and interested only in self-preservation. They think no evil, and exhibit mild temperaments and elegant mediocrity in much of their work.

Zhou goes on to lament the absolute absence of a critical consciousness and skepticism among China’s poets. That which may once have existed in China’s underground poetry is stripped away once this poetry is co-opted into the establishment literary mainstream – something that Zhou (and Liao Yiwu) had noted before June Fourth and presciently feared would occur with renewed liberalization. New styles and techniques are readily accepted in the establishment on condition that new, critical content is left behind in the unofficial journals and the privately printed collections of poets during their foolish, headstrong youth. At this point, it seems clear that <Red Writing> is, in part, a rebuttal and a new position-taking with reference to the ideas of Xiao Kaiyu, Sun Wenbo, Ouyang Jianghe, and Zhong Ming found in the forewords of *The Nineties*, *Against*, and *Image Puzzle*, if not also the version of *Not-Not* produced by Yang Li, Lan Ma *cum suis* in 1990-1991.

Possibly, during his 25 months in prison, Zhou recognized that he himself was guilty of the sins he had accused others of earlier, if to a lesser degree. Not-Not-ism, while critical of poetic convention, linguistic order, and traditional value systems, was still an obscure, roundabout subversive maneuver, understood by few and thus easily dismissed as irrelevant. The events of June 1989, his subsequent personal experiences, and, ultimately,

the overthrow of totalitarian regimes in Eastern Europe and the former USSR, seem to convince Zhou that literature has a direct political role to play in Chinese society – though not the traditional Chinese role in support of good government. In addition, he thinks poets have social responsibilities, and that irrelevance is the inevitable reward for those who do not face up to them. Furthermore, Zhou believes art for art's sake, when devoid of any relationship to the artist's society, is little more than self-centered, nihilistic expressionism. He claims that Red Writing is a literature of freedom that will allow the human spirit to become pure and whole again. It is a literature that will help to put an end to division and antagonism in Chinese society.

Notably, Liao Yiwu would reach similar conclusions about avant-garde poetry upon his release from prison camp in 1994. However, Liao chose to abandon poetry entirely, considering the art as practiced in China was compromised beyond redemption. Presumably, he felt that he had already said, or written, as much as was necessary and useful in his two 1986-1989 trilogies and the five-part <The Master Craftsman>.

On the last page of <Red Writing>, Zhou seems to issue a challenge to the CCP cultural apparatus. The “red” in Red Writing does not stand for communism and its victory, but for fresh blood, for the reinvigoration of all forms of writing, not just poetry, and ultimately for freedom – freedom of the spirit, of the imagination, of expression. The writings of Solzhenitsyn and Havel are still banned in China, and Kundera was banned at the time in 1992. Only the non-political works of Brodsky, Milosz and Osip Mandelstam, and so on, were available to the Chinese readers with an interest in such literature, and were lauded – without any sense of irony – by the editors of and contributors to *The Nineties*, *Against*, *Image Puzzle*, and *Writer's Workshop*. Yet word of mouth and untranslated foreign texts allowed knowledge of what was banned to reach those who had an interest and who also wondered why it is that China has yet to produce even one writer or poet of equal courage, strength of character and moral purpose. While Zhou may exaggerate the influence of literature in the fall of foreign communist regimes, as he conceived them, the aims of Red Writing go beyond literature and writers alone, they reach out to readers and Chinese society in general. In this sense, the impact of literature is certainly greater than that of any one author:

..... Actually, my intention is very simple: To invigorate the pure fountainhead of your innermost being – a consciousness of the blood ties between the individual and the fate of all mankind; the vigorous enthusiasm created by true freedom; the satisfying actualization of a full and complete life!

A new century will soon be rung in. We stand on this side and look towards it. A great battle is taking place within us. The entire significance of Red Writing is to join in and fight it out to the end – to penetrate into all that is sacred or blasphemous in the arts, and to mount the final assault upon all the forbidden regions and ramparts of language. One day seventy-three years ago, Lenin's guard said to his woman: "We'll have bread, we'll have food, we'll have everything." Today, seventy-three years later, after having become sculpted historical reliefs, the Vladimir Ilyich's have been reduced to rubble. Now I will tell you, aside from food, other things that have not been realized, will be.

- There will be art
- There will be freedom
- There will be everything

What but man's freedom does art hope to symbolize? All things are temporary, only this eternal undertaking will not change. Red Writing believes this, and, furthermore, reaffirms: Art that is rooted in life is immortal. Having experienced calamity, young Chinese poets are testifying with their golden voices that during mankind's final efforts to free itself, the people of China will not give themselves up for lost!

Not-Not #5 was printed and went into circulation in the autumn of 1992. Also at that time, in response to Deng Xiaoping's call to "counter leftism", a number of literary conferences were organized in Beijing to attack continued leftist influence in the arts establishment. The first of these was a poetic theory conference that took place in Beijing on August 20-21. Zhou Lunyou was invited to attend and was able to present his yet unpublished Red Writing manifesto. At the time, it received an enthusiastic response.⁷⁴⁴ Subsequent events, or rather the lack of them, indicated that these conferences were just for show and primarily an effort by the CCP to placate disgruntled intellectuals. In hindsight, it now appears Deng and his supporters used the anti-leftist tide to quell critics within the party in preparation for the CCP's Fourteenth Congress, which was convened in November 1992. Shortly after the Congress was completed the second half of the slogan which Deng supposedly mouthed in January-February 1992 was given added emphasis: In its entirety the slogan now read "Counter leftism, guard against rightism" (反左, 防右). In this, there are shades of 1978-1979 when Deng used public opinion to

⁷⁴⁴ According to correspondence with Tang Xiaodu who was one of the principle organizers of the conference.

remove Maoists and other “radicals” who opposed his policies of economic reform at that time. Criticism of leftism (by doctrinaire Marxists, Stalinists, Maoists and anyone else opposed to Deng’s policies) in 1992, however, was strictly limited to the CCP and certain intellectual and arts circles – doubtless with an eye to the events of 1989, and for fear that a broader campaign might lead to calls for a redress of June Fourth. Zhou reacted to this apparent manipulation by writing a poem that laid out in detail the deceptions practiced by the CCP since its foundation, a poem more explicitly political than any he had ever written and possibly meant as a warning to those avant-garde poets who appeared to be reaching an accommodation with cultural establishment:

<TALKING ABOUT REVOLUTION> (谈谈革命)

-- In imitation of a particular ideological discourse (April 14, 1993)⁷⁴⁵

Revolution is not a dinner party..... – Mao Zedong

Chairman Mao said only the half of it about revolution
 I’ll supply the remaining half
 First I want to say: This topic of revolution is very big
 Very broad, we can’t get a grasp of it
 We can only see a color (which makes us remember
 That the blood of revolutionary martyrs did not flow in vain)
 Red is the representative color of revolution. Hence the red flag
 Is red, the red scarf is red, the revolutionary
 soldier’s heart is red, the red sun is red

 Also the “two hands of revolution”⁷⁴⁶: Conspiracy becomes an overt act
 Treachery becomes virtue, it triumphs over honesty and intelligence
 Anything can be said in the name of revolution
 And it becomes irrefutable truth, not open to doubt

 These are all
 Basic principles of revolution, inviolable
 Born into New China, nurtured beneath the red flag
 You and I grew up drinking the milk of revolution
 Of course we know what revolution is. Revolution is
 instantly effective when using the class struggle, when the three mountains⁷⁴⁷
 Are toppled, we stamp another foot down on them

⁷⁴⁵ First published in *Not-Not* #6-7, 1993.

⁷⁴⁶ The “two hands” refer to peaceful methods and violent methods, or covert and overt methods of carrying out revolution.

⁷⁴⁷ The three “mountains” were imperialism, feudalism, and bureaucratic capitalism.

A million feet, teach them that they will never stand again
 Revolution is a political campaign, incite masses to struggle against masses
 Fight yourself: Ruthlessly struggle against fleeting thoughts of the word “private”
 Revolution is revolt to its greatest degree (combat imperialism combat revisionism
 Combat leftism combat rightism combat liberalization combat peaceful evolution)
 Only revolution cannot be opposed (counter revolution carries a death penalty)
 This way of saying it is still too abstract, let me explain
 More concretely: Revolution is to examine ancestry back three generations
 There is theory of class status, but not theory of the unique importance of class
 origins⁷⁴⁸

.....

Revolution is overt plotting, is to lure the snakes out of their nests
 Especially to attack snakes with eyeglasses (the more knowledgeable
 The more reactionary) Revolution is the East Wind prevailing over the West Wind
 Its “asking for instructions in the morning”, “reporting back in the evening”, the
 fandango of loyalty⁷⁴⁹
 Mao’s quotations sung. It’s Attention Long Live Chairman Mao To the right Dress
 Down with Liu Shaoqi⁷⁵⁰ Look to the front Forever loyal to Chairman Mao
 To the left Turn Forever

.....

Chairman Mao waves and I advance
 Revolution is a vast world that tempers red hearts
 It’s to recall past suffering

.....

To adore New China even more. It’s Lei Feng
 Wang Jie, Yang Zirong, Ouyang Hai, Guo Jianguang⁷⁵¹
 Just before dying the hero raises his arm in salute and shouts:
 “Long Live Chairman Mao! The diary is under the pillow.....”
 Revolution is Xi’er not becoming Huang Shiren’s concubine⁷⁵²
 The ignominiousness of Wang Debiao as a traitor.⁷⁵³ Li Yuhe
 Before departing drinking a bowl of wine to his mother, Thank you Ma!⁷⁵⁴

⁷⁴⁸ The theory of class status referred to one’s profession or economic status before joining the revolutionary ranks (as all had to after 1949). The latter theory of class origins was an offshoot of the previous theory but implied that those of non-revolutionary background were not welcome in the revolutionary ranks. Mao rejected this theory.

⁷⁴⁹ Stylized dances performed while singing quotations from Mao’s writing that were set to music during the Cultural Revolution.

⁷⁵⁰ Liu was the president of China and second in power for much of the time during 1949-1966. During the Cultural Revolution, he was criticized by Mao, after which he was arrested. Liu died in prison in 1969.

⁷⁵¹ Lei Feng and the others are the names of model soldiers and workers held up by the Party as exemplars for other Chinese citizens (the spirit of self-sacrifice for the Party, communism and others is particularly stressed). Lei’s diary was supposedly found upon his death and in it were recorded his good deeds, deeds that had never come to light before his death.

⁷⁵² From the revolutionary opera *The White-Haired Girl* (白毛女). Huang was the evil landlord who coveted Xi’er, the heroine.

⁷⁵³ From the revolutionary opera *Shajiabang* (沙家浜).

Heroes always fall beneath the same pine tree
 Accompanied by The Internationale, there's no pain
 The final victory must surely be ours
 Revolution is not to allow monsters and demons to act and speak carelessly
 Much less allow them to fart! Class warfare must be stressed day in day out
 Month in month out year in year out (with regard to farting)
 Only later did we hear that it is beneficial to mind and body)
 Now the wording is different: one center two points⁷⁵⁵
 Class struggle must still be stressed. Revolution is to
 Emancipate thought, seek truth from facts,⁷⁵⁶ not to wrong good people
 Initially it gave you hats to wear,⁷⁵⁷ now it gives you redress
 All is correct, all is revolutionary necessity
 Correcting one's own mistakes is the equivalent of making no mistakes
 Revolution is "dichotomy",⁷⁵⁸ and the "seventy-thirty ratio"⁷⁵⁹
 Results are of paramount importance. Don't get cocky
 (Being more correct than chairman Mao is in itself an error)
 Revolution is the reimportation and sale of exports, defective goods
 Sold to Chinese, don't worship foreign things
 With foreigners you can transcend ideology
 Not with nationals. Or in other words
 Peacefully coexist with imperialism, with the people
 Under no circumstances be soft-hearted! This is called distinguishing between
 domestic and foreign
 Government policy and tactics are the life of the Party, now
 There's no need to recite them, but they must continue to be carried out
 The East Wind did not prevail over the West Wind, but
 Certainly will never be overwhelmed by the West Wind. Future prospects
 Are bright, the road is torturous
 Revolution is like feeling for rocks with your feet while wading across a river,⁷⁶⁰
 suddenly left
 Suddenly right, it's difficult to avoid paying some tuition
 It's all a matter of dressing warmly and eating one's fill. A comparatively well-off

⁷⁵⁴ From the revolutionary opera *The Red Lantern* (红灯). In the 1970s until 1976, the above three operas were the most famous of the five operas and two ballets allowed to be performed on stage during 1969-1971 – another 12 items were added in 1972.

⁷⁵⁵ Economic development in China as the central task; one point being to uphold the four basic principles (socialism, people's democratic dictatorship, the leadership of the CCP, and Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong thought); the other point being to persevere with Deng Xiaoping's "reform" and "opening" policies. These were introduced into the constitution at the 13th congress of the CCP in 1987.

⁷⁵⁶ A famous phrase of Mao's.

⁷⁵⁷ From 1949 until 1976, people were made to wear hats on which were written their crimes against the people during mass criticism rallies and demonstrations.

⁷⁵⁸ Mao's idea that there were two sides to everything (the right side and the wrong side, the positive and the negative side): everything, or everyone, is on one side or the other.

⁷⁵⁹ A shorthand method used when assessing individuals: i.e., one's record or past is seen to consist of 70 percent achievements and 30 percent mistakes.

⁷⁶⁰ A traditional folk saying used by Deng Xiaoping to describe how political and economic reform in China would proceed after his return to power in 1978.

level of living. Double it and double that again
 Now we need to lengthen our strides a bit
 Revolution is to get things moving, for a second time
 Distribute land to the farmers (no change for fifty years)
 It's all the people going into business. A stockholding system. A market economy
 Revolution is changing from agricultural to non-agricultural producer, the "54321
 Office"
 (Five stresses four beauties three ardors two civilizations brought together as one)⁷⁶¹
 Possessing Chinese characteristics. Casual pissing and shitting is not allowed
 But of a billion people nine hundred million gamble. Saunas at public expense
 Blind wandering of the unemployed. Syphilis. Sexual diseases spread widely
 Is revolution surnamed "socialist" or "capitalist", it's hard to say
 Don't argue anymore. Together all the people of the land look to money
 Ultimately revolution is an issue about cats
 I approve of this way of saying it: white cat black cat
 If it catches mice, it's a good cat.⁷⁶² Finally, I want to say
 Revolution is buying a cat over an open sack
 Revolution is catching the mice

Zhou seems to reduce the role of all China's ordinary citizens to that of mice, and the cat is a mere instrument firmly controlled by the party leadership. The mice, which may be deemed cats when useful, appear to be the ongoing victims of a socio-political experiment conducted by the CCP leadership.

For this reason, Zhou apparently chose to opt out of the system altogether, much like Liao Yiwu had already done. Zhou's decision was possibly made easier by a renewed ban on the publication and distribution of *Not-Not* later in 1993 and his difficulties in 1994-1995, as well as the choices made by many contributors to *Not-Not* #5 and #6-7 to opt back into the official cultural scene when there was a modicum of cultural liberalization in 1993-1994. In fact, <Talking About Revolution> was his last published poem (in *Not-Not* #6-7) until 2001.⁷⁶³ In 2000, Zhou re-established *Not-Not* on his own terms as a publication devoted to the work of poets "writing outside the system" (体制外写作), as it was termed in *Not-Not* #11 (2003). During the intervening years, one can only imagine

⁷⁶¹ These are a series of slogans, in use since the Cultural Revolution, with the aim of creating the kind of citizens the Party requires. They stress absolute adoration of the CCP, socialism, and the nation, as well as moral standards that all people are to strive for.

⁷⁶² A dictum uttered by Deng Xiaoping. Officially it is understood to mean that it is of no importance what methods (whether socialist or capitalist) are used to improve China's economy, all that matters is that the end result is achieved.

⁷⁶³ See Zhou Lunyou (2001f).

his disappointment as poets and critics, who had so enthusiastically supported his <Red Writing> manifesto in 1992-1993, were once again (as before June Fourth) gradually co-opted into the official cultural system in their quests for cultural capital, official recognition, and the concomitant invitations to foreign poetry conclaves.