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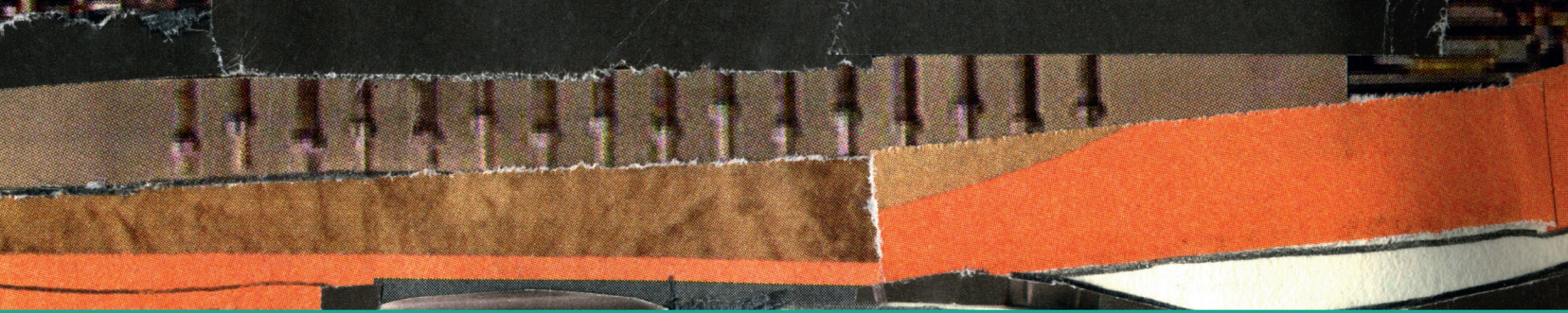


Debts

Coming to Terms with Migrant Worker Poetry

Maghiel van Crevel

This essay offers some impressions of a grassroots literature group and the multifaceted non-governmental organization of which it is a part: the Migrant Workers Home based in Picun, in the suburbs of Beijing. In migrant worker literature the subaltern definitely speaks—and this is also true for the museum of migrant worker culture that is part of the Migrant Workers Home. After comparing this museum with government-run migrant worker museums in Shenzhen and Guangzhou, the essay returns to the Picun literature group and highlights the question of translatability in foreign scholarship's engagement with China's migrant worker poetry.



“Undress, to sleep with you” (“Tuoguang le, shui ni” 脱光了，睡你).¹ Somewhat coarse in the source text and even more direct than the English, “sleep with you” echoes a signature text by Yu Xiuhua 余秀华, whose rise to fame and influence is making us rethink the dimensions of Chinese poetry yet again as we speak.² But the “you” in “Undress, to sleep with you” is not another human being but a bed, and the poem is not by Yu Xiuhua but by Li Ruo 李若. This sleeping is not about having sex but about resting one’s tired limbs, and Li’s poem is modest and fragile in comparison to Yu’s outburst. In another of Li’s poems, a daughter laments her inability to do more for her mother than bring her a gadget every time she visits home: a microwave, a massage tool, a radio. To make up for her absence, all the daughter can do is “when I’m not there / to let those ice-cold electrical appliances / care for you in my stead.”³ Li is a migrant worker; in migrant worker poetry and the broader category of contemporary Chinese subaltern writing (*diceng xiezu* 底层写作), the equation of authors with speakers and protagonists is generally defensible and often the obvious way to go.

Li Ruo features prominently in the second issue of *Picun Literature* (*Picun wenxue* 皮村文学, 2016), an unofficial publication produced by the literature group of the Migrant Workers Home (Gongyou zhi jia 工友之家).⁴ Based in Picun, a migrant workers’ village-in-the-city (*chengzhongcun* 城中村) in the northeastern suburbs of Beijing, the Home is one of the largest and most influential non-governmental organizations (NGO) working on labor in China. There are floodwaves of Chinese-language material on the Home, especially online. English-language publications include coverage in Chinese media like *China Org*, the *China Daily*, the *Beijing Review*, the *Global Times*, and the *South China Morning Post*; the occasional mention or interview in foreign media; and scholarship by Jack Linchuan Qiu and Wang Hongzhe, Sun Wanning, Tom Cliff and Wang Kan, and Lian Zhiying and Gillian Oliver. Beautiful impressions are offered in online mini-documentaries by the Goethe Institute (2018) and by Chen Wei 陈玮 (2019, in Chinese), the latter with special attention to the literature group.⁵

The Home was established in 2002 by Sun Heng 孙恒, Xu Duo 许多, and Wang Dezhi 王德志, three young, male migrant workers who had each come to Beijing in the late 1990s with a dream of making a living as a

musician (Sun and Xu) or a crosstalk⁶ performer (Wang). When that didn’t work out and they were forced into the typical precarious subsistence of rural-to-urban migrants, volunteer work for an NGO for women migrant workers introduced them to key intellectual figures of the New Left who helped them set up and find funding for the Migrant Workers Home.⁷

At the same time, Sun and company had channeled their artistic ambitions into their politics—meaning the wish to fight discrimination against migrant workers as second-class citizens—by forming a band called the New Workers Art Troupe (Xin gongren yishutuan 新工人艺术团) that performed for migrant workers and their sympathizers. Their lyrics address the hard lot of the migrant workers and identify the workers as a social group, famously captured in the slogan “Migrant Workers throughout the Land Are All One Family” (“Tianxia dagong shi yi jia” 天下打工是一家) and the eponymous song.⁸ The Migrant Workers Home started out as the band’s base camp and a physical place for migrant workers to gather outside work. Over the next ten years or so, it turned into a multifaceted organization that undertakes a range of activities: cultural events, education, publications, charity, vocational training, organic farming, and more.

Something of a founding myth, the story of the Art Troupe is a thumbnail image of the Home’s mission, which is to build “culture” for migrant workers in order to help them establish a social identity and claim their rightful place in society. “Without our culture, we have no history,” reads their mission statement, and it continues: “without our history, we have no future.” Thus, the notion of culture is taken broadly, and the Home’s objectives include social empowerment and awareness-building in areas such as labor rights and gender equality, with support from the Beijing Chaoyang District government and Oxfam Hong Kong among many other donors over the years. Since 2005, the Home has run a nearby school for migrant worker children that was initially funded from the royalties of the Art Troupe’s first CD. Under the banner of a Workers University (Gongren daxue 工人大学)—a set of courses organized by the Home rather than a formally accredited institution—it offers basic professional training for adults as well, such as in computer literacy.

Located in two facing courtyards that once hosted a tile factory, the Home physically encompasses living quarters and an office (where the Literature Group has



its meetings), a mutual-benefit thrift shop with recycled clothing (one of about twenty such shops in the wider area), a library, a cinema, and two bigger spaces: the New Workers Theater (Xin gongren juchang 新工人剧场) and the Museum of Migrant Worker Culture and Art (Dagong wenhua yishu bowuguan 打工文化艺术博物馆). The door to the theater shows the Home's characteristic emblem: a worker beating a drum, an image that symbolizes migrant workers making themselves heard. Online, the Home's website lays out an array of structural activities and theme projects run by migrant workers with the help of many volunteers.⁹ One of the most visible gigs is the Migrant Workers Spring Festival Gala (Dagong chunwan 打工春晚), held annually since 2012 as a friendly shadow version of the famous Chinese New Year's TV show. In typical Picun style, the Gala is a grassroots initiative with government support.

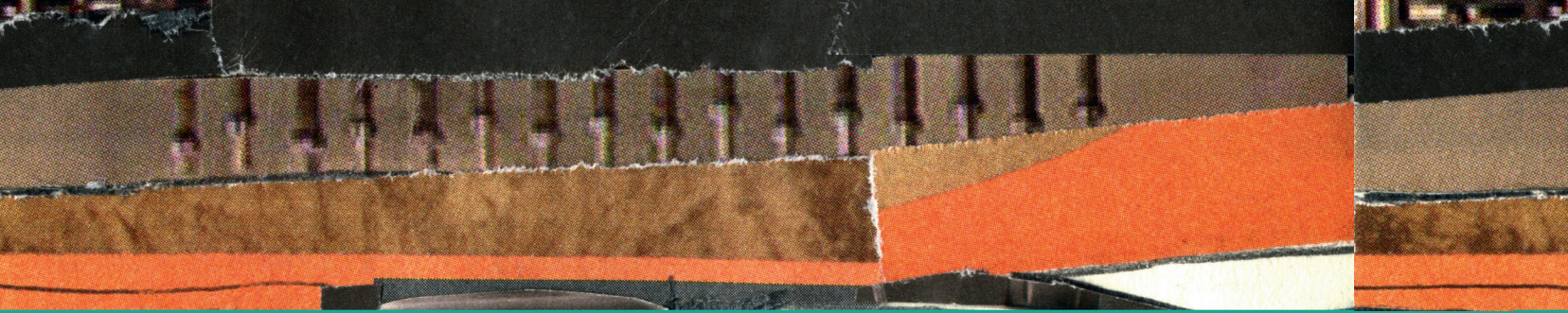
Picun Literature

The Picun literature group was established in fall 2014, with academics based in Beijing as volunteer teachers. Foremost among them is Zhang Huiyu 张慧瑜, a scholar of film and television. Most of the organizational work is done by Fu Qiuyun 付秋云, better known as Xiao Fu 小付, the Home's manager and the literature group's convenor. She collaborates with Zhang on the editorial work for *Picun Literature* by helping the authors convert their manuscripts to computer files, among other things. Nine issues have appeared to date. Works by members of the group have also appeared in official print publications including major literary journals, on social media, and on websites featuring migrant worker literature (*dagong wenxue* 打工文学).¹⁰ Fu and Zhang present this writing as not just personal expression but also historical testimony. They aim to raise the workers' literary accomplishment (*wenxue xiuyang* 文学修养) in terms of reading as well as writing, their workers' consciousness (*gongren yishi* 工人意识), and their ability to partake in debate, and they encourage them to tell their own stories and stories of the New Worker (*xin gongren* 新工人) at large.¹¹

A deprived successor to the Mao-era worker and their iron rice bowl, the New Worker stands for China's present-day precariat, made up of the foot soldiers of economic growth: hard-working, low-earning, with little in the way of socio-economic security, and, for the many rural-to-urban migrants among them, often far away from their native place. The terminology is important to



(Top) Entrance to the public yard of the Migrant Workers Home in Picun. The low building in back houses the museum.
(Center) At the entrance to the public yard of the Migrant Workers Home in Picun. Migrant workers on their way to the city.
(Bottom) Entrance to the New Workers Theater, with the emblem of the Migrant Workers Home (Picun).



the Migrant Workers Home. Following a debate in the late 2000s, “New Worker” has their preference over expressions such as *nongmingong* 农民工, literally “peasant worker” and usually translated as “rural migrant,” and *dagongzhe* 打工者, a challenge for the translator that is often rendered as “migrant worker,” which is a good pragmatic move but an explanation rather than a translation. (For the latter, in an attempt to capture the register of the Chinese expression, I have suggested “battler,” after an Australian colloquialism.¹² In this essay, I am sticking with “migrant worker” to align with the English term used for *dagong* 打工 by the Home.)

Several poems in *Picun Literature* no. 2 are dedicated to Zhang Huiyu, who has been the mainstay of the literature group throughout, coming to Picun on Sunday evenings to teach, typically with ten to thirty students attending. Recently, numbers have dropped off a little as the government has closed some nearby factories to bring down pollution levels. After Zhang’s first year as a teacher and mentor in Picun, he spent the academic year of 2015 to 2016 in the United States while other colleagues stepped in, but he picked up again in fall 2016 and his dedication is duly noted by his students.

I first meet Zhang at Peking University in May 2017 when we are both panelists at a screening of *Iron Moon* (*Wo de shipian* 我的诗篇), Qin Xiaoyu 秦晓宇 and Wu Feiyue’s 吴飞跃 documentary on migrant worker poets. (The poetry recital at the start of this semi-scripted film was held in Picun in the New Workers Theater in February 2015.) When I interview him a few weeks later, he explains that the group’s membership constantly changes because people come and go at unpredictable times, making it impossible to run a regular, cumulative program. Rather, he says, it is about finding out what people need when they join, and acting as their sounding board. The group gives the migrant workers a network and a place where others respond to what they write—and where it is acknowledged *that* they write. In light of their circumstances, this is not a self-evident choice or even a self-evident possibility. They mostly write by hand, Zhang says, and many move from paper notebooks to mobile phone screens in one go, leapfrogging the computer phase.

One of Zhang Huiyu’s students was Fan Yusu 范雨素, whose autobiographical account of a migrant worker’s struggle went viral in China in April 2017 and made the papers internationally: a book-crazy runaway child grows up in rural poverty, becomes a village teacher at

age twelve, moves to Beijing to see the world, becomes a mother of two in an abusive and violent marriage, flees from that marriage and returns to teaching, but then finds better money baby-sitting for the rich—Fan’s piece ends with a plea for love and compassion in a cruel world. As it happens, her rise to fame has attracted more volunteer teachers to Picun. Together with Wan Huashan 万华山, she is now editor in chief of *New Workers Literature* (*Xin gongren wenxue* 新工人文学), announced as a bimonthly publication to showcase the achievements of the literature group and launched on Labor Day in 2019—with a disclaimer of the sort often seen in unofficial poetry journals, stating that it is meant “for study and exchange” and that it is not for sale. In 2017, *The Guardian* cited Zhang Huiyu as approvingly calling Fan a literature fanatic.¹³ This is doubtless so, but Zhang’s mentorship might just have been equally important. Wang Dezhi, who helped Fan Yusu handle the throngs of journalists that descended on Picun after she became famous overnight, says Fan would not have “taken up the pen” without Zhang’s encouragement.

I meet Wang when I visit Picun in June 2017, not long after my interview with Zhang. One of the Home’s founding members, Wang holds central coordinating responsibilities and he is clearly in charge. As I enter the larger, more public of the Home’s two yards from the street (the one with the theater, the cinema, the shop, the library, and the museum), two student interns emerge from the museum, accompanying a foreign visitor on his way out, and Wang reprimands them for not having introduced this person to him. When I introduce myself and say I would love to see the museum for my research on migrant worker poetry, he is stand-offish, and I can see why. Migrant worker culture and the hard lot of China’s “floating population” lend themselves to easy politicization in foreign media (and in Chinese media, but those are curbed by censorship). To be sure, there are thoroughly political sides to these matters, but the discourse surrounding migrant workers presents a complex dynamic in which the state plays different roles, sponsoring as well as censoring and supportive as well as repressive—and I imagine the Home is not helped by foreign reporting of the kind that sucks it into a black-and-white tale of oppression and resistance instead, certainly not at a time when Chinese NGOs have been discouraged from relying on international connections, financially and otherwise. Wang wryly notes that among those wanting to



(Top) Wang Dezhi outside the Museum of Migrant Worker Culture and Art (Picun).

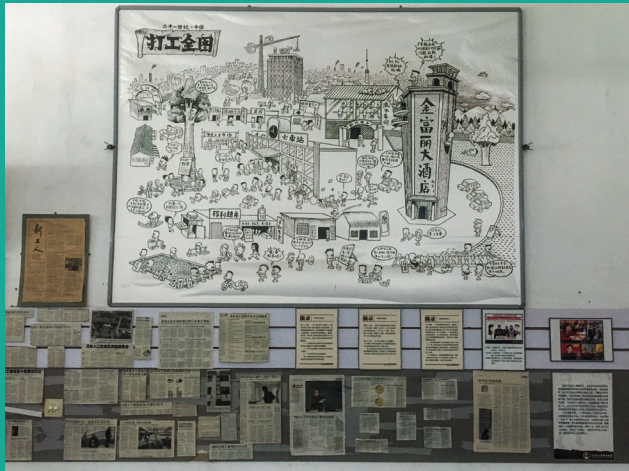
(Bottom) Inside the Picun museum.

interview Fan Yusu whose requests were “not accepted” were compatriots of mine from the Netherlands.

When he sits down with me at the entrance to the museum, having agreed to answer some questions but not exactly brimming with enthusiasm, I feel he is assessing me in this regard before he waves me on. Three and a half hours later his mood has thawed, perhaps because I have been diligently taking notes as I work my way through the museum, adding credibility to my claim of being an academic rather than a journalist looking for a particular type of headline. He invites me to join him for lunch in a local noodle shop, where he tells me more about the Home and about himself.¹⁴ He comes from an Inner Mongolian family of agrarian workers (*zhongdi gongren* 种地工人), a category that he notes used to rank higher in the social hierarchy than peasant (*nongmin* 农民) and once came with a state pension. References to socio-economic issues permeate his conversation throughout, a recurring topic being the need for workers, especially women workers, to stand up for their rights in the pernicious dependency relationships that migrant labor often entails, in a climate that is characterized by growing inequality overall.

Three Museums

The museum is a rickety, single-story former factory workshop that assumed its new identity on Labor Day in 2008. It is a DIY grassroots operation that is visibly run on a shoestring, reflecting its non-governmental (*minjian* 民间) status.¹⁵ This is reaffirmed in the exhibition’s opening and closing statements, which side with the New Worker and stress that the museum is “alive,” as an activist unit that wants not just to document history but to change it. It is a poor museum in material terms and it is not just *about* migrant workers but is also run by them. Thus, the workers *speak* through the museum. This adds to the immediacy of the experience—said the foreign academic with pretty good job security. Saying this means entering debates on appropriation and authenticity that are emerging in foreign-language discourse on Chinese migrant worker culture, just as they did some time ago in Chinese-language discourse. Standing inside the museum, I feel this sharply. I don’t believe in the kind of cultural identification that comes with exclusive ownership claims and disallows outsiders from engaging, and the museum does nothing of the sort. Authors and advocates of migrant worker poetry, too, usually welcome outsider



(Top) Wei Ke's *Migrant Worker Panorama* (Picun).
 (Bottom) The migrant worker children theme room (Picun).

The first, large room provides general information and historical background on the household registration system, economic development in the Mao era and beyond, the growth of domestic migration, and subsequent policy development. One of the material exhibits is a set of the temporary urban residence permits (*zanzhuzheng* 暂住证) that embody the migrant workers' status and identity as dangling between the countryside and the city: this is permission as restriction. At the same time, the visitor is confronted with the cruel underside to the economic miracle that has happened in the reform era, through visual and textual documentation of the notorious temporary detention system (with many migrant workers among its victims, especially in the 1990s), labor rights issues, strike action, work injuries, migrant worker suicide, and so on. On the far wall hangs the famous *Migrant Worker Panorama* (*Dagong quantu* 打工全图) poster drawn by Wei Ke 魏克 that first appeared as a fold-out with the canonical anthology *Best of China's Migrant Worker Poetry, 1985–2005* (1985–2005 *Zhongguo dagong shige jingxuan* 1985–2005 中国打工诗歌精选) edited by Xu Qiang 许强, Luo Deyuan 罗德远, and Chen Zhongcun 陈忠村,¹⁶ and has become a signature visual of contemporary migrant worker culture.

The next three, smaller rooms each have a theme. One focuses on the special plight of female migrant workers: the widespread perception among factory managers that they have greater license to bully women than men, a persistent gender pay gap, sexual harassment and rape, fertility issues caused by unhealthy labor regimes, and forced prostitution—all in addition to the general horrors of maltreatment and dehumanization that can befall migrant workers regardless of their gender.¹⁷ The exhibits in the next room focus on the children of migrant workers. According to the information panel, a staggering 37.7 percent of rural children up to age seventeen were living apart from their parents in the late 2000s, and about thirty-six million children were “floating” between the countryside and the city themselves. The third theme room focuses on NGO work (social, legal, cultural, policy lobbying), suggesting that in spite of the efforts of the many organizations working to advance the interests of the floating population and labor rights in general, the scale of grassroots activism is nowhere near what is needed. Amid physical objects taken from migrant worker life (tools, safety helmets, a handcart), the exhibition in the final, larger room foregrounds individual stories

engagement. But the issues are real and the outsider owes awareness and respect.

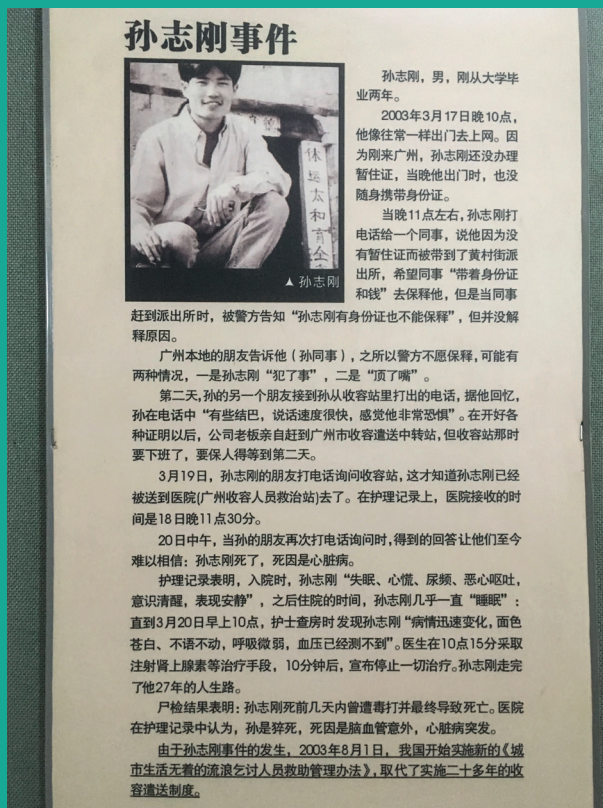
Inside the building the material is tightly arranged across five rooms, totaling a floor area of about 250 square meters. The exhibition opens with an acknowledgment of support for the museum by dozens of institutions: various national and local government units, many universities and schools, and all manner of NGOs, volunteer organizations, and issue groups on rural-to-urban migration. The Home has a vast network. In addition to migrant workers as its primary constituency, its visitors have included government officials, foreign students, and everything in between.

that point out how migrants can feel lost between the city and the countryside, how their pension rights tend to be “forgotten,” and so on.

Throughout the exhibition, upright text panels with the occasional photograph or diagram show what has been achieved over the decades—poverty alleviation, social mobility, economic growth—but they also highlight the challenges faced by migrant workers in the process. These include the deprivation of rights and benefits, especially rights linked to an urban household registration, which is hard to get (e.g., the right to affordable health insurance, to school placement for children, to home ownership), as well as the broader struggles of displacement.

The latter range from homesickness to police violence of the kind widely suspected to have occurred in the 2003 “Sun Zhigang Incident” (Sun Zhigang shijian 孙志刚事件), when a twenty-seven-year-old migrant worker in Guangzhou was arrested for not carrying a temporary residence permit or ID during an evening stroll. His friends and employer were denied access to him at the detention center and later learned he had been transferred to a hospital, whose report said he died suddenly of cerebrovascular issues and heart failure. Popular outrage over his death led to improved legislation for the protection of “urban vagrants and beggars” in the cities. Sun has his own text panel in the museum, headed by a photograph of a cheerful young man above a chilling, official account of his fate—on which the general consensus, also in state media, was that he was beaten to death.¹⁸ The museum also documents the string of migrant worker suicides at the Shenzhen Foxconn plant in the 2010s. One vitrine contains an original, handwritten “Letter of Gratitude” by Tian Yu 田玉, a Foxconn worker who attempted suicide by jumping in 2011. Now confined to a wheelchair, she thanks those who looked after her when she was in the hospital and gave her the courage to live on and try to make a living by knitting.

This grim narrative is counterbalanced by accounts of successful advocacy for workers’ rights, and by photographs, drawings, and documents that send a message of determination, hope, and progress rather than suffering and despair: information leaflets and “guidebooks” for migrant workers, academic writing on migrant worker literature, and so on. In the bigger picture, this message is backed up by photographs of what I have privately nicknamed the grinning helmets, showcasing happy migrant workers, usually men, in the iconic yellow



(Top) Text panel on the Sun Zhigang incident (Picun).

(Bottom) Tian Yu: “The story of a female Foxconn worker who jumped” (Picun).



Grinning helmets (Picun).

headgear worn on construction sites, often against the background of gigantic engineering projects. Depending on where you stand, these photographs can feed that overly clear oppression-and-resistance tale: “This is just propaganda!” Or, they can impress the hell out of you because the economic miracle is just that, migrant labor means opportunity as well as hardship, and the workers’ drive, perseverance, and resilience are breathtaking. Many among the first, poorest generations of migrant workers have lived lives for which the notion of sacrifice is not politicized rhetoric but an accurate description of their readiness to suffer in order to make enough money for their children to start from a better place in life.

A year and a half after my visit to Picun, in January 2019, I am in Shenzhen’s Bao’an district, one of the earliest hubs of migrant labor in the Pearl River Delta, on a visit to the Labor Museum, which is what the Laowugong bowuguan 劳务工博物馆 calls itself in English; literally, the name means “Casual Laborer Museum.” This

is one of two government-run (*guanfang* 官方) migrant worker museums examined in research by Qian Junxi 钱俊希 and Guo Junwan’guo 郭隽万果. The other is the Guangzhou-based Migrant Workers Museum, to which I turn below.¹⁹ The Shenzhen Labor Museum opened in late April 2008, a few days before the Museum of Migrant Worker Culture and Art in Picun, and I wonder if there is a connection between the establishment of both institutions in 2008 and the fact that migrant worker poet Zheng Xiaoqiong 郑小琼 received an essay award from *People’s Literature* (*Renmin wenxue* 人民文学) in 2007. The award came in the wake of government recognition of issues surrounding rural-to-urban migration and policy adjustments to address these issues. It constituted a breakthrough at the national level for migrant worker literature and culture, and made Zheng an icon overnight.

The Labor Museum exhibits the same kind of subject matter as the museum in Picun, but, as a government-run institution, it has a different style. First of all, it appears to be better resourced. It lies away from the street at the end of a driveway flanked by an old factory building where entire workshop scenes from the 1980s have been recreated: work stations, a canteen, an in-house film-viewing area. The furniture and machinery are now ancient-looking, and the explanatory notes ooze pride and nostalgia over Shenzhen’s early days as a pioneer city of the reform era. With a floor area seven or eight times bigger than that in Picun, the museum’s actual exhibition halls sit in a three-story building whose front wall features a vast boccero relief sculpture by local artist Liang Bing 梁冰 depicting scenes from migrant worker life.

Inside, opposite the entrance, the visitor is met by another two large copper-and-iron reliefs. Yuan Xuehan 袁雪寒, the museum’s director, tells me they are machine-produced and, as such, authorless. On the left are the peasants the migrant workers once were: old, resting, sitting or standing in place, against the backdrop of a river flowing through the fields. On the right are the factory workers they have become today: young, energetic, walking into the future in front of an urban skyline. Notably, the workers are all women. Off to the side sits a small sculpture of three hulking, rugged, male construction workers, also by Liang Bing, that embodies a more traditional labor heroism. From there, the visitor enters an insistently upbeat narrative, with some room for sacrifice but little for suffering. Plenty of super-grinning helmets then, with some of the pictures almost looking like sports



team celebrations or graduation parties. The exhibition takes the viewer from the macro-level of economic history, illustrated by before-and-after aerial photographs of Shenzhen among other things, to depictions of migrant worker life. Examples of the latter are a photograph by Huang Jianhua 黄建华 captioned “The dormitory is like home” (“Sushe shi wo jia” 宿舍是我家), which shows a group of uniform-clad female workers energetically crossing the yard at the bottom of a high-rise neatly hung with colorful laundry, and a photograph by Xu Jiahu 徐佳虎 called “Indefatigable” (“Zizi bu juan” 孜孜不倦), of a worker “busy but finding time to read,” carrying a tractor tire over his shoulder while browsing in a bookstore. The exhibition ends with a series of individual life stories marked by rapid social advancement, for example, from lowly worker to local government official.

I visit the Labor Museum with Yang Honghai 杨宏海, the recently retired Shenzhen cultural official known as the “father of migrant worker literature.” After I ask him about the museum on WeChat, in true Yang style he sets up a visit in no time, efficiently asking me to outline my new research to him while we are driven to the museum by his personal assistant. It is because of his reputation that we get a guided tour from director Yuan. Unlike the Picun museum, the Labor Museum does not have culture in its name, but it does have an entire exhibition hall hung with the portraits of well-known authors of migrant worker literature, probably because the genre first emerged in Shenzhen. Photographed during her acceptance speech for the *People's Literature* award, Zheng Xiaoqiong is claimed for Shenzhen in the accompanying text, which says she started out here as a factory worker. In fact, she was based in Dongguan before moving to Guangzhou, where she lives today.

Yang Honghai worked for decades to “add culture” to Shenzhen’s economic development, from bodybuilding contests to poetry recitals, and published prolifically in the process. His work shows the complexity of the force field in which the discourse on migrant worker culture has taken shape, as he strikes a delicate balance, showcasing the opportunities that economic reform has created for individuals and social groups but also pointing out the hardships of migrant worker life. Acknowledging that the economic boom has come with big, painful issues of social justice and much individual suffering, the government regularly states its desire to protect and support the migrant workers, and the last two decades



(Top) Outside wall of the Labor Museum, detail (Shenzhen).

(Center) What the migrant workers once were (Shenzhen).

(Bottom) What the migrant workers are today (Shenzhen).



(Top) Liang Bing's construction workers (Shenzhen).
 (Center) Super-grinning helmets (Shenzhen).
 (Bottom) "Indefatigable" (Shenzhen).



have seen policy change on a range of issues, including a loosening of the rules set by the household registration system. At the same time, in official history such as that produced in the Labor Museum, bad news is not allowed to get in the way of a story of progress toward a strong and wealthy nation built on solidarity across class divides. Whether this story could be told more effectively by allowing for the occasional spot of darkness amid all that blinding light is an old question that currently yields a definite No.

The light is even more blinding in the Migrant Workers Museum (Nongmingong bowuguan 农民工博物馆) in Guangzhou, which I visit about a week later; an otherwise Chinese-language brochure has "Museum of Migrant Workers" as its English caption. Established in 2012, this is another official institution,²⁰ but up a couple notches from the Shenzhen museum in size and, by the looks of it, in terms of resources. It is housed in a four-story factory building inside a former industrial zone in Guangzhou's Baiyun district, the entrance marked by a sculpture by Chen Honghui 陈宏辉 of a group of migrant workers marching toward the future in the socialist-realist tradition. In the entry hall, a life-size impression of migrant workers on a railway platform waiting for "the 218 service to Guangzhou" sits side by side with the Socialist Core Values inscribed on a marble wall. The museum's opening statement is couched in orthodox political discourse that is echoed in a jubilant film loop celebrating the greatness of the nation and its unstoppable development. A brochure explains that the museum "declares to the world that it is the hard work and sweat of the myriad migrant workers that propels society, the cities, and the Chinese economy," and praises their "historic achievements."

The Migrant Workers Museum is not just bigger and richer than the Labor Museum but louder as well. Literally so in the audio loops through the PA system that accompany mise-en-scène moments from migrant worker life, but also in a figurative sense. The extensive history section, for instance, goes back to the late-imperial era and is ambitious in its attempt to offer more than textual narratives and statistics. It presents many photographs and other material from the decades preceding the reform era, when urban labor also came from the countryside, albeit in less stunning numbers. A full-page cartoonish depiction of the "omnipotent industrial city" of Shanghai and its successes during the first Five-Year Plan, printed in the



Labor News (*Laodong bao* 劳动报) on National Day in 1957, reminds me of Wei Ke's *Panorama* in the Picun Museum. But the *Panorama* is conspicuously absent from the rich collection of the Guangzhou museum, perhaps because it features places in the migrant worker's life that do not fit the official narrative. The roof of a high-rise luxury hotel, for instance, for a suicide threat ("Give us our back pay or I'll jump"), and foot massage parlors, which are associated with sex work.

The Guangzhou museum makes enthusiastic use of technology to be more than a collection of documents, visuals, and objects (migrant worker baggage, tools and machinery, boots and gloves, and so on, in addition to the inevitable helmets). Theatrical "stills" are brought to life by the audio loops—for instance, a static-filled telephone conversation to accompany a sculpture of two children under a banner that says "Mommy, we miss you"—and several full-fledged theater scenes with audio play on repeat in 3-D projection. One such scene is set in a meticulously propped four-bed dorm room where an older migrant worker lets fly at his younger fellow workers who he feels have no clue about real poverty. Another shows a huge construction site at night, with a worker loading up a wheelbarrow and pushing it off into the distance. Halfway through the exhibition, the visitor finds themselves outside a life-size train compartment: standing under one of the spherical sensors hanging from the ceiling outside each window will trigger the passengers to come alive and start a conversation. Each window has different "actors" and themes. The train's departure and destination stations are shown as Chengdu and Guangzhou.

But the museum also employs more traditional exhibits, such as in the display of original, handwritten letters exchanged by couples forced to live apart, placed in front of a map of China with arrows to indicate the physical distance of their separation. This is toward the end of the exhibition path; just like the Picun and Shenzhen museums, the Guangzhou museum starts its narrative at the macro-level of migration history and economic development and then moves on to the migrant worker experience. The importance of safeguarding workers' rights and mitigating abuse is recognized near the exit, in a row of touch-screen computer terminals that provide the answers to frequently asked questions on labor relations and legal and regulatory aspects of migrant worker life at large.



(Top) Zheng Xiaoqiong's portrait (Shenzhen).
 (Center) The Migrant Workers Museum (Guangzhou).
 (Bottom) "The 218 service to Guangzhou" (Guangzhou).



(Top) A 1957 cartoon of “the omnipotent industrial city—Shanghai” (Guangzhou).

(Bottom) “Mommy, we miss you” (Guangzhou).



Again, migrant labor means opportunity as well as hardship, and not just in official discourse. In the Picun museum, the voices of the migrant workers speak to address both. In the Guangzhou and Shenzhen museums, the relentless optimism of the story largely elides these voices, especially where they might articulate hardship and injustice. When Qian and Guo interviewed migrant workers who visited the museums in 2015 and 2016, they found that this was among the observations made by their interviewees.²¹

Coming to Terms with Migrant Worker Poetry

China’s migrant workers mean many things to many people. In the countryside, they constitute an absence. In the cities, a presence, one that is often uncomfortable, both for the migrants themselves and for the “original” city people, who rely on them more or less directly for goods and services and their basic infrastructure. To the state, migrant labor continues to be crucial for economic growth but the migrant workers’ troubles are a concern. The state recognizes their entitlement to benefit from the economic growth they drive, and their numbers make them a potential source of social unrest.

China’s migrant worker *poetry* also means many things to many people, with the P-word bringing a whole ‘nother dimension into play, as above: both for the migrant workers themselves and for the original poetry people (sorry, can’t resist). Do migrant workers really write? Why do they write? What do they write? Who do they write for? Do they all write the same thing? What should this poetry be called in Chinese? (I have not gone into this here, but it is a bit of an issue.) Is it even poetry? Is it not just labor activism or social justice warfare with line breaks, socially significant but artistically dull? If so, and if not, what do literary critics and scholars have to say about it? Can they connect if they are not migrant workers themselves? (This not a rhetorical question of either the no-yielding or the yes-yielding type.) Is this poetry something Chinese? Does it mean anything outside China? What should it be called in other languages than Chinese? Should it be translated? For the reasons for which, erm . . . your regular poetry is translated, or for some other reason? If the latter, isn’t paraphrasing or summarizing the better option? If the former, is the translator’s preface or afterword always going to discuss the



migrant workers' world before discussing their words? Should this poetry be "regularized" or "improved" in translation? And, for all of the above: says who?²²

That migrant worker poetry means many things to many people—including its authors—is clear even from a tiny sample. I am referring to, and returning to, *Picun Literature* no. 2. Before the numerous pages dedicated to the work of Li Ruo, whose poetry kicks off this essay, the anthology opens with a poem in a different style called "The Laborers' Tale" ("Laodongzhe sushuo" 劳动者诉说), collectively authored by Wang Chunyu 王春玉, Xu Liangyuan 徐良园, Zhang Ziyi 张子怡, and Guo Fulai 郭福来. Each author speaks in turn and then they speak in unison: "We are all of us ordinary laborers / We may not be rich in money / but we feel just fine / Outside work / we know how to read, dance, sing / to let the day's fatigue and sadness / follow the evening breeze / and quietly float away." Having come "from all quarters of the motherland," they sing the praises of the Migrant Workers Home for bringing them together, and write: "We love labor / Labor has enriched our lives." That the poem opens the collection means it is important in the community. And of course, vis-à-vis society at large and the authorities, a love of labor helps to show that the Home is doing the right thing.

But there are many ways of doing the right thing and the anthology has room for a wide range of voices. Yang Meng's 杨猛 "Living Dead Man" ("Huo siren" 活死人) reflects bitter anger over life at the bottom:

lightly wandering through the alleyways all at ease
 it looks up time and again, tilts its head, finds and
 ponders its target
 stops at the base of a wall, sniffs left and right from
 close up
 lifts its left hind leg to aim and squirts out a piss
 then swiftly packs up and expertly seeks out its next
 target
 this spectacle has the Drifter obsessively looking on
 with fascination and envy

in Picun all the walls, electricity poles, stone seats, tree
 trunks, car wheels—every single signpost is covered
 in piss stains



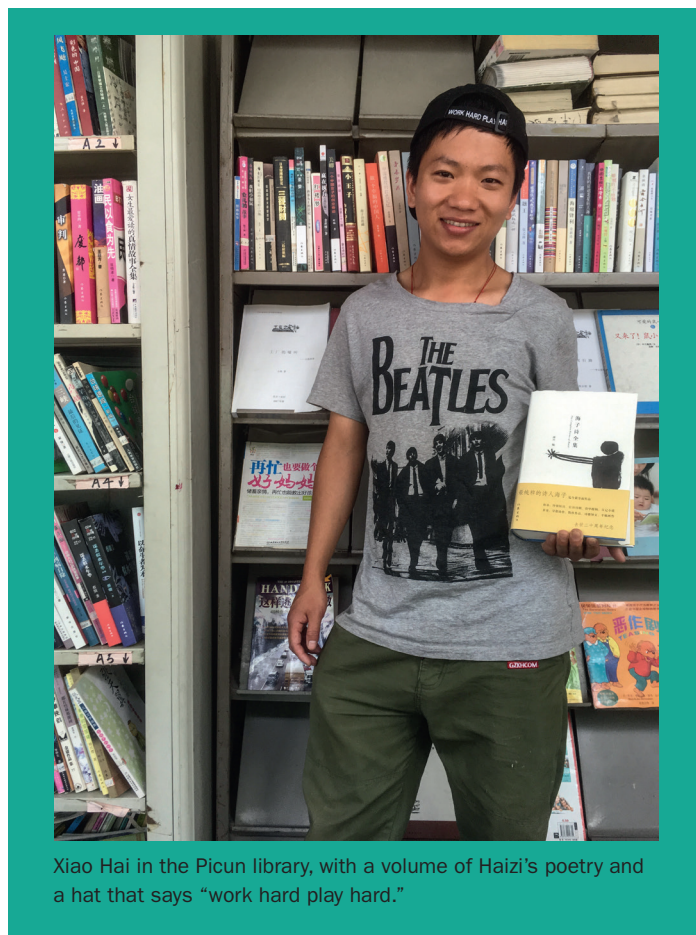
The Chengdu–Guangzhou train as museum exhibit (Guangzhou).

this is not just a memory of going home, it is a symbol
 of life and existence
 at the mere cost of excretions thrown out by the body
 what *he* has sprinkled through this city is sweat, tears,
 his youth, the best part of his life
 but those who control the city despise him as if he had
 just given it dog piss
 no wonder it's left him tired, lonely, homesick, bewil-
 dered, with wrinkles, grey hair, a bad stomach,
 arthritis
 and a temporary residence permit that carries the origi-
 nal sin of the controllers
 at the open-air job fair the Drifter's body has warmed
 half a stone bench through and through
 he's set a record by finding no temp work at all for
 seven days straight
 and when he sadly, fiercely, draws on his cigarette
 again to drown his sorrows
 all he can do is admit he's an old man now . . .
 —as for going home
 when the thought crosses his mind he finds it ridicu-
 lous himself
 since his parents passed one after the other he's cut
 himself off from his hometown

but the wait-for-work ordeal has kicked him out of the
 city and hurled him back to the countryside
 with the villagers cordially issuing their conventional
 greetings as always
 when he finds out the house has collapsed the land
 deed's been revoked his residence scrapped
 it's like a bolt from the blue and the Drifter feels he is
 falling apart
 full of hate he hopes for the glint and flash of daggers
 and swords
 determined to cut off the lifeblood of the temporary
 residence system at the root
 because he's realized this is the only way out
 but after all he still quietly chooses to end himself
 in the painful struggle yet again to end himself

“Living Dead Man” is an indictment of inequality. After the careful, patient description of the dogs pissing all over Picun, when the poem turns to the Drifter (*lao piao* 老漂), it shifts to direct message mode. The message in question is important and while it has been articulated in government reports, media, and scholarship, there is no harm in driving it home once again and letting the New Worker speak, as per the aims of the Picun literature group. The poem is unconstrained in terms of form and handles its imagery differently than most “specialist” (*zhuan ye* 专业) writing.²³ I considered citing only—how do I say this—what I have been taught to find the strongest lines but decided against that. Aside from the question of how its style might be read in light of the anger in the writing and the reasonable assumption that the Drifter’s story is real if not necessarily autobiographical, its rambling tone does not disqualify “Living Dead Man” as poetry outside Picun or outside China, or as material for research and translation, as long as literary and critical discourse manage to engage with it with an open mind that remains curious about old questions in a new age.

Different from Wang Chunyu et al.’s ditty-like declaration of optimism, Li Ruo’s short lines of brittle melancholia, and Yang Meng’s long lines of bitter anger, Xiao Hai’s 小海 poetry in *Picun Literature* shows he is trying out all kinds of things alongside one another. Originally from Henan Province and with a dozen years of factory



Xiao Hai in the Picun library, with a volume of Haizi’s poetry and a hat that says “work hard play hard.”

labor in the South under his belt before he came to Picun, Xiao Hai is something of a poster boy for New Workers literature and the literature group. Bouncy and hip, he was the only migrant worker poet among the panelists for the screening of *Iron Moon* at Peking University, where I first met Zhang Huiyu. Xiao Hai’s first collection of poetry had just come out at the time, published by the Migrant Workers Home; the cover carries a disclaimer like the one noted earlier for *New Workers Literature*, saying it is “for internal exchange.” It is called *Howl in the Factory* (*Gongchang de haojiao* 工厂的嚎叫) and sentence-level evidence confirms this as a reference to Allen Ginsberg.²⁴ Elsewhere, Xiao Hai addresses Vincent van Gogh. Add to this that his pen name is an allusion to Haizi 海子, in whose honor he offers a rewriting of “Asian Bronze” (“Yazhou tong” 亚洲铜),²⁵ and it is easy to see that one of his affiliations is with the mainland-Chinese cult of poetry as described by Michelle Yeh. Xiao Hai’s various



identifications blur the boundaries between migrant worker poetry—or, in the Home’s preferred terminology, New Workers poetry—and subaltern writing on the one hand, and “specialist,” avant-garde (*xianfeng* 先锋) poetry, on the other hand.²⁶

For all his infatuation with foreign literature (and rock music), Xiao Hai is intensely engaged with local issues of social justice. When, in late 2017, the Beijing authorities evicted large numbers of migrant workers, his performance of a poem by Yu Xiuhua to support this “low-end population” (*diduan renkou* 低端人口) went viral,²⁷ and some of his own poems are sociopolitical manifestos. One example is “The Chinese Worker” (“Zhongguo gongren” 中国工人), which connects Chinese migrant labor to global capitalism and inequality in a tone that is both solemn and assertive. In yet another register, and unusual among the poetry included in *Picun Literature* in its regard for poetic form, albeit of the rigid kind, this is Xiao Hai’s “Debts” (“Zhai” 债):

You owe the everyday a happiness

You owe the dusk a dawn

You owe the dream a future

You owe your friend an expectation

You owe freedom your dignity

You owe the flower a dewdrop

You owe your youth a craziness

You owe your family an aspiration

You owe the sky a pair of wings

You owe the sea a teardrop

You owe the earth a seed

You owe the rain a rainbow

You owe the sun a brilliance

You owe the moon a tenderness

You owe the stars an upward look

You owe your lover an eternity

But it’s just that fate owes you fairness²⁸

As of this writing in May 2019, Xiao Hai was taking a poetry training course offered by the Lao She Literary Institute of the Beijing branch of the China Federation of Literary and Art Circles. Another of Zhang Huiyu’s students in the literature group whose talent is recognized beyond Picun, he is being supported and/or being incorporated by the literary establishment. This is a pattern that brings to mind Zheng Xiaoqiong’s and Yu Xiuhua’s careers, although at this stage there is no telling how things will work out for Xiao Hai, and the notion of incorporation is a tendentious simplification of Zheng’s and Yu’s situations to begin with.²⁹ When I first leafed through *Picun Literature*, the energy of Xiao Hai’s writing, the multiple directions it takes, and its desire to connect different spheres of life struck me as a miniature of migrant worker poetry. Especially in foreign scholarship (by scholars such as Justyna Jaguścik, Heather Inwood, Sun Wanning, Gong Haomin, Amy Dooling, Zhou Xiaojing, Eleanor Goodman, and the present author—and by a growing number of graduate students), we are just beginning to realize the richness and complexity of the questions raised by these texts, their contexts, and the discourse about them.³⁰

In this essay, I have spoken of “migrant worker literature” and only parenthetically mentioned that what this poetry is called, in Chinese or in other languages, is by no means a straightforward matter. But beyond the literal level of what to call it, we owe it to this poetry to come to terms with it in the broader sense of the expression, and with the discourse that it generates. One of the things that determine how this happens for individuals and scholarly communities is their proximity or distance to the source. So we need a conversation that truly involves both Chinese and foreign scholarship, without homogenizing or essentializing either.

Trying to contribute to such a conversation on contemporary Chinese poetry at large as a researcher, teacher, and translator, I have long found myself wondering about the translatability, or the commensurability, of Chinese and foreign discourse on poetry. Not, obviously, as a question to be answered by Yes or No, but as a key factor in our professional ecology that is not a given but something that evolves and that we shape ourselves. On that note, I have read with interest about Timothy Cheek, David Ownby, and Joshua Fogel’s “Reading and Writing the Chinese Dream,” a project on Chinese intellectual life since the 1990s that “aims to capture the discourse of Chinese scholarship in a way to make it meaningful for

Anglophone audiences” and proposes a special form of translation to reach this objective.³¹ Their project description shows how hard it is to steer clear of dichotomies of the Chinese and the foreign, but the risks in this respect may well be outweighed by the benefits of their explicit, frontal engagement with an issue that undergirds (new) area studies in the broadest sense. Where would we be without difference?

In a nutshell, after Raymond Carver, the translatability of Chinese and foreign discourse concerns the question of *what we talk about when we talk about poetry*, a phrase I have used before and will likely use again. For China’s migrant worker poetry, this question leads to reflection on the power of poetry as a meme in Chinese cultural tradition that remains operational today, and on earlier incarnations of workers’ poetry in the People’s Republic. But migrant worker poetry and its discourse also remind us of the perennial need to revisit, and mess with, fundamentals surrounding the notion of literature in the broadest sense. Not just in China or in Chinese studies but wherever we are.

Notes

In addition to the works cited, this essay draws on fieldwork in China in 2017 and 2019 and on personal communication with individuals at the Migrant Workers Home and the Picun, Shenzhen, and Guangzhou museums. Since I am currently working on several interrelated projects on migrant worker poetry, there is minor overlap with some of my other recent publications, cited in notes 12 and 23. All translations in this essay are mine, and so are the accompanying photographs. The photos taken in Picun are from 2017 and those taken in Shenzhen and Guangzhou are from 2019. I am grateful to the editors of *Chinese Literature Today* and to Nick Admussen and Paola Iovene for their feedback on a draft version of this essay.

¹ Fu Qiuyun 付秋云 and Zhang Huiyu 张慧瑜, eds., *Picun Literature: Second Collection, Works from the Literature Group of the Migrant Workers Home (2015–2016)* (*Picun wenxue: di er ji, Gongyou zhi jia wenxue xiaozu zuopinji* [2015–2016] 皮村文学: 第二辑, 工友之家文学小组作品集 [2015–2016]) (Beijing: Gongyou zhi jia [unofficial], 2016), 38.

² See the Yu Xiuhua 余秀华 special feature in *Chinese Literature Today* 7, no. 2 (2018): 4–41.

³ Fu and Zhang, *Picun Literature*, 39.

⁴ *Ibid.* The name literally means “the home of friends-in-work” (compare *zhanyou* 战友, “friend-in-battle,” “comrade in arms”). The Home has been referred to in English in various ways, reflecting that the organization used various names in its early

years. “Migrant Workers Home” is the English name used by the organization itself.

⁵ This brief sketch of the Home gratefully draws on this material. Media: He Shan and John Sexton, “Migrant Workers Tell Their Story in New Museum,” *China Org*, November 7, 2008, accessed March 18, 2019, http://www.china.org.cn/china/features/content_16728913.htm; Max Jorge Hinderer and Matthijs de Bruijne, “Cultural Revolution from Below?” [Interview with Sun Heng], *Linksnet*, September 6, 2010, accessed March 18, 2019, <https://bit.ly/2W4tZbt>; Xinhua, “Reform and Opening Up Reshapes Chinese Labor,” *China Daily*, April 30, 2013, accessed March 18, 2019, <https://bit.ly/2HDVftj>; Bernice Chan, “The Musician Who Became a Champion of Migrant Workers,” *South China Morning Post*, July 1, 2014, accessed March 18, 2019, <https://bit.ly/2Ji6LwZ>; Yao Wei, “Work Hard, Play Hard: Migrant Workers Stage Their Very Own Spring Festival Show,” *Beijing Review*, February 26, 2015, accessed March 18, 2019, <https://bit.ly/2W4Wfe7>; Xu Ming, “Migrant Workers Use Poetry, Rock ‘n’ Roll to Uplift Spirits amid Evictions,” *Global Times*, December 13, 2017, accessed March 18, 2019, <https://bit.ly/2W70kyp>. Scholarship: Jack Linchuan Qiu and Wang Hongzhe, “Working-Class Cultural Spaces: Comparing the Old and the New,” in *China’s Peasants and Workers: Changing Class Identities*, ed. Beatriz Carrillo and David Goodman (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2018); Sun Wanning, *Subaltern China: Rural Migrants, Media, and Cultural Practices* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2014), ch. 5; Tom Cliff and Wang Kan, “Survival as Citizenship, or Citizenship as Survival? Imagined and Transient Political Groups in Urban China,” in *The Living Politics of Self-Help Movements in East Asia*, ed. Tom Cliff, Tessa Morris-Suzuki, and Wei Shuge (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018); Lian Zhiying and Gillian Oliver, “Sustainability of Independent Community Archives in China: A Case Study,” *Archival Science* 18, no. 4 (2018). Video: Goethe Institute, “A Theater of Migrant Workers, for Migrant Workers” (“Ein Theater von Wanderarbeitern, für Wanderarbeiter”), 2018, accessed March 18, 2019, <https://bit.ly/2HDWPvx>; Chen Wei 陈玮, dir., *Roaming Picun* (*Liulang Picun* 流浪皮村), Weibo, accessed May 1, 2019, <https://m.weibo.cn/status/4366757634384252>.

⁶ Crosstalk (*xiangsheng* 相声) is a traditional Chinese comedic performance in the form of a dialogue.

⁷ Cliff and Wang, “Survival as Citizenship,” 46–47.

⁸ For the song, see <https://bit.ly/2ObHQdx>. The troupe started out with a different name, the Young Migrant Workers Art Troupe (Dagong qingnian yishutuan 打工青年艺术团).

⁹ See <http://www.dashengchang.org.cn/>.

¹⁰ For example: Guo Fulai 郭福来, “Dog Tales from a Builders’ Shed” (“Gongpeng ji gou” 工棚记狗), a story on the village dogs, in *Beijing Literature* (*Beijing wenxue* 北京文学) no. 2 (2017): 157–58. Guo Ting, “How Fan Yusu Wrote Dignity Back into Migrants’ Lives,” *Los Angeles Review of Books* blog, June 7, 2017, accessed March 18, 2019, <https://bit.ly/2TOhYKR>,



notes the importance of the Picun literature group. Federico Picerni, “Strangers in a Familiar City?: The Urban Space of Beijing Seen and Written by Picun Migrant Poets,” unpublished manuscript, 2019, kindly showed to me by the author, offers an incisive analysis of a WeChat poetry group run from the literature group.

¹¹ Fu and Zhang, *Picun Literature*, 261.

¹² Maghiel van Crevel, review of *Iron Moon: An Anthology of Chinese Migrant Worker Poetry*, edited by Qin Xiaoyu and translated by Eleanor Goodman, and *Iron Moon*, directed by Qin Xiaoyu and Wu Feiyue, *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture*, MCLC Resource Center, February 2017, accessed March 18, 2019, <https://bit.ly/2TejwbC>; Maghiel van Crevel, “The Cultural Translation of Battlers Poetry (*Dagong shige*),” *Journal of Modern Literature in Chinese*, 14, no. 2 & 15, no. 1 (2017): 246; Maghiel van Crevel, “Walk on the Wild Side: Snapshots of the Chinese Poetry Scene,” *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture*, MCLC Resource Center, December 2017, accessed March 18, 2019, <https://bit.ly/2GaWWhc>, paragraph 99.

¹³ Fan Yusu 范雨素, “I Am Fan Yusu” (“Wo shi Fan Yusu” 我是范雨素), Tencent News (Tengxun xinwen 腾讯新闻), April 25, 2017, accessed March 18, 2019, <https://bit.ly/2ABbd4H>; Tom Phillips and Wang Zhen, “‘I Am Fan Yusu’: China Gripped by Dickensian Tale of a Migrant Worker’s Struggle,” *Guardian*, May 3, 2017, accessed March 18, 2019, <https://bit.ly/2p7CvGE>; Guo Ting 2017.

¹⁴ For more on Wang Dezhi, see Sun, *Subaltern China*, ch. 5 and Huang Chuanhui, *Migrant Workers and the City: Generation Now*, translated by Anna Bearé (Nova Scotia: Fernwood, 2016), ch. 4. For interviews with Sun Heng and Xu Duo, see several of the media items listed in note 5.

¹⁵ Qiu & Wang (“Working-Class”) study the museum in a contrastive analysis of “old” and “new” working-class cultural spaces. Lian and Oliver (“Sustainability”) study it as a community archive. Cliff and Wang (“Survival as Citizenship”) provide some historical background on the museum as part of a comprehensive study of the Migrant Workers Home. Huang (*Migrant Workers*) offers a personal impression after outlining the life stories of several migrant workers living in Picun.

¹⁶ Xu Qiang 许强, Luo Deyuan 罗德远, and Chen Zhongcun 陈忠村, eds., *The Best of Chinese Battlers Poetry, 1985–2005* (1985–2005 *Zhongguo dagong shige jingxuan* 1985–2005 国打工诗歌精选). (Zhuhai: Zhuhai chubanshe, 2007).

¹⁷ See also Zheng Xiaoqiong 郑小瓊, *Female Workers: A Record* (*Nügong ji* 女工记) (Guangzhou: Huacheng chubanshe, 2012); and Qin Xiaoyu 秦晓宇, ed., *My Poetry: Outstanding Works of Contemporary Workers Poetry* (*Wo de shipian: dangdai gongren shidian* 我的诗篇: 当代工人诗篇) (Beijing: China Writers Publishing House, 2015), 56.

¹⁸ He and Sexton, “Migrant Workers.”

¹⁹ Qian Junxi and Guo Junwan’guo, “Migrants on Exhibition: The Emergence of Migrant Worker Museums in China as a Neoliberal Experiment on Governance,” *Journal of Urban Affairs*, January 2, 2018: 1–19.

²⁰ I know of one more, the Chinese Migrant Workers Museum (*Zhongguo nongmingong bowuguan* 中国农民工博物馆), established in 2011 in Chengdu, which I have not visited to date; in spring 2019, it was temporarily closed. Qian and Guo suggest that the Chengdu museum is a “bottom-up,” non-governmental initiative, like the Picun museum and the Migrant Workers Home at large (“Migrants on Exhibition,” 6). What I have seen of it online does not appear to reaffirm this conclusively. Notably, distinctions of governmental and non-governmental cultural institutions and events in postsocialist China are anything but absolute, as illustrated by the expression “run by the government, done by the people” (*guanban minzuo* 官办民做).

²¹ Qian and Guo, “Migrants on Exhibition,” 16.

²² Questions such as the above hold for other genres in migrant workers’ literature as well, but perhaps most conspicuously for poetry. On Chinese and English terminology for migrant worker poetry, see van Crevel, review of *Iron Moon*; van Crevel, “The Cultural Translation,” 246; van Crevel, “Walk on the Wild Side,” paragraph 99. On translating migrant worker poetry, see Eleanor Goodman, “Translating Migrant Worker Poetry: Whose Voices Get Heard and How?,” *Journal of Modern Literature in Chinese* 14, no. 2 & 15, no. 1 (2017): 107–27.

²³ On the notion of “specialist” writing, see van Crevel “Walk on the Wild Side,” paragraphs 90 and 111; and Maghiel van Crevel, “Misfit: Xu Lizhi and Battlers Poetry,” *Prism: Theory and Chinese Literature* 16, no. 1, (2019), 85–114.

²⁴ Xiao Hai 小海, *Howl in the Factory: Xiao Hai’s Poetry* (*Gongchang de haojiao: Xiao Hai de shi* 工厂的嚎叫—小海的诗) (Beijing: Gongyou zhi jia [unofficial], 2017).

²⁵ Fu and Zhang, *Picun Literature*, 59, 73, 76.

²⁶ Michelle Yeh, “The ‘Cult of Poetry’ in Contemporary China,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 55, no. 1 (1996): 51–80. For a broad-strokes overview of “departments” in contemporary Chinese poetry, see van Crevel, “Walk on the Wild Side,” paragraphs 72–113.

²⁷ Xiao Hai, *Picun Youths Discuss Beijing’s Big Clean-Up* (*Picun shaonian tanlun Beijing da qingsao* 皮村的少年谈论北京大清洗), Youtube, posted by Xue Mengchun 薛孟春 on November 29, 2017 (Inside the Great Firewall, the video appears to have been posted on the vlog-ldz 言值视频 channel.), accessed March 18, 2019, <https://bit.ly/2FhKzis>. See also Xu, “Migrant Workers.”

²⁸ Fu and Zhang, *Picun Literature*, 55–57, 90.

²⁹ See van Crevel, review of *Iron Moon*, 255–57.

³⁰ Justyna Jaguścik, “Representation of *Dagongmei* in Contemporary China.” *DEP* 17 (2011): 121–38; Justyna Jaguścik, “Literary Body Discourses: Body, Gender and Class in Contemporary Chinese Female-Authored Literature,” PhD diss., University of Zürich, 2014; Heather Inwood, “Between License and Responsibility: Reexamining the Role of the Poet in Twenty-First-Century Chinese Society,” *Chinese Literature Today* 2, no. 1 (2011): 49–55; Sun, *Subaltern China*, ch. 7; Gong Haomin, “Toward a New Leftist Ecocriticism in Postsocialist China: Reading the ‘Poetry of Migrant Workers’ as Ecopoetry,” in *China and the New Left: Political and Cultural Interventions*, edited by

Wang Ban and Lu Jie, 139–57 (Lanham: Lexington, 2012); Gong Haomin, “Ecopoetics in the *Dagong* Poetry in Postsocialist China: Nature, Politics, and Gender in Zheng Xiaoqiong’s Poems,” *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and the Environment* 25, no. 2 (2018): 257–79; Amy Dooling, “Representing *Dagongmei* (Female Migrant Workers) in Contemporary China,” *Frontiers of Literary Studies in China* 11, no. 1 (2017): 133–56; Zhou Xiaojing, “Scenes from the Global South in China: Zheng Xiaoqiong’s Poetic Agency for Labor and Environmental Justice,” in *Ecocriticism of the Global South*, edited by Scott Slovic, Swarnalatha Rangarajan, and Vidya Sarveswaran, 55–76 (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015); Zhou Xiaojing, “Zheng Xiaoqiong’s Poems on the Global Connection to Urbanization and the Plight of Migrant Workers in China,” *Verge: Studies in Global Asias* 2, no. 1 (2016): 84–96; Zhou Xiaojing, “‘Slow Violence’ in Migrant Landscapes: ‘Hollow Villages’ and Tourist River Towns in China,” *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 24, no. 2 (2017): 274–91; Goodman, “Translating”; Eleanor Goodman, “Working with Words: Poetry, Translation, and Labor,” in *Chinese Poetry and Translation: Rights and Wrongs*, edited by Maghiel van Crevel and Lucas Klein (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, forthcoming in 2019); van Crevel, review of *Iron Moon*; van Crevel, “The Cultural Translation”; van Crevel, “Walk on the Wild Side,” paragraphs 98–108; van Crevel, “Misfit.” Taken together, this material provides reference to a wealth of Chinese-language source material, scholarship, and other commentary.

³¹ Timothy Cheek, David Ownby, and Joshua Fogel, “Mapping the Intellectual Public Sphere in China Today,” *China Information* 32, no. 1 (2018): 107.

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