

**The Inferno Tango:
Gender Politics and Modern Chinese Poetry, 1917-1980**

by

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To my parents

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ABSTRACT

The Inferno Tango: Gender Politics and Modern Chinese Poetry, 1917-1980

by

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This dissertation studies the gender politics of modern Chinese intellectuals through a close examination of the problem of masculinity and the making of modern poetry from the 1910s to the 1980s. My research focuses mainly on Guo Moruo, Wen Yiduo and Chen Jingrong of the early generation and more recent poets such as Bei Dao, Mang Ke and Shu Ting who emerged from the literary activism of *Today!* in the late 1970s. Combining archival research, close readings and methods from gender and literary history, I analyze the formative moments in the lives of Guo and Wen during their travels abroad in the 1910s and 1920s. I also examine Chen's encounter with the Anti-Japanese War (1937-1945) and the Chinese Civil War (1945-1949) as well as the underground

literary activities in the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) as embodied by the *Today!* poets.

Many factors have contributed to the Chinese poets' construction of their newly gendered subjectivities in times of profound national crisis and transformation. I argue that the masculinity of the poetic canon in modern China was naturalized and perpetuated by the discourses of love, marriage, nationalism, revolution and industrial progress as well as by the indigenous literati tradition. I also show how a small minority of poets including men and women were inspired by Western feminist thoughts on the one hand and Daoist philosophy on the other to develop alternative positions of gender in response. With a sustained focus on gender politics, my study seeks to reinterpret the literary and cultural history of China in the twentieth century.

Introduction

This project sprang from my interest in *Jintian (Today!)*, the first unofficial literary journal in China since 1949. From its debut on the street walls of major cultural and political institutions in Beijing on December 23, 1978, until it was closed down by the state police at the end of December 1980, the literary activists of *Today!* published 9 issues of the journal, a series of four books, and three issues of *Materials for Internal Circulation*.¹ By posting loose pages of the journal on street walls and holding poetry readings in the parks of Beijing as well as by nationwide distribution through the state postal system and various forms of personal sharing, *Today!* brought to national attention the underground literature and art that emerged during the Chinese Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) and circulated in small elite literary circles in Beijing. Born in 1949, Bei Dao, one of the founders and chief editors of *Today!*, is the most celebrated poet to emerge from this literary movement. He rightly observed in 2006: “The influence of *Today!* reaches far beyond literature. Permeating fine arts, film, drama, photography and other artistic genres, *Today!* marks the beginning of avant-garde literature and art in contemporary China.”²

¹ *Today!* was ordered to close down on September 12, 1980, by the Municipal Police Department in Beijing. However, it continued to exist in the name of “Jintian wenxue yanjiuhui” [“Today Literary Study Association”] and produced three more issues entitled *Neibu jiaoliu ziliao* [Materials for Internal Circulation]. See Ao Fuming, “*Today: a Chronicle of Events*.” Ao Fuming kindly gave me a copy of this chapbook, which he compiled in 1988 for the tenth anniversary of *Today!*.

² Bei Dao, “Kaimushi zhici” [“Opening Remarks”] at “Crisis and Detour: 25 years of *Today!*,” March 19-21, 2006, University of Notre Dame. I obtained the transcription from Bei Dao. For a more detailed account of

Still, when it first appeared in the late 1970s, *Today!*'s immediate impact was primarily through its poetry. Dubbed "Obscure Poetry" by hostile official critics in the early 1980s, the avant-garde poetry first brought out by *Today!* debunked the prevailing symbolic system supported by official poetry, and caused a fundamental paradigm shift in the world view of a whole generation of Chinese youths. China in the 1980s witnessed a golden age of poetry. Not only were many readers, mostly college students, inspired to start their own poetic experimentations, launch their own unofficial literary journals and become the "Third Generation" poets,³ but the majority of readers, who did not become poets, turned into poetry-lovers and participated in the widespread poetry fever of the 1980s. The avant-garde poets, now called Obscure Poets, were treated as pop stars wherever they went; young men and women from remote corners of the country plunged themselves into passionate reading and writing of poetry and adopted the new mode of life depicted in this avant-garde poetry as their own life ideals. Bei Dao attributes this poetry fever and idolization of the poets to "a misunderstanding on the readers' part."⁴ Misunderstanding or not, the avant-garde poetry *Today!* thus brought above the ground reached a broad readership and shaped the life of a generation of Chinese youth.

the beginning of *Today*, see Bei Dao, "Duanzhang" ["Fragments"], in Bei Dao, Li Tuo, eds., *Qishi niandai* [The Seventies] (Beijing: Shenghuo dushu xinzhi sanlian shudian, 2009), 31-49. Except for where noted, all translations are mine.

³ Ouyang Jianghe and Tang Xiaodu both described their excitement upon discovering the new ways of writing poetry in *Today* during my interviews with them. Shen Rui and Wang Jiaxin were in the list of subscribers that Ao Fuming has carefully kept. Among the letters from readers, I also discovered a letter and a few poems submitted by Han Dong, also a well-known poet now. Bai Hua described similar experience in his "Shiyu 1979 – bi bing he tie geng ci ren xinchang de huanle" [Beginning from 1979 – joy more piecing than ice and iron], see Bei Dao, Li Tuo, eds., *Qishi niandai* [The Seventies], 531-546.

⁴ Bei Dao describes one instance of his pop-star experience in Sichuan province in China in "The Importance of being 'ordinary': Bei Dao in conversation with Michael March," *Index on Censorship*, 1746-6067, Volume 17, Issue 10, 1988, Pages 26 – 28. I am grateful to John Rosenwald for generously sharing this article with me.

On the one hand, the materials I gleaned from personal interviews and private collections allowed me valuable insights into the literary, social, cultural and political implications of *Today!*'s literary activism; on the other hand, they left me with many questions: After the thirty-year implementation of the policy of gender equality by the Chinese government, why was there only one major female poet amidst the constellation of avant-garde poets published in *Today!*? Why were the male poets worshipped like gods? And why did the only major female poet seem to have been marginalized by her male counterparts? Was the creation of a new poetic paradigm against state ideological control the means by which rebellious sons achieve autonomy from the state patriarchy? Why were there many more female members in this literary group participating in the material production and distribution of the journal than there were women contributing as authors? The same set of questions arose constantly in my research on the avant-garde writers and artists from the *Today!* group as well. Are these questions particular to this group and this generation, or do they have deeper roots in history? These questions led me to probe into the century-long history of modern Chinese poetry with a particular focus on gender.

This dissertation studies the gender politics of modern Chinese intellectuals through a close examination of the problem of masculinity and the making of modern poetry from the 1910s to the 1980s. My research focuses mainly on Guo Moruo, Wen Yiduo and Chen Jingrong of the early generation and more recent poets such as Bei Dao, Mang Ke and Shu Ting who emerged from the literary activism of *Today!* in the late 1970s. Combining archival research, close readings and methods from gender and literary history, I analyze the formative moments in the lives of Guo and Wen during their travels

abroad in the 1910s and 1920s. I also examine Chen's encounter with the Anti-Japanese War (1937-1945) and the Chinese Civil War (1945-1949) as well as the underground literary activities in the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) as embodied by the *Today!* poets.

Many factors have contributed to the Chinese poets' construction of their newly gendered subjectivities in times of profound national crisis and transformation. I argue that the masculinity of the poetic canon in modern China was naturalized and perpetuated by the discourses of love, marriage, nationalism, revolution and industrial progress as well as by the indigenous literati tradition. I also show how a small minority of poets including men and women were inspired by Western feminist thoughts on the one hand and Daoist philosophy on the other to develop alternative positions of gender in response. With a sustained focus on gender politics, my study seeks to reinterpret the literary and cultural history of China in the twentieth century.

Why Poetry?

Poetry is central to this project not only because of its special status in the 1970s and 1980s, but because of the age-long intimate relationship between politics, poetry and male literati-officials in Chinese history, as well as the acute crisis poetry faced from the turn of the twentieth century. Since Confucius (551 BC – 479 BC) extolled poetry as the foremost element leading to moral perfection for any man who could be entrusted with state business in *Lunyu (Analects)*, poetry has been closely intertwined with politics and with the privileged status of Chinese literati until the fall of the Qing dynasty (1644-

1911). In her pioneering work in modern Chinese poetry, Michelle Yeh sums up the close relationship between literati, politics and poetry as follows:

Traditionally the Chinese literati always held poetry in the highest esteem. In a society founded on Confucian ethics and pragmatism, it served several purposes, the loftiest as the cornerstone of moral cultivation and cultural refinement. This notion was sanctified by Confucius in the *Analects* (Lunyu), where poetry came first in the “three-part curriculum” leading to moral perfection, along with ritual (*li*) and music (*yue*).⁵ In the political realm, poetry was a practical means of advancing oneself in the world, since literary skills in general were essential for passing the civil service examination, and poetry, in the form of both *fu* (rhyme-prose) and *shi* (verse), had been a required subject since the early seventh century.⁶ Talented poets regularly received patronage from the highly placed, even the emperor himself.⁷

Zong-qi Cai also notes,

The *Shijing* (*The Book of Poetry*), compiled around 600 B.C.E, is the earliest extant collection of Chinese poems and was regarded by Confucius as an essential part of his educational program. He considered its mastery as a prerequisite for anyone entrusted with state business. In subsequent dynasties, the status of poetry steadily increased. Not only did scholars assiduously study the *Book of Poetry* as a Confucian classic, but they also occupied themselves with writing poetry in ever more diverse and complex forms. Poetic composition became their indispensable medium for self-expression, social criticism, and even career advancement. Poetic excellence often earned them social prestige as well as entry into officialdom.⁸

The abolition of the Civil Service Examination system in 1905 and the eventual fall of the Qing dynasty in 1911 cut off the long-standing route through which Chinese literati achieved their elite status and forced them to search for alternative means for social prestige, cultural prominence and political power.

Due to deep-rooted ties between the Chinese literary men and officialdom, the national crisis that resulted from the continued invasion of China by imperialistic powers

⁵ Yeh's note: Donald Holzman, “Confucius and Ancient Chinese Literary Criticism,” in *Chinese Approaches to Literature from Confucius to Liang Ch'i-ch'ao*, ed. Adele Rickett, 35.

⁶ Yeh's note: Ping-ti Ho, *The Ladder of Success in Imperial China: Aspects of Social Mobility, 1368-1911*, 12.

⁷ Yeh's note: Hans H. Frankel, “T'ang Literati: A Composite Biography.”

⁸ Zong-qi Cai, ed., *How to Read Chinese Poetry: A Guided Anthology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 1.

since the mid-nineteenth century had an extra layer of implications for the male literary elite in comparison to their female counterparts. National survival also meant the prospect of regaining the elite position. Many male Chinese intellectuals believed that industrial and military supremacy was essential for a prosperous China. In the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, the common view was that the country could be saved by learning advanced science and technology from the West was common. The slogan “Fuguo qiangbing” (“a prosperous country with a powerful army”), borrowed from Japan, embodied this view.⁹ By the May Fourth era (1915-1925), “Westernization as cultural radicalism entailed a leap from Western borrowing to indiscriminate imitation of the West.”¹⁰ The cultural radicals “wanted China to become a modern nation like France, Britain and the United States”; theirs represents “a Euro-American vision of modernity based on the ideas of progress, science, democracy, rationality, secularism and capitalist development.”¹¹ A large number of young men from wealthy families, who formerly would have secured their elite status through civil service examinations with their command of classical Chinese texts, especially poetry, traveled to Europe, the United States and Japan to study science and technology, and achieved similar social status, cultural prestige, political power and of course financial stability. Of all those who traveled abroad to study, only a small number chose to study Western literature and art due to the apparent irrelevance of literary pursuit in modern times.

Those who pursued a literary path to save the country and themselves transformed themselves into “modern, post-Confucian, professionalized” intellectuals “who oversaw

⁹ See Wu Jiping, *Guo Moruo liu Ri shi nian: 1914-1924* [Guo Moruo's ten years studying in Japan, 1914-1924] (Chongqing: Chongqing chubanshe, 2001), 2.

¹⁰ Edmund S. K. Fung, *The Intellectual Foundations of Chinese Modernity: Cultural and Political Thought in the Republican Era* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 37.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 30-31.

the transcription of foreign signs into the new domestic, urban, mass market, mechanized print economy.”¹² As the new mission for the intellectuals became connecting with and mobilizing the masses in order to save the country, the status of poetry gradually declined from the top of the literary hierarchy to the bottom due to its intimate ties with the elite. In his 1898 essay entitled “Forward to the Publication of Political Novels in Translation,” Liang Qichao introduces the genre of the political novel originating in the West and advocates fiction, a traditionally lowly genre consumed by people of low levels of literacy and despised by the elite literati in China, as a vehicle to change the views of the whole nation.¹³ In his 1902 essay, “On the Relationship between Fiction and the Government of the People,” Liang recognizes fiction as a genre of “the masses” and champions the revolution of fiction as the starting point for both “the reformation of the government of the people” and “the renovation of the people.”¹⁴ Thus, as Denton notes,

Liang’s influential essays set in motion the process, which the May Fourth would inherit and attempt to complete, of overturning the traditional hierarchy of literary genres that placed fiction at the bottom of a strata capped by poetry and historical writings.¹⁵

As Michelle Yeh points out,

With the abolition of the civil service examination system in 1905, the writing of poetry ceased to be politically desirable, and the gentry that relied on the system for entrance into the civil bureaucracy lost much of its elite status.... Probably for the first time in Chinese history, the writing of poetry [whether in traditional or modern forms] needed to be justified because its function and value were no longer universally recognized.... Compared with their contemporaries who wrote

¹² Barlow, Tani E. “Theorizing Woman: Funu, Guojia, Jiating [Chinese Woman, Chinese State, Chinese Family],” in Angela Zito and Tani E. Barlow edit., *Body, Subject and Power in China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 253-289.

¹³ Gek Nai Cheng, trans., Liang Qichao, “Yi yin zhengzhi xiaoshuo xu” [Forward to the Publication of Political Novels in Translation], *Qing yi bao* [The China discussion], 1, 1898, in Kirk A. Denton, edit., *Modern Chinese Literary Thought: Writings on Literature, 1893-1945* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, c1996), 71-73.

¹⁴ Gek Nai Cheng, trans., Liang Qichao, “Lun xiaoshuo yu qunzhi zhi guanxi” [On the Relationship between Fiction and the Government of the People], *Xin xiaoshuo* [New Fiction], 1902, *ibid.*, 74-81.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 66.

fiction, however, modern Chinese poets probably underwent a more severe identity crisis and suffered a greater degree of alienation.¹⁶

In *Guys Like Us: Citing Masculinity in Cold War Poetics*, Michael Davidson argues that, in its long history, poetry has often exemplified the site where alternative gender positions are created.¹⁷ Davidson's critique of Western poetic history holds even truer for twentieth-century Chinese poetry. It is exactly the deep-rooted ties among poetry, politics and the Chinese male literary elite, together with the severe sense of crisis experienced by modern Chinese poets, that make poetry the best means to gain close insights into the formation and transformation of modern Chinese male intellectuals and, thus, their relationship with the female poets who entered this traditionally male-dominated field.

Why Gender?

Challenged by the radical changes of the time, Chinese intellectuals since the late Qing period endeavored to construct new subject positions by envisioning a modernized China. Besides modern technology, one important parameter of this modernization project was the introduction of Western feminist thought before Marxist theory in the mid-1920s. Late Qing male reformers such as Kang Youwei, Liang Qichao, Tan Sitong and Jin Tianhe had started to advocate gender equality and the freedom to choose one's spouse in the late 1890s. However, the late Qing male reformers' advocacy of feminism remained a tool for them to propagate their fundamentally male-centered agenda. For example, in his well-known article titled "On Women's Education" (1896), Liang Qichao

¹⁶ Michelle Yeh, *Modern Chinese Poetry: Theory and Practice since 1919* (New Haven: Yale University Press, c1991), 13-14.

¹⁷ Michael Davidson, *Guys Like Us: Citing Masculinity in Cold War Poetics* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 2.

subjugates women's education to the male-centered discourse of the nation, that is, the purpose of women's education is to make them good "mothers" so they can play their role in "safeguarding the race" and "strengthening the country."¹⁸ Jin Tianhe's *Nüjie zhong* (*The Women's Bell*), published in 1903, was probably one of the most widely read feminist texts by these male intellectuals. Jin dismantles traditional views of the woman's role as "considerate wife and good mother." He listed highly accomplished women in the history of many countries and stressed the independent role of women in various fields. However, Jin's view, though with a different focus from Liang's, is no less male-centered. For instance, in his advocacy of the education of women into upright, pure, smart persons free from patriarchic oppression, Jin is trying to create the ideal companion to fulfill modern man's needs for modernization; in proposing the education of women into persons as capable as men, Jin creates a variation of the traditional gender hierarchy by modeling the ideal new women after modern men; and Jin's vision of educating women into people with strong bodies who can give birth to strong sons is similar to that of Liang's.¹⁹

Feminist scholars such as Wang Zheng, Dorothy Ko and Lydia Liu have undertaken insightful critiques of the gendered agendas of these male intellectuals. In their discussion of *The Women's Bell*, Ko observes that the original motivation of Jin Tianhe's advocacy of feminism and gender equality was a sense of male inferiority under the impact of imperialism.²⁰ Liu points out that this text "offers a concentrated expression

¹⁸ Liang Qichao, *Yinbing shi heji* [Collected Writings from an Ice-drinkers Studio] (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1941), vol. 1, 37-44.

¹⁹ Jin Tianhe, *Nüjie zhong* [The Women's Bell], edited by Chen Yan, (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 2003).

²⁰ Wang Zheng, Dorothy Ko and Lydia Liu, "Cong *Nüjie zhong* dao 'nanjie zhong': nanxing zhuti, guozu zhuyi yu xiandaixing"[From *The Women's Bell* to the men's bell: male subjectivity, nationalism and modernity], in Wang Zheng and Chen Yan, eds., *Bainian Zhongguo nüquan sichao yanjiu* [Studies of one-hundred years of Chinese feminist thoughts] (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2004), 2.

of the modernization blueprint envisioned by the late Qing intelligentsia including Liang Qichao. Readers could clearly discern how the subject positions of Chinese men were constructed through the discourse about women.”²¹ Wang remarks that “For a male intellectual in this era, borrowing overseas, especially Western, discourse of gender equality was an important element in this construction of modern male subjectivity. This is what distinguished him from the traditional male.”²²

These feminist observations apply to the male intellectuals’ introduction and championing of the ideal of free love in the first quarter of the twentieth century. Free love was an important ideal in the social movements, especially feminist movements in the nineteenth century in Euro-American countries, an ideal the New Culturists in China, such as Chen Duxiu, started to advocate in 1915 and which did not reach its peak until the early 1920s.²³ Wendy Larson notes that many articles on “sexual morality” were published in *Xiaoshuo yuebao* (*Fiction Monthly*) from 1920 to 1922; a special issue on sexuality appeared in May 1922. This

gave witness to the effort of reform-minded intellectuals to reconstitute the meaning of sexual relations in Chinese culture: from the traditional husband-wife relationship based on subordination within family roles and hierarchized within a metaphor of relationships within the kingdom, into a modern alliance based on love (*lian’ ai*).²⁴

As Haiyan Lee observes,

The May Fourth generation proposed “love” (*aiqing*) as a symbol of freedom, autonomy, and equality. Hu Shi’s (1891-1962) one-act play, “Zhongshen dashi” (The greatest event in life, 1919), set the basic tone for much of the May Fourth

²¹ Ibid., 3.

²² Ibid., 5.

²³ Wang Zheng, *Women in the Chinese Enlightenment: Oral and Textual Histories* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 35, 44-45; Haiyan Lee, *Revolution of the Heart: A Genealogy of Love in China, 1900-1950* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 5

²⁴ Wendy Larson, *Women and Writing in Modern China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 88.

representation of “free love” as a battle between tradition and modernity, feudalism and enlightenment, hypocrisy and authenticity, old and young.²⁵

In the late 1920s and 1930s, as Lee states, free love was attacked for its bourgeois limitations by cultural radicals, and for undermining the institution of marriage and family by conservatives. Lee also remarks, “Political ideologies, in particular, called for a total commitment to the nation by subordinating the romantic imperative to that of revolution.”²⁶ This subordination of love to revolution by [male] cultural radicals was officially sponsored by the Chinese Communist Party, especially after CCP took power in 1949. But love, and related gender issues such as gender equality, women’s social roles and marriage, remains a constant theme for modern Chinese intellectuals in their struggle to construct new subject positions throughout the twentieth century. It is also a central thread in my gendered inquiry into the changing subject positions of modern Chinese intellectuals.

Feminist scholars across many disciplines have long demonstrated the importance of gender in understanding key issues in modern Chinese history. In the introduction to *Chinese Femininities, Chinese Masculinities: A Reader*, Susan Brownell and Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom offer a comprehensive overview of the history of gender studies across disciplines. As Brownell and Wasserstrom note, most contributors are either historians or anthropologists; only two chapters are by literary scholars, Lydia Liu and Wendy Larson respectively. Brownell and Wasserstrom also mention Rey Chow²⁷ and Xiaomei Chen,²⁸ two influential literary scholars whose work centers on the link between gender and the

²⁵ Haiyan Lee, *Revolution of the Heart: A Genealogy of Love in China, 1900-1950*, 5.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

²⁷ Rey Chow, *Woman and Chinese Modernity: The Politics of Reading between West and East* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, c1990).

²⁸ See Xiaomei Chen, *Occidentalism: A Theory of Counter-discourse in Post-Mao China* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

nation.²⁹ Notwithstanding, the few literary scholars included in this comprehensive collection indicates that the field of Chinese literature has been relatively slow in incorporating theoretical insights from gender studies. The fact that few literary scholars attempted to reexamine modern Chinese literary history from a gender perspective is particularly baffling as the canonized authors of modern Chinese literature have been predominantly male. For instance, in *Modern Chinese Literary Thought: Writings on Literature, 1893-1945*, an extensive selection of texts by both canonical and marginalized modern Chinese authors published in 1996, only four out of fifty-five texts are by female authors. And these four female authors were included because the editor Kirk Denton made a special effort to include marginalized groups such as women writers.³⁰ In her often-quoted 1993 article titled “The Female Body and Nationalist Discourse: Manchuria in Xiao Hong’s *Field of Life and Death*,” Lydia Liu calls attention to the highly developed, institutionalized, nation-oriented and male-centered critical tradition and questions the gendered politics in the practice of literary criticism in China.³¹

In recent years, scholars of literature have endeavored to reexamine modern Chinese literary history with a gender focus. Anthologies of modern Chinese women writers and poets have been published in an attempt to complicate modern Chinese literary history by focusing on women’s responses to this complex era.³² Scholarship on

²⁹ In “Introduction: Theorizing Femininities and Masculinities,” Susan Brownell and Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom offer a comprehensive overview of gender studies across disciplines. See Susan Brownell and Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom, eds., *Chinese Femininities, Chinese Masculinities: A Reader* (Berkeley: University of California Press, c2002), 1-41.

³⁰ Kirk A. Denton, edit., *Modern Chinese Literary Thought: Writings on Literature, 1893-1945*, viii.

³¹ Lydia H. Liu, “The Female Body and Nationalist Discourse: Manchuria in Xiao Hong’s *Field of Life and Death*,” in Angela Zito and Tani E. Barlow edit., *Body, Subject and Power in China*, 157.

³² To name a few: Amy D. Dooling and Kristina M. Torgeson, eds., *Writing Women in Modern China: An Anthology of Women’s Literature from the Early Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, c1998); Amy D. Dooling, ed., *Writing Women in Modern China: The Revolutionary Years, 1936-*

women's fiction and poetry brings to light compelling alternative literary voices by delving into the close connections between feminist ideologies and women's writing.³³ While there has been fine scholarship that pays close attention to previously silenced or well-known women writers and poets, few scholars have attempted to reexamine the male-dominated modern Chinese literary canon from a gender perspective. Xueping Zhong's 2000 book titled *Masculinity Besieged?: Issues of Modernity and Male Subjectivity in Chinese Literature of Late Twentieth Century* remains the lone work in that attempt. In her book, examining the representations of men by Chinese male fiction writers in the 1980s, Zhong demonstrates that contemporary male writers' obsession with male weakness is symptomatic of the changing male subject positions in the complex historical conditions of Chinese modernity.³⁴ Zhong's astute reading of literary texts offers fine insights into the gendered positions of contemporary male writers. However, limiting her examination to literary representations, Zhong leaves the complex interplay of many historical issues unexplored. Combining archival research and literary analysis, my project aims to add fresh insights into the formation and transformation of the gendered positions of Chinese intellectuals in the modern era.

Recent studies of modern and contemporary Chinese poetry have seen laudable new approaches but pay scant attention to a gendered reading of the male-dominated canon of modern Chinese poetry. For example, Maghiel van Crevel's 2008 monograph, *Chinese Poetry in Times of Mind, Mayhem and Money*, offers excellent literary and

1976 (New York: Columbia University Press, c2005); Julia C. Lin, edit & trans., *Twentieth-Century Chinese Women's Poetry: An Anthology* (Armonk, New York and London: M.E. Sharpe, 2009).

³³ For instance: Jeanne Hong Zhang, *The Invention of a Discourse: Women's Poetry from Contemporary China* (Leiden: CNWS Publications, 2004); Amy D. Dooling, *Women's Literary Feminism in Twentieth-Century China* (New York, N.Y.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Haiping Yan, *Chinese Women Writers and the Feminist Imagination, 1905-1948* (London; New York: Routledge, 2006).

³⁴ Xueping Zhong, *Masculinity Besieged?: Issues of Modernity and Male Subjectivity in Chinese Literature of Late Twentieth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).

discursive analysis of contemporary Chinese avant-garde poetry since the mid-1980s with special attention to its socio-political and cultural context.³⁵ John Crespi's 2009 book, *Voices in Revolution*, attempts a new modern Chinese literary history by focusing poetry recitation as the basis for auditory culture in literary and historical experience.³⁶ Yet neither scholar adopts gender as a category of analysis. My research will fill this gap and raise new issues of gender in the study of modern Chinese literature.

The Poets

Rather than offering a comprehensive account of the gendered history of the modern Chinese poetic canon, I probe into the particularities of critical historical moments and attempt to unravel the complex interplay of a number of important factors in the formation and transformation of the poets' gendered positions. Scholars of modern Chinese poetry have long noted the indebtedness of this poetry to its Western counterparts. However, few have delved deeply into the historical complexities of the poets' close encounters with the West, whether in China or during their traveling abroad, or closely examined how these complex factors shaped their poetic explorations. In my study, I focus on the poets' relations with the "transcription of foreign signs"³⁷ in three realms: modern technology, feminist discourse and literary texts. By modern technology, I mean modern industrial technology such as factory machines, trains, ships and airplanes. My study focuses on how literary tropes of technology figured in the poets' creation of new poetics. By feminist discourse, I refer to the public discourse of feminist ideals such

³⁵ Maghiel van Crevel, *Chinese Poetry in Times of Mind, Mayhem and Money* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2008).

³⁶ John Crespi, *Voices in Revolution: Poetry and the Auditory Imagination in Modern China*. (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, c2009).

³⁷ Barlow, Tani E. "Theorizing Woman: Funu, Guojia, Jiating [Chinese Woman, Chinese State, Chinese Family]," in Angela Zito and Tani E. Barlow edit., *Body, Subject and Power in China*, 253-289.

as gender equality, women's social roles and related modern concepts such as free love and new-style marriage based on love. In terms of Western texts, rather than looking for literary parallels and signs of influence, I focus on how the Chinese poets appropriated ideas from Western texts in the construction of their own subject positions. The notion of the [male] poet in Euro-American Romantic poetry is a major factor in my analysis.

The first two chapters of my dissertation focus on two important yet radically different poets in the May Fourth period, Guo Moruo (1892-1978) and Wen Yiduo (1899-1946) respectively. Chapter one pays special attention to rarely examined texts, draws on new findings in recent scholarship, and revisits Guo Moruo's well-known works. I analyse Guo Moruo's transnational construction of a new masculinist poetics in China and Japan from the late 1910s to the early 1920s. Like most modern intellectuals, Guo was born into a wealthy family in China, received a new-style education and was immersed in traditional Chinese texts and in translated Western texts. In January 1914, Guo left behind the wife from his arranged marriage and joined the ranks of Chinese male elite who journeyed to Japan in pursuit of a modern career. While studying medicine in the Westernizing Japan, Guo not only had the opportunity to become informed about new developments in modern science and technology, and to read Western literature and philosophy extensively in both originals and Japanese translation, but he also fulfilled his desire for romantic love in his common-law marriage with Satō Tomiko (1895-1994), a Japanese new woman with feminist aspirations. It is in this context that Guo produced his two most influential texts, *Sanye ji* (Cloverleaf) published in 1920, and *Nüshen* (The Goddesses) published in 1921.³⁸

³⁸ Guo Moruo, *Nüshen* [*The Goddesses*] (Shanghai: Shanghai taidong shuju, 1921).

Cloverleaf is a collection of correspondence between Guo Moruo and two other rising stars in the constellation of modern Chinese men of letters, Zong Baihua (1897-1986) and Tian Han (1898-1968).³⁹ With its focus on issues such as new poetry, arranged marriage and free love, mostly derived from Guo's personal experience, this immensely popular text introduced Guo not only as the foremost poet in Chinese new poetry but also as a rebel against arranged marriages.⁴⁰ *The Goddesses*, Guo's first and most influential collection of new poetry, firmly established Guo's position as the most influential poet of his time. It is no coincidence that new poetry and free love were intertwined in the discussions of these early modern Chinese intellectuals; they were both important vehicles through which the male literary elite constructed new gendered positions at the fall of the old order. Both Guo's rebellion against his arranged marriage and his pursuit of free love in Japan were contemporaneous and slightly earlier than the introduction and championing of free love by the May Fourth intellectuals in China. The wide circulation of *Cloverleaf* made his personal experience into a classic case and an important basis for the discourse against the traditional gender system, especially the symbol of this system, arranged marriages.

In this chapter, I read Guo's new poetry against the context of his encounters with feminist thought, modern science and industrial technology, and Western literature and culture. I demonstrate how Guo constructed a hyper-masculine poetics through his unreserved identification with industrial progress and his aggressive appropriation of new

³⁹ Zong Baihua was a pioneering figure of modern Chinese esthetics as well as philosopher and poet. When serving as the chief editor of *Xuedeng* [Learning Lamp], literary supplement of *Shishi xinbao* [Current Affairs Newspaper], one of the leading newspapers of a liberal bent in Shanghai, Zong was not only the first to publish Guo's new poems, but promoted Guo as the "future poet of the East"; Tian Han was a playwright, a leader of revolutionary music and movies, as well as a translator and poet.

⁴⁰ Tian Han, Zong Baihua, Guo Moruo, *San ye ji* [Cloverleaf] (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 1982; first edition, Shanghai: Yadong tushuguan, 1920), 3.

concepts from Western science, technology, literature and philosophy. I also demonstrate how this new construction was closely related to a sense of emasculation resulting from his failed new-style marriage with Satō Tomiko based on romantic love.

In Chapter two, drawing on archival research, personal interviews and secondary scholarship, I demonstrate how the industrial environment and feminist atmosphere in Chicago compelled Wen Yiduo to reflect critically on May Fourth mainstream discourses and construct a radically different poetics, which I term “ecopoetics,” while studying painting in Chicago from 1922 to 1923. Seven years younger than Guo Moruo, Wen Yiduo started writing new poetry in 1920, right at the time when Guo was widely acknowledged as the foremost Chinese poet. Wen’s first poetry collection, entitled *Hongzhu* (Red Candle, 1923), established his position as another major figure in the canon of modern Chinese poetry. Similar to Guo, Wen grew up in a wealthy family and was steeped in classical Chinese literature and philosophy since childhood. Wen’s elite family background enabled him to receive ten years of Americanized education at the Qinghua School, predecessor of the present Qinghua University in Beijing. At the time, Qinghua was a preparatory school for higher education in the United States. Its educational system, courses, textbooks and teaching methodology were mostly transplanted from the U.S.⁴¹ With his poetry education mainly centering on nineteenth century European Romantic poetry, Wen’s poetry from his Qinghua period resonates with Guo’s extreme aggrandizement of the male poet figure, a trope derived from Romantic poetry but infused with new dimensions through its audacious appropriation of the new ideas of the age.

⁴¹ “Beijing Qinghua Xuexiao jinzhang” [Recent rules for Qinghua School in Beijing] (1914), in Qi Jiaying, ed., *Qinghua renwen xueke nianpu* [A chronicle of humanities disciplines at Qinghua University] (Beijing: Qinghua daxue chubanshe, 1998), 1.

Upon his graduation from the Qinghua School, Wen left for Chicago and studied painting in the School of the Art Institute of Chicago from August 1922 to August 1923. It is during this year that Wen experienced his most intensive poetic production and a radical turn. Most of the poems Wen wrote in Chicago, which I term his “Chicago poems,” were collected in *Red Candle* together with his “Qinghua poems.” In this chapter, I reread Wen’s “Chicago poems” against the particularities of local modernities in Chicago, namely its factory machines and industrial pollution, as well as the strong feminist presence in the literary and cultural circles in which Wen was immersed. I argue that Wen’s weakened physical condition, due to severe air pollution, and his lowered social position in the literary and cultural circles dominated by powerful Western women, were extremely painful yet rewarding. The complexity of his experience compelled Wen to shift from his previous secure and privileged position to that of the weak (*ruozhe*) and enabled him to reconstruct his relationship with the world in his poetry. However, Wen’s critical reflections on the unreserved embracing of industrial progress and on the rigid opposition to arranged marriage in favor of free love, advocated by May Fourth mainstream intellectuals, were overshadowed by the dominant discourse of nation and revolution in his time.

In Chapter three, I inquire into Chen Jingrong’s (1917-1989) uncollected essays in newspaper archives, newly excavated works and biographical information. I trace the poetic journey of one of the few female poets in the male-dominated canon of modern Chinese poetry from the early 1930s to the late 1950s. Unlike many May Fourth Chinese intellectuals such as Guo Moruo and Wen Yiduo who later embraced the Marxist discourse of nation and revolution advocated by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP),

Chen never let go of the early May Fourth ideals such as individual autonomy. Chen belonged to the group of humanist intellectuals who stayed in the Nationalist-controlled areas during the four-year civil war (1945-1949) between the CCP and the Nationalist Party, and never fully embraced the literary principles of nation, class and revolution laid down by Mao Zedong in his well-known “Talks at the Yan’an Forum on Literature and Art” in 1942. She underwent a thirty-year break in her poetic career during the Mao-era and did not enter the poetic canon until the 1980s in the Post-Mao era.

Growing up in the 1920s, Chen’s early new-style education afforded by her well-off family consisted of traditional Chinese literature and Western texts in translation, as well as the new literature and ideals from the May Fourth generation. Yet, unlike her male counterparts whose families readily supported their college education in China or abroad, Chen did not receive any formal higher education due to the opposition of her family. Instead, she managed to educate herself by sitting in on college classes, reading on her own, and joining literary circles in Beijing after running away from home in 1934. During the few years before the eight-year War of Resistance against Japanese invasion (1937-1945), Chen immersed herself in the male literary circle in Beijing and actively engaged in poetic experiment and innovation like her male counterparts. Her common-law marriages with fellow male poets, first with Cao Baohua (1906-1978) in 1936-1939, then with Sha Lei (1912-1986) from 1940 to 1945, turned out to be more hindering than encouraging for her literary pursuits. Though she published her first poem in 1932, Chen did not publish her first collection of literary writings until 1946. In this chapter, I demonstrate how Chen’s painful struggle not only enabled her to gain acute insights into the discrepancy between modern Chinese male intellectuals’ discursive promotion of

gender equality and their actual practice of traditional patriarchal values in reality, but also discrepancies between other discourses and reality, which resulted in a poetics of irony.

In my fourth and final chapter, drawing on original archival research, personal interviews and close readings of texts and images, I tease out the complicated dynamics between gender, politics and literature in the literary group of *Today!* in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Mostly born around 1949 when the CCP took power, this generation of young people grew up at a time when the publishing industry became increasingly controlled by the CCP government. Mao's literary guidelines laid out in 1942 were officially stipulated. Literature and art were vehicles for official political messages. The mainstream poetry at the time resembled much of the propagandistic poetry Chen Jingrong critiqued in the late 1940s. But during this period, many translations of Western modernist and Soviet "revisionist" works were commissioned by the government and circulated among high-ranking officials or intellectuals to provide them with up-to-date knowledge of their enemies. When large numbers of the high-ranking officials and intellectuals were removed from their high positions and sent to the countryside during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), their children were able to get hold of these works and share them with their friends. With Beijing being the political and cultural center of the country and many high-ranking officials and intellectuals living in this city, small elite literary circles began to form in Beijing. The avant-garde writers, poets and artists of *Today!* were either children of these officials or friends of their children. Although there were many female members in these literary groups, the majority of avant-garde poets,

writers and artists who became the mainstay of the contemporary avant-garde scene were predominantly male.

In the last chapter, I examine the new poetic paradigm conceived by these avant-garde poets and how this paradigm materialized in the production and daily practice of *Today!*. Comparing the gender politics between the male and female members of the group, I argue that the creation of a new symbolic system in avant-garde poetry and art was not simply part of the pro-democracy movement; rather, it bore closer ties with earlier generations of modern Chinese literary intellectuals than the poets admit. The marginalization of women poets in this group continued the male-centered tradition of the modern Chinese poetic canon. As with earlier poets such as Guo Moruo, the creation of a new poetic paradigm advocating the emotions of the individual and the personal was the means through which the rebellious sons achieved autonomy from the state patriarchy. Criticizing the CCP's gender-equality policy of taking men as the norm as a suppression of sexuality, the male avant-garde poets created an alternative form of gender norms based on the traditional distrust of women's capacity, a huge step back from both the CCP's gender policy and the May Fourth generation's feminist discourse.

Chapter One

The Transnational Production of a Masculine Poetics in Guo Moruo's *The Goddesses*

Since the first appearance of his new poetry in *Xue deng* (*Learning Lamp*) on September 11, 1919, Guo Moruo (1892-1978) quickly rose not only as a luminary in the canon of Chinese poetry, but also as a ringing voice in the gendered discourses of the intellectuals of the May Fourth period (1915-1925). In May 1920, *Cloverleaf* (*San ye ji*), a collection of correspondence between Guo Moruo, Zong Baihua (1897-1986) and Tian Han (1898-1968),¹ became an immediate success across China. Guo was introduced as “a future poet of the East” and applauded for his “lyrical genius.”² With its focus on issues such as poetry, arranged marriage and free love, this collection established Guo’s position as the foremost poet of Chinese new poetry and a rebel against arranged marriage.

Scholars have duly noted Guo’s crucial contribution to modern Chinese poetry and to the May Fourth discourse against arranged marriage. Guo’s personal rebellion against his arranged marriage was frequently retold by various scholars.³ His emergence on the Chinese poetic scene was described as “almost miraculous” and “marked the end

¹ Zong Baihua was a pioneering figure of modern Chinese esthetics as well as a philosopher and poet. While serving as the chief editor of *Xuedeng* [Learning Lamp], literary supplement of *Shishi xinbao* [Current Affairs Newspaper], one of the leading newspapers of a liberal bent in Shanghai, Zong was not only the first to publish Guo’s new poems, but promoted Guo as the “future poet of the East”; Tian Han was a playwright and a leader of revolutionary music and movies, as well as a translator and poet.

² Tian Han, Zong Baihua, Guo Moruo, *San ye ji* [Cloverleaf], 1, 3.

³ Xiaoming Chen, *From the May Fourth Movement to Communist Revolution: Guo Moruo and the Chinese Path to Communism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 11-31.

of tradition.”⁴ Largely due to his enthroning of the modern Chinese poet as a solitary kingly figure in line with the Romantic notion of the poet as a solitary genius, and to his unreserved adoption of Romantic concepts such as “passion,” “intuition,” “inspiration” and “imagination”⁵ as essential elements of Chinese new poetry, Guo was often labeled and applauded as an out-and-out Romantic poet.⁶ However, few have examined these two issues in connection with each other to locate the underlying motivations of Guo’s pursuit of free love and new poetry.

In this chapter, through close readings of texts in their historical context, I delineate Guo’s construction of a masculinist poetics in relation to the technological modernity and gender discourse in both China and Japan in the 1910s and 1920s. I demonstrate that Guo’s production of such a poetics was closely related to his literary and scientific education in an industrially advanced Westernized nation such as Japan, as well as his transnational common-law marriage with Satō Tomiko (Anna), the result of their pursuit of free love in rebellion against their respective arranged marriages.

For centuries, traditional Chinese poetry had been a major avenue for Chinese male literati to achieve social, political and cultural prominence as well as gender supremacy. In the early twentieth century, when the Qing throne abolished the civil service examination system, Chinese men had to turn to alternative means to achieve

⁴ David Tod Roy, *Kuo Mo-jo: The Early Years* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971), 79-80; Achilles Fang, “From Imagism to Whitmanism in Recent Chinese Poetry: a Search for Poetics that Failed,” in Horst Frenz and G. L. Anderson, eds., *Indiana University Conference on Oriental-Western Literary Relations* (Chapel Hill, 1955), 186-188.

⁵ Tian Han, Zong Baihua, Guo Moruo, *San ye ji* [Cloverleaf], 6-7.

⁶ David Tod Roy, *Kuo Mo-jo: The Early Years*, 87-91; Leo Ou-fan Lee, *The Romantic Generation of Modern Chinese Writers* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973), 187-190; Shu-mei Shih, *The Lure of the Modern: Writing Modernism in Semicolonial China (1917-1937)* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2001), 98-99; Xie Zhixi, *Modeng yu xiandai: zhongguo xiandai wenxue de shicun fenxi* [Modeng and modern: an historical analysis of modern Chinese literature] (Beijing: Qinghua daxue chubanshe, 2006), 335. Lu Yan, *Re-understanding Japan: Chinese Perspectives, 1895-1945* (Honolulu: Association for Asian Studies and University of Hawaii Press, 2004), 91.

political, social and cultural prestige. Rather than becoming Confucian officials through the civil service examination system, Chinese male literati became “modern, post-Confucian, professionalized” intellectuals “who oversaw the transcription of foreign signs into the new domestic, urban, mass market, mechanized print economy.”⁷ Thanks to the deep-rooted status of poetry in Chinese history, modern Chinese poetry has been a crucial means for Chinese male intellectuals to construct a new discourse of masculinity. I argue that one of the main reasons for Guo’s quick rise to prominence among modern Chinese male intellectuals was that his new poetry provided them a much-needed, forceful expression of such a discourse. The texts I will focus on are some of Guo’s most influential poems in *Nüshen (The Goddesses)* (1921),⁸ his correspondence with Satō Tomiko (1895-1994), which led to their pursuit of free love in a transnational common-law marriage, and his correspondence with Zong Baihua and Tian Han in *Sanye ji (Cloverleaf)*.

Rebellion against Arranged Marriage, or the Pursuit of Male Desire

In this section, I want to revisit Guo’s legendary rebellion against his arranged marriage and its connection with the transformation of his poetics. Guo was informed of his arranged marriage in October 1911; the wedding took place on March 2, 1912.⁹ Yet Guo’s rebellion against this arranged marriage did not start at the time of its announcement, but on the day of the wedding when he lifted the veil of the bride and was

⁷ Barlow, Tani E. “Theorizing Woman: Funu, Guojia, Jiating [Chinese Woman, Chinese State, Chinese Family],” in Angela Zito and Tani E. Barlow edit., *Body, Subject and Power in China*, 253-289.

⁸ Guo Moruo’s first and most important poetry collection, a foundational text of modern Chinese poetry.

⁹ Guo Moruo, *Shaonian shidai* [The period of my youth] (Hong Kong: Sanlian shudian, 1978), 268, 277.

confronted with “a pair of chimpanzee-like nostrils pointing toward the sky!”¹⁰ Though Guo’s parents and the matchmaker promised him a modern girl with “unbound feet” and good education (“was going to school”) in order to cater to Guo’s desire as a modern man, it was the promised beauty of the girl (supposedly as beautiful as one of his sisters-in-law whom Guo had secretly admired since childhood) that played a decisive role in Guo’s consenting to this arranged marriage.¹¹

The significance of this event can be better comprehended in the larger historical context. Late Qing reformers such as Kang Youwei, Liang Qichao, Tan Sitong and Jin Tianhe had started to advocate gender equality and freedom to choose one’s spouse in the late 1890s. Among them, Jin Tianhe’s *Nüjie zhong* (The Women’s Bell), published in 1903, was probably the most widely read feminist text. At the same time, educated women from elite families were also actively spreading feminist ideals. For the Qing government, the purpose of women’s education was to “teach women the ways of being a wife and mother.” The late Qing reformers’ campaigns protesting footbinding and promoting women’s education were remarkably successful. By the time the republican government passed laws banning footbinding and institutionalizing female education, many girls from elite families had unbound their feet and been sent to schools.¹² Though Guo never mentioned reading these feminist works, it is evident that the image of a new woman with education and unbound feet as the desired spouse for modern man had become a popular notion at the time Guo’s parents arranged his marriage in 1911. Even

¹⁰ Guo Moruo, *Shaonian shidai* [The period of my youth] (Shanghai: Haiyan shudian, 1947), 329. This description is from a short autobiography titled “Heimao” [Black cat]. The English translation is by Lu Yan in *Re-understanding Japan: Chinese Perspectives, 1895-1945*, 94.

¹¹ Guo Moruo, *Shaonian shidai* [The period of my youth] (1978), 268-270.

¹² Wang Zheng, 14, 36-44, 126. The lines in quotation marks are cited by Wang from Luo Suwen, *Nüxing yu Zhongguo jindai shehui* [Women and modern Chinese Society] (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1996), 131.

Guo's parents and the matchmaker learned to utilize the concepts to persuade Guo into the arranged marriage.

However, Guo's parents and the matchmaker did not pick up on another modern notion that Guo held dear – romantic love. Guo's notions of romantic love mostly came from translated European romance novels. As David Caplan notes, “in the late 1800s the rise of ‘companionate marriages’ – that is, marriages based on principles of shared love and friendship – superseded the previous standard of matrimony motivated largely by economic factors.”¹³ Lawrence Stone points out that “romantic love and the romantic novel grew together after 1780...romantic love became a respectable motive for marriage among the propertied classes, and that at the same time there was a rising flood of novels filling the shelves of the circulating libraries, devoted to the same theme.”¹⁴ Guo was probably not aware of the notion of “companionate marriage” at the time, yet his reading of European romance novels offered him concrete descriptions of it and planted in him a strong desire for such an experience. For example, after reading Lin Shu's Chinese adaptation of *Joan Haste* (1895) by H. Rider Haggard,¹⁵ Guo's response was:

How that heroine elicited my deep-felt sympathies and induced large quantities of my tears. I pitied her and I admired her lover, Henry.... I imagined that should I have such a charming girl as Joan who loved me, I would die content for her by falling from the top of a tower on Ling-yun Mountain.¹⁶

Xiaoming Chen succinctly summarizes Guo's desire for such a romantic love:

¹³ David Caplan, *Questions of Possibility: Contemporary Poetry and Poetic Form* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 65.

¹⁴ Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800* (London: Weidenfield and Nicolson, 1977), 284.

¹⁵ Lin Shu and Wei Yi's translation of this romance is titled *Jiayin xiaozhuan* [The story of Jiayin] (Shanghai: Shanghai shangwu yinshu guan, 1905).

¹⁶ Guo Moruo, *Shaonian shidai* [The period of my youth], 126, translated by Leo Ou-fan Lee in *The Romantic Generation of Modern Chinese Writers*, 182.

Under increasing Western influence, he [Guo] now dreamed that someday he would have a Western-style romance. He had the fantasy that he would be like a Western prince who ran into a woman of “unrivalled beauty” on a desert island during a hurricane. He had also imagined that he would be like a Western gentleman who “won the love of a beauty at a duel.” If such Western-style romance could not happen, then he still dreamed that his marriage would offer a beautiful and poetic experience.¹⁷

It is worth noting, though, that in Guo’s fantasy of romantic love, beauty (i.e., perfect female form) is always the most important quality of the female lover, not education or unbound feet, symbolic qualities of the Chinese new woman. As I will show below, this obsession with the ideal female form remained the most decisive element in Guo’s conception of a new poetics later in Japan.

In January 1914, Guo joined the thousands of men from elite Chinese families who journeyed to Japan and arrived in Tokyo to to escape from his marriage and pursue a career as a modern man. It was in August 1916, two and a half years into his study in Japan, that Guo met Satō Tomiko and finally had the opportunity to fulfill his desire for romantic love with a beautiful woman. By that time, two years of immersion in the stimulating environment of Japan must have had a tremendous impact on Guo, since his notion of romantic love had grown far more sophisticated and more deeply imprinted by modernity than the pure desire for a charming girl he saw in European romance novels. The beauty of the female form was still the primary constituent for this romantic love. Satō was a beautiful girl with natural feet. And she was unusually tall for girls of her time.¹⁸ In Guo’s own words, “When I first saw my Anna, I sensed an incredible pure light

¹⁷ Xiaoming Chen, *From the May Fourth Movement to Communist Revolution: Guo Moruo and the Chinese path to Communism*, 13. The phrases in quotation marks are cited by Chen from Guo Moruo, *Shaonian shidai* [The period of my youth] (1978), 270.

¹⁸ Sawachi Hisae, *Zoku Showwashi no onna* (Tokyo: Bunkei Shunju, 1986), 133.

in her looks.”¹⁹ Tao Jingsun, Guo’s fellow writer and brother-in-law who married Satō’s younger sister, transformed Guo and Satō’s experience into a story²⁰ and described Guo’s physical attraction to Satō, “[her] tall and slender build and outgoing personality unusual for girls of her time, strongly attracted him.”²¹

The difference between this romantic love and Guo’s early fantasy based on European romance novels of the late nineteenth century lies in the fact that, besides Satō’s beautiful female form, the romantic love between Guo and Satō was based on many of the shared notions of modern persons -- rebellion against their respective arranged marriages, aspirations for a professional career, and, of course, love of modern Western literature. It should be noted that, when it comes to Guo and Satō’s transnational love story, most scholarship relies solely on Guo’s autobiographical narratives, especially in *Cloverleaf*.²² Satō was depicted as the virtuous daughter of a Japanese Protestant minister, educated in an American mission school in Japan and devoted to charity work.²³ Of all descriptions of Satō Tomiko in English, Lu Yan’s is the only one that cites sources other than Guo’s narrative and gives due note to Satō’s identity as a new woman.

Three years younger than Guo Moruo, Satō Tomiko (1895-1994) was the eldest of eight children in a Japanese missionary’s family in the Ohira village of Kurokawa District, Miyagi Prefecture, some twenty miles from the city of Sendai. In her teens, she had begun boarding at Shokei Women’s School in Sendai, a school established by Baptist missionaries. Upon graduation, she learned that her mother was arranging a marriage for her and would not let her continue her

¹⁹ Tian Han, Zong Baihua, Guo Moruo, *San ye ji* [Cloverleaf], 36.

²⁰ “Sen toraru sapurai no dorobō: Aru kangofu no hanashi” [The thief who stole things from the supply room: A nurse’s story], *Nihon e no isho* (Tokyo: Sōgensha, 1953), 94-101.

²¹ The English rendering is from Lu Yan, *Re-understanding Japan: Chinese Perspectives, 1895-1945*, 95.

²² Tian Han, Zong Baihua, Guo Moruo, *San ye ji* [Cloverleaf], 36.

²³ David Tod Roy, *Kuo Mo-jo: The Early Years*, 63; Xiaoming Chen, *From the May Fourth Movement to Communist Revolution: Guo Moruo and the Chinese Path to Communism*, 16.

education. Alone, the twenty-year-old Satō went to Tokyo and found a job at St. Luke's Hospital, just a year before she met Guo.²⁴

It is interesting that Guo would choose to highlight Satō's religious background and downplay her aspirations as a modern person. Though it is not clear whether Satō's resolute decisions to resist her arranged marriage and pursue an independent career were informed by the curriculum in the Baptist school or her extracurricular readings, it is evident that they were in line with radical feminist ideals of the time. Because of their shared rebellion against their respective arranged marriages, the romantic love between Guo and Satō was one of the earliest, and thus more archetypal cases of free love in modern Chinese history.

Free love was an important ideal in social movements of the nineteenth century, especially feminist movements in Euro-American countries, an ideal that the New Culturists in China such as Chen Duxiu started to advocate in 1915 and which did not reach its peak until the early 1920s.²⁵ In 1920, 1921 and 1922, many articles on "sexual morality" were published in *Xiaoshuo yuebao* (Fiction monthly); a special issue on sexuality appeared in May 1922, Vol. 8, No. 5. All these "gave witness to the effort of reform-minded intellectuals to reconstitute the meaning of sexual relations in Chinese culture: from the traditional husband-wife relationship based on subordination within family roles and hierarchized within a metaphor of relationships within the kingdom, into a modern alliance based on love (*lian'ai*)."²⁶ Having lived in Japan since January 1914, Guo Moruo did not learn about the changes in China until summer 1919, thus his pursuit

²⁴ Lu Yan, *Re-understanding Japan: Chinese Perspectives, 1895-1945*, 95-96. This paragraph was a summary from Sawachi Hisae's interview with Satō herself, see Sawachi Hisae, *Zoku Showwashi no onna* (Tokyo: Bunkei Shunju, 1986), 127-130.

²⁵ Wang Zheng, *Women in the Chinese Enlightenment: Oral and Textual Histories*, 35, 44-45.

²⁶ Wendy Larson, *Women and Writing in Modern China*, 88.

of free love in Japan was independent of the New Cultural movements in China and only became a compelling force in the movement after the publication of *Cloverleaf* in May 1920. In other words, Guo's poetry was not only based on his own personal experience, but a pioneering case of a pivotal modern project embarked on by modern Chinese male intellectuals and an important basis for the discourse against the traditional gender system, especially against the symbol of this system, arranged marriage.

However, in his letter to Satō, Guo did not breathe a word of the ugliness of his wife, the most decisive factor that turned him away from his arranged marriage, but fashioned himself as “a rebel of the old family” and attributed the reason for his rebellion solely to the lack of “love” in this marriage arranged by his “feudal” family.²⁷ Guo obviously had picked up some modern concepts during his time in Japan. In another letter urging Satō to pursue further education, Guo again used modern concepts such as women's independence, women's social roles, women's professional training and gender equality:

I felt that women are also independent human beings. I admire your spirit of self-reliance. You earn your own living rather than relying on the support of family. You deserve to be an exemplary model for the women of today. This is what many women were not able to achieve even if they wanted to. Yet I felt that you might as well further improve your ability since you have the will to independence; you might as well strengthen your service skills since you have the self-sacrificing spirit to serve the society. This way, no matter what kind of setbacks you encounter in the future, you will still live on. This is why I suggest you pursue further education in the Women's medical school. This is in line with your present career. After graduation, you could receive equal pay from society because of your better skills to serve it. In contemporary Japan, a record of formal schooling and a diploma are indispensable for those who pursue a career. The main reason for your low pay and exhausting work was your lack of a record of formal schooling and skills from professional schools.

²⁷ Letter dated September 1, 1916, in Zheng Shenong, *Guo Moruo Anna* (Beijing: Zhongguo qingnian chubanshe, 1995), 196.

Yet Guo did not have Satō's acute feminist sensitivity in his employment of these concepts. The premise of "women are also independent human beings" is that men are naturally independent human beings and that they are in the position to help women become modern subjects. Further, in attributing the reason for Satō's low-paying and exhausting job solely to her lack of professional training, Guo shows himself unaware of the patriarchal nature of society and the deeply-embedded gender inequality in society, which Satō points out to him in her letter responding to his suggestion that he support her further education. In her letter dated November 11, 1916, amidst expressions of her gratitude for Guo's offer, Satō gave an insightful criticism of the patriarchal society in Japan:

Schools today are still the world of men; in fact, it is the same everywhere, it is the world of men everywhere. The talent of women at most could be brought into play within the family. My mother is an authoritative woman at home; my father often gives way to her. Yet she is nameless in society. At most, people know her as the wife of Mr. Itōemon. My mother thinks that she would be content if I were also like her. But I don't want to be; I want to walk my own way. I want to learn more skills and be a useful woman to society.²⁸

Satō's criticisms of the patriarchal nature of modern institutions such as schools and the limitedness of women's roles in the domestic realm, coupled with her aspirations for breaking away from domesticity and pursuing a social role, are all clearly informed by radical feminist thought of the time, and contrary to the emphasis on women's domestic roles as mother and wife, by Shimoda Utako (1854–1936), the most famous Japanese promoter of female education of the Meiji and Taisho period.²⁹ In other letters, Satō also

²⁸ Satō's letter to Guo dated November 11, 1916. Zheng Shenong, *Guo Moruo Anna*, 215.

²⁹ Joan Judge, "Talent, Virtue, and the Nation: Chinese Nationalisms and Female Subjectivities in the Early Twentieth Century," *The American Historical Review* 106, no. 3 (2001): 765.

conveyed the ideals of the early feminists. For example, “The first and foremost thing in one’s life is career. Without career, life will be meaningless.”³⁰

Another key component of Guo’s notion of romantic love in 1916 was “pure love,” in other words, “spiritual love,” a notion of Western romantic love promoted by progressive Christian thinkers in Japan at the turn of the twentieth century. The progressive Christian journal, *Jogaku Zasshi* (*The Woman’s Magazine*) was “an arena for new romantic, sexual and family ideology. In 1892, a monumental essay by a poet, Kitamura Tokoku, entitled ‘The Pessimist Poet and a Woman’...introduced the new coinage ‘humane love’ (*ren’ai*) in order to convey the sense of Western romantic love. The new notion emphasized moral perfection through heterosexual or conjugal union, something that the Japanese under the Shogunate never dreamed of, and denounced the carnal aspect of the male-female relationship.”³¹ Though there was no record of Guo reading *The Woman’s Magazine*, his notion of “pure love” bore a striking resemblance to Tokoku’s description. When Guo urged Satō to join him in Okayama where he was a pre-med student at the Sixth Higher School so he could support her education,³² he intended to keep their romantic love on a spiritual level. As Guo wrote reminiscently to Tian Han in *Cloverleaf* in 1920, sexual intimacy came as an unexpected outcome: “I was, after all, overconfident in my weak soul! Shortly after we lived together, my soul unexpectedly collapsed! And my Anna was violated by me!”³³ Later on in the letter, Guo referred to

³⁰ Satō’s letter to Guo dated August 28, 1916. Zheng Shenong, *Guo Moruo Anna*, 195.

³¹ Takayuki Yokota-Murakami, “The Creation of a ‘Lady’ [*Kajin*] as a Modern Gendered Subjectivity: Sexual Politics in the Japanese Translations of Walter Scott and Charlotte Brontë” (conference paper delivered at 2009 MLA Annual Convention held in Philadelphia, December 29, 2009), 5.

³² Guo’s letter to Satō dated November 1, 1916. Zheng Shenong, *Guo Moruo Anna*, 207.

³³ Guo’s letter to Tian Han dated February 15, 1920, in Tian Han, Zong Baihua, Guo Moruo, *San ye ji* [*Cloverleaf*], 38.

their sexual intimacy as “violating the sacredness of romantic love.”³⁴ Though Guo repeatedly mentioned in his letters to Satō that he was not a Christian, this Christian notion of romantic love had a strong impact on him. I will come back to Guo’s battle with Christianity later.

However Guo might have viewed his sexual intimacy with Satō, it was the beginning of their transnational common-law companionate marriage, a form of rebellion against their respective arranged marriages and pursuit of free romantic love. Both families adamantly opposed this union and severed their ties with this young couple. Satō was punished with *hamon* (expulsion); Guo’s parents refused to write to him until the birth of Guo and Satō’s first son in December 1917.³⁵ Unwittingly, Guo, Satō and their children formed a typical conjugal family (*xiao jiating*) as opposed to the model promoted by the traditional joint family system (*da jiating*) in China and the traditional stem family system in Japan. According to Susan Glosser, the conjugal family “consisted of the husband and wife and their children, who lived apart from the joint family and operated as an independent economic unit...the husband and wife were joined in a companionate marriage made of their own free choice. Husband, wife and children looked to each other for emotional fulfillment.” Instead of viewing the companionate marriage and conjugal family as a growing sign of privatization as their Western counterparts did, Chinese intellectuals of the May Fourth period viewed the conjugal family as the antidote to China’s ills. Although historians of the New Culture Movement have mostly portrayed participants’ interest in family reform as an outgrowth of either nationalism or romantic individualism, Glosser argues that “the primary

³⁴ Ibid., 42.

³⁵ Tang Mingzhong, Huang Gaobing, eds., *Yinghua shujian: Guo Moruo 1913 zhi 1923 nian jiaxin xuan* [Letters from Japan, 1913-1923] (Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1981), 140-143.

impetus of the family revolution was the search of young urban males for a new identity in a modernizing, industrializing society.”³⁶

As the most direct confrontation with traditional family organization by modern Chinese male intellectuals did not come until January 1920,³⁷ Guo’s transnational conjugal family with Satō and their children was well ahead of its time. The industrial society was not developed enough to provide adequate means of living and the facilities to relieve the heavy domestic responsibilities that came with a conjugal family without the support of the traditional big family. Satō was forced to give up her aspirations for a professional career and was consumed by the domestic role she was rebelling against; the time- and energy-consuming responsibilities of taking care of new-born babies also greatly reduced Guo’s mobility, distracted him from his course work and literary pursuits, and plunged him into deeper despair.

Guo had had suicidal thoughts shortly after arriving in Japan for many reasons. Guo was 21 years old when he arrived in Tokyo in January 13, 1914.³⁸ This was an important turning point in Guo’s life. Up until then Guo had been the center of his world because of his elite family background. He could do whatever he wanted knowing his family would get him out of any trouble he got himself into. Although his trip to Japan served successfully as a means for him to escape from his arranged marriage, it turned out not to be a simple blessing. At the same time as he gained independence from his old family, he lost its support and protection as well. Because of numerous extremely difficult circumstances, Guo lapsed into

³⁶ Susan L. Glosser, “‘The Truths I Have Learned’: Nationalism, Family Reform, and Male Identity in China’s New Culture Movement, 1915-1923,” in Susan Brownell and Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom, eds., *Chinese Femininities/ Chinese Masculinities: A Reader*, 121.

³⁷ *Ibid.* 122.

³⁸ Guo Moruo, “Ziran zhi chui-huai,” originally written in 1934, *Xian Dai*, 4.6: 954 (April 1, 1934). This work is translated from Japanese. It was originally published in the February 1934 issue of *Bungei* [Literary Arts]. See note 1 in David Tod Roy, *Kuo Mo-jo: The Early Years*, 56, 187.

depression and was haunted by the thought of committing suicide.³⁹ Guo claimed that his romantic love with Satō rescued him from that crisis. It turned out that he was only plunged into another crisis.

“Ye ku” (Night Cry) (1917) and “Chun han” (Spring Chill) (1919), both old-style poems Guo wrote after he realized his dream of free romantic love, depict vividly Guo’s hopeless and helpless mental state in his new conjugal family. The title “Night Cry,” though it seems to indicate that Guo was staying up at night steeped in sad thoughts, could just as well mean the night cry of his son kept him up, a common experience with a one-year-old, but also extremely trying for new parents.

忆昔七年前， 七妹年尤小。 兄妹共思家， 妹兄同哭倒。 今我天之涯， 泪落无分晓。 魂散魄空存， 苦身死未早。 有国等于零， 日见干戈扰。 有家归未得， 亲病年已老。 有爱早摧残， 已成无巢鸟。 有子才一龄， 鞠育伤怀抱。 有生不足乐， 常望早死好。 万恨摧心肝， 泪流达宵晓。 悠悠我心忧， 万死终难了。 ⁴⁰	I remember it was seven years ago, My seventh sister was still a child. She and I were both homesick, And we both cried until we collapsed. But now I am alone far away from home, And I have cried with so many tears. I have lost my soul and now only have an empty body, I regret that I have not died to finish my misery. I have a motherland but it amounts to nothing, Since the country is constantly suffering from wars. I have a home but I can not return to it, My parents are there sick and old. I have my love but she has already been ruined, Like a bird without its nest. I have a son who is only one year old, Crying in my arms when I take care of him. I thus have a life which is not happy, So I often hope that I can die soon. Overwhelming sadness and regret are tearing me apart, And I have cried from morning till night. I have such profound sadness in my heart, Which is hard to end even if I die ten thousand times. ⁴¹
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³⁹ Guo Moruo, “Wang Yangming li zan” in *Guo moruo quanji*, vol. 3, 289. For English, also see Xiaoming Chen, *From the May Fourth Movement to Communist Revolution: Guo Moruo and the Chinese path to Communism*, 22; David Tod Roy, *Kuo Mo-jo: The Early Years*, 59-60.

In this autobiographical poem, Guo describes the wretched state of his transnational family in the larger context. A war-troubled home country that could not back him up in this foreign country, a home that he could not return to because of his common-law marriage against the will of his parents, a loved one who was disowned by her parents, a one-year-old son who was often crying in his arms, a life that could not be enjoyed because of all the sorrow.

“Spring Chill” depicts a moment when their two-year-old first-born was sick and highlights the baby as the aggravating factor for this new conjugal family. The exhausting routine of taking care of their two-year-old son is sketched out poignantly:

凄凄春日寒， 中情惨不欢。 隐忧难可名， 对儿强破颜。 儿病依怀抱， 咿咿未能谈。 妻容如败草， 浣衣井之阑。 蕴泪望长空， 愁云正漫漫。 欲飞无羽翼， 欲死身如瘫。 我误汝等耳， 心如万箭穿。 ⁴²	It is a cold day in spring, I feel very depressed and unhappy. I have profound sadness beyond description, But I have to force a smile for my son. The son is in my arms sick, He does not talk yet and can only babble. My wife looks as miserable as withered grass, She is doing laundry at the well. I look into the vast sky with tears, The sky is full of depressing clouds. I want to fly but I have no wings, I want to die but I can't move, as if I am paralyzed. It is I who have ruined my wife and child, My heart is aching as if thousands of arrows are piercing it. ⁴³
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Raising the baby in a conjugal family, with no support from either the extended family or the society, was devastating for both spouses. Satō was transformed from the embodiment of the ideal new woman with “incredible pure light in her looks” to the exhausted housewife with

⁴⁰ This old-style poem titled “Night Cry” was written in 1917. The original poem was not written in lines. See Tian Han, Zong Baihua, Guo Moruo, *San ye ji* [Cloverleaf], 10.

⁴¹ Xiaoming Chen, *From the May Fourth Movement to Communist Revolution: Guo Moruo and the Chinese path to Communism*, 19.

⁴² Tian Han, Zong Baihua, Guo Moruo, *San ye ji* [Cloverleaf], 10.

⁴³ Xiaoming Chen, *From the May Fourth Movement to Communist Revolution: Guo Moruo and the Chinese path to Communism*, 21.

looks of “withered grass.” Confined in this domestic space and tied down by housework, Guo was desperate for mobility. The speaker’s eyes are directed toward “the vast sky”: “I want to fly but I have no wings, / I want to die but I can’t move, as if I am paralyzed.” Thus, Guo’s pursuit of free romantic love ended up in complete disaster. His complete rejection of marriage, including the companionate marriage resulting from free romantic love, was more explicitly expressed in his letter to Zong Baihua dated March 30, 1920:

Shou Chang [Tian Han] asked me [Guo], “Can romantic love be sustained in marriage?” I said, “Marriage is the funeral of romantic love.” Shou Chang said, “Some say marriage is the tomb of romantic love.” He continued to say that he was doing research. He did not want to marry if there were no good approach to this. I said it would be ideal if one could remain unmarried forever and maintain the mindset of *pure love*. Neither party would be free after getting married, which was relatively easier to deal with. There would be even less freedom after the birth of children. And there would be virtually no solutions to that situation. Public care for children would bring utmost defect in the emotional education of children. One could ask, without emotions, would not the world turn into the desert of *Sahara*? I regret that it was too late when I realized this.⁴⁴

Guo’s overwhelming sense of failure in his companionate marriage and his desperate desire for mobility, not only physical but social mobility, found an outlet in another modern project, that is, to join the constellation of modern Chinese male intellectuals. In a letter to Zong Baihua dated January 18, 1920, Guo included his old-style poems but dismissed them as “broken copper, rotten iron.” Then Guo expressed his admiration for the rising modern Chinese male intellectuals who were published in *Shaonian Zhongguo (Youth China)*, a leading magazine of the May Fourth generation and lamented that he was “a ruined human being” and wished to “be like a *Phoenix*, gather some incense wood, burn my present body,

⁴⁴ Tian Han, Zong Baihua, Guo Moruo, *San ye ji* [Cloverleaf], 137. The English was in the original text.

burn him while singing a sad elegy, and be reborn as a new ‘me’ from the cold clean ashes!
Yet I am afraid that is a fantasy after all.”⁴⁵

The implications of Guo’s dismissive attitude toward his old-style poetry are twofold: it could easily mean that the traditional poetic form of old-style poetry could no longer resonate with the spirit of the age and should be replaced with new poetry, a well-known notion among modern Chinese intellectuals in the early twentieth century. Yet, considering the realistic depiction of his overwhelming sense of being besieged in his transnational companionate marriage in these poems, Guo’s attitude could just as well indicate the shift of his poetics, which turned his gaze from reality to fantasy, in spite of his negation of fantasy in his letter to Zong.

In Guo’s new poetic vision, his “old” self, “ruined” in the wreckage of his companionate marriage yet in possession of great potential for more sophisticated insights on love and marriage, is replaced with the restless forward motion of a “new” self, in possession of infinite mobility and capacity in accordance with the progressive spirit of the age, yet without a trace of his initial concerns for the equal rights of women remains. In Guo’s “new poetry,” Satō would never appear as withered grass, nor would their son be sick and sad. Both mother and son would be transformed into symbols; the woman would serve as the symbol of freedom, in the form of Venus, nude or barely clothed. Just as it was the physical form of the woman rather than her traditional or modern identity that played a decisive role in Guo’s consenting to or resisting his arranged marriage in 1912, the actual new woman is insignificant in comparison with the naked beauty of the female form in Guo’s new poetics. As is evident in “Yu zhong wang hu” (Lake-Gazing in the Rain) written on April 10, 1921 during a brief trip back to China:

⁴⁵ Tian Han, Zong Baihua, Guo Moruo, *San ye ji* [Cloverleaf], 9-11.

雨中望湖
--湖畔公园小御碑亭上

沐浴着的西子哟，
裸体的美哟！
我得身中……
这么不可言说的寒噤！
哦，来了几位写生的姑娘，
可是，unschoen⁴⁶。⁴⁷

Lake-Gazing in the Rain
--On the Small Imperial Stele Pavilion in the Lakeside Park

O bathing Xizi,
O beauty of the nude!
In my body...
Such an unspeakable shiver!
Oh, here come some drawing girls,
Yet, not beautiful.⁴⁸

“Xizi” here is another name for Xi Shi, meaning Lady Xi, one of four renowned beauties in ancient China. Because of its beautiful scenery, West Lake in Hangzhou is also known as Xizi Lake. In this poem however, Xizi, a personification of West Lake, is not simply the Chinese beauty from ancient China. Rather than being clothed in ancient attire, she is a bathing nude. Note that the female nude is a distinctly Western notion. Representation of the female nude is generally absent in East Asian art;⁴⁹ it is only in the modern era that the female nude is adopted by modern Chinese male intellectuals in their modernization project for various reasons.⁵⁰ Thus, the nude Xizi is a Westernized / modernized version of classical Chinese beauty. In other poems such as “Nüshen zhi zaisheng” (Rebirth of the Goddesses)⁵¹ and “Xiang lei” (The Entangled One of the Xiang River),⁵² female figures from ancient Chinese history or legend are also depicted as nude goddesses serving as symbolic bearers of Guo’s aspirations as a modern man. The above poem, however, is the only one that explicitly

⁴⁶ Guo’s original note: unschoen ---不美丽，不漂亮。

⁴⁷ Guo Moruo, *Nüshen* [The Goddesses] (Hong Kong: Shenghuo dushu xinzhì sanlián shūdiàn, 1958), 198-199.

⁴⁸ The German word appears in Guo’s original poem, meaning not beautiful, not pretty.

⁴⁹ John Hay, “The Body Invisible in Chinese Art?” in Angela Zito and Tani E. Barlow edit., *Body, Subject and Power in China*, 42-43.

⁵⁰ Yingjing Zhang, “Artwork, Commodity, Event: Representations of the Female Body in Modern Chinese Pictorials”; Carrie Waara, “The Bare Truth: Nudes, Sex, and the Modernization Project in Shanghai Pictorials,” in Jason C Kuo, ed., *Visual Culture in Shanghai: 1850s-1930s* (Washington, DC: New Academia Publishing, 2007), 121-203.

⁵¹ Guo Moruo, *Nüshen* [The Goddesses], 3,

⁵² *Ibid.*, 18.

depicts a hierarchical relationship between the male speaker, the symbolic new woman and the actual new woman. The male speaker obviously occupies an authoritative position in terms of both female figures. The symbolic new woman is worshipped because of the deep sensuality her nude beauty evokes in the male speaker; while the actual new women, despite their aspirations for modernity (e.g., learning fine art), are sneered at because of their “not beautiful [unschoen]” physical forms. The support for women’s independence and social roles that Guo had expressed in his love letters to Satō seems to be simply a means to win over the heart of a beautiful girl. At best, those ideals had been abandoned at the failure of Guo’s pursuit of romantic love in a companionate marriage.

Yet how was the speaker in Guo’s poetry transformed from a powerless besieged man into such an authoritative male figure? Though Guo generally divided his poetic career into three phases (the Tagore phase, the Whitman phase and the Goethe phase), his ascent on the poetic scene was largely attributed to his first encounter with Walt Whitman in September 1919, through Arishima Takeo’s *Hangyakusha* (Rebels), a Japanese book introducing Rodin, Millet and Whitman. Takeo’s book directed Guo to *Leaves of Grass* and quickly brought him under its spell. In the following months, Guo wrote the series of poems that carved him a permanent niche in the history of modern Chinese poetry. Many of his best-known poems were composed during the year after his first encounter with Whitman.⁵³ Scholars have repeatedly pointed out that Guo’s Whitmanian “barbaric yawp” attracted him immediate nationwide attention and earned him the name of the foremost poet of his time. Many characterize Guo’s poetry for its “passion and

⁵³ David Tod Roy, *Kuo Mo-jo: The Early Years*, 79; Guo Moruo, *Chuangzao shinian* [Ten years of the Creation Society], 63-64.

imagination,”⁵⁴ “Romantic heroism”⁵⁵ and “the spirit of the age.”⁵⁶ In his recent study of Guo, Jiayan Mi offers illuminating observations on Guo’s construction of a new self by focusing on the concept of the body.⁵⁷ However, similar to other scholars, Mi has not looked further and examined Guo’s construction of a poetics of hyper-masculinity as well as its relationship with his transnational marriage. In the following sections, I examine some of Guo’s best-known poems in relation to his transnational marriage and demonstrate how Guo’s pursuit of new poetry is an attempt to be reborn. His construction of a modern hyper-masculinity is also an attempt to counter the threat of emasculation posed by domesticity of his failed companionate marriage, his initial yet frustrated effort to construct his identity as a modern man.

Earth, My Mother! or, Reclamation of Authority

“Earth, My Mother!” is one of the Whitmanian poems that distinguished Guo as the foremost poet of Chinese new poetry and inspired many young people with its passionate energy. Guo recalls the circumstances of its creation as follows:

“Earth, My Mother!” was written in December 1919 just after the New Year’s vacation began. One morning, when I was reading in the Fukuoka library, I suddenly felt an attack of poetic inspiration. Running outside, I took off my wooden clogs [*geta*] and paced back and forth bare-footed on a secluded cobblestone path behind the library, where from time to time I hastily lay down on the path to find greater intimacy with “mother earth,” by feeling her skin and accepting her embrace...under these conditions, urged on and stimulated by the

⁵⁴ Xie Zhixi, *Modeng yu xiandai: zhongguo xiandai wenxue de shicun fenxi* [Modeng and modern: a historical analysis of modern Chinese literature], 335.

⁵⁵ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *The Romantic Generation of Modern Chinese Writers*, 177-200.

⁵⁶ In his insightful article “The Spirit of the Time in *The Goddesses*,” Wen points out five important elements in Guo’s poetry that reflect the spirit of the age, i.e. excitement in the motion of machines, passion for rebellions, new developments in modern sciences, cosmopolitanism, and despair in materialism. See Wen Yiduo, edited by Sun Dangbo and Yuan Jianzheng, *Wen Yiduo quanji* [The complete works of Wen Yiduo] (Wuhan: Hubei renmin chubanshe, 1993), vol. 2, 110-117; originally published on June 3, 1923 in *Creation Weekly*, No. 4.

⁵⁷ Jiayan Mi, *Self-fashioning and Reflexive Modernity in Modern Chinese Poetry, 1919-1949* (Lewiston, N.Y.: E. Mellen Press, 2004), 15-84.

poem itself, I finally saw it to completion and dashed home to put it down on paper, feeling as though I had been reborn...⁵⁸

It is evident that Guo was able to experience the rebirth he so desperately wished for in the process of writing poetry. What resulted from this rebirth? The secluded surroundings, the removing of his shoes, the repeated press of his warm bare feet on the cold uneven texture of the cobblestones, the hasty action of lying down, the sliding of his fingers on the smooth cobblestones, the actual embracing of the earth, all these details unmistakably convey a liberated and liberating sensuousness completely absent from Guo's old-style poems. This sensuousness plays a key role in the poem as well.

The first four stanzas of the poem establish a sensuous connection between the personified mother figure of the earth and the male speaker.

地球，我的母亲！
天已黎明了，
你把你怀中的儿来摇醒，
我现在正在你背上爬行。

Earth, my mother!
The sky is already pale with dawn;
You wake up your son in your bosom,
Now I am crawling on your back.

地球，我的母亲！
你背负着我在这乐园中逍遥。
你还在那海洋里面，
奏出些音乐来，安慰我的灵魂。

Earth, my mother!
You carry me on your back, sauntering in this
paradise,
And from within the ocean
You play some music to soothe my spirit.

地球，我的母亲！
我过去，现在，未来，
食的是你，衣的是你，住的是你，
我要怎么样才能够报答你的深恩？

Earth, my mother!
Through past, present, future,
You are food, clothes, shelter for me;
How can I repay your profound kindness?

地球，我的母亲！
从今后我不愿常在家中居住，
我要常在这开旷的空气里面，

Earth, my mother!
From now on I am unwilling to stay often at home;
I will stay often in the open air,
And express my filial piety to you.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Guo Moruo, "My Poetry-making Process" [Wode zuoshi de jingguo], written on the night of September 4, 1936, in Guo Moruo, *Guo Moruo lun chuanguo* [Guo Moruo on literary production] (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1983), 199-209. Originally published in *Zhiwen*, Vol. 2, No. 2, November 10, 1936. The English translation is adapted from David Tod Roy, *Kuo Mo-jo: The Early Years*, 83.

对于你表达我的孝心。⁵⁹

The male speaker, rather than adopting Whitman's hyper-masculine posture, assumes the identity of a defenseless baby boy. His relationship with the mother is that of a physical dependence: the mother holds him in her arms when he is asleep, carries him on her back when he is awake, plays music to soothe him, and provides him with food, clothes and shelter. Read out of context, these details could be easily understood as manifestations of the poet's imagination running wild. However, if we think about Guo's family situation at the time, we realize that they could have come from Guo's actual life. At the time, Guo's first son was a handful of a two-year-old; his second son was to be born in three months. With Satō heavy with advanced pregnancy, Guo would have frequently played the role he ascribes to mother earth in the poem. The only fantasy would be the role-reversal in the poem -- the male speaker is the baby son whose physical needs are all taken care of rather than the mother figure who exhausts herself satisfying the needs of the baby.

I want to call attention to the opposition between "home" and "open air" in stanza four. At this point, the male speaker miraculously ceases to be the baby boy that needs to be taken care of, but becomes a grown man who expresses his willingness to perform filial duty for the mother. Since the earth is the mother, the "open air" is naturally the home where the male speaker performs his filial duty, while the "home" that is not in the open air becomes the unwanted other. Many would understand this choice as one of Guo's "pantheist" moments, his unreserved embracing of Nature in a manner similar to

⁶⁰ Adapted from Lester and Barnes' translation, see John Lester and A.C. Barnes, trans., Kuo Mo-jo (i.e. Guo Moruo), *Selected Poems from The Goddesses* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1958), 29.

⁵⁹ Guo Moruo, *Nüshen* [The Goddesses], 86-87.

Whitman's. If we understand "home" in its common sense, as a place of personal comfort, a shelter one can always return to, the above understanding would be adequate. Yet since "home" is where Guo frequently performs the exhausting role of a mother, the fact that he constructs a male speaker who is taken care of like Guo's two-year-old son and who prefers to stay with the protecting mother earth rather than going "home" seems to betray Guo's desire to get away from his role in the companionate marriage and form a new family structure. This new family structure takes shape in stanzas 5 to 9:

地球，我的母亲！
我羡慕你的孝子，田地里的农人，
他们是全人类的保姆，
你是时常地爱抚他们。

Earth, my mother!
I am envious of your dutiful sons, the peasants in
the fields;
They are the nurse of mankind,
You have always cared for them.

地球，我的母亲！
我羡慕你的庞子，炭坑里的工人，
他们是全人类的普罗美修士⁶¹，
你是时常地怀抱着他们。

Earth, my mother!
I am envious of your darling sons, workers in coal
pits;
They are the Prometheus⁶³ of mankind,
You have always held them to your chest.

地球，我的母亲！
我羡慕那一切的草木，我的同胞，
你的儿孙，
他们自由地，自主地，随分地，健康
地，
享受着他们的赋生。

Earth, my mother!
I am envious of all grass and trees, my brothers,
your sons and grandsons;
Freely, autonomously, contentedly, healthily
They enjoy the life bestowed on them.

地球，我的母亲！
我羡慕那一切动物，尤其是蚯蚓——
我只不羡慕那空中的飞鸟：
他们离了你要在空中飞行。

Earth, my mother!
I am envious of all animals, the earthworm most of
all—
Only I do not envy the birds flying in the air:
They have left you to go their way in the air.

地球，我的母亲！
我不愿在空中飞行，
我也不愿坐车，乘马，着袜，穿鞋，

Earth, my mother!
I do not wish to fly in the air,
Nor travel in a vehicle, ride a horse, wear socks or

⁶¹ Guo's Original note: 普罗美修士 (Prometheus), 希腊神话中半神半人之神, 他曾把天上的火种偷给人间, 而他却因此被缚在高加索 (Caucasus) 山上, 每天受着鸷鹰啄肉的苦行。

我只愿赤裸着我的双脚，永远和你相
亲。⁶²

shoes,
I only wish to go bare-foot, ever closer to you.⁶⁴

In the above stanzas, the speaker extends the protecting mother – filial son affinity to the peasants, the miners, all plants and animals except for the birds. The speaker’s resounding repetitions of his devotion to mother earth and admiration for the peasants, miners, plants and animals seem to resonate with Whitman’s “acceptance of the universe as he found it, his magnificently shouted comradeship with all nature and all men.”⁶³ Yet the exclusion of the birds from this comradeship is not characteristic of Whitman, but of Guo’s new design. Here, the speaker divides the elements of Nature into two camps, those who have direct physical ties with the earth, and those who do not. Although it is absurd to think that the birds are not part of Nature, their exclusion from the comradeship only emphasizes the divide between the earth and the sky, which prepares for the opposition between mother earth and heavenly father in the following stanzas. Before moving on, I want to call attention to two characteristics of the new paradigm of family structure Guo designs. The first is the predominance of masculinity. Not only are the peasants and miners sons, but also all plants and animals, the offspring of mother earth, are male. The new family structure is that of ultimate brotherhood, with no place for daughters, a paradigm completely different from the one Guo designed in his romantic love with Satō, where he acknowledged the independence and social roles of both men and women. The second is the abstraction of peasants and miners into symbol bearers

⁶³Guo’s note in translation: Prometheus is a half-god and half-human god in Greek mythology. He stole fire from heaven and brought it to the world. Because of this he was bound on the Caucasus Mountain and was tortured daily by a vulture.

⁶² Guo Moruo, *Nüshen* [The Goddesses], 87-89.

⁶⁴ Adapted from Lester and Barnes’ translation, see John Lester and A.C. Barnes, trans., Kuo Mo-jo (i.e. Guo Moruo), *Selected Poems from The Goddesses*, 29-30.

⁶⁵ Alice Corbin Henderson, “A Perfect Return,” *Poetry*, A Magazine of Verse, December 1912, Vol. I, No. 3, 89.

rather than depicting them in the light of the complex sociopolitical conditions of the time. In order to construct a new paradigm where the new men (sons rather than fathers) are the absolute masters of the world, Guo opted to wipe out the poignant reality he depicted in his old-style poems. The abysmal situation of the miners and peasants resulting from constant wars and the imperialist expansion of capitalism is out of the picture.

As I mentioned earlier, stanzas 10 to 14 reveal the reason why the male speaker makes the forced division between the earth and the sky. Furthermore, they also reveal the intention behind the speaker's effort to establish a close affinity with the earth and to construct a strong family paradigm with a powerful mother figure and numerous sons: it is to imbue both the earth and the male speaker with the power and authority to overthrow the authority of the father figure in the sky.

地球，我的母亲！
你是我实有性的证人，
我不相信你只是个梦幻泡影，
我不相信我只是个妄执无明。

Earth, my mother!
You are the proof of my true existence.
I don't believe that you are merely illusions and bubbles,
I don't believe that I am merely vainly stubborn and ignorant.

地球，我的母亲！
我们都是空桑中出生的伊尹，
我不相信那缥缈的天上，
还有位什么父亲。

Earth, my mother!
We are both I-Yin born out of the empty mulberry,
I don't believe that in the illusive sky,
There is still some father.

地球，我的母亲！
我想这宇宙中的一切都是你的化身：
雷霆是你呼吸的声威，
雪雨是你血液的飞腾。

Earth, my mother!
I think everything in the universe is your incarnation:
Thunderbolts are your breath resounding,
Snow and rain are your blood soaring.

地球，我的母亲！
我想那缥缈的天球，是你化妆的明镜，
那昼间的太阳，夜间的太阴，
只不过是那明镜中的你自己的虚影。

Earth, my mother!
I think that the illusory celestial globe is your cosmetic mirror,
And that the sun by day and the moon by night
Are but your illusory reflections in that mirror.

地球，我的母亲！

我想那天空中一切的星球
只不过是我們生物的眼球的虛影；
我只相信你是實有性的證明。⁶⁶

Earth, my mother!
I think all the celestial bodies in the sky
Are but illusory reflections on the eyeballs of us
organisms.
I only believe that you are the evidence of true
existence.⁶⁷

Note that from stanza ten, the male speaker, though still claiming a mother-son relationship with the earth, no longer occupies the inferior position of a defenseless baby or a devoted son, but assumes the more powerful position of the spokesman for their alliance in confrontation with the father authority. First of all, the primary role of the earth is to serve as “the proof of my true existence.” Obviously the speaker does not feel all the foreshadowing in the previous stanzas sufficient to qualify the earth as his proof. He resorts to the resounding duplicate parallelism of “I don’t believe”⁶⁸ to directly overthrow the judgment of certain authority which has rendered both the speaker and the earth nonexistent and unworthy. The repetitive duplication seems to present the speaker and the earth as equally negated by the authority. Yet the resounding “I don’t believe” unmistakably shows the male speaker as the spokesman for their alliance and “proof” of the “true existence” of the earth.

In the next stanza, the speaker not only claims that both he and the earth were born from the empty mulberry, but also rejects the existence of the father figure in the sky. Note that all these negations are directed against fundamental Christian beliefs. In Christianity, God is the creator of the whole world and the ultimate authority high above;

⁶⁶ Guo Moruo, *Nüshen* [The Goddesses], 89-90.

⁶⁷ Adapted from Lester and Barnes’ translation, see John Lester and A.C. Barnes, trans., Kuo Mo-jo (i.e. Guo Moruo), *Selected Poems from The Goddesses*, 30-31.

⁶⁸ The forceful declaration of “I don’t believe” would find echoes in Bei Dao’s household poem “The Answer” half a century later. I write about Bei Dao and his generation’s poetic movement in chapter four.

God is the spiritual father of all human kind while earth is the sensual mother, the former representing trustworthy reason whereas the latter represents untrustworthy sensuous knowledge.

In stanzas twelve, the male speaker adopts a creation myth that presents an alternative to the Christian myth. By claiming that “everything in the universe” is the incarnation of mother earth, the speaker shifts the authoritative power of poetic inspiration from God the spiritual father to mother earth. What is more, the speaker justifies the “true existence” of the earth with medical terms descriptive of life signs such as the sound of “breathing” and flow of “blood.” In stanza thirteen, the speaker further denies the existence of the father in the sky by not only referring to the sky with an astronomical term such as “celestial globe,” but also relegates the sky to the subsidiary position of mere feminine accessories (“cosmetic mirror”) for mother earth. In stanza fourteen, the speaker continues to employ language from the medical and biological sciences such as “organisms” and “eyeballs” to deny the “true existence” of the sky, rendering everything in the sky as “illusory reflections.”

It is worth noting that the last line in this stanza seems to repeat the claim the speaker makes earlier. However, rather than repeating that the earth is “the proof of *my* true existence,” the speaker claims the earth to be “the proof of true existence,” hence turning an individual agenda into a universal truth. Thus, the speaker evolves from a defenseless baby boy, to a devoted filial son, to an ally and spokesman, finally into the holder of universal truth; the ultimate authority is shifted from God the spiritual father to the male speaker. Though Guo was mostly regarded as a Romantic poet, the replacement of God with the male speaker is definitely a significant step away from nineteenth

century Romanticism and paves the way for the construction of the male poet as an omnipotent god-like figure.

In stanzas fifteen to twenty-one, the speaker reverts to a theme from the beginning of the poem and repeats mother earth's function as providing physical and spiritual comfort to the speaker. The speaker untiringly reiterates his desire to "repay the profound kindness" of mother earth. The expression "profound kindness" is repeated three times in stanza fifteen. The line "especially to soothe my spirit" concludes stanzas seventeen, eighteen and nineteen. Though the speaker attempts to create a sonorous symphony in his appreciation of mother earth's "profound kindness," the result is full of sound and fury that signifies nothing. The only thing the speaker offers explicitly in return to the earth is a weak employment of the Marxist term "labor": "I will follow your example and labor myself, never stop." The weight of this twenty-one stanza poem of eighty-four lines lies in the earth's function to serve the speaker, physically, spiritually and politically.

One might wonder why Guo would draw on the heavenly father and mother earth dichotomy in Christianity to construct, prove and universalize a male persona with the voice of ultimate authority. Why would he define sensuousness as the "true existence" and deem the spiritual father "illusory," contrary to Christian belief? It is worth noting that Satō came from a Christian family. The immediate father figure that denies Guo's "true existence" was Satō's father, a Protestant minister, who disowned Satō after she entered the common-law companionate marriage with Guo against her father's will. Christian beliefs concerning marriage denied the legitimacy of Guo and Satō's common-law marriage. Most importantly, as the notion of Western romantic love promoted by progressive Christian thinkers in Japan denounced the carnal aspects of male-female

relationships, Guo's sexual intimacy with Satō in pursuit of their romantic love violated the "sacredness of romantic love." All these beliefs condemned Guo's physical desires. By holding up the sensuous quality of mother earth against the spiritual father, Guo was able to fashion his pursuit of male desire into a rebellious gesture against the reigning authority, in the same way that he adopted the female nude as a banner of his modern avant-garde position in other poems.

It should be noted that mother earth is only one of the many tropes Guo utilizes to construct an omnipotent male figure. In the following section, I analyze "Tian Gou" (Celestial Dog), another of Guo's best-known poems and parse out how Guo draws upon all available sources to construct an all-powerful universal persona.

Celestial Dog: The Becoming of the Self

Written on January 30, 1920,⁶⁹ a month after the composition of "Earth, My Mother!," "Celestial Dog" is radically different from the former in both form and content. Yet, interestingly, upon close reading, it could very well be taken as a sequel to "Earth, My Mother!" Two important themes are carried over from the former and developed to the fullest in this poem. The first is the speaker's resolution to stay away from home; the second is the extolling of cosmic energy. It seems that, after successfully providing justification for the universality of his "true existence" in the former poem, it is natural that the speaker now takes on a universal identity and demonstrates that "true existence." In "Celestial Dog," the speaker has shed all personal traces of Guo's failed modern pursuit of romantic love. No longer in need of the power of the mother earth to construct an alternative family paradigm, the speaker assumes the identity of a more powerful

⁶⁹ Wu Jiping, *Guo moruo liuri shinian (1914-1924)* [Guo Moruo's ten years studying in Japan, 1914-1924], 418.

mythical figure devoid of any familial ties. Each and every line of the poem starts with the resolute voice of an abstract and therefore universal “I” firmly declaring its existence and its role as the sole agent of all actions. While many scholars interpret the poem as the expression of Guo’s “superego” or “individual heroism,” I suggest an alternative reading here. I argue that Guo is not only attempting to express a strong individualism, but also constructing a universal modern identity that works for all modern Chinese male intellectuals of his time. And the modern Chinese male intellectuals quickly recognized the value of Guo’s construction. Guo’s instant nationwide success was proof of that.

Contrary to the speaker in “Earth, My Mother!” who vows to remain in an almost static closeness with the earth and refuses to travel on any vehicles, “Celestial Dog” opens with the speaker not only positioned in the sky, but in the restless forward motion of the train, a sharp contrast to the confinement and lack of mobility associated with the domesticity depicted in Guo’s old-style poems and letters as discussed earlier. Guo’s desperate wish to fly in “Spring Chill” and to be reborn as a new self in his January 18, 1920 letter to Zong Baihua are fulfilled in this poem. Despite apparently going back on Guo’s promises in relation to mother earth, the speaker in “Celestial Dog” continues to draw on her cosmic energy. Here, however, rather than making “everything in the universe,” (that is, the “incarnation” of mother earth), display that energy to oppose the ultimate power of the Christian God, the speaker in “Celestial Dog” starts the poem with an inversion of that incarnation / creation, taking “the entire universe” (back) to the mythical body, and harvesting that energy. The following are the first two stanzas of the poem:

我是一条天狗呀！
我把月来吞了，

I am a celestial dog!
I devour the moon,

我把日来吞了，
我把一切的星球来吞了，
我把全宇宙来吞了。
我便是我了！

I devour the sun,
I devour all the stars,
I devour the entire universe.
I become myself!

我是月底光，
我是日底光，
我是一切星球底光，
我是 X 光线底光，
我是全宇宙底 Energy 底总量！⁷⁰

I am the light of the moon,
I am the light of the sun,
I am the light of all stars,
I am the light of X-ray,
I am the total Energy of the entire universe!

The celestial dog is a powerful mythical figure in Chinese legends, which first appeared in *Shan hai jing* (The Classic of Mountains and Seas), a much-loved classical Chinese text.⁷¹ It is described as a vicious animal that brings war and disaster wherever it goes.⁷²

The description in *Zhou shu* (The Book of Zhou) offers more details of its power that closely fit the present poem:

The ground collapses wherever the celestial dog arrives. Its remaining light illuminates the sky and becomes the shooting star. It is more than a hundred feet in length, with the speed of wind, the sound of thunder and the brightness of lightning.⁷³

In Chinese legend, this vicious and powerful dog chases and devours the sun and the moon, causing solar and lunar eclipses. Having been a science major for six years in Japan while writing this poem, Guo was well aware of the astronomical explanations of those phenomena and the scientific authority they carry. However, just as he abandoned the realistic approach to poetry along with his old-style poems, Guo obviously opted to

⁷⁰ Guo Moruo, *Guo Moruo shi* [Selected poems by Guo Moruo], edited by Xiao Zhang (Hangzhou: Zhejiang wenyi chubanshe, 2000), 45.

⁷¹ For a detailed introduction to this text, see Anne Birrell's "Introduction," in Anne Birrell, trans., *The Classic of mountains and seas* (London: Penguin Books, 1999), xiii-xlvi.

⁷² Chen Cheng, trans. (from classical Chinese to modern vernacular Chinese), *Shan hai jing* [The Classic of Mountains and Seas] (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2008), 354.

⁷³ Ibid. The Chinese description is from a note in *Shan hai jing* [The Classic of Mountains and Seas].

disregard the scientific objectivism prevalent at the time in order to be free to construct a fantastic poetic persona. Not only did Guo's scientific education not restrict his thinking to scientific objectivism, but it also served as a powerful source of inspiration for his poetic fantasy, as did Chinese myths and Western literature, religion and philosophy.

If the celestial dog's devouring of the sun and moon are still adaptations of the familiar Chinese myth, the devouring of "all the stars" and then "the entire universe" goes far beyond the realm of Chinese myth and completes an inversion of mother earth's diffuse process of "incarnation" described in "Earth, My Mother!" The result, the self that the speaker becomes after this process of devouring, is an intense concentration of mass resembling that of a Black Hole.⁷⁴ Though obviously unaware of the specific theorizations of the Black Hole, Guo did intuit one of its most essential qualities – radiation, thanks to his knowledge of Einstein's theory of relativity. In accordance with the way this theory proposed the mutual convertibility of mass and energy, the second stanza defines the new self, the infinitely huge or compact mass of the body, as an equivalent amount of energy in the form of radiating light. The triumphant declarations of "I become myself!" and "I am the total Energy of the entire universe!" at the end of each stanza show that the speaker finally achieves ultimate existence /authority by taking over the realm supposedly ruled by the Christian God and comes into possession of the entire universe.

Note that Guo's literary analogy to the Black Hole is not an arbitrary reading, but well-situated in the historical context. Though quantum mechanics was not yet to be

⁷⁴ In his unpublished paper, Li Zhang gives an acute analysis of the connection of Guo's poetics, especially that in "Celestial Dog," with Black Hole theory. He calls attention to the fact that the knowledge and theoretical calculations about the Black Holes took off in the 1910's after Einstein's general theory of relativity. Li Zhang, "X-rays, Animal Magnetism and Energetics: Reflecting on Radiation and Early Modern Chinese Literature," 20.

officially established until five or six years after Guo's composition of "Celestial Dog," new developments in modern physics at the turn of the twentieth century had been challenging the Newtonian laws. In 1900, Max Planck, studying black-body radiation, discovered that the basic structure of nature, in the terms of modern physics, is granular or discontinuous and that energy is absorbed and emitted in chunks, which he called quanta. As he put it, "the hypothesis of quanta has led to the idea that there are changes in Nature which do not occur continuously, but in an explosive manner."⁷⁵ Planck's discovery marked the birth of quantum mechanics. Einstein, stimulated by Planck's discovery, used the photoelectric effect to illustrate that not only are the processes of energy absorption and emission quantized, but that energy itself comes in packages of a certain size. This is the famous wave-particle duality which is fundamental to quantum mechanics.⁷⁶ Einstein's theory of relativity rendered the Newtonian laws of mechanics invalid when the velocity of the moving particle approaches that of the speed of light. One fundamental assumption of the special theory of relativity is that the velocity of light always has the same value. A consequence of this theory is the mutual convertibility of mass and energy. Mass is energy and energy has mass.⁷⁷

Thanks to Guo's education in science and Japan's worship of Nobel Prize winners, Guo Moruo was well aware of the new developments in modern science and was excited about the alternative perceptions and great potential they promised. He not only repeatedly extolled Einstein as one of his heroes, but told his literary friends in Japan that their education in science would serve as an advantage for them in their literary creation

⁷⁵ 1913, trans. F. D'Abel, *phil. Mag.* Vol. 28, 1914.

⁷⁶ Gary Zukav, *The Dancing Wu Li Masters: An Overview of the New Physics* (New York: Bantam Books, 1979), 95-96.

⁷⁷ A. Einstein and L. Infeld, "Mass and Energy are Interconvertible" (1905), *The Evolution of Physics*, in M.P. Crosland edit. *The Science of Matter: A Historical Survey* (Middlesex, England: Penguin Book, 1971), 341-344.

and make their works stand out from others. In his letter to Zong Baihua dated February 15, 1920, two weeks after writing “Celestial Dog,” Guo wrote that he had long since finished reading Bergson’s *Creative Evolution* (1911) and believed that aspiring artists would be most easily influenced by Bergson’s philosophy of life.⁷⁸ On February 23, 1920, Guo published “Shengming di wenxue” (“The Literature of Life”) in *Learning Lamp*, a short yet well-known piece on artistic and literary creation that attempts to establish the utmost importance of literature, and thereby that of the author, by utilizing new concepts from both modern physics and Bergson’s philosophy. I want to examine part of this piece which is a companion piece “Celestial Dog” in terms of both the time of its composition and its theoretical basis:

Life and literature are not two distinct things. Life is the essence of literature. Literature is the reflection of life. Without life, literature does not exist.

In human life, the optimum element is the function of consciousness. The function of consciousness is simply the sum total of the function of the brain. The essence of the function of the brain is simply the exchange of *Energy*.

All matter has life. Inorganic matter has life as well. All life is the exchange of *Energy*. The entire universe is simply the exchange of *Energy*.

Matter and *Energy* are simply one unity, not two distinct entities. Without matter, the concept of *Energy* does not exist. Without *Energy*, matter does not exist.

Energy is in constant motion: ceaselessly gathering, ceaselessly radiating.

The radiation of *Energy* is manifested as sound, light and electric heat in matter; as emotion, impulse, thought and consciousness in humans. Pure expression of emotion, impulse, thought and consciousness is the literature of life in the narrow sense.

The literature of life is the literature of individuality, because life is completely autonomous.

The literature of life is universal literature, because life is universally the same.

⁷⁸ Tian Han, Zong Baihua, Guo Moruo, *San ye ji* [Cloverleaf], 57.

The literature of life is immortal literature, because Energy never perishes.⁷⁹

The piece starts with a statement of the inseparability of literature and life, thereby placing literature in an indispensable position. Note that the piece was written when Chinese men had lost their avenue to social, political and financial prestige through the civil examination system and were trying to blaze another way to the same privileged position through the pursuit of a professional career. At this point, literature was still far from a well-established career path for modern men. This piece of literary theorization, similar to poems such as “Earth, My Mother!” and “Celestial Dog,” is an attempt at justifying the existence of the author and his profession in the modernization project.

After the initial statement, the piece quickly moves on to offer a definition of life, not life in the social-economic-political context, but in the context of Bergson’s philosophy of life and quantum physics. By essentializing human life as the function of consciousness and eventually as the exchange of energy, Guo was able not only to avoid dealing with the socio-economic-political plight of his transnational companionate marriage (i.e., the immediate reality of human life) as subject matter for literature, but also to elevate the function of literary creation (and, thereby, the creator of literature) to the privileged position of autonomy, universality and immortality. “Celestial Dog” offers a poetic demonstration of the construction of just such a privileged figure.

If the first two stanzas transform a powerful mythical figure in Chinese legends into an infinitely more powerful figure thanks to recent developments in modern physics, stanza three demonstrates that the essence of that powerful new-born figure is “the exchange of energy” through the combined forces of Chinese myth, modern technology, modern physics, modern medical science and modern philosophy:

⁷⁹ Guo Moruo, “Shengming di wenxue” [The Literature of Life], *Xuedeng* [Learning Lamp], February 23, 1920.

我飞奔，
我狂叫，
我燃烧。
我如烈火一样地燃烧！
我如大海一样地狂叫！
我如电气一样地飞跑！
我飞跑，
我飞跑，
我飞跑，
我剥我的皮，
我食我的肉，
我吸我的血，
我啮我的心肝，
我在我的神经上飞跑，
我在我的脊髓上飞跑，
我在我的脑筋上飞跑。⁸⁰

I hurtle,
I roar,
I blaze.
I blaze like a fierce fire!
I roar like the mighty ocean!
I hurtle like electricity!
I hurtle,
I hurtle,
I hurtle,
I peel my skin,
I eat my flesh,
I suck my blood,
I gnaw my heart and liver,
I am hurtling on my nerves,
I am hurtling on my spine,
I am hurtling on my brain.

The first six lines in this stanza evoke at once the speed and sound of the celestial dog described in *The Book of Zhou*, the radiation of energy from “matter” Guo described in “The Literature of Life,” and most importantly, the fast-moving, coal-burning and loudly whistling train, symbol of industrial progress. Thematically, the stanza continues to elaborate on Guo’s concept that both “matter” and “human” are “life.” Furthermore, the poem shows the radiation of energy from “matter” and “human” as seamlessly integrated. The speaker first takes on the form of “matter” in the first six lines, radiating in the form of heat, sound and electricity. Then, when it seems that the non-stop radiation of energy has depleted the mass stored previously, the speaker starts to repeat the process of mass storage and energy radiation performed previously. This time, however, thanks to the double quality of the speaker as both organic (as celestial dog) and inorganic (as mass and energy of the entire universe), the speaker seamlessly metamorphoses into “human.” Since the speaker has already devoured the whole universe, there is nothing left to devour

⁸⁰ Guo Moruo, *Guo Moruo shi* [Selected poems by Guo Moruo], 45-46.

except for the compact mass of his own body that has gathered the energy of the whole universe. Therefore, the gathering of energy is through the devouring of the mass of the bodily self (“flesh,” “blood,” “heart and liver”), and the radiation of energy takes place through the hurtling motion of the consciousness (on the “nerves,” “spine” and “brain”). The speaker is condensed into “the function of the consciousness,” that is, “the optimum element” of “human life.”

Thus, in the final stanza, the speaker reaffirms the existence of this newly constructed self and ends the poem with the beginning of another cycle in the “exchange of energy”:

我便是我呀！
我的我要爆了！⁸¹

I AM myself!
My self is about to explode!⁸²

Note that “energy” and “explosion” are important concepts in Bergson’s philosophy as well.

What constitute[s] animality ... is the faculty of utilizing a releasing mechanism for the conversion of as much stored-up potential energy as possible into “explosive” actions... as we rise in the animal scale, the form of the body itself is observed to indicate a certain number of very definite directions along which the energy travels. These directions are marked by so many chains of nervous elements...it may... be surmised that in the nervous element, as soon as it appears, and also in its appendages, the faculty of suddenly freeing the gradually stored-up energy is concentrated... the organism as a whole tries to attract as much energy as possible to those points where the locomotive movements are effected. So that where a nervous system exists, with its complementary sense-organs and motor apparatus, everything should happen as if the rest of the body had, as its essential function, to prepare for these and pass on to them, at the moment required, that force which they are to liberate by a sort of explosion.⁸³

⁸¹ Guo Moruo, *Guo Moruo shi* [Selected poems by Guo Moruo], 46,

⁸² Adapted from Ming-hui Chang Lin’s translation. See Ming-hui Chang Lin, “The Tradition and Innovation in Modern Chinese Poetry,” PhD diss., University of Washington, 1965, 115.

⁸³ Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution* (1911), 120.

Bergson employed concepts such as energy and explosion to discuss the evolution of plant and animal life. For Bergson, energy mainly means the solar energy stored up by plants and then passed on to animals. Explosion is the way energy is released by animals through discontinuous motion. The nervous system is the key factor in coordinating these movements.⁸⁴ For Bergson, explosion is the form of creation. In creation, “there are no things, there are only actions,” and that “center” from which creation explodes is not a “thing” but a dynamic tendency, “a continuity of shooting out.”⁸⁵ Thus, by declaring the self to be on the verge of explosion, the speaker in the poem is not expressing Guo’s uncontainable superego as some scholars argue, but describing the optimum state of “the function of the consciousness,” that is, consciousness at the critical point of creating the “literature of life,” a consciousness stripped of all materiality in the Newtonian sense, and free from the material confinement of the body in any social contingency. Similar to the case of “Earth, My Mother,” in “Celestial Dog,” Guo constructed a powerful author / poet persona and placed him in the highest position.

While grafting Bergson’s concepts from his *Creative Evolution*, Guo not only elevates the literary creation of the author (in this case, the poet) to the privileged position of autonomy, universality and immortality -- a position previously occupied by the Christian God in nineteenth-century Romantic poetry -- but also intuited a literary analogy to the Big Bang Theory that was not formally presented until the early 1930s by Georges Lemaître.⁸⁶ While Guo draws on new concepts from recent developments in modern science and philosophy in constructing a powerful author / poet persona and

⁸⁴ Ibid., 253.

⁸⁵ Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution* (1944), 271.

⁸⁶ Georges Lemaître, “The Beginning of the World from the Point of View of Quantum Theory,” *Nature*, 127 (1931), n. 3210, 706.

placing him in the highest position, the formal construction of the poem is a close mimesis of the train, the most rapid transportation technology of the early twentieth century and an emblem of industrial progress. Each line resembles a self-contained compartment. Especially in stanza three, the three-syllable lines mimic the clanging rhythm of the train; the neat subject-verb sentence structure highlights the powerful rhythmic motion of the train. “Hurtle,” “roar,” and “blaze” are all vivid depictions of a fast-moving, coal-burning machine monster roaring across space. Having lived for six years in Japan, the most technologically advanced nation in Asia at the time, Guo had plenty of experience riding fast trains in Japan. In his later poems, the hurtling rhythm of the train in “Celestial Dog” emerges from a wide range of elements that help configure a new poetic realm and becomes a major trope in Guo’s continued construction of an omnipotent, autonomous and immortal poetic persona. In the following section, I analyze a series of Guo’s machine poems and demonstrate that Guo’s ecstatic romance with the ceaseless motion and inexhaustible energy of machines coincides with his desperate desire to break free from the stagnant confinement of domesticity that had resulted from his previous pursuit of masculinity in free romantic love.

New Life

In a letter to Zong Baihua dated March 30, 1920, two months after writing “Celestial Dog,” Guo describes his utter ecstasy at his integration into the hurtling motion of the train and its clanging rhythm:

The weather is very nice today, the train hurtling through verdant fields, like a valiant and composed youth striving and striding bravely toward a future enveloped in hope. Fly! Fly! All verdant life dazzling light waves are dancing in our eyes. Fly! Fly! Fly! My “self” has integrated into this stupendous and

booming rhythm! I have completely merged into a single whole with the entire train, the entire nature! I lean against the train window, gazing at the whirling and flying nature, listening to the clanging march from the wheels. Joyful! Joyful!⁸⁷

This ecstasy was the combined effect of the hurtling train and the “rhythm of motion” in Max Weber’s “The Eye Moment.” Following his ecstatic description of the train ride, Guo quotes the English version of “The Eye Moment” in full and follows it with his Chinese version. He indicates that the ecstatic shouting of “Fly! Fly! Fly!” is his “cubist poetry.”⁸⁸ Before further analysis of Guo’s machines poems, it is necessary to add a note on Guo’s connection with futurism.

“The Eye Moment” is the first poem in Weber’s first poetry collection entitled *Cubist Poems* (1914). Though Weber claimed to be a Cubist and refused to be labeled as a Futurist,⁸⁹ according to the widely acknowledged distinction between Cubism and Futurism, this poem definitely shows Weber as more of a Futurist than a Cubist:

Cubes, cubes, cubes, cubes,
High, low, and high, and higher, higher,
Far, far out, out, out, far,
Planes, planes, planes,
Colors, lights, signs, whistles, bells, signals, colours,
Planes, planes, planes,
Eyes, eyes, window eyes, eyes, eyes,
Nostrils, nostrils, chimney nostrils,
Breathing, burning, puffing,
Thrilling, puffing, breathing, puffing,
Millions of things upon things,
Billions of things upon things,
This for the eye, the eye of being,
At the edge of the Hudson,
Flowing, timeless, endless,

⁸⁷ Tian Han, Zong Baihua, Guo Moruo, *San ye ji* [Cloverleaf], 137-138.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 138-141.

⁸⁹ In response to an interviewer of 1915 who called him a futurist, Weber replied, “Certainly not! I am Max Weber. My sole desire is to express myself; to paint what I see not with my eye but with my consciousness. My work now is entirely subjective.” (*Baltimore Evening Sun*, March 1915, clipping, Archives of American Art, Max Weber Papers), see note 85, in Merrill Schleier, 247.

On, on, on, on, on.....⁹⁰

Since Boccioni declared in 1912 that the Futurists were opposed to Cubist art and criticized the subjects of Cubist painters as “motionless, frozen, and all the static aspects of Nature,”⁹¹ Cubism and Futurism have often been regarded as “fundamentally opposed, thus necessitating a choice between the *L’art pour l’art* classicism of Cubism and the expressionistic dynamism of Futurism.”⁹² The Futurists, as Marjorie Perloff succinctly characterizes, had “a peculiar (and non-Cubist) obsession with the machine, with speed, dynamism, and energy as the expression of an intense nationalism,” and “reconceived collage as propaganda art, an art that directly bombards the senses.”⁹³ “The Eye Moment,” with its exhilarating celebration of the cataclysmic whirl of energy in the skyscrapers and machines of New York rather than depicting buildings as static monoliths, clearly shows more futuristic dynamism than cubist stasis. Weber himself, elaborating on his theory of art, writes, “magnetism, energy, cohesion make form. Such forms destine matter and determine its plastic and poetic character as weight, dimension

⁹⁰ Max Weber, *Cubist Poems* (London: Elkin Mathews, 1914), 11. The poem is quite similar to a prose piece entitled “On the Brooklyn Bridge” of 1912: “This morning early I was on the old bridge of this New York. Midst din, crash, outwearing, outliving of its iron and steel muscles and sinews. I stood and gazed at the millions of cubes upon billions of cubes pile upon pile, higher and higher, still piled and higher with countless window eyes, befogged, chimney throats clogged by steam and smoke... I gazed and thought of this pile of throbbing, boiling, seething, as a pile after destruction, and this noise and dynamic force created in me a peace the opposite of itself. Two worlds I had before me the inner and outer. I never felt such. I lived both.” Archives of American Art, Max Weber Papers, cited in Merrill Schelier, *The Skyscraper in American Art, 1890-1931* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1983), 247.

⁹¹ Boccioni et al. “Les Peintres futurists italiens,” in *Archivi del futurismo*, ed. Maria Drudi Gambillo and Teresa Fiori, 2 vols. (Rome: De Luca, 1958-62), 1:104; idem, “The Exhibitors of the Public 1912,” in *Futurist Manifestos*, ed. Umbro Apollonio, trans. Robert Brain et al. (New York: Viking Press, 1973), 46, cited in Marjorie Perloff, *The Futurist Moment: Avant-Garde, Avant Guerre, and the Language of Rupture* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1986, 2003), 53.

⁹² Marianne W. Martin, *Futurist Art and Theory, 1919-1925* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), xxix.

⁹³ Marjorie Perloff, *The Futurist Moment: Avant-Garde, Avant Guerre, and the Language of Rupture*, 54.

or energy.”⁹⁴ These words are not specifically referring to “The Eye Moment,” yet they reveal similar artistic conceits employed in the poem.

Though Weber was more well-known as an American modernist painter and theoretician on art, probably because Guo’s only knowledge of Weber was his poetry collection *Cubist Poems*, Guo called Weber a “cubist poet” and did not mention a word of the strong painterly conceits in the poem. While Weber focused more on the fragmentation and abstraction of the city as a painter, Guo was more attracted to the staccato rhythm of the language. Guo did not miss the dynamic energy of the machines in the poem and found the fragmented units in the poem fit perfectly with the rhythm of the train: “One could only realize the intriguing quality of this poem in the train. It is the record of time, rhythm of motion,”⁹⁵ thus turning Weber’s “Eye Moment” into his own “Ear Moment.”

Three months later, in June 1920, this staccato rhythm of mechanical motion created by progressive verbs piling upon one another in “The Eye Moment” found its way into “Bili Shantou zhanwang” (“Panorama from Fudetate Yama”) to embody the “pulse of the metropolis”:

笔力山⁹⁶头展望

大都会的脉搏呀！
生的鼓动呀！
打着在，吹着在，叫着在，……
喷着在，飞着在，跳着在，……
四面的天郊烟幕蒙笼了！
我的心脏呀，快要跳出口来了！

Panorama from Fudetate Yama⁹⁸

Pulse of the metropolis!
Surge of life!
Beating, panting, roaring ...
Spurting, flying, leaping ...
The whole sky covered with a pall of
smoke!
My heart is ready to leap from my mouth!

⁹⁴ Max Weber, *Essays on Art* (New York: W.E. Rudge, 1916), 68-69.

⁹⁵ Tian Han, Zong Baihua, Guo Moruo, *San ye ji* [Cloverleaf], 138.

⁹⁶ Guo’s original note: 笔力山在日本门司市西。登山一望，海路船只，了如指掌。

⁹⁸ Guo’s note in translation: Fudetate Yama: mountain in Japan west of Moji. Seen from the peak, the sea, land and ships are spread out as clear as if in the palm of a hand.

哦哦，山岳的波涛，瓦屋的波涛，
涌着在，涌着在，涌着在，涌着在呀！
万籁共鸣的 symphony，
自然与人生的婚礼呀！
弯弯的海岸好像 Cupid 的弓弩呀！
人的生命便是箭，正在海上放射呀！
黑沉沉的海湾，停泊着的轮船，进行着的
轮船，数不尽的轮船，
一枝枝的烟筒都开着了朵黑色的牡丹
呀！
哦哦，二十世纪的名花！
近代文明的严母呀！⁹⁷

Ah! Hills, roofs, surge on,
Wave after wave they well up before me!
Symphony of myriad sounds,
Marriage of man and Nature!
The curve of the bay might be Cupid's
bow!
Man's life his arrow, shot over the sea!
Dark and obscure coastline, steamers at
anchor, steamers in motion, steamers
unnumbered,
Funnel upon funnel bearing its black
peony!
Ah! Celebrated flower of the Twentieth
Century!
Stern mother of modern civilization!⁹⁹

Similar to the ecstatic train-riding experience in March, this poem depicts a harmonious unity among the speaker, industrial technology and Nature. The beat of “my heart” resonates with “pulse of the metropolis,” both pulsating to the staccato rhythm of the train.

This unified expression of life seems to be an expansion of Guo's proposition that both inorganic and organic matter have life in “The Literature of Life.” Still further, Guo ends the poem by integrating this human-Nature-machine unity into the grander theme of national salvation through industrial progress, part of the mainstream discourse of the May Fourth generation of Chinese intellectuals. Note that the “Peony,” especially a red peony, is not simply a flower of Nature, but a “celebrated flower” in the Chinese tradition, an emblem of wealth and power. By comparing the black smoke from the ship chimneys to black peonies, and making it an emblem of the “modern civilization” of the twentieth century, Guo serves as the mouthpiece of May Fourth intellectuals in their hope for

⁹⁷ Guo Moruo, *Guo Moruo shi* [Selected poems by Guo Moruo], 58-59.

⁹⁹ Adapted from Lester and Barnes' translation, see John Lester and A.C. Barnes, trans., Kuo Mo-jo (i.e. Guo Moruo), *Selected Poems from The Goddesses*, 23.

“wealth and power” through industrial progress. Using “stern” to qualify “mother of the modern civilization” shows that Guo was not unaware of the negative side of industrial progress. In his letters, Guo described the machine-oil covered sea when he was taking a dip in the ocean with his friends. However, for Guo as well as for the majority of the May Fourth generation, industrial pollution, rather than a threat to humanity and nature, was a necessary evil in the effort to make China rich and strong in the face of the invading imperialist powers.

On April 1, 1921, on his way back to China after living in Japan for more than seven years (except for a brief three-day trip to Shanghai in 1915), Guo wrote “Xinsheng” (New Life). In the poem, the vast openness of the earth in “Earth, My Mother!,” the relentless “hurtling” in “Celestial Dog,” the elated cries of “Fly! Fly! Fly!” during the train ride in March 1920,¹⁰⁰ and the clanging rhythm of the train Guo gleaned from Weber’s “The Eye Moment,”¹⁰¹ all merged seamlessly together in the staccato rhythm of the train:

紫罗兰的，	Violet,
圆锥。	Cone.
乳白色的，	Milky,
雾帷。	Haze.
黄黄地，	Golden,
青青地，	Verdant,
地球大大地	The earth is vast
呼吸着朝气。	Breathing morning air.
火车	The train
高笑	Laughing loud
向……向……	To...to...
向……向……	To...to...
	To the gold...
	To the gold...

¹⁰⁰ Tian Han, Zong Baihua, Guo Moruo, *San ye ji* [Cloverleaf], 137-138.

¹⁰¹ Max Weber, *Cubist Poems* (London: Elkin Mathews, 1914), 11. Guo quoted the whole poem and translated it into Chinese in his letter to Tian Han. See Tian Han, Zong Baihua, Guo Moruo, *San ye ji* [Cloverleaf], 138-141.

向着黄……
向着黄……
向着黄金的太阳
飞……飞……飞……
飞跑，
飞跑，
飞跑。
好！好！好！……¹⁰²

To the golden sun
Fly...fly...fly...
Hurtle,
Hurtle,
Hurtle.
Good! Good! Good!

Just as Guo wrote after his ecstasy in reading “The Eye Moment” in the fast-moving train, “observing nature in the train is the brain essence of modern persons,”¹⁰³ this poem is another instance of the integration of the “self” into the powerful rhythm of the train. Guo was firmly bonded with the futuristic notion of machines. Two days later, on April 3, 1921, as the ship approached Shanghai, Guo was amazed by the industrial landscape along the Huangpu River, “noise from the factories, the coal smoke, the steam whistle, the cranes, the cigarette billboard and the porters.” He confessed that had all these belonged to China rather than to “alien races,” he would have celebrated them as a “futuristic painting” and “modern scenery” and “reveled in it.”¹⁰⁴

Guo’s repeated revelry in futuristic machines seems to match Marshall Berman’s criticism of the Futurists’ “uncritical romance of machines”: “The problem of all modernisms in the futurist tradition is that, with brilliant machines and mechanical systems playing all the leading roles ... there is precious little for modern man to do

¹⁰² Guo Moruo, *Guo Moruo shi* [Selected poems by Guo Moruo], 144-145,

¹⁰³ Tian Han, Zong Baihua, Guo Moruo, *San ye ji* [Cloverleaf], 142.

¹⁰⁴ Guo Moruo, *Chuangzao shinian* [Ten years of the Creation Society] (Hongkong: Huiwenge shudian, 1972; first edition, Shanghai: Xiandai Shuju, 1932, 111-112.

except to plug in.”¹⁰⁵ While Berman’s criticism pinpoints the issue with the official poetry of the Mao-era,¹⁰⁶ it is not the case with Guo’s embracing of Futurism.

Before further examining Guo’s poetic romance with machines, let us take another look at Guo’s poetic ecstasy in the train in its historical context. The train ride described in the passage quoted at the beginning of this section immediately follows the conversation between Guo Moruo and Tian Han on romantic love and marriage quoted earlier in the chapter. Guo’s regret for losing his freedom in marriage (i.e., his transnational companionate marriage based on romantic love) serves as an intriguing foil to his ecstatic joy over his unrestrained mobility he experiences in the hurtling train. Furthermore, the letter was written on March 19, 1920, four days after Guo and Satō’s second son was born and right after Tian’s four-day visit to Guo.¹⁰⁷ Tian’s visit caught Guo overwhelmed by domestic responsibilities. When Tian knocked on the door, Guo was tending the kitchen fire and boiling water while reading Symon’s translation of Verhaeren’s poetic drama. While Tian was there, Guo kept running upstairs to hold a brief literary conversation with Tian and then running downstairs to tend the kitchen fire and cook lunch. Tian was both disappointed and surprised by the sharp contrast between the poet he knew from reading Guo’s poetry and the actual life of the poet. When Guo complimented Tian’s visit by saying, “There is a learned scholar to laugh and converse with,” Tian responded with, “There is a midwife as a friend.” It should be noted that Guo was quoting a popular couplet from Liu Yüxi’s (772—842)¹⁰⁸ widely-known prose piece

¹⁰⁵ Marshall Berman, *All That is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Penguin Books, 1982, 1988), 26-27.

¹⁰⁶ As is exemplified in He Jingzhi’s famous poem titled “Song of Lei Feng,” the individual serving as a cog in the omnipotent socialist machine is acclaimed as the ideal in socialist poetics.

¹⁰⁷ Tian Han, Zong Baihua, Guo Moruo, *San ye ji* [Cloverleaf], 120.

¹⁰⁸ Liu Yüxi was an acclaimed Chinese poet, philosopher, and essayist during the Tang Dynasty.

titled “Loushi ming” (Inscription on a Crude Dwelling). Tian was supposed to respond with “There are no illiterate persons among friends” to return Guo’s compliment. Tian’s response expressed his disappointment over Guo’s domestication and emasculation as well as its sharp contrast with the hyper-masculine poetic persona Guo constructed in his poetry.

The episode of the train ride happened on March 22, 1920. Leaving Satō alone with their two baby sons, one two years old, one a week old, Guo went on a literary excursion with Tian Han in a train. Satō, resting in bed before Tian came, had to get up and take on the family responsibilities Guo abandoned for his literary interests. The heavy housework would have an adverse effect on Satō’s health and cause her to prematurely wean their son, which would in turn affect their newborn’s health and lead to his life-threatening food poisoning in November.¹⁰⁹ Ironically, when Satō took on more housework at the expense of her and their son’s health, Guo took the opportunity to invalidate their companionate marriage and experience the same euphoria he had experienced with the earth when writing “Earth, My Mother!” If the speaker’s liberating union with the openness of nature in “Earth, My Mother!” simply offers an escape from the confinement of “home,” Guo’s liberating union with the train hurtling through the open air of Nature in this passage at once assured Guo’s freedom from the confinement of domesticity and satisfied his aspiration to a modern masculinity.

As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, Guo quickly became the foremost figure in Chinese poetry and in the May Fourth discourse against arranged marriage largely due to the wide circulation of Guo’s new poetry and his correspondence with

¹⁰⁹ Guo would compose his well-known “Night Song of a ‘Misanthrope’” during that sleepless night. It will be discussed later.

Zong Baihua and Tianhan. Yet my analysis shows another picture. Guo's unreserved romance with not only futuristic machines, but also modern Western science, technology, literature and philosophy, enabled him to construct a hyper-masculine poetic figure infinitely more powerful than God (the ultimate authority in Romantic poetry). He constructed this figure as an alternative to his real emasculation in his transnational companionate marriage, the relic of an earlier pursuit of a modern masculinity that had ended in complete failure. Guo's focus on creating a fantastic persona rather than confronting the disheartening reality enabled him to free his imagination and creativity, but also prevented him from seeing the more complex picture of modernity.

In the sleepless night of November 23, 1920 in a small ward of the Kyushu Imperial University hospital, while watching his gravely ill eight-month-old son, "a half-dead feverish baby crying from pain and hunger,"¹¹⁰ Guo wrote "Night Song of a 'Misanthrope,'" "a fantasy extracted from the burden of painful life."¹¹¹ The poem depicts the poetic speaker as a solitary kingly figure dominating the infinite space of Nature and once again resorts to the powerful staccato rhythm and forward motion of the train ("Forward!...Forward!") in order to replace lamentable emasculation with unbound mobility. The poem reads,

无边的天海呀！
 一个水银的浮沤！
 上有星汉湛波，
 下有融晶泛流，
 正是有生之伦睡眠时候。
 我独披着件白孔雀的羽衣，
 遥遥地，遥遥地，
 在一只象牙舟上翘首。

Boundless sky and sea!
 A quicksilver buoy bubble!
 Above, the limpid waves of the Milky Way,
 Down, melted crystal overflowing,
 Right at the moment when living beings are asleep.
 I alone, cloaked in the plumes of a white peacock,
 Far away, far away,
 Was on an ivory boat tilting my head.

¹¹⁰ Guo Moruo, *Chuangzao shinian* [Ten years of the Creation Society], 80-81.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 81.

<p>啊，我与其学做个泪珠的鲛人 返向那沉黑的海底流泪偷生， 宁在这缥缈的银辉之中， 就好像那个坠落了星辰， 曳着带幻灭的美光， 向着“无穷”长陨！ 前进！……前进！ 莫辜负了前面的那轮月明！¹¹²</p>	<p>Ah, rather than mimicking the teary Jiaoren,¹¹³ Returning to the pitch-dark bottom of the sea, dragging out an ignoble life in tears, I would, in the illusory silvery radiance, Just like that fallen star, Trailing behind evanescent luminosity, Fall perpetually to “infinity.” Forward! ... Forward! Do not let down the shining moon ahead!¹¹⁴</p>
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This poem offers an exquisite rendering of Guo’s poetic ideal, which would take root among generations of Chinese youth. On July 29, 1922, Wen Yiduo (1899-1946), another pioneering figure of modern Chinese poetry, tested this ideal against his own ocean-crossing experience on the ocean-liner carrying him to his three-year sojourn in the United States, and was bitterly disappointed about the discrepancy between the ideal and reality.¹¹⁵ This is the beginning of Wen’s disillusionment with the mainstream poetics and discourse of the May Fourth intellectuals. In the next chapter, I examine how Wen Yiduo critically reevaluated mainstream May Fourth discourses on industrial progress and on arranged marriage, and explored an alternative poetics during his one-year sojourn in Chicago.

¹¹² Guo Moruo, *Nüshen* [The Goddesses], 165.

¹¹³ Jiaoren refers to Chinese mythical beings living in the sea. They weep pearls rather than tears.

¹¹⁴ For Lester and Barnes’ translation, see John Lester and A.C. Barnes, trans., Kuo Mo-jo (i.e. Guo Moruo), *Selected Poems from The Goddesses*, 55.

¹¹⁵ Wen Yiduo, *Wen Yiduo quanji* [The complete works of Wen Yiduo], vol. 12, 43.

Chapter Two

Wen Yiduo's Ecological Turn in Chicago

On August 9, 1922, two days after arriving in Chicago to study painting at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Wen Yiduo wrote to his parents, “The true experience of bodily life starts now.”¹ Six weeks later, on September 24, 1922, Wen described to his friend Wu Jingchao how that “true experience of bodily life” precipitated a fundamental paradigm shift of his poetics:

The reality of life constantly pulled me from the poetic realm into the dusty realm. While reading poetry, I was certain that God -- father of all humankind—was with me wherever I was. But sitting in a restaurant, riding a streetcar and walking on the street, new shapes and colors, new sounds and new smells, always stimulated my senses, rendering them disturbed and at a loss. Sense and mind are equally real. Human being is the fusion of body and soul.²

Note that the “poetic realm” Wen referred to in this passage is not a general term, but specifically refers to that of canonical European Romantic poetry. Before embarking on his trip to Chicago, Wen had had ten years of Americanized education at the Qinghua School, predecessor of the present Qinghua University in Beijing. At the time, Qinghua was a preparatory school for higher education in the United States.³ Its educational

¹ Wen Yiduo, *Wen Yiduo quanji* [The complete works of Wen Yiduo], Vol 12, 49.

² See Wen's letter on September 24, 1922. Ibid. 77-78. Except for noted, all translations are mine.

³ According to Kai-yu Hsu, “Founded in 1908 with Boxer Indemnity funds to train Chinese youth for their country's modernization, it [Qinghua School] offered a program roughly parallel to that of the American high school.” Kai-yu Hsu, *Wen I-to* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1980), 27. While Hsu is right in comparing Qinghua School to an American high school, due to the lack of historical documents at the time of his research, he fails to point out the other side of the story. Another important reason why the US government agreed to return part of the Indemnity funds to the Qing government on condition of the establishment of Qinghua School was that “The nation which succeeds in educating the young Chinese of

system, courses, textbooks and teaching methodology were mostly transplanted from the U.S. Its purpose was to educate Chinese students so they could enter universities in the U.S. and receive the same education as American students.⁴ Wen's reading of Western poetry centered mostly on canonical Romantic poets such as Wordsworth, Shelley and Keats.⁵ Though Qinghua was not a missionary school, most of the American teachers came through the YMCA and had Christian beliefs. Like most of his schoolmates, Wen became a Christian at Qinghua.⁶

With Christianity as its religious foundation, the otherwise vastly different poetry in the Romantic canon entitles the male poet as a special character with privileged access to God and is characterized by "solitariness, introspection and a desire for transcendence – the antithesis of the social and the quotidian."⁷ Scholars have rightly argued that the emphasis on the privileged power of the male poet in Romantic poetry was the poets' response to the social conditions of their time. For example, Sarah M. Zimmerman argues against the persistent view of Romantic lyric as an inherently introspective mode and

the present generation will be the nation which for a given expenditure of effort will reap the largest possible returns in moral, intellectual, and commercial influence." See excerpt of "Memorandum concerning the sending of an Educational Commission to China," by Edmund J. James, President of the University of Illinois, to Theodore Roosevelt (Chinese translation), in Qinghua Daxue xiaoshi yanjiushi, ed., *Qinghua Daxue shiliao xuanbian, vol. 1: Qinghua Xuexiao shiqi (1911-1928)* [Selected materials on the history of Qinghua University, vol. 1: the Qinghua School period (1911-1928)]. (Beijing: Qinghua Daxue chubanshe, 1991), 72-73. For the English text, see Arthur Smith, *China and America To-day: A Study of Conditions and Relations* (New York, Chicago Toronto: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1907), 213-218.

⁴ See "Beijing Qinghua Xuexiao jinzhang" (1914), in Qi Jiaying, ed., *Qinghua renwen xueke nianpu* (Beijing: Qinghua Daxue chubanshe, 1998), 1.

⁵ See Kai-yu Hsu, *Wen I-to*, 30.

⁶ I learned about this from my interview with Wen Lipeng, Wen Yiduo's son, at his home in Beijing in December 2008. For a brief introduction to the YMCA activities since 1912 at Qinghua, see "Qinghua Xuexiao de Qingnianhui" in *Qinghua Daxue shiliao xuanbian, vol. 1: Qinghua Xuexiao shiqi (1911-1928)* [Selected materials on the history of Qinghua University, vol. 1: the Qinghua School period (1911-1928)], 212-213; originally published in *Qinghua zhouban* [Qinghua Weekly], no. 235-249, 1922.

⁷ This characterization is Sarah M Zimmerman's summary of M.H. Abrams' analysis in his *The Mirror and the Lamp*. See Sarah M. Zimmerman, *Romanticism, Lyricism, and History* (Albany: State University of New York, 1999), 16. Though Zimmerman criticizes Abrams' focus on the few canonical male poets for this poetic paradigm, it serves as a good exegesis of Wen's earlier notion of poetry because these canonical poets were exactly whom Wen read extensively at Qinghua.

situates Romantic poetry not only in relation to major historical events but also within myriad local contexts.⁸ James C. McKusick offers an ecological reading of the Romantic poets and highlights their environmental concerns.⁹ As complicating conceptions of Romanticism is not the purpose of my chapter, Abrams' characterization of canonical Romantic poetry serves as a good exegesis of Wen's earlier notions of poetry because these canonical poets were exactly whom Wen read extensively at Qinghua. I also want to draw on Rosemarie Waldrop's insightful analysis of the Romantic poetic canon to illuminate the significance of Wen's rectification of his earlier poetics, heavily shaped by his belief in Christianity, and his intensive reading of the Romantic canon among many things.¹⁰ As Waldrop notes, Goethe challenged neo-classic esthetics around 1770 and pointed the focus of poetry to the relationship between the inner and the outer, the spiritual world and the material world. By claiming poetry as organisms, as a metaphor for the world created by God, as a means to transcendence and the hotline to the holy meaning, the Romantic poet becomes a special character, a priest or prophet, with privileged access to God. Since then, poetry has become the enlightenment of the poetic mind: transcendence, always upward. Waldrop also points out that there were efforts to break away from the organic forms of Romantic poetry since Gertrude Stein (1874 - 1946). For many modernist poets, transcendence is no longer vertical, but horizontal and contextual; there was no longer the break between the spiritual and the material.¹¹

Wen's passage shows that his intense bodily experience in the "dusty realm" of Chicago shattered the certainty he felt about his previous poetics and displaced him from

⁸ Sarah M. Zimmerman, *Romanticism, Lyricism, and History*.

⁹ James C. McKusick, *Green Writing: Romanticism and Ecology* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000).

¹⁰ I will elaborate on this later.

¹¹ Rosemarie Waldrop, "Form and Discontent," in Rosemarie Waldrop, *Dissonance (if you are interested)* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2005), 198-203.

the security of the privileged position prescribed to the male poet in the Romantic canon, the superior spiritual existence high above the material world. He came to the painful realization that the body was not simply the material shell that needed to be transcended; on the contrary, the senses of the body were reliable sources of knowledge as trustworthy as the mind. And his realization of the fusion of the body and the soul is a negation of the separation of the spiritual and the material, a negation of his previous conception that the ideal state of existence of the soul is independent of the body. Transcendence, the movement of detachment from the quotidian or the material, would cease to be the poetic mode for Wen.¹² It is intriguing that the “dusty realm” of Chicago would inspire a Chinese poet such as Wen Yiduo to break away from the most fundamental principle of canonical Romantic poetics and come to a rude awakening more radical than Gertrude Stein, “one of modernism's earliest experimenters and the celebrated mother of the avant-garde.”¹³

One other thing I want to note about the Romantic canon is that the poetic speaker is implicitly a male poet.¹⁴ As Adriana Craciun acutely argues in “Romantic Poetry, Sexuality, Gender,” the otherwise wildly different canonical male Romantic poets were “never wholly at ease around women intellectuals” and “shared a fundamental investment in a poetic identity unshakably masculine.”¹⁵ A pervasive paradigm among their poetry is a male poet whose masculinity is defined in relation to a feminized nature. For example, Wordsworth’s poetry celebrates the “great consummation” between the male poet and

¹² I will elaborate more on Wen’s previous poetics in the next section.

¹³ Liesl M. Olson, “Gertrude Stein, William James, and Habit in the Shadow of War,” *Twentieth Century Literature* 49, no. 3 (Autumn 2003): 328.

¹⁴ Sarah M. Zimmerman, *Romanticism, Lyricism, and History*, xiii, 16.

¹⁵ Craciun, Adriana, “Romantic Poetry, Sexuality, Gender,” in James Chandler and Maureen N. McLane, Eds., *The Cambridge Companion to British Romantic Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 159.

female nature.¹⁶ Nature is a catalyst, means or medium for the transcendence of the male poet. As I will demonstrate in this chapter, rather than using female nature as a means of transcendence and definition of his masculinity, the poetic persona in Wen's "Chicago poems" frequently identifies with nature.

It should be noted that the purpose of my chapter is not to carve a niche for Wen in the Euro-American modernist movement, but to demonstrate how the complex reality of Chicago compelled Wen to reflect critically on his Westernized education in China and to explore an eco-poetics that not only challenged the male-centered dominant discourse of modernity among Chinese intellectuals of the May Fourth generation, but preceded many of his contemporaries abroad for half a century. Note that during Wen's one-year stay in Chicago, his experience of the "dusty world" was not limited to the "new shapes and colors, new sounds and new smells" on the streets of this industrial metropolis, but the broader landscapes of industrial progress and feminist movements, both legacies of the 1893 Columbian Exhibition in Chicago. In this chapter, I demonstrate that, unlike Guo Moruo who not only defined his masculinity in relation to a feminized nature, but also constructed an infinitely more mighty masculinity than the Romantics in his identification with modern science, technology and philosophy, Wen's vulnerable existence in the industrial environment and strong feminist atmosphere of Chicago, though extremely painful, enabled him to embrace his emasculated condition in Chicago, identify with the weak, and embark on a radical departure from the popular enthusiasm over industrial progress and imperial expansion as well as stereotypical views on romantic love and arranged marriage prevalent among Chinese May Fourth intellectuals.

¹⁶ Ibid., 156.

Wen's one-year sojourn in Chicago (August 1922 - August 1923) witnessed the most intensive and brilliant burst of his poetic energy and the radical turn of his poetics. The poems Wen wrote in Chicago, which I term his "Chicago poems," were mostly collected in *Hongzhu (Red Candle)* (1923),¹⁷ together with earlier poems written when he was studying at Qinghua, which I term Wen's "Qinghua poems." While acknowledging *Red Candle* as another foundational text in modern Chinese poetry after Guo Moruo's *The Goddesses* (1921), scholars generally consider the poems in *Red Candle* as Wen's "early poems," i.e., as immature preparations for Wen's second poetry collection *SiShui (Dead Water)* (1928) where he demonstrates more prosodic maturity. Few have paid serious attention to the radical differences between Wen's "Qinghua poems" and "Chicago poems." No one has read Wen's "Chicago poems" as a whole and discussed their profound implications.

The chapter includes three parts. First, I analyze a couple of Wen's "Qinghua poems" together with his short "Chicago poems" to show how Wen's poetics shifted toward an eco-poetics thanks to his close encounter with the technological modernity of Chicago. In part two, I examine Wen's "Chicago poems" against the industrial expansion and pollution of the city and demonstrate how the shift from a privileged spiritual existence to a vulnerable physical existence compelled Wen to reevaluate industrial progress and Chinese Daoist philosophy and reach toward an eco-poetics half a century ahead of his contemporaries both in China and abroad. In part three, I focus on another intersection of Wen's vulnerability in Chicago and the transformation of his poetics. I

¹⁷ Among Wen's Chicago poems, "Guyan" [A Lone Wild Goose], a series of 14 poems, and "Hongdou" [Red Beans], a series of 42 poems, were collected in the *Red Candle*; two long poems, "Elegy at the Foot of the Great Wall" and "In the Garden" did not go into the *Red Candle* because they were composed early in 1923, after Wen submitted his manuscripts to the publisher in China.

demonstrate how the predominance of powerful women in the literary and art circles of Chicago had a strong impact on Wen's self-conception as a modern male Chinese poet and engendered the production of much more sophisticated views on romantic love and arranged marriage.

Smoke: From Spirituality to Materiality

The 1893 Columbian Exhibition in Chicago set the tone for industrial progress and boosted rapid industrial and commercial growth in this metropolis. One aftermath was severe air pollution. The factory smoke in Chicago was always the first overwhelming impression of this industrial metropolis for visitors throughout the late 1890s and early 1930s. In 1895, Hamlin Garland described Chicago as “a gigantic smoke-cloud [which] soared above the low horizon line, in shape like an eagle, whose hovering wings extended from south to east, trailing mysterious shadows upon the earth.”

¹⁸ As William Cronon notes, this great cloud-eagle was “sent soaring skyward on jet black wings by ten thousand tons of burning coal.”¹⁹ Waldo Frank's description of his first trip to Chicago in 1919 is particularly close to Wen's first impression of that industrial metropolis:

Here is a sooty sky hanging forever lower. The sun is a red ball retreating. The heave of the prairie lies palpable still to the grimed horizons. But on it, a thick deposit: gray, drab, dry – litter of broken steel, clutter of timber, heapings of brick. The sky is a stain: the air is streaked with runnings of grease and smoke. Blanketing the prairie, this fall of filth, like black snow—a storm that does not stop ... The train glides farther in toward the storm's center. Chimneys stand over the world, and belch blackness upon it. There is no sky now.²⁰

¹⁸ Hamlin Garland, *The Rose of Dutcher's Coolly* (New York and London: Harper & Brothers, 1895), 156.

¹⁹ William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York, London: W.W. Norton Company, 1991), 12.

²⁰ Waldo Frank, *Our America* (New York: Boni and Liveright Publishers, 1919), 117-118.

Like many first-time visitors to Chicago, Wen Yiduo was taken by surprise by the severe air pollution in this industrial metropolis despite his knowledge of Western machine civilization acquired at Qinghua. The blanketing coal smoke from the city's factory sprawl immediately became a prominent presence in his life and poetry. However, unlike most of his American and Chinese counterparts who took the factory smoke as a symbol of technological modernity, personal hope and national prosperity, Wen's experience of the factory smoke in Chicago was profoundly corporeal. A week after arriving in Chicago, Wen wrote to his friends about his first impression of this industrial city:

Chicago is the second largest city in the US. I only tell you one thing and you'll understand how many factories there are here. The houses along the Michigan Avenue are all colored black, thanks to the coal smoke belched out by the factories. We went there only once and our collars all went black.²¹

Note that the School of the Art Institute of Chicago was located on Michigan Avenue.

During his one-year study at the School, Wen traveled one and half hours by train nearly everyday from the University of Chicago where he lived to the Art Institute on Michigan Avenue. This industrial metropolis would leave a much deeper imprint on Wen than his coal-smoke-blackened collars.

Two weeks later, Wen wrote again to his friends back at Qinghua and included the first batch of his "Chicago poems." He started the letter with expressions of surprise that he could write poetry in an environment that he would characterize as the "dusty world" three weeks later: "I was, to my surprise, able to write poetry in such an environment. This is truly not easy. I am sending them to you to smell and see whether

²¹ See Wen's letter written on August 14, 1922 in Wen Yiduo, *Wen Yiduo quanji* [The complete works of Wen Yiduo], vol. 12, 51-52.

they smell of coal smoke.”²² If Wen’s friends could not literally “smell” the coal smoke from his “Chicago poems,” they would definitely sense the significance of the factory smoke in these poems. For the blackness of the factory smoke became a major poetic trope and blackened the poetic landscape of Wen’s “Chicago poems”: “sinister black smoke” (“A Lone Wild Goose”), “black tears” (“Memory”), “pitch-black heart” (“A Sunny Morning”), “endless black road” (“I am an Exile”), “the black stern city” (“To Shiqiu”) and the list goes on. What is more, “the coal smoke belched out by the factories” would not stay on the surface of Wen and his friends’ clothes and give off a palpable smell, but enter their respiratory system and render them physically weak.

The last time factory smoke came up in his letter to friends was on May 15, 1923, after living in Chicago for nine months. In this letter, Wen quoted Guo’s famous metaphor from “Panorama from Fudetate Yama,” where Guo eulogizes industrial progress by comparing the chimney smoke to “Black Peony” and calling it “celebrated flower of the twentieth century” and “stern mother of modern civilization.”²³ Yet contrary to Guo’s speaker’s euphoric reaction to the machines and their smoke, Wen describes the “black peony” as “terrifying” and juxtaposes it with his roommate Liang Zongbao’s lung disease; the “pulse of the metropolis” that Guo’s speaker’s heart beats to in ecstasy became “bloodcurdling” for Wen:

Liang Zongbao is suffering from minor lung disease and will soon be hospitalized. I am going to live alone. Think about this kind of feeling – an “eastern fool” living alone on the fourth floor of an *apartment house*. Raise your head and look outside the window, one could only see a forest of chimneys blooming terrifying “black peonies” above the wavy rooftops; at the foot of the building are trains,

²² See Wen’s letter written on September 1, 1922 in Wen Yiduo, *Wen Yiduo quanji* [The complete works of Wen Yiduo], vol. 12, 63.

²³ Adapted from Lester and Barnes’ translation, see John Lester and A.C. Barnes, trans., Kuo Mo-jo (i.e. Guo Moruo), *Selected Poems from The Goddesses*, 23.

trams, automobiles, trucks (automobiles used to carry cargo, with thunderous noise), forever playing a bloodcurdling symphony.²⁴

In September 1923, immediately after settling in Colorado Springs, an idyllic college town where Wen's best friend Liang Shiqiu went to school, Wen wrote to his family and placed his coal-smoke-breathing experience in Chicago in sharp contrast to the wholesome air-breathing life in Colorado Springs:

And in Chicago, breathing coal smoke all day long, even my snivel and saliva were black; here I am able to breathe air and bathe in the sun, which is also of great benefit for life preservation.²⁵

From factories belching out coal smoke, to Liang's lung disease, to Wen's breathing coal smoke all day long, one cannot help but notice the smoke's clear route of circulation that connects the outer environment with the inner environment of the body. The blackness on Wen Yiduo and his friends' collars was not only an unpleasant color for the eye, but coal particles dispersed in the air, entering their bodies through the act of inhaling. Traces of the coal smoke made this web of interconnections not only visible to the eye, but deeply felt. Wen was not simply joking when he invited his friends to "smell" his poems and "see whether they smell of coal smoke." The air pollution of the industrial environment in Chicago made breathing an extremely unpleasant and conscious act for Wen and compelled him to connect seemingly distinct systems of circulation, that of the human body and that of the machine body, into a larger web of circulation. The trope of smoke in Wen's "Qinghua poems" and "Chicago poems" demonstrates how the poetic speaker was transformed from the upward transcendence of spiritual superiority to the vulnerable materiality enmeshed in the complicated web of reality.

²⁴ See Wen's letter written on May 15, 1923 in Wen Yiduo, *Wen Yiduo quanji* [The complete works of Wen Yiduo], vol. 12, 175.

²⁵ See Wen's letter on September 24, 1923 in *ibid.*, 187.

In the passage I have quoted at the beginning of the chapter, the tug of war between the privileged spiritual existence high above with God in the “poetic realm” and the unsettling experience of bodily senses in the “dusty realm” below is symptomatic of Wen’s struggle with his previous beliefs in the separation of body/senses and mind/soul as well as the superiority of the former over the latter. In his 1920 essay titled “Dianying shi yishu ma?” (“Is Film an Art?”), Wen denounces film as mechanical and commercial rather than artistic. One example he provides to disqualify film as art is that scenes such as the trains’ head-on clashes or slipping off the tracks only “stimulate a kind of violent shock in you.” In other words, since the shocking effects in film only appeal to the lower senses rather than the higher mind, film could not be considered art. Wen quotes his friend and schoolmate Pan Guangdan to support his argument, “In a human being, the pleasure of the mouth and nose was less than that of the ear and the eye, the pleasure of the ear and the eye was less than that of the mind. The pleasure of the art had the ear and the eye to function, yet the pleasure of the mind is the highest pleasure a human being would have.”²⁶ It is evident that Wen was a firm believer in the superiority of mind over senses in 1920.

Wen’s poetry in that period was imbued with the same belief as well. In “Xue” (“Snow”) for example, the upward-going smoke is a metaphor for the “ascending soul of

²⁶ Wen Yiduo, “Is Film an Art?” in Wen Yiduo, *Wen Yiduo qingshaonian shidai shiwen ji* [Selected poems and prose of the young Wen Yiduo], 92-94; originally published in *Qinghua zhoukan* [Qinghua Weekly], No. 203, December 17, 1920. It should be noted that while Wen quotes Pan Guandan here, this hierarchy is neither his nor Pan’s invention, but Cartesian binary of the mind and body that has been deeply rooted in Western culture. Susan Bordon points out that Cartesianism presumes mutual opposition of the spiritual and corporeal, God being the spiritual father, while the earth, the female flesh, being the mother. See Susan Bordon, *The Flight to Objectivity: Essays on Cartesianism and Culture* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 108. Paul Stoller reminds the reader of the continuing presence of the Cartesian separation of mind and body of the rationalists since the seventeenth century despite the critiques of thinkers such as Montaigne, Nietzsche, Husserl and Heidegger. See Paul Stoller, *Sensuous Scholarship* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), xi-xv.

the poet,” leaving the material body down on earth and reaching for spiritual transcendence up in Heaven:

啊！屡屡蜿蜒的青烟啊！ 仿佛是诗人向上的灵魂， 穿透自身的躯壳：直向天堂迈往。 ²⁷	Ah! Wisps of meandering blue smoke! As if the ascending soul of the poet, Penetrating through its own body: striding Straight toward Heaven. ²⁸
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In another Qinghua poem “Jian xia” (“Sword Casket”), the trope of smoke again serves as a portal for poetic transcendence. In this poem, Wen depicts another Romantic ecstasy in achieving spiritual supremacy by abandoning the body to “a smoke-permeated emptiness,” a process Wen would totally reverse in his “Chicago poems”:

啊！我将看着，看着，看着， 看到剑匣战动了 模糊了，更模糊了 一个烟雾弥漫的虚空了，…… 哦我看到肺脏忘了呼吸 血液忘了流驶， 看到眼睛忘了看了。 哦！我自杀了！ 我用自制的剑匣自杀了！ 哦哦！我的大功告成了！ ²⁹	Ah! I will be looking, looking, looking, Seeing the sword casket shaking Blurred, more blurred A smoke-permeated emptiness ... Oh I saw my lungs forget breathing Blood forget flowing, Eyes forget looking. Oh! I killed myself! I killed myself with my self-made sword casket! Oh Oh! My feat has been accomplished!
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Just as in the Romantic canon, the speaker in Wen’s poetry is implicitly or explicitly male.

In “Hui gu” (“Looking Back”), a poem in celebration of finishing his ten years of Qinghua education, Wen ended the poem with a victorious proclamation – “I am King of

²⁷ Wen Yiduo, *Hongzhu* [Red Candle], 68.

²⁸ Gloria Roger’s translation is “Ah! The twisting threads of blue smoke! / As a poet’s ascending soul, / After filtering through its own body, / Goes straight toward heaven.” See Catherine Yi-Yu Cho Woo, ed., *Wen Yiduo: Selected Poetry and Prose* (Beijing: Chinese Literature Press, 1990), 16. Tao Tao Sanders’ translation is “Oh, sinuous smoke! / Like a poet’s soul stretching up, / piercing his body’s shell, making straight for paradise.” See Tao Tao Sanders, trans. *Red Candle: Selected Poems by Wen I-to* (London: Jonathan Cape Ltd, 1972), 64.

²⁹ Wen Yiduo, *Hongzhu* [Red candle], 52-53.

the whole universe,”³⁰ echoing the hyper-masculine privileged speaker in Guo Moruo’s “Celestial Dog.”

This privileged poetic spirituality would soon be challenged by the “dusty realm” of Chicago. On September 19, 1922, five weeks into his Chicago experience, Wen Yiduo included a poem titled “Yihuai Shiqiu” (“Thinking of Shiqiu”) in a letter to Liang Shiqiu. In this poem, the trope of “smoke” acts as a metaphor for the poetic soul as in his Qinghua poems, but this time, the “disembodied soul” does not have a bit of the triumphant certainty exhibited in “Snow” and “Sword Casket.” Rather than “striding straight toward Heaven,” it is hesitant, looking in horizontal directions and at a loss as to where to go:

泪绳捆住的红烛
已被海风吹熄了；
跟着有一缕犹疑的轻烟，
左顾右盼，
不知往哪里去好。
啊！解体的灵魂哟！
失路底悲哀哟！³¹

The tear-rope bounded red candle,
Is already blown out by the sea wind;
Then a wisp of hesitant light smoke,
Looks right and left,
Not knowing where to go.
Ah! The disembodied soul!
The sadness of losing way!

This is a moment when the poetic speaker experiences a violent downfall from the Romantic ecstasy of the “King of the whole universe” at Qinghua to the disheartening epiphany of “a homeless dog.”³² If Wen was still clinging to the notion of the separation of body and soul and a disparaging view of the body, he was no longer as sure of it. This sadness and hesitancy were not only feelings of homesickness for a traveler away from home, but the disheartening realization that the knowledge system he acquired at

³⁰ Wen Yiduo, *Hongzhu* [Red candle], 92.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 184.

³² See “Thinking of Shiqiu,” *ibid.*, 184.

Qinghua, which had once made him believe that he was invincible, was but bubbles bound to burst in this “black stern city.”

In “Qing zhao” (“A Sunny Morning”), a Chicago poem included in Wen’s letter on September 24, 1922, the trope of “smoke” appears again. Yet rather than serving as a metaphor for the poetic soul, the smoke is identified as a masculine other, and with a haunting agency of its own:

一阵淡青的烟云
偷着跨进了街心……
对面的一带朱楼
忽都被他咒入梦境。³³

A gust of light-dark smoke-cloud
Stealthily steps into the heart of the street……
The strip of red buildings on the other side
Goes swiftly into the dream realm under his
curse.

It should be noted that Wen’s description of the smoke here, though it seems surreal, is an accurate depiction of the curious quality of the smoke in Chicago. As William Archer wrote in 1900, the smoke of Chicago “sweeps across and about them in gusts and swirls, now dropping and now lifting again its grimy curtain…Again and again a sudden swirl of smoke across the street … has led me to prick up my ears for a cry of ‘Fire!’”³⁴ Things were no better twenty years later. Unlike Archer, however, Wen discerns a sinister force in the smoke and its negative impact on the environment. If the speaker in this poem seems to be an observer of this sinister act, another poem written a few months later in the winter of 1922 seems to further reveal the effect of the curse cast by the smoke.

In “Xiao xi” (“Rivulet”), the curse of the smoke is cast on the rivulet. The smoke takes on the form of “the lead-grey tree shadow” stretching out on the surface of the rivulet:

铅灰色的树影，
是一长篇恶梦，

The lead-grey tree shadow,
Is a long text of nightmare,

³³ Wen Yiduo, *Hongzhu* [Red candle], 187-188.

³⁴ William Archer, *America To-Day: Observations & Reflections* (London: William Heinemann, 1900), 91.

横压在昏睡者的
小溪底胸膛上。
山溪挣扎着，挣扎着……
似乎毫无一点影响。³⁵

Pressing horizontal against the slumbering
Rivulet's chest.
The mountain rivulet struggles, and struggles……
It seems to no avail.

The shadow of leafless gray winter trees on a quiet rivulet could have been depicted in the simple elegance of Chinese ink landscape painting, a serene scene of nature in the Daoist tradition. However, in this poem, the originally weightless gray of the shadow, akin to the weightless and substanceless permeating smoke that embodies the transcendence of the poetic soul in “Sword Casket,” is infused with the weight of lead weighing down on the chest of the rivulet. Instead of slipping into a blessed oblivion (“my lungs forget breathing”) to make way for spiritual transcendence, the body here struggles to breathe under the curse of industrial smoke. It is riveting to see the transformation of Wen’s perception of smoke in Chicago and the shifting of his poetic focus from spiritual transcendence to physical imperilment. In other words, with the trope of smoke transformed from the embodiment of the ascending poetic soul to the sinister industrial smoke suffocating the body of the poet and rendering it vulnerable, the position of the poetic speaker also shifted from privileged invincible spirituality high above to imperiled weakness on the ground, be it the red-brick building in “A Sunny Morning” or the rivulet in this poem. The nightmarishly masculine power of the factory smoke remains a central trope in Wen’s poetry, a compelling force in Wen’s journey toward an eco-poetics.

The poem crystallizes the constraints of breathing Wen felt in the heavily polluted air of Chicago. The inescapable sense of suffocation is palpable in this poem not only

³⁵ Wen Yiduo, *Hongzhu* [Red candle], 224.

thematically but formally. The movement of the poem is stumbled by tightly packed mixed metaphors: lead-grey, a color, at the same time evokes the heavy weight of the metal; a long text serves as an adjective, yet also evokes the taxing demand on breathing in the process of reading a long text and the physical weight of the pages of a long text; nightmare, the content of the long text, adds to the difficulty in breathing in the panic. At the end of the poem, Wen maximizes the effect of the weight of this giant mass of mixture by focusing the point of contact on the chest of the unconscious sleeping rivulet. The weight, density and duration of the pressure are not only maximized by the many layers of mixed metaphors, but by the line arrangement as well. The weight of shadows, accumulated in three lines, is pivoted against the last line: “the rivulet’s chest.” The intensity of its “pressing” force pushes air out from the chest, leaving no space to breathe in. The rivulet is in danger of imminent or eventual suffocation. All the techniques employed in this short poem, the short, abrupt movements of lines and phrases, frequent commas serving as caesuras, phrasal repetitions to the sharp contrast between the length and weight of shadows and the thinness and weakness of the rivulet, all reinforce the dreadful sensation of inescapable suffocation.

This poem conveys an overwhelming sense of paralysis similar to that of Guo’s old-style poems such as “Night Cry” and “Spring Chill.” This sense of paralysis came from the poet’s personal crisis as a Chinese modern man catalyzed by the more advanced modernization in a foreign country. One immediate consequence of this crisis is a strong sense of emasculation. Unlike Guo Moruo who dismissed his old-style poems as “broken copper rotten iron” and moved on to pursue a poetics of hyper masculinity akin to the Western avant-gardes, Wen dwelled on this sense of emasculation and developed it into

an eco-poetics much more insightful and sophisticated than his Chinese and Western contemporaries.

I want to note here that while I use the trope of smoke to illustrate the shift of Wen's poetics, the overwhelming sense of suffocation in Wen's poetry does not only come from the difficulty of breathing in the heavily polluted industrial environment, but also the difficulty in shifting from his privileged authority in the male-centered community at Qinghua as a modern/Westernized Chinese male intellectual to the marginal position in the "matriarchy" of the strong feminist presence in Chicago.

Wild Goose vs. Goshawk

While its date of composition is uncertain, "Guyan" ("A Lone Wild Goose") is one of the most important poems Wen wrote in Chicago.³⁶ This twelve-stanza poem, one of Wen's longer Chicago poems, depicts a lone wild goose flying away from home, over the ocean, toward the "territory of the goshawk." The title of the poem alludes to Du Fu (712-770)'s well-known poem of the same title. A noted line from Du Fu's poem serves as the subtitle of Wen's poem:

³⁶ There is no hard evidence as to when Wen Yiduo wrote this poem. Wen Yiduo first mentioned it in a letter to Liang Shiqiu, dated October 30, 1922, as the title of the set of poems Wen wrote since he arrived in Chicago. It appeared as the first and title poem of a poem series collected in *Red Candle*. The poems in this set were mostly arranged chronologically. Thus I infer that it is Wen's first poem. Some scholars assume that it was written on the ship while Wen crossed the Pacific Ocean. However, his two other poems, also set on the Pacific Ocean were written in his first month in Chicago when he heard the news of some friends' deaths. The ocean-crossing setting could not be used as evidence for the poem being composed on the ship. Also, in this poem, the overwhelming presence of the black smoke, stinky slaughterhouses and factory chimneys were characteristic first impressions of visitors to Chicago. Wen never had such detailed descriptions of Chicago until this poem. Before that, his descriptions of the United States and Chicago were general and stereotypical labels such as department stores and factories. The black smoke, the stinkiness and other sense perceptions only appeared when Wen arrived in Chicago. Wen wrote a handful of poems expressing his sadness as a lonely traveler far from home during his first month in Chicago. The overall sentiment of "The Lone Wild Goose" fits into that cluster, but the fact that Wen never mentioned it until it appeared as the title poem of his Chicago series suggests that Wen might have been working on it for a long time just as he did with his later long poem "Elegy at the Foot of the Great Wall."

天涯涕泪一身遥³⁷

In tears at the sky's edge, far from home alone

Du Fu's line best exemplifies the implication of "a lone wild goose," a familiar trope in classical Chinese poetry used to signify the loneliness and homesickness of a scholar-official far away from his family at home. It is no doubt that Wen was borrowing this classical trope to describe his situation in Chicago. Only, because of the nature of his travel, home for Wen means more than his family, but also his home country. The goshawk is clearly a misnomer for the bald eagle, the symbol of the United States.³⁸

Scholars have frequently noted Wen's resentment of the Western machine culture in the States and fervent patriotism for China in Chicago. The apparent opposition between the two birds, one a symbol of traditional Chinese culture, the other, a modern nation with advanced "machine civilization" (Wen's own words), seems to confirm this reading. Yet a close reading of Wen's poems will reveal much more sophisticated reflections on the Western /modern machine culture and traditional Chinese culture than mere patriotic opposition. Take one stanza for example:

啊！那里是苍鹰底领土——
那鸷捍的霸王啊！
他的锐利的指爪
已撕破了自然底面目
建筑起财力底窝巢。
那里只有铜筋铁骨的机械，
喝醉了弱者底鲜血，
吐出些罪恶底黑烟，
涂污我太空，闭熄了日月，
叫你飞来不知方向，
息去又没地藏身啊！³⁹

Ah! That's the territory of the goshawk —
The ferocious tyrant!
His sharp claws
Have torn the face of Nature
Built up monetary nest.
*There were only copper-sinewed iron-boned
machines,
Drunk with blood of the weak,
Belching out sinister black smoke,
Smearing our outer space, putting out the sun and
moon,
Leaving you disoriented as you fly here,
Shelterless upon retiring!*

³⁷ Wen Yiduo, *Hongzhu* [Red candle] (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 1985), 163.

³⁸ In his letters, Wen also commented on its advanced machine culture. In later poems, Wen used "cangji" [falcon] and "eniao" [evil bird] to represent the machine power of the United States.

³⁹ Wen Yiduo, *Hongzhu* [Red candle], 167-168.

This stanza has some of Guo's Moruo's major poetic tropes: the autobiographical I, coal-smoke, machines, nature and laborers, the outer space, the sun and the moon. Yet, they form a radically different web of interrelations than Guo's. Despite its apparent U.S.-China opposition, this stanza accentuates another two clear-cut camps instead, the destructive masculine goshawk and the protective feminine nature. In the camp of the goshawk are machines and their smoke; in that of nature are the speaker, the weak, the lone wild goose, the outer space, the sun and the moon. Lines one to five depict the machine conquest of Nature as physical violence against the body -- that massive machine bird tearing the face of Nature and building up sprawling monetary nests in the wound. These lines set up the two opposing camps and make clear the speaker's antagonistic position on industrialization and commercialization, which is the exact antithesis of the dominant discourse popular among most Chinese male intellectuals of the time including Guo Moruo, who embraced industrial progress for a prosperous China and a strong masculinity.

Wen's negative attitude toward the destruction of nature as a result of the commercial and industrial expansion of the city also differs from his American contemporaries at the time. As Cronon points out, for most Americans at the time, Chicago was seen as the city, the antithesis of the rural. Traveling to Chicago was seen as the passage from the rural to the urban, "from beauty to ugliness, from pastoral simplicity to cosmopolitan sophistication, from rural bondage to urban freedom, from purity to corruption, from childhood to adulthood, from past to future."⁴⁰ Carl Sandburg's *Chicago Poems* (1916), "a tradition-shattering book, written in Whitmanesque free verse at a time when such poetic informalism was still controversial," was notable for its sharp social

⁴⁰ William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West*, 17.

criticism, its focus on the plight and struggles of “the laboring masses,” “America’s desperately poor urban families.”⁴¹ Sandburg did not simply condemn the city, but depicted the urban-industrial society Chicago symbolizes as “an imperfect cultural hero, but a deeply American one.”⁴² Wen’s depiction of the machines drunk on the blood of the weak clearly echoes Sandburg’s socialist criticism of the capitalist exploitation of the poor laboring masses. However, rather than the main focus of the poem, this constitutes one link in the complicated web of interrelations Wen observed in Chicago.

Similar to Guo Moruo, Wen depicted the machines with powerful dynamism. However, instead of Guo’s euphoric identification with their omnipotent masculine energy, Wen’s speaker stands indubitably in the opposite camp. The animalistic machines, on the one hand relentlessly draw the blood of the weak for life like vampires, on the other cause a series of interlocked destructive ramifications on the outer space, the sun and the moon, the lone wild goose and the poetic speaker. Note that the series of destructive ramifications are tightly packed into six short clauses, one following closely on the heels of another, until the end of this extremely long sentence. The verbs, one after another, continuously press on the poetic speaker until he is both out of breath and out of space to run. Never before had Wen packed so many pounding actions in a passage with such intensity and urgency. Rather than resonating with the pulse of the industrial metropolis like Guo, what Wen depicts here is a sharp contrast between the prolonged exhaling of the machines and the poetic speaker running out of time and space to breathe. Rather than defining his masculinity in relation to the female nature like the European canonical Romantic poets and the prominent Chinese new poets such as Guo Moruo, the

⁴¹ John E. Hallwas, “Introduction,” in Carl Sandburg, *Chicago Poems* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1992; first edition: New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1916), xiii, xvii.

⁴² *Ibid.*, xx.

poetic speaker, in the same camp with the feminine nature and the weak, is in an emasculated position in the face of the aggressive masculine energy of the machines. Though not explicitly using the term “ecology,” Wen’s vivid depiction of the negative impact of the machines on the natural environment, the creatures and humans evinces an unmistakable ecological worldview.

Besides the radical transformation of the trope of smoke from a symbol of the privileged poetic spirituality to a menace to the physical existence of nature including the poetic speaker, there is another critical difference between this poem and Wen’s Qinghua poems. In “Chuxia yiye di yinxiang – yijiuerer nian wuyue Zhi-Feng zhanzheng shi” (“Impressions of an Early Summer Night—during the May 1922 Zhi-Feng War”), a poem written a few months before Wen’s trip to Chicago, Wen depicted a poet figure witnessing the disastrous impact of the wars between Chinese warlords. The poem ends with the poet speaker appealing to God for an answer:

上帝啊！眼看着宇宙糟蹋成这样， 可也有些寒心吗？仁慈的上帝哟！ 43	Oh, God! Seeing the universe trampled to such an extent, Aren’t you a little disheartened? Oh, merciful God!
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While the poem “A Lone Wild Goose” depicts a similar yet much more urgent sense of disaster, the poet speaker no longer appeals to God for an answer. If Wen was still hoping Christianity could pull him through his crisis three weeks into his Chicago experience,⁴⁴ his faith in it was soon shaken.⁴⁵ In a letter dated December 4, 1922, Wen wrote, “I lost

⁴³ Wen Yiduo, *Hongzhu* [Red candle], 150.

⁴⁴ See letter dated September 1, 1922. Wen Yiduo, *Wen Yiduo quanji* [The complete works of Wen Yiduo], Vol 12, 68.

⁴⁵ As is evident the passage I have quoted at the beginning of the chapter from his letter dated September 24, 1922.

my Christian belief, but I am still an affirmer of life, my mysticism *mysticism*⁴⁶ still exists, so I still have a religion.”⁴⁷ In fact, Wen Yiduo never has the speaker appeal to God in his Chicago poems. Instead, later on in the poem, the speaker calls on the lone wild goose for a Daoist “return” to nature:

归来偃卧在霜染的芦林里，
那里有校猎的西风，
将茸毛似的芦花，
铺就了你的床褥
来温暖起你的甜梦。

归来浮游在温柔的港溲里，
那里方是你的浴盆。
归来徘徊在浪舔的平沙上，
趁着溶银的月色，
婆娑着戏弄着你的幽影。⁴⁸

Come back to rest in the frosty reed bushes.
There the west wind
Will go hunting fluffy reed catkins for your bed,
To keep your sweet dreams comfortably warm.

Come back to swim in the warm and soft haven,
Where you'll find your bath.
Come back to walk on the wave-lapped sandy
beach, and,
Under the soft silvery moon,
Dance playfully with your own shadow.⁴⁹

Contrary to nature in the industrialized land that has her face disfigured by the sinister goshawk, the feminine nature at “home” is intact and offers a soothing and comforting shelter for the lone wild goose. The repetitions of sentence and phrasal structures as well as the profuse and regular employment of adjectives before nouns, all create a soothing sense of balance and harmony. Note that “return” here is not simply the homecoming of an exhausted traveler. Embedded in the last line of the poem is “guiqulai,” the phrase for “come back” in classical Chinese and the title of Tao Yuanming’s (365~427) “Guiqulai xi ci” (“Homeward Ho!”),⁵⁰ one of the earliest and most important poems in the Daoist line of classical Chinese poetry. The repetitions of “return” here unmistakably invoke the

⁴⁶ The English is Wen’s own.

⁴⁷ Wen Yiduo, *Wen Yiduo quanji* [The complete works of Wen Yiduo], Vol. 12, 122.

⁴⁸ Wen Yiduo, *Hongzhu* [Red candle], 170-171.

⁴⁹ Translated by Vincent Shih. See Catherine Yi-yu Cho Woo, ed., *Wen yiduo: Selected Poetry and Prose* (Beijing: Panda Books, 1990), 28.

⁵⁰ The English translation is Tan Shilin’s. See Tan Shilin, trans., *The Complete Works of Tao Yuanming* (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing Co., Ltd., 1992), 158.

Daoist notion of man and nature: nature is the spiritual home for the hermit scholar-poet. Rather than assuming the male poetic privilege over nature as the canonical European Romantic poets and the most prominent Chinese poet such as Guo Moruo did, the Daoist poet vanishes into nature and becomes indistinguishable from other elements in it. As David Hinton notes, Tao's return to nature was "also a return to self." For Tao, "to become a complete and distinctive individual was to become an indistinguishable part of earth's Great Transformation."⁵¹ Tan Shilin points out, Tao's influence "has acted as a corrective for moral degradation and helped many a perplexed soul re-examine the values of his age."⁵² Note that Wen's Daoist "return" here is not a simple departure from the Western machine culture and reversion to Chinese ancient culture, or from Christianity to Daoism, but his attempt to convey his ecological insight into the uncontrolled industrialization by means of the closest paradigm known to him.

When the black smoke, carrying the massive energy of the machines transformed from human blood, enters this Daoist nature, the harmonious interconnection among the poet, the lone wild goose and nature is broken. Trapped in the same vulnerable point as the lone wild goose in this dynamic web of interrelations, the poet figure can neither retain the privileged position high above beside God as in his Qinghua poems, nor merge seamlessly into Nature as a scholar-poet in classical Chinese poetry. The poetic speaker comes to a rude awakening: this Daoist harmony is not only spiritual, but deeply material. The belching action of the machines, rather than a distinct visual phenomenon, is now the most powerful driving force and a crucial link in a web of interrelations among the

⁵¹ David Hinton, trans., *The Selected Poems of T'ao Ch'ien* (Port Townsend, WA: Copper Canyon Press, 1993), 6.

⁵² Tan Shilin, trans., *The Complete Works of Tao Yuanming*, 1.

machines, the weak, the smoke, Nature (the outer space, the sun and moon), the poetic speaker and the lone wild goose.

While the Daoist notion of nature and man emphasizes spiritual harmony between the two, Wen's rude awakening to the physical connections among the many elements in the universe in Chicago allowed him to see the Daoist notion in a new light and to weave an eco-poetics with it. Not until half a century later in 1972 did Gregory Bateson start to advocate an ecological perspective and contend that the unit of survival is organism plus environment, against the industrial progress based on Darwinism. Wen Yiduo never used the term ecology, but as this poem exemplifies, his daily experience of breathing coal smoke in Chicago was painful yet rewarding. It served as the most powerful catalyst for him and enabled him to weave the industrial environment of Chicago and the legacy of classical Chinese poetry and philosophy into a new poetics of ecology that is still extremely illuminating in our time.

Similar to his conception of eco-poetics and criticism of relentless industrial expansion in "A Lone Wild Goose," still structured on the dichotomy between the Western machine culture and ancient Chinese culture, Wen's long poem "Changcheng xia de aige" ("Elegy at the Foot of the Great Wall")⁵³ demonstrates thoroughly his penetrating insights into industrial progress and imperial expansion beyond the paradigm of national and cultural oppositions. Wen first started writing the poem in February 1923 and was still revising it in May 1923. In fact, in the letter to Liang Shiqiu dated May 15, 1923, Wen first mentioned that he was revising the poem before describing Liang Zongbao's lung disease and the horrifying scene of the factory chimneys outside his

⁵³ Originally published in *Dajiang jikan* [Dajiang Quarterly], Vol. 1, No. 1, July 1925.

window⁵⁴ quoted earlier in the chapter. The “forest of chimneys blooming terrifying ‘black peonies’” would inspire Wen to make a powerful critique of the dominant discourse of modernity in China at the time.

In this poem, rather than upholding machines as the “celebrated flower of the twentieth century” and “stern mother of modern civilization”⁵⁵ as Guo Moruo did, Wen calls it “today’s enemy”:

但是今日的敌人，今日的敌人，
是天灾？是人祸？是魔术？是妖氛？
哦，铜筋铁骨，嚼火漱雾的怪物，
运输着罪孽，散播着战争，……
哦，怕不要扑熄了我们的日月，
怕不要捣毁了我们的乾坤！⁵⁶

But today’s enemy, today’s enemy,
Is it natural disaster? Is it human
catastrophe? Is it magic play? Is it ghostly
air?
O, copper-sinewed iron-boned, fire-chewing
fog-swishing monstrosity,
Transporting sins, spreading wars, ...
O, I am afraid it will put out our sun and
moon,
I am afraid it will smash up our sky and
earth!

In this stanza, Wen synthesizes his acute insights into the machines from both his Qinghua and Chicago poems. The “monstrosity” in lines three and four alludes to the monster machines in both “A Lone Wild Goose” and “Impressions of an Early Summer Night—during the May 1922 Zhi-Feng War.” In the latter poem, the train is depicted as an enslaved monster serving reluctantly as a vehicle for war:

嚼火漱雾的毒龙在铁梯上爬着，
驮着灰色号衣的战争，吼的要哭
了。⁵⁷

The fire-chewing fog-swishing poisonous dragon
crawling on the iron-ladder,
Carrying the gray-uniformed war, howling, close
to tears.

⁵⁴ Wen Yiduo, *Wen Yiduo quanji* [The complete works of Wen Yiduo], vol. 12, 175.

⁵⁵ Adapted from Lester and Barnes’ translation, see John Lester and A.C. Barnes, trans., Kuo Mo-jo (i.e. Guo Moruo), *Selected Poems from The Goddesses*, 23.

⁵⁶ Wen Yiduo, *Wen Yiduo quanji* [The complete works of Wen Yiduo], vol. 1, 227.

⁵⁷ Wen Yiduo, *Hongzhu* [Red Candle], 150.

In “Elegy at the Foot of the Great Wall,” all these seemingly distinct and unrelated phenomena are pulled together and identified as one interrelated phenomenon. Wen uses four powerful rhetorical questions to define this one phenomenon, that is, “today’s enemy.” When nature’s face is torn up, is it a natural disaster? When the blood of the weak is sucked dry, is it a human catastrophe? When our sun and moon and outer space are blotted out by black smoke, is it magic play? When the smoke takes on all kinds of unpredictable forms and permeates all spaces including inside the body, is it ghostly air? The answers are no, no, no, and no, because all these are interrelated and caused by the same monster machines.

Note the change of term when referring to the universe. Rather than using “outer space,” an astronomical neologism, as in “A Lone Wild Goose,” Wen chooses the term for “sky and earth” from classical Chinese. In the following two stanzas, Wen grafted some well-known allusions from classical Chinese poetry, especially in the Daoist tradition, onto his modern vernacular free verse. Once again, Wen uses powerful rhetorical questions to reinforce the sharp contrast between the Daoist paradigm of the nature-man relationship and the congealing aftermath of the violation of this paradigm by uninhibited industrial progress, which Wen portrays immediately afterwards.

啊！从今哪有珠帘半卷的高楼，
镇日里睡鸭焚香，龙头泻酒，
自然歌稳了太平，舞清了宇宙？
从今哪有石坛丹灶的道院，
一树的碧荫，满庭的红日，--

Ah, from now on where is the tall building with its pearl-curtain half rolled up,
All day long Sleeping-duck⁵⁹ burning incense, Dragon-head⁶⁰ pouring wine,
Nature singing peace into stillness, dancing the universe into clarity?
From now on where is the Daoist temple with stone altar and red stove,

⁵⁹ It refers to a kind of copper incense burner in the shape of a sleeping duck from the antiquity. See Xu Fu and all, eds., *Guhanyu dacidian* [Dictionary of Ancient Chinese] (Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 2000), 2004. This term frequently appears in classical Chinese poetry

⁶⁰ It refers to a kind of wine-warmer from antiquity. See *ibid.*, 1986. This term also frequently appears in classical Chinese poetry.

童子煎茶，烧着了枯藤一束？	A tree of green shade, a yard of red sun, -- A lad boiling tea, setting fire to a bunch of dried vine?
哪有窗外的一树寒梅，万竿斜竹，	Where is a plum tree in full bloom, thousands of leaning bamboos outside the window,
窗里的幽人抚着焦桐独奏？	And a lone man playing zither alone inside?
再哪有荷锄的农夫踏着夕阳，	And where is the farmer carrying his hoe, treading in the sunset,
歌声响在山前，人影没入山后？	His song echoing in front of the mountain, his shadow vanishing behind?
又哪有柳荫下系着的渔舟，	And where is the fishing boat tied under the shade of a willow tree,
和细雨斜风催不回去的渔叟？ ⁵⁸	And the fisherman who would not be hurried home by the drizzling rain and slanting wind?

In these two stanzas, Wen not only explicitly reiterates the spiritual and physical harmony between man and nature in the Daoist tradition, but highlights a free, autonomous, contented and healthy manhood achieved through this relationship, a manhood Guo Moruo attempted to convey in “Earth, My Mother!” through extolling the harmony between mother earth and modern peasants and miners. Unlike Guo’s enthusiastic embracing of industrial progress through the idolization of miners, in the following stanzas, Wen depicts a horrifying picture of the world turning into a vast mine when the Daoist paradigm is destroyed by the very discourse Guo embraced:

哦，从今只有暗无天日的绝壑，	O, from now on there is only the gloomy skyless and sunless abyss,
装满了么小微茫的生命，	Filled with trivial and measly lives,
象黑蚁一般的，东西驰骋，——	Like black ants, rushing east and west,--
从今只有半死的囚奴：鹄面鸠形，	From now on there are only half-dead prisoner-slaves, emaciated,
抱着金子从矿坑里爬上来，	Crawling out from the mine pits with gold in their arms,
给吃人的大王们献寿谢恩。	Offering the human-eating monarchs birthday gifts and thanks.
从今只有数不清的烟突，	From now on there are only countless smoke columns,
彷彿昂头的毒蟒在天边等候，	Like poisonous pythons, raising its head await at the
又象是无数惊恐的恶魔，	

⁵⁸ Wen Yiduo, *Wen Yiduo quanji* [The complete works of Wen Yiduo], vol. 1, 227.

伸起了巨手千只， 向天求救，
从今瞥着万只眼睛的街市上，
骷髅拜骷髅， 骷髅赶着骷髅
走。⁶¹

sky edge,
Also like numerous horrified devils,
Stretching out a thousand hands, asking help from
the sky;
From now on in the downtown streets once with tens
of thousands of eyes glancing,
Only skeletons kow-tow skeletons, skeletons driving
skeletons on.

In the harsh reality of excessive capitalist industrialism, the “darling sons” of the mother earth, extolled as “the Prometheus of mankind”⁶² in Guo’s poetry, are but “trivial and measly lives, like black ants” and “half-dead prisoner-slaves.” For Wen, the machines were not only a function of modern wars, not only destroying the ecology we and other creatures’ lives depend on, not only a function of capitalism exploiting workers, but turning them into anything but the free, autonomous, contented and healthy human beings Guo idolized. Without the flesh and blood of the body enabling them to have complex sense perceptions, these modern men become robot-like skeletons, completely in tune with the capitalist machine. Wen’s apocalyptic depiction resonates with Marshall Berman’s insightful criticism of the futurist romance with machines sixty years later, “The problem of all modernisms in the futurist tradition is that, with brilliant machines and mechanical systems playing all the leading roles ... there is precious little for modern man to do except to plug in.”⁶³

Wen went a step further than Berman in his acute reflection on the machine phenomenon. In this stanza, the industrial coal smoke, once invincible masculine machine monsters with seemingly limitless destructive power, after destroying the

⁶¹ Ibid., 227-228.

⁶² See Guo Moruo’s “Earth, My Mother!” adapted from Lester and Barnes’ translation, see John Lester and A.C. Barnes, trans., Kuo Mo-jo (i.e. Guo Moruo), *Selected Poems from The Goddesses*, 29-30.

⁶³ Marshall Berman, *All That is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Penguin Books, 1982, 1988), 26-27.

ecology of life, rendering the world a “gloomy skylless and sunless abyss” and turning men into bloodless robot-like skeletons, no longer possesses inexhaustible potency. On the contrary, it is portrayed as either waiting at the margins of this world in stasis or reaching in horror toward the sky for help, the universe it had ruthlessly destroyed. Isn’t this Wen’s way of saying that “The organism which destroys its environment destroys itself”⁶⁴? Further, by rendering the masculine dynamism of the machines Guo identified with into impotent stasis, Wen also rendered invalid Guo’s pursuit of super-masculinity through integration with the machines.

Wen was well aware of the capitalist and imperialist drive behind the monster machines. If Wen still saw the problem of machines as a Chinese issue before visiting Chicago, if he saw machines as a Western phenomenon at the start of his Chicago experience, he clearly saw them in a much more complicated light now. In the following stanzas, he directly addresses building a future China through complete Westernization, the dominant discourse among Chinese intellectuals since the end of nineteenth century, especially among the radical May Fourth intellectuals including Guo Moruo:

啊！你们夸道未来的中华，
就夸道万里的秦岭蜀山，
剖开腹脏，泻着黄金，泻着宝
钻；
夸道我们铁路络绎的版图，
就象是网脉式的椿叶一片，
停泊在太平洋底白浪之间。

又夸道麤载归来的战舰商轮，
载着金的，银的，形形色色的货
币，
镌着英皇乔治，美国总统林肯，
各国元首底肖像，各国底国名；

Ah! When you brag about the future China,
You brag about the ten thousand-li Qin Ranges
and Shu Mountains,
Cutting open their abdomens and viscera, pouring
gold, pouring diamonds;
You brag that the endless domain of our railroad,
Is like a web-veined leaf of the Chinese toon,
Lodged amidst the white waves of the Pacific
Ocean.
You also brag that, the war-ships and merchant
ships, upon victorious return,
Carrying gold, silver, currency of all forms and
shades,
Engraved with George the British Emperor,
Lincoln the American President,

⁶⁴ Gregory Bateson, “Pathologies of Epistemology” in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, 1972, 484.

夸道西欧底海狮，北美底苍隼，
俯首锻翻，都在上国之前请命。

你们夸道东方的日耳曼，
你们夸道又一个黄种的英伦，——
哈哈！夸道四千年文明神圣，
俯首贴耳的堕入狗党狐群！
啊！新的中华吗？假的中华哟！
同胞啊！你们才是自欺欺人！⁶⁵

Portraits of each nation's rulers, names of each
nation;
Brag that the Sea Lion of West Europe, the Eagle
of North America,
Head-lowered and wings-closed, all taking orders
from the Upper Country.

You brag about the Oriental German,
You brag about a yellow-raced Briton,--
Haha! Brag about the four thousand years of
sacred civilization,
Obediently falling into a gang of scoundrels!
Ah! New China? Fake China!
Fellow countrymen! It is you who are self-
deceptive!

The invasion of China by imperialistic powers since the mid-nineteenth century made many Chinese intellectuals believe that industrial and military supremacy was essential for a prosperous China. In the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, the common view was to save the country by learning advanced science and technology from the West. The slogan of “Fuguo qiangbing” (“a prosperous country with a powerful army”), borrowed from Japan, embodied this view.⁶⁶ By the May Fourth era, “Westernization as cultural radicalism entailed a leap from Western borrowing to indiscriminate imitation of the West.”⁶⁷ The cultural radicals “wanted China to become a modern nation like France, Britain and the United States”; theirs represents “a Euro-American vision of modernity based on the ideas of progress, science, democracy, rationality, secularism and capitalist development.”⁶⁸ In Whitmanesque free verse similar to Sandberg's, Wen vehemently satirized the mainstream Chinese intellectuals' belief in

⁶⁵ Wen Yiduo, *Wen Yiduo quanji* [The complete works of Wen Yiduo], vol. 1, 228-229.

⁶⁶ See Wu Jiping, *Guo Moruo liu shi shi nian: 1914-1924* [Guo Moruo's ten years studying in Japan, 1914-1924], 2.

⁶⁷ Edmund S. K. Fung, *The Intellectual Foundations of Chinese Modernity: Cultural and Political Thought in the Republican Era* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 37.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 30-31.

strengthening China through complete industrialization and imperial expansion like the Western powers that invaded China. Unfortunately, Wen's caustic criticism was subsumed under the dominant discourse of the May Fourth intellectuals which was later adopted by the Communist Party and has remained the dominant discourse in China until now. This poem never received the same critical attention as Wen's *Red Candle* and *Dead Water*. Wen was regarded as a formalist who strived for perfection and innovation in poetic forms. After his assassination in 1946 by the Nationalist Party, Wen was enshrined as a patriotic "poet, scholar, democratic fighter and martyr" by the Communist Party.

While still working on "Elegy at the Foot of the Great Wall," Wen wrote another long poem titled "Yuannei" ("Inside the Garden") in March 1923, in commemoration of the anniversary of the founding of the Qinghua School. Contrary to his knowledge and experience of Qinghua as a Westernized environment, in this poem Wen envisioned Qinghua as a Daoist utopia, a corrective to the world of machines. In the poem, Wen highlights the total destruction of mental ecology by Western machines:

...西方式的机器，
大齿轮啮着小齿轮，
全无意识地转动，
全无目的地转动。⁶⁹

...the Western-style machines,
Large gears holding small gears,
Turning in total unconsciousness,
Turning in total purposelessness.

The poem ends with "the purple air" of Lao Zi as a powerful generative force in counter action against the all-pervasive coal smoke:

云气氤氲的校旗呀！
你便是东来的紫气，
你飘出函谷关，向西迈往，⁷⁰

Oh, the school flag enshrouded in floating clouds!
You are the purple air from the east,
You float out of Hangu Pass, and stride westwards,

⁶⁹ Wen Yiduo, *Wen Yiduo quanji* [The complete works of Wen Yiduo], vol. 1, 206.

Daoism and use it not only as a philosophical stance, but also a mainstay for his creation of a new poetics.

Recent scholarship in ecocriticism has addressed many of the issues that perplexed Wen Yiduo in 1922-1923. Lynn White, Jr., in her 1996 article “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis,” points out that “our present combustion of fossil fuels threatens to change the chemistry of the globe’s atmosphere as a whole.”⁷³ In the same article, White traces the roots of our ecological crisis to Judeo-Christian teleology, its concept of time as nonrepetitive and linear, its faith in perpetual progress, its anthropocentric dogma of man’s transcendence of, and rightful mastery of, nature. She acutely points out that these Christian attitudes toward man’s relation to nature are “almost universally held not only by Christians and neo-Christians but also those who fondly regard themselves as post-Christians.”⁷⁴ The prerequisite she singles out to get us out of the ecological crisis is to “find a new religion, or rethink our old one.” And she applauds the beatniks as “the basic revolutionaries of our time” and their affinity to Zen Buddhism.⁷⁵ Other scholars such as Sueellen Campbell, in her article titled “The Land and Language of Desire: Where Deep Ecology and Post-Structuralism Meet,” suggests adding some of the insights of Zen and Taoism to ecological thinking.⁷⁶ It is intriguing that Wen Yiduo anticipated our current ecological concerns by more than half a century.

I want to note that while I have focused on the trope of smoke and the role of the industrial milieu in Chicago in shaping Wen’s eco-poetics in this section, there is at least

⁷³ Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, eds., *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 5.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 12-13.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 135.

one other important factor playing a critical role in this process, that is, the strong feminist atmosphere in Chicago. I will discuss this in the next section.

“Something of a Matriarchy”

Another all-pervasive presence in Chicago besides the black coal smoke was the omnipresence of strong women coupled with a general keen interest in China, especially ancient Chinese culture, in the literary and artistic circles Wen was immersed in in Chicago. Scholarly narratives of Wen’s interaction with the literary and artistic circles in Chicago draw heavily on Wen’s own vague and sporadic references in his correspondence with friends and family. For example, “Mrs. Bush,” the critical figure who introduced Wen into the circle, remained “Mrs. Bush” as Wen mentioned in his letter. Her full name and her role in the circle remained unknown. To better understand Wen’s poetic exploration in Chicago, it is necessary to place his personal account into the larger historical context before further reading of his poetry.

During his first three weeks in Chicago, as Wen wrote in his letter dated August 27 (the only one typed in English), he was “constantly prying into magazines, searching among the latest books and learning from whatever personal talks I have had the chance to have, for the recent condition and prevailing tendencies in the literary sphere in this country.” In the letter, Wen introduced in detail the “new poetry in this country,” i.e., “the imagists.” The four poets Wen highlighted were Amy Lowell, Carl Sandburg, Harriet Monroe, and Hilda Conkling. Two things stand out in this list: First, Ezra Pound, who coined the term “imagiste,” was not included; second, with the exception of Sandburg, all were women poets. Further, Wen mentioned in this August letter that he

was sending a copy of *Poetry* to his friends in China. And the August 1922 issue of *Poetry* was “a woman’s number of *Poetry*,” “the first one to speak entirely with feminine voices,” “to present exclusively the feminine claim to a variety of method and mood in this art.”⁷⁷

Wen was probably unaware that the predominance of women poets on the American poetry scene was closely related to the famous rivalry between Amy Lowell and Ezra Pound, which was symptomatic of the tension between the new feminist sensibility and the male avant-garde of the teens and twenties.⁷⁸ Their disagreement was partly about the concept of avant-garde. While Pound insisted on limiting members of imagism to a small elite group, emphasizing the high quality of the work, Lowell⁷⁹ wanted to be inclusive, namely, to give voice to a wide range of poets, especially women poets. Pound worried that Lowell’s feminist equality principle would allow large numbers of women poets into the group, thereby lowering the quality of imagist poetry and defeating its initial purpose as the avant-garde.⁸⁰ He soon moved on to pursue other notions of the avant-garde, leaving the imagist label to Amy Lowell and satirized the imagist poetry under Amy Lowell’s wing as Amygism.⁸¹ Thus, Amy Lowell had a dominating presence in the American poetry scene until she was “subjected to an almost

⁷⁷ *Poetry*, August 1922, 291.

⁷⁸ Marjorie Perloff, *Poetry on & off the Page*, xi. The original quotation is “the male avant-garde versus the new feminist sensibility of the teens and twenties.” I shift the order between Pound and Lowell because Lowell could use some spotlight after so many years in the dark. A note to the male tradition: Since Edouard Manet’s scandalous showing of his painting *Olympia* at the Salon in 1863, male artists have been depicting woman as “other,” as the object of men’s gazes and desires. The female nude takes center stage in the iconic modern works of artists such as Manet. Michael Robinson, *Surrealism* (London: The Foundry Creative Media Co. Ltd., London, 2006), 88, 222.

⁷⁹ She also critiques the masculinist vision of U.S. imperialism. See Adrienne Munich and Melissa Bradshaw, eds., *Amy Lowell, American Modern* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 121.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, xiii-xiv.

⁸¹ Susan McCabe, Review of *Amy Lowell, American Modern*. *Legacy*: volume 22 no. 1 2005, 89.

systematic exclusion from literary consideration” since her death in 1925.⁸² Wen certainly did not miss the prevalent feminist sentiment in *Poetry*, especially after he was introduced into its social circle and met some of the major poets in person.

Soon, on October 8, 1922, Wen met the powerful “Mrs. Bush” who wrote letters of introduction for him to Carl Sandburg and Harriet Monroe, and invited Wen to the Arts Club of Chicago for dinner and Amy Lowell’s poetry reading.⁸³ In November, Wen met with “Mr. Winter” who introduced him to Eunice Tietjens, poet and former editor of *Poetry*, on December 1, 1922.⁸⁴ At the School of the Art Institute of Chicago where Wen studied painting, more than half of his instructors and two thirds of the students were women.⁸⁵ As Robert Morss Lovett argues, Chicago’s social and cultural life at the time was “something of a matriarchy” from the perspective of male members in the fields of art and literature.⁸⁶

It is no coincidence that Wen’s Chicago experience featured severe industrial pollution and powerful women playing leading roles in the realms of art and poetry: both were closely related to the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair. The large number of woman poets

⁸² Even the wave of feminist and queer criticism that has swept modernist studies in the last fifteen years has left her archive nearly untouched. *Ibid.*; in *Amy Lowell, American Modern*, the famous rivalry between Pound and Lowell is treated as having “more to do with egos than with images.” Adrienne Munich and Melissa Bradshaw, eds., *Amy Lowell, American Modern*, xiii.

⁸³ See Wen’s letter dated Oct 9, 1922, Wen Yiduo, *Wen Yiduo quanji* [The complete works of Wen Yiduo], vol. 12, 93.

⁸⁴ In letters to his parents and his friend, Wen Yiduo recounted his meeting with Tietjens and her husband the day before, but he did not mention how he got in touch with them. See Wen’s letter to his parents dated December 2, 1922 and his friend dated December 4, 1922, *ibid.*, 119. In his diary on March 22, 1948, Robert K. Winter recalled, “I met him [Wen Yiduo] through some painters I knew and I invited him to dinner several times—once, I remember, with Eunice Tietjens and her husband Cloyd Head. We talked about Chinese poetry, chiefly. Eunice had just returned from China and had published a volume of poetry which she wrote in Wuhsi. It was my first introduction to Chinese manners.” Robert Winter’s diary, 244, Rockefeller Archive Center.

⁸⁵ See Wen’s letters dated October 30 and December 2, 1922 in Wen Yiduo, *Wen Yiduo quanji* [The complete works of Wen Yiduo], vol., 12, 111, and 121.

⁸⁶ See Neil Harris, “The Chicago Setting,” in Sue Ann Prince, edit., *The Old Guard and the Avant-Garde: Modernism in Chicago, 1910-1940* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 14.

and leaders, art instructors and art students fell into the category of “new women.” As Tracey Jean Boisseau notes,

“New woman” first appeared in the British Press in the mid-1890s as a derogatory label for middle-class women who seemed to violate the doctrine of “separate spheres.” Middle-class women who aspired to professionalism, engaged in athleticism, critiqued the institution of marriage, decried the sexual double-standard, or eschewed confining clothing on semi-political grounds were vulnerable to the charge of being “new women.”⁸⁷

Boisseau also points out that it was at and shortly after the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair that “the full-fledged figure of the ‘new woman’ appeared in public discourses in the United States media and print culture” and “challenged the ban on public roles for women.”⁸⁸ According to Boisseau, influential reformers and professional women from across America organized into a loose association called the Queen Isabella Association and proposed to oversee the organization of the 1893 World’s Fair and its exhibits. As soon as Chicago was chosen as the site of the exposition, a local group, chiefly made up of wives of prominent Chicago businessmen, took control of the Board of Lady Managers and appropriated the powerful discourses of progress and modernity, and linked (white, middle-class American) women’s advancement in the public sphere to modernity and American national identity.⁸⁹

What was left in place once the fair had been burned to the ground in 1894 was an organizational infrastructure of women’s clubs which would prove indispensable in the fight for women’s suffrage, temperance, protective labor legislation, and women’s civil liberties and educational opportunities—that is, for the construction of a tangible, multi-pronged feminist movement... The same decade which saw Chicago’s World Exposition also saw the coining of the term “feminism” and the founding of women’s national organizations which a generation later would

⁸⁷ Tracey Jean Boisseau, “Where Every Woman May Be a Queen: Gender, Politics, and Visual Space at the Chicago World’s Fair, 1893” in Klaus Benesch, Kerstin Schmidt, eds., *Space in America: theory, history, culture* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005), 285.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 302.

permit the adoption of several reform measures, notably woman's suffrage in 1920.⁹⁰

While women's energy was still checked by conventions in business, politics and technology, by the time Wen came to Chicago, feminist efforts in the last twenty years had enabled white, often well-to-do women to enter the fields of literature and art, often supported by their husbands or fathers who were rich businessmen, though not without resistance on the part of their male counterparts who had previously owned the field, assumed the position of masters and allowed women only subordinate positions as students and readers.⁹¹

The driving forces of the Arts Club of Chicago, Rue Winterbotham Carpenter and Alice Roullier, were two such powerful "new women."⁹² The former was a painter and interior designer,⁹³ the original initiator of the concept of the Arts Club and Chairman of its Exhibition committee since its inception in 1916. The latter, Chairman of the Exhibition Committee from 1918 to 1941, was director of the Albert Roullier Galleries,⁹⁴

⁹⁰ Ibid., 292-293.

⁹¹ I'll elaborate this point later on with the rivalry between Ezra Pound and Amy Lowell as well as Pound's relation with H.D.

⁹² As portrayed by James Wells, Rue Winterbotham Carpenter was "a successful and original interior decorator," "a woman of strong convictions and equally strong taste." She had "a lively, probing mind, endless energy and enthusiasm, and a willingness to take chances," and exceptional interpersonal and managing skills. James M. Wells, "Portrait of an Era: Rue Winterbotham Carpenter and the Arts Club of Chicago," in *The Arts Club of Chicago, portrait of an era: Rue Winterbotham Carpenter and the Arts Club of Chicago, 1916-1931: seventieth anniversary exhibition, the Arts Club of Chicago, September 15-November 1, 1986* (Chicago: The Arts Club of Chicago, 1986). Other descriptions of her were never as elaborate as James Wells, but along similar lines, such as "independent and energetic." Richard R. Brettell and Sue Ann Prince, "From the Armory Show to the Century of Progress: The Art Institute Assimilates Modernism," in Sue Ann Prince, ed., *The Old Guard and the Avant-Garde: Modernism in Chicago, 1910-1940*, 217.

⁹³ Sophia Shaw, "A Collection to Remember," in Sophia Shaw, ed. *The Arts Club of Chicago: The Collection 1916-1996* (Chicago: The Arts Club of Chicago, 1997), 22.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

a well-connected, sophisticated connoisseur.⁹⁵ Under their leadership, the Arts Club, though started by some male trustees of the Art Institute of Chicago, had totally different visions from the latter. While the Art Institute shared an extremely conservative stance with regard to modernism as did other major U.S. museums in the 1920s,⁹⁶ the Arts Club started to have an exhibition space for avant-garde arts, to explore new ways of looking at the world and to aim at more adventurous purposes⁹⁷ once Rue Winterbotham Carpenter was elected president of the Arts Club in 1918.⁹⁸ One of the few American groups willing to show avant-garde art, the Arts Club made this city “the most hospitable place in the United States for the presentation of modern art.”⁹⁹ In other words, the Arts’ Club was a place where powerful women acted as patrons of European male avant-garde artists such as Picasso. The Arts Club’s strong support of European, especially French, modern art paralleled their fascination with ancient Chinese art and lack of interest in contemporary Chinese art.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁵ Richard R. Brettell and Sue Ann Prince, “From the Armory Show to the Century of Progress: The Art Institute Assimilates Modernism,” in Sue Ann Prince, ed., *The Old Guard and the Avant-Garde: Modernism in Chicago, 1910-1940*, 217.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 216. Before the founding of the Museum of Modern Art in 1929, hardly any institution in the country – and none in Manhattan – would exhibit European modernism. See Michael C. FitzGerald, *Making Modernism: Picasso and the Creation of the Market for Twentieth Century Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 120. Even though the Art Institute had shown a portion of the notoriously controversial Armory Show in 1913, its collection as late as 1921 was extremely conservative, holding only two works by twentieth-century European artists, and both were salon paintings in the nineteenth-century academic tradition.” See Sophia Shaw, “A Collection to Remember” in Sophia Shaw, ed., *The Arts Club of Chicago: The Collection 1916-1996*, 22. Her reference is Richard R. Brettell and Sue Ann Prince, “From the Armory Show to the Century of Progress: The Art Institute Assimilates Modernism,” in Sue Ann Prince. ed., *The Old Guard and the Avant-Garde: Modernism in Chicago, 1910-1940*, 219.

⁹⁷ Richard R. Brettell and Sue Ann Prince, “From the Armory Show to the Century of Progress: The Art Institute Assimilates Modernism.” *ibid.*, 216.

⁹⁸ Essay by James M. Wells in *Arts Club of Chicago: Seventy-fifth Anniversary Exhibition 1916-1991, The Arts Club of Chicago, May 11-June 26, 1992* (Chicago: The Arts Club of Chicago, 1992), 6.

⁹⁹ Michael C. FitzGerald, *Making Modernism: Picasso and the Creation of the Market for Twentieth Century Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 120.

¹⁰⁰ The “Annual Report of the Exhibition Committee of the Arts Club of Chicago, May 1922 to May 1923” lists the exhibitions of this year and highlights those from France. The Chinese Arts exhibition specified as “Chinese Sculpture, Porcelains & Bronzes.” By the end of the report, among the things purchased from the

Mrs. Bush's interest in ancient Chinese art and Wen Yiduo was not simply a random event, but a manifestation of the overall atmosphere in the literary and artistic circle of the Arts Club. A new woman similar to Rue Winterbotham Carpenter and Alice Roullier, Mrs. William H. Bush served on the Exhibition Committee of the Arts Club at the time when Wen arrived in Chicago.¹⁰¹ Having had a passion for Chinese [ancient] culture since her youth, Mrs. Bush actively promoted the exhibition of early Chinese art at the Club. Her husband, Mr. William Henry Bush, was a successful businessman, one of the wealthy elites who had built the city of machines and smoke and were actively involved in the growth of the Art Institute of Chicago.¹⁰²

The reason why Mrs. Bush could write introduction letters of introduction for Wen to Harriet Monroe and Carl Sandburg, and invite him to attend Amy Lowell's reading is because *Poetry* was also closely related to the Arts Club. While Mrs. Bush was a member of the Exhibition Committee, Monroe, chief editor of *Poetry*, was the chair of the

exhibits, Chinese pieces claimed \$6,150 out of \$16,000 total sales. *Inventory of the Arts Club Records, 1892-1995*, Vol. 3, 1922-1924.

¹⁰¹ In the Arts Club of Chicago archives, Mrs. William H. Bush is listed on the Exhibition Committee in the "Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Directors of the Arts Club of Chicago," held at the Club rooms at 12:30 p.m. on May 23, 1922. See the "Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Directors of the Arts Club of Chicago," held at the Club rooms at 12:30 p.m. on May 23, 1922. *Inventory of the Arts Club Records, 1892-1995*, Vol. 3, 1922-1924.

¹⁰² A letter to Mrs. Wm. H. Bush from the Chairman of the Exhibition Committee of the Arts Club dated October 10, 1928, in response to her suggestion to have a series of lectures on early Chinese paintings at the Arts Club. The address of Mrs. Wm. H. Bush included in the letter was 1538 North State Street, Chicago, Illinois. *Inventory of the Arts Club Records, 1892-1995*. In *Empire Builder in the Texas Panhandle: William Henry Bush*, Paul H. Carson notes that Mrs. William Henry Bush, whose maiden name was Ruth Russell Gentry, graduated from Vassar College and "was fascinated with the history of China and Chinese culture" since her youth. Both her husband William Henry Bush and she were actively involved in the growth of the Art Institute of Chicago in the 1910s and 1920s. Their address in Chicago at the time was also 1538 North State Street, Chicago, Illinois. See Paul H. Carson, *Empire Builder in the Texas Panhandle: William Henry Bush* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1996), 98-99, 116, 118. However, Carson fails to mention the archives of the Arts Club of Chicago and Mrs. Bush's involvement in the Arts Club.

Literature Committee of the Arts Club.¹⁰³ The poetry reading by Amy Lowell, major sponsor of *Poetry*, was held at the Arts Club on February 17, 1923.¹⁰⁴

Not only the Arts Club, but the literary circle surrounding *Poetry* shared a keen interest in ancient Chinese culture. Harriet Monroe visited China and undertook an intensive study of Chinese art there in 1910-1911. Upon her return to the U.S., Monroe founded *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*, through which she introduced the Imagists and other “new poetry” to American readers. “Most important of all,” claimed Monroe, as she sought in 1917 to define the single component that encapsulated the newness of this modernist verse, “these poets have bowed to winds from the East.”¹⁰⁵ Mr. Winter, whose full name was Robert K. Winter, was a member of the class of 1909 at Wabash College, “a favored student and close friend of Ezra Pound, former Wabash college faculty member.”¹⁰⁶ Mr. Winter’s passion for ancient China was exemplified by a portrait of Lao Zi he painted and hung on his wall. When Wen met with Eunice, the latter had just returned from China and published a volume of poetry she wrote in Wuxi.¹⁰⁷

The strong feminist atmosphere and enthusiasm for ancient Chinese culture would play critical roles in Wen’s conception of a new poetics. Close contact with many established American women playing leading roles in the field of literature and art enabled Wen to have an acute feminist sensibility much more sophisticated than the

¹⁰³ See the “Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Directors of the Arts Club of Chicago,” held at the Club rooms at 12:30 p.m. on May 23, 1922. *Inventory of the Arts Club Records, 1892-1995*, Vol. 3, 1922-1924.

¹⁰⁴ Record of this talk is listed in “President’s Report: The Arts Club, 1922-1923,” *Inventory of the Arts Club Records, 1892-1995*, Vol. 3, 1922-1924. Also see “Lectures This Week,” in *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1872-1963), February 17, 1923. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

¹⁰⁵ “Petals on a Wet Black Bough: American Modernist Writers and the Orient,” A Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library Exhibition, Yale University, October 18 - December 20, 1996, organized by Patricia C. Willis, Curator of the Yale Collection of American Literature
<http://www.library.yale.edu/beinecke/orient/mod2.htm> (accessed June 10, 2010).

¹⁰⁶ “R.K. Winter, Ex-Local Man, Raps U.S. Policy in Korea,” in *Crawfordsville Journal*, August 17, 1950. Rockefeller Archive Center.

¹⁰⁷ See Robert Winter’s diary dated March 22, 1948, 244. Rockefeller Archive Center.

male-centered feminist discourse prevalent among male intellectuals in China. From being a Westernized modern Chinese male elite with established authority as a poet and critic of new poetry and challenger of tradition in the male literary and social circles at Qinghua¹⁰⁸ to a lone inconsequential Chinese student who was mainly appreciated for his expertise in ancient Chinese culture and whose work was evaluated by the strong American female authorities in Chicago, Wen's emasculated position was one other major factor that compelled him to rethink his previous notions of the male poet as an omnipotent masculine figure in domination of the world, identify with the weak (whether the laboring masses, the lone wild goose, feminine nature, his wife or daughter), and redefine the weak and the strong.

Unlike the mainstream Euro-American and Chinese male elites who showed a fundamental distrust of women's literary capacity, Wen expressed a genuine belief that in terms of their capacity for achievement, women were "no weaker than men." In his letter home dated December 2, 1922, Wen talked about his dinner meeting with Tietjens and wrote the following to his sisters and wife:

My fourteenth sister, sixteenth sister and Xiaozhen [Wen's wife] should all heed the following words. You see I have mentioned another American woman poet in my letter this time; I feel very proud because she praised my poetry. Hence, women are not incapable of producing great scholarship and high accomplishments. More than half of the instructors at our Art Institute are women. Women are no weaker than men. If it is the case with foreign women, how can one say it is not the case with Chinese women?¹⁰⁹

Later on, in a letter to his father dated February 10, 1923, Wen gave an incisive analysis and criticism of his father's view of gender hierarchy and expressed his determination to

¹⁰⁸ Before his trip to Chicago, Wen had established himself at Qinghua as a poet and critic of Chinese new poetry and editor of *Qinghua zhoukan* [Qinghua Weekly], a revolt against tradition, among many other leading roles.

¹⁰⁹ Wen Yiduo, *Wen Yiduo quanji* [The complete works of Wen Yiduo], vol., 12, 120-121.

educate his daughter into a strong and worthy woman for everyone, including the favored sons, to look up to:

There had been no letter from home since Xiaozhen [Wen's wife] gave birth. Only in the last letter, father added a few words in small character at the corner of the page, saying what my daughter's name was and that was all. If she were a boy, it would probably be worth even telegraphing me the good news? To be honest, I got a daughter; this fulfills exactly my wish and I am very pleased. I will educate my daughter into a model for everybody ... My hope and happiness in the future lies in this girl.¹¹⁰

Wen's conflict with his father over the birth of his daughter showed his conscious awareness of and sharp insight into gender issues in relation to economy and technology. The trivialized position of the daughter in the patriarchal family was placed in sharp contrast with the paramount position of the son in terms of two means of communication, the letter and the telegraph. During Wen's stay in Chicago in 1922-1923, the telegraph was expensive, yet one of the fastest and most reliable means of communication; while a letter was much cheaper, it was much slower and unreliable. It took the postal system more than two months to send a letter across the Pacific. To make things worse, letters and packages were often lost. During his stay in Chicago, Wen's major means of communication with his family and friends at home was through letters. Wen was deeply aware of the limitation of this technology as he complained repeatedly about the slowness of the postal system and the loss of letters and packages.¹¹¹ Even within such a lesser technology as the letter, as Wen sharply pointed out, the daughter was further trivialized by the minimization of the number and size of the words regarding her news and the relegation of the news to the marginal position of the corner of the page. Such insightful observation of the diminishment of women and ingenious employment of tropes of

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 143-144.

¹¹¹ For example, see letter to Wen Jiasi dated September 24, 1923 in Wen Yiduo, *Wen Yiduo quanji* [The complete works of Wen Yiduo], vol. 12, 187.

technology had a lot to do with Wen's experience of the technological modernity and feminist atmosphere in Chicago. The strong accomplished women in Chicago provided Wen with vivid models for the liberation of women in China and enabled him to challenge the weak position women were relegated to.

During the winter break shortly after his dinner meeting with Tietjens, Wen composed his well-known "Red Beans" poem series, a cluster of short love poems addressed to his wife. The title "Red Beans" not only indicates the thematic rubric of these poems -- lovesickness for his wife – but also their organizational structure. While the general theme of lovesickness threads all the poems together, each poem depicts an independent moment of reflection, not necessarily forming a coherent narrative. Numbering provides the most random and loose way of organizing the content of a long poem. Under each number is a fragment of thought. The absence of a title for each fragment indicates its integral relation to the whole poem, yet allows its flexibility to be read in connection with any of the rest of the poems.

The marriage between Wen and his wife was arranged by their parents. Unlike most May Fourth intellectuals who abandoned their wives of arranged marriage and went on to pursue love, mostly in common-law marriage, Wen Yiduo chose to obey his parents, married his cousin, stuck to this arranged marriage and shared genuine affection with his wife. Because of this unique situation, these love poems, addressed to his arranged marriage wife, not only express Wen's lovesickness for his wife, but also his more complicated understanding of love and marriage in response to the stereotypical mainstream discourse of love and marriage in China.

In these poems, the male speaker always identifies himself with the weak. For example, poem No. 19 reads like a condensed variation of “A Lone Wild Goose.” Similar to the latter, the speaker identifies himself with a lone wild goose in a foreign land:

我是只惊弓的断雁。
我的嘴要叫着你，
又要衔着芦草，
保障着我的生命。
我真狼狈哟！¹¹²

I am a bow-startled cutoff wild goose.
My mouth wants to cry out your name,
And to hold the reed at the same time,
Ensuring my life.
How awkward I am!

In this poem, the nourishing and protective nature home of the “reed bushes” elaborated in the poem “A Lone Wild Goose” is reduced to a single blade of reed positioned precariously in the mouth of the cutoff wild goose. Similar to “A Lone Wild Goose,” this home in nature is critical in the sustenance of both the spiritual and physical life of the speaker. The poem epitomizes the contradictory needs for the sustenance of life and the chanting of poetry. To “cry out your name,” that is, to chant the love poem for his wife, the speaker needs to open his mouth and breathe, and yet to maintain the sustainability of life, he needs to shut his mouth tight to hold the reed. Whether the need to hold onto the reed is due to the suffocating factory coal-smoke or the overwhelming presence of strong female authorities, the poet speaker admits to the “awkward” situation he is trapped in and unmistakably identifies with the weak.

In many poems, the male speaker describes his wife and himself as equally vulnerable, subjected to the impact of external forces, with little or no agency themselves. For example, in poem No. 23, the speaker and his wife are compared to “two leaves of duckweed”:

我们是两片浮萍：

We are two leaves of duckweed:
From the speed of our meeting and parting,

¹¹² Wen Yiduo, *Hongzhu* [Red candle], 251.

从我们聚散底速率，
同距离地远度，
可以看出风儿地缓急，
浪儿底大小。¹¹³

And the remoteness of the distance,
One could discern the scale of the wind,
The size of the waves.

In No. 25, “we” are explicitly equated to “the weak” at the mercy of the upholders of Confucian rites and ethics who arranged their marriage. Unlike many May Fourth intellectuals such as Guo Moruo who equated the wives of their arranged marriages with the evils of the arranged marriage system and portrayed the abandonment of them as a brave rebellion against the old system and pursuit of a modern identity, the male speaker in Wen’s poem identifies with his wife of the arranged marriage and lays bare the absurd nature of the wedding ceremony of this arranged marriage with utter and brilliant sarcasm:

我们弱者是鱼肉；
我们会被求福者
重看了盛在笊豆里，
供在礼教底龛前。
我们多么荣耀啊！¹¹⁴

We the weak are fish and meat;
We will be valued by the fortune-seekers,
Held in sacrificial vessels,
Laid in front of the shrine of ethics and rites.
How glorious we are!

In poem No. 30, Wen’s reflection on their arranged marriage takes an even more extraordinary turn. Rather than demonizing the system of arranged marriage as many radical May Fourth intellectuals did, Wen depicts his arranged marriage as a risky, painful yet not completely erroneous operation of grafting:

他们削破了我的皮肉，
冒着险将伊的枝儿
强蛮地插在我得茎上。
如今我虽带着癍肿的疤痕，
却开出从来没有过的花儿了。
他们是怎样狠心的聪明啊！
但每回我瞟出看花的人们
上下抛着眼珠儿，

They cut open my skin and flesh,
Riskily forced her sprig
Onto my stalk.
Now I carry a swollen scar
Yet have blown flowers never before bloomed.
How cruelly smart they were!
Yet every time I notice the flower-watching folks
Throwing their glances up and down
Studying my stalk,

¹¹³ No. 23 in “Red Beans,” Wen Yiduo, *Hongzhu* [Red candle], 255.

¹¹⁴ Wen Yiduo, *Hongzhu* [Red candle], 257.

打量着我的茎儿时，
我得脸就红了！¹¹⁵

My face turns red!

Grafting is a technique used to join parts from two plants with cords so that they grow as one. It hurts deeply and might kill either or both plants, yet also provides possibilities for a new life. In this case, this cruel deed results in the most beautiful flowers of love. The trope of grafting sets this poem apart from the majority of May Fourth literature where arranged marriage equals absence or suffocation of love. Wen is clearly aware of the difference between himself and the majority of his contemporaries, for the latter are figured as the flower-watching people. For them, flowers of this kind can only bloom from “free love,” not from arranged marriage. The male speaker, under the gaze of these people, betrays his awareness of the difference between his case and the dominant discourse among the intellectuals. The face turning red could be a sign of embarrassment; it could be a sign of excitement as well. Whatever it indicates, the trope of grafting in this poem breaks away from the monolithic discourse of the radical May Fourth intellectuals and shows the complexities and subtleties of reality. What is more, the weak figure, which appears as the helpless victim of the machines in “A Lone Wild Goose,” appears to possess the power to generate new life against the hostile environment in this poem.

Strangely, Wen Yiduo failed to maintain such an acute feminist awareness after he went back to China. In an essay titled “Funü jiefang wenti” (“The Issue of Women’s Liberation”) (1945), Wen completely adopted the seemingly objective yet privileged high position of male-centered May Fourth intellectuals. While advocating the notion of the strong woman as the model and leader of future culture, Wen characterized Chinese women in history as slaves, Western women as prostitutes, and the “completely liberated

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 262-263.

new women” as “useful.”¹¹⁶ Not only were all these categories defined in relation to male needs, but the strong high-achieving American woman leaders from his Chicago years were left completely out of the picture. One wonders what caused Wen to change his views over the years in China.

While this question is beyond the scope of this chapter, I want to note Wen’s identification with the weak was at the price of profound pain on his part. Despite the profound insights gained through this suffering, Wen still longed to regain his masculine and authoritative privilege. Take for example No. 13 of his “Red Beans” series.

我到底是个男子！
我们将来见面时，
我能对你哭完了，
马上又对你笑。
你却不必如此；
你可以仰面望着我，
像一朵湿蔷薇，
在雾后的斜阳里，
慢慢儿晒干你的眼泪。¹¹⁷

I am after all a man!
When we meet in the future,
I can, after crying to you,
Smile at you right away.
Yet you don’t need to do this;
You may turn up your face and look at me,
Like a moist rose,
In the slanting sun after rain
Slowly basking dry your tears.

The poem opens with the speaker categorically affirming his masculinity. While sharing with his wife the weakness of tears, the male speaker sets a higher bar for himself than for his wife: as a gesture of love, he requires himself to smile at her immediately after crying, but allows his wife the luxury of drying her tears slowly, a beautiful love poem with exquisite images. Yet the speaker seems to be not only lovesick for his wife, but lovesick for his wife’s lovesickness. In his imagination, not only does she look up at him, but when she looks up, she is still the object of his gaze. What the speaker pines for here is not only reciprocal love from his wife, but to be the center of attention and admiration.

¹¹⁶ Wen Yiduo, *Wen Yiduo quanji* [The complete works of Wen Yiduo], vol. 2, 414-418.

¹¹⁷ Wen Yiduo, *Hongzhu* [Red candle], 244.

This desire to be the center has a lot to do with his marginalized position in the “matriarchy” of Chicago.

It should be noted that Wen was welcomed into the social circle of the Arts Club and *Poetry* mainly for his expertise in ancient China; his identity as a modern Chinese poet was never really recognized. Though Robert Winter showed interest in Wen’s new poetry in Chinese and offered to help Wen translate his poems into English,¹¹⁸ he was only a teacher of French at Evanston High School in Illinois¹¹⁹ rather than some powerful figure in the *Poetry* circle. Though Wen introduced Winter as the associate Professor of French at the University of Chicago in his letter,¹²⁰ there is no record of Robert Winter in the University of Chicago archives. It is possible that Winter taught French as an adjunct professor at the University of Chicago. It was eventually up to the female authorities from *Poetry* to decide whether Wen’s poems were good enough for publication. Despite Tietjens’ expressions of approval and interest in publishing Wen’s poems, Wen’s poems never appeared in *Poetry*.¹²¹

In his letters to friends, Wen frequently complained about his loneliness in Chicago and his longing to resume his life in a male literary community. For example, in his letter to Liang Shiqiu dated May 29, 1923, Wen confessed that the long poem “In the Garden” was composed in a state of “sadness, despair, loneliness and boredom.” He later wrote,

All in all, the year in Chicago has been extremely painful. Except for a foreign girl in the class with whom to talk superficially about language, there was nobody

¹¹⁸ He also invited Wen to translate classical Chinese poetry together. See Wen’s letter to Liang Shiqiu, dated December 27, 1922. Wen Yiduo, *Wen Yiduo quanji* [The complete works of Wen Yiduo], vol. 12, 126.

¹¹⁹ “R.K. Winter, Ex-Local Man, Raps U.S. Policy in Korea,” in *Crawfordsville Journal*, August 17, 1950. Rockefeller Archive Center.

¹²⁰ Wen Yiduo, *Wen Yiduo quanji* [The complete works of Wen Yiduo], vol. 12, 126.

¹²¹ I checked all issues of *Poetry* from 1922 to 1925.

to talk with. A year is painful enough; I must drag one of you along with me in the future.¹²²

In his last letter written in Chicago, dated September 12, 1923, Wen Yiduo told his brother Wen Jiasi his plan of moving to Colorado Springs to live with Liang Shiqiu,

The Art School in Colorado Springs is probably not as good as the Art Institute of Chicago, yet living together with Liang Shiqiu and talking about literature together, the pleasure of exchanging poems should far outstrip being entrenched in Chicago.¹²³

Writing to Wen Jiasi again on September 24, 1923 shortly after settling down in Colorado Springs, exactly a year after his crisis over his Qinghua poetics described in the letter I have quoted at the beginning of the chapter, Wen Yiduo singled out two advantages his life in Colorado Springs over that in Chicago, that is, male-centered literary community and its pristine nature:

In short, moving here is probably less constructive for my study of art, yet for literary creations, being able to encourage each other with Shiqiu, exchange poems with each other, it will lead to great accomplishments. And in Chicago, breathing coal smoke all day long, even my snivel and saliva were black; here I am able to breathe air and bathe in the sun, which is also of great benefit for life preservation.¹²⁴

However, despite his joy in sliding back to the comfort zone he was used to at Qinghua, Wen never experienced such intense poetic creativity as in Chicago in the rest of his years in the States, whether in Colorado Springs or New York. In fact, at the end of the first semester at Colorado Springs, Wen admitted to Wen Jiasi, “Thinking back on the half a year here, spiritually I feel more peaceful than in Chicago. Yet strangely, though I

¹²² Wen Yiduo, *Wen Yiduo quanji* [The complete works of Wen Yiduo], vol. 12, 177.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 185-186.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 187.

have been living together with Shiqiu, contrary to what I thought, my literary productivity was extremely low.”¹²⁵

The many downsides of Wen’s relations with the city of Chicago were a blessing in disguise. His involuntary half-drowning immersion as a modern man, though not by his choice, saved him from an absolute elitist detachment from and objectification of the impenetrable crowd. It is no coincidence that Wen’s year in Chicago was the most productive of his three years in the United States. It was in Chicago that he experienced not only the initial shock of a modern man moving into the modern capitalist city as Simmel observes, but the most violent clashes of many elements refracting and imploding in him and channeled into his poetry. The tension of experience triggered the most complicated, often contradictory sentiments in him, reflecting, colliding, refracting in the cloud chamber of his body. Everything was new: not even the knowledge he gained about the United States at Qinghua was useful to navigate this new milieu. The capitalist, materialistic, commercial and corrupted United States he learned from mass media and classrooms at Qinghua was challenged, revised, and complicated by his experience in Chicago. The complexity of experience that allowed the coexistence of contradictions saved him from the simplistic radicalism of the mainstream May Fourth intellectuals in China. Yet, for various reasons, Wen’s alternative poetics was eclipsed by the hegemony of dominant intellectual discourse of modernity in China with few exceptions. In the next chapter, I will focus on Chen Jingrong (1917-1989), one of the few female poets in the canon of modern Chinese poetry and the only female Chinese translator of Baudelaire. I demonstrate how Chen strove for a distinct poetics of irony with her acute insights into

¹²⁵ Wen’s letter to Wen Jiasi dated January 8, 1924 in *ibid.*, 200.

war-time modernity and Baudelaire's poetry in the male-dominated literary field in Shanghai in the 1940s.

Chapter Three

Chen Jingrong's Journey to a Feminist Poetics

This chapter will not focus on major male poets though the field of modern Chinese poetry, like many other fields, continues to be dominated by men. Instead, I focus on the poetic explorations of Chen Jingrong (1917-1989), one of the few female poets in the male-dominated modern Chinese poetic canon and the only female Chinese translator of Baudelaire since his first introduction into China in 1919.¹ Though Chen Jingrong played critical roles in the history of modern Chinese poetry, scholarly studies of her in English have been few and far between.² In China, Chen was mostly studied as a member of the Nine Leaves School,³ rather than a poet in her own right in the history of modern Chinese poetry, until the publication of *Chen Jingrong shiwen ji* (Poetry and prose of Chen Jingrong) in 2008. In the preface to this collection, Zhao Yiheng credits

¹ Zhou Zuoren (1885 - 1967), a modern Chinese writer, essayist and translator, was credited as the first one who acknowledged Baudelaire's influence on his poetry in *Xin qingnian* [*New Youth*], vol. 6, no. 2, February 1919. See Liu Chengxin, "Xu: 'quan' 'xin' de fengxian" ["Preface: 'Completely' 'New' Contributions"] in Wen Aiyi, trans. *E zhi hua* [*The Flowers of Evil*] (Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 2007), 4; also see Zou Zhenhuan, *Yingxiang zhongguo jindai shehui de yibai zhong yizuo* [One hundred translated works that influenced modern Chinese society] (Beijing: Zhongguo duiwai fanyi chubanshe, 1996), 429.

² In the English world, there are only a few PhD dissertations on Chen. For example, Shiu-Pang E. Almborg, "The Poetry of Chen Jingrong: a Modern Chinese Woman Poet," PhD dissertation, 1988, University of Stockholm; Andrea Lingenfelter, "A Marked Category: Nine Women of Modern of Modern Chinese Poetry, 1920-1997," PhD dissertation, University of Washington, 81-135.

³ To name a few: Jiang Dengke, *Jiuye shiren lungao* [Thesis on the Nine Leaves poets] (Chongqing: Xinan shifan daxue chubanshe, 2006), 30-53; Tang Shi, *Jiuye shiren: Zhongguo Xinshi de zhongxing* [The Nine Leaves poets: the resurgence of *Chinese New Poetry*] (Shanghai: Shanghai jiaoyu chubanshe, 2003), 110-152. "Nine Leaves" is the title of a collection of poems by nine poets who experimented with Modernist techniques in poetry during the 1940s. Chen was an important poet in this group and one of the editors of the poetry journals that published their poetry in the Nationalist-occupied Shanghai during the late 1940s before CCP took power in 1949. I will give more detailed information about Chen and this group later on.

Chen as “a profound source linking the 1930s through the 1980s and silent carrier of the undercurrent of the modernity of Chinese poetry.”⁴ Chen Li, editor of the collection, also emphasizes Chen Jingrong’s crucial position as an important link between the 1930s and the 1980s in her recent articles.⁵ With her first poem published in 1932⁶ and last poems written in 1987,⁷ Chen Jingrong is indeed one of the few Chinese poets whose works bear the imprint of a half century’s turbulent modern Chinese history.

To better understand Chen’s significance as a crucial link in the history of modern Chinese poetry, it is necessary to place Chen’s poetic career in the larger historical context. Growing up in the 1920s, Chen’s early new-style education afforded by her well-off family consisted of traditional Chinese literature and translated Western texts, as well as the new literature and ideals from the May Fourth generation. Yet, unlike her male counterparts whose families readily supported their elitist college education in China or abroad, Chen did not receive any formal higher education due to the opposition of her family. She managed to educate herself by sitting in college classes, reading on her own and joining literary circles in Beijing after running away from home in 1934. During the few years before the eight-year War of Resistance against the Japanese invasion (1937-1945), Chen immersed herself in the male literary circle in Beijing and actively engaged in poetic experiment and innovation like her male counterparts. From 1935 to 1937, Chen

⁴ Zhao Yiheng, “Shihang jian de zhuanji: xu *Chen Jingrong shiwen ji*” [Biography between the lines of poetry: preface to *The Collection of Chen Jingrong’s poetry and prose*] in Luo Jiaming and Chen Li, eds., *Chen Jingrong shiwen ji* [Poetry and prose of Chen Jingrong] (Shanghai: Fudan University Press, 2008), 5.

⁵ Chen Li, “Chen Jingrong yu Cao Baohua de Qinghua shiyuan: zaoqi yishi yu lixiang chuzou shijian” [The Qinghua poetry connection between Chen Jingrong and Cao Baohua: uncollected early poetry and the runaway incident], *Xin wenxue shiliao*, No. 3, 2008, 158-164; Chen Li, “Ren yu ziran de fenlie yu tongyi: Chen Jingrong shige ‘genxing’ jiedu” [Fission and Identity between Human and Nature—Interpretation of “Root Character” of Chen Jingrong’s Poetry], *Zhonghua wenhua luntan*, no. 4, 2009, 31-38.

⁶ Chen’s first poem “Huanmie” [Disillusion] was published in *Qinghua Weekly*, 1932, vol. 38, no. 4, see Luo Jiaming and Chen Li, eds., *Chen Jingrong shiwen ji* [Poetry and prose of Chen Jingrong], 300, 726.

⁷ Chen Li, “Chen Jingrong shengping ji chuanguo nianbiao” [A chronicle of Chen Jingrong’s life and literary writings], in *ibid.*, 736.

was the youngest and probably the only female among a group of poets and writers in Beijing who further refined modern Chinese vernacular poetry after their predecessors such as Guo Moruo and Wen Yiduo. Chen Jingrong actually sat in Wen Yiduo's lecture classes at Qinghua though he had turned from poetry to scholarship by that time.

Chen's first two marriages, both with more established older male poets (with Cao Baohua (1906-1978) from 1936-1939 and with Sha Lei (1912-1986) from 1940 to 1945) turned out to hinder rather than encourage to her literary pursuits. Upon the outbreak of the Anti-Japanese War in July 1937, unlike many modern Chinese intellectuals who left for the CCP controlled areas such as Yan'an, Chen first moved to Chongqing, a Nationalist-controlled city, with Cao Baohua, then moved to Lanzhou in northwest China with Sha Lei. Although Chen managed to publish a few essays in Chongqing, she was almost completely cut off from the literary community and did not publish anything in Lanzhou due to the isolation and heavy domestic duty as a full-time housewife with two baby daughters to take care of. In addition, Chen had to struggle to continue her poetic career against the dismissive attitude toward her identity as a poet from male literary authorities most close to her, namely, her poet husbands. Thus, the eight-year Anti-Japanese War for Chen meant both the fight for national survival against the Japanese army and the struggle for poetic autonomy against Chinese male literary authority. The latter left a more concrete imprint on her poetry and psychology.

In January 1945, about seven months before the end of the Anti-Japanese War, Chen finally left her second marriage in full pursuit of her literary career. She first settled down in Chongqing, and a year later moved to Shanghai, both big cities in the Nationalist-controlled areas. The four years Chen lived in Chongqing and Shanghai

proved to be the most productive period of her literary career. Her poetry, prose poetry, essays, and poetry translations frequently appeared in major newspapers and literary journals. She published two prose collections, two poetry collections, and a number of literary translations. From July 1947 to June 1948, Chen co-edited *Shi chuangzao* (Poetry creations). From June 1948 to November 1948, she co-edited *Zhongguo xinshi* (Chinese new poetry). It was in Shanghai that Chen firmly established herself in the literary field. Yet it was also in Shanghai that Chen's poetic prospects in the Mao era were completely destroyed because of her extremely different poetic style from the prevalent propagandistic poetry and her debates on different poetic approaches to reality with Leftist writers and critics supported by the underground CCP organization in Shanghai.

As You Youji notes, by the time the Anti-Japanese War was over, the poetic field, even in Nationalist-controlled areas such as Shanghai, was dominated by "People's Poetry," advocating revolutionary realism and optimism, catering to the taste of the masses.⁸ From December 1946 to February 1947, Chen's translation of Baudelaire and her so-called "Baudelairean" poetry was mercilessly attacked by Leftist critics as "ambiguous," "obscure," and "hard to understand."⁹ Criticizing Chen's "Baudelairean tendency," one critic singled out two major lines of poetry descended from the 1920s: the Romantic line represented by Guo Moruo who "maintained their Romantic enthusiasm, reevaluated the tendency of social changes, and turned to the prevailing trend of revolution" and the "aesthetic" line such as the New Crescent poets whose poetry "quickly lost its social foundation" during the eight-year Anti-Japanese War (1937-1945).

⁸ You Youji, *Jiuye shipai yanjiu* [Studies on the Nine Leaves Poetry School] (Fuzhou: Fujian jiaoyu chubanshe, 1997), 41-42.

⁹ For example, see Li Baifeng, "Cong bodelaier de shi tanqi" [Speaking of Baudelaire's poetry], in *Wenhui bao* (Shanghai), No. 153, January 30, 1947, and Tan Zihao, "Xiaomie xiesiteli de qingxu" [Eliminating the sentiment of hysteria], in *Wenhui bao* (Shanghai), No. 163, February 9, 1947.

According to this critic, Chen Jingrong belonged to the second line, a member of the petty bourgeoisie with close affinity to Baudelaire who “are sentimental toward the past, do not have confidence in the future, and do not have the strength to approach the new revolutionary forces.”¹⁰

This series of Leftist attacks on Chen’s “bourgeois” tendency was not an isolated event, but a prelude to the debates between Leftist writers and critics and literary intellectuals who insisted on a more complicated approach to poetry and reality. The latter were often called the “modernists” by literary scholars because their poetry employed poetic techniques from Western modernist poetry. In July 1947, Chen Jingrong co-edited *Poetry Creations* together with Zang Kejia, Cao Xinzhi and others. At the beginning, this poetry journal published both “People’s Poetry” by Leftist writers such as Zang Kejia and “modernist poetry” by Chen Jingrong and her fellow poets who became known as the “Nine Leaves poets” in the 1980s. As You Youji states, the journal was immediately under attack by Leftist critics who advocated “People’s Poetry” as soon as it came out because of the “modernist poetry” it published. In June 1948, because of the disagreement between the Leftists and the Modernists, Chen Jingrong and her “Nine Leaves” colleagues left *Poetry Creations* and started *Chinese New Poetry*. The new poetry journal was inevitably under fierce attack by Leftist critics.¹¹

During the Mao era from 1949 to 1978 when the revolutionary discourse became the official guiding principle for literature, Chen and many literary intellectuals who did not follow this principle were compelled to give up literary writing and switched

¹⁰ Dong Ping, “Tan bodelaier qingxiang” [On the Baudelairian tendency], in *Wenhui bao* (Shanghai), No. 168, February 14, 1947.

¹¹ You Youji, *Jiuye shipai yanjiu* [Studies on the Nine Leaves Poetry School] (Fuzhou: Fujian jiaoyu chubanshe, 1997), 42-52.

completely to literary translations, as the latter were regarded as harmless drudgery that did not carry the translator's own voice. Ironically, it was Chen's translations of Baudelaire, published in the July 1957 issue of *Yi wen (Translation)*¹² that served as an important source of inspiration for many young poets in their search for a new poetics during the Chinese Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). As Bei Dao recalled,

The nine poems she [Chen] translated appeared in various issues of *World Literature* in the 1950s and 60s, were gathered together by us as if fishing for a needle in the sea and copied down neatly in our notebooks. For the underground literary world in Beijing that originated at the end of the 1960s, the translation of those poems played a role of spiritual guidance that could never be overstated.¹³

What is more, these translations were collected in *Waiguo wenxue zuopin xuan* (Selections of foreign literature), a textbook for college liberal arts education published in 1979 and an important source of literary inspirations for experimental poetry in the 1980s. Interestingly, the new generation of poets was criticized by the official critics in the same terms used by Leftist critics to attack Chen Jingrong in the 1940s. Some of the critics were exactly the same ones who had attacked Chen earlier.¹⁴

The appellation of "silent carrier of the undercurrent" of modern Chinese poetry was particularly apt for Chen because of her unique experience as a female poet in a male-dominated field. Take for instance the debate about her translation of Baudelaire and her Baudelairean poetry. There was a striking discrepancy regarding a sense of history and reality between Chen and her attackers. For Chen, the eight years between

¹² The journal was renamed as *Shi jie wen xue* [World Literature] in 1959. Chen's translation of Baudelaire from *Translation* was collected in Zhou Xuliang, ed., *Waiguo wenxue zuopin xuan* [Selections of foreign literature] (Shanghai: Shanghai yiwén chubanshe, 1979), 87-98.

¹³ Bei Dao, "Li'erke: wo renchu fengbao er jidong ru dahai" [Rilke: I recognize the storm and agitate like the sea], in Bei Dao, *Shijian de meigui: Bei Dao suibi* [The rose of time: essays by Bei Dao] (Beijing: Zhongguo wenshi chubanshe, 2005), 86.

¹⁴ For example, Li Baifeng was among those who both attacked Chen in 1947 and the "Obscure poets" in the 1980s.

1937 and 1945 meant both the national history of the Anti-Japanese War and her personal history of struggling for literary freedom against the stifling force of her male literary colleague/lover. Chen's insight into the discrepancy between the theoretical recognition of gender equality and the actual situation of Chinese women enabled her to gain sharp insights into the complexities of war-time reality, often absent from the experience of and difficult to understand for her male Leftist counterparts. Accusing Chen as one of the "decadent Bourgeoisie /intellectuals" removed from the reality of workers' and peasants' revolution, Chen's Leftist critics invariably came from a class framework. Their reading experience of Chen's poetry as "ambiguous," "obscure," and "hard to understand"¹⁵ was often due to the lack of a gender consciousness and failure to grasp the often gendered perspectives and profound irony embedded in Chen's poetics. Both Li Baifeng and Tan Zihao, two of Chen's harshest critics who complained about the obscurity of Chen's poetry, assumed Chen was a man and criticized "him" as a follower of Baudelaire.¹⁶ A milder critic affirmed that "*He* [emphasis mine] could indeed quite epitomize the mood and experience of intellectuals in the new era," but is "still quite distanced from the surging time and complex reality."¹⁷ Even her defenders such as Tang Shi (1920- 2005), Chen's colleague and close friend, highlighted a masculine quality in her poem, "a female poet, yet tunes of masculine complexity and urgency often exude from her

¹⁵ For example, see Li Baifeng, "Cong bodelaier de shi tanqi" [Speaking of Baudelaire's poetry], in *Wenhui bao* (Shanghai), No. 153, January 30, 1947, and Tan Zihao, "Xiaomie xiesiteli de qingxu" [Eliminating the sentiment of hysteria], in *Wenhui bao* (Shanghai), No. 163, February 9, 1947.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Tie Ma, "Lüelun Chen Jingrong de shi – dule ta zhi yige mosheng duzhe de xin yihou de ganxiang" [A brief note on Chen Jingrong's poetry – thoughts after reading his letter to an unfamiliar reader], in *Wenhui bao* (Shanghai), December 30, 1946, see Wang Shengsi, ed., "*Jiuye shiren*" *pinglun ziliao xuan* [selected critical resources on the "Nine Leaves Poets"] (Shanghai: Huadong shifan daxue chubanshe, 1995), 222-223.

poetry.”¹⁸ The gender politics surrounding the reading of Chen’s poetry and her “Baudelairian tendency” compel us to ask: did Chen’s “Baudelairian” poetry in the late 1940s sound like a man’s? If yes, to what ear and according to what criteria? Did the literary field, whether literary writing or translation, share the common assumption that every member was a man? Was “masculine” a more desirable quality for the modernist? Why did Chen’s distinctly gendered poetics seem to have fallen on the deaf ears of both her foes and friends?¹⁹

In this chapter, drawing on uncollected essays in newspapers, Chen’s newly excavated works and biographical information from recent scholarship, I trace Chen’s poetic career from her teenage years in the early 1930s to the late 1950s and tease out the complicated dynamics among gender, politics and literature. I demonstrate how Chen’s painful struggle for her own literary career not only enabled her to gain acute insights into the discrepancy between modern Chinese male intellectuals’ discursive promotion of gender equality and their actual practice of traditional patriarchal values in reality, but also discrepancies between other promoted discourses and reality, which resulted in a brilliant poetics of irony.

Female Apprentice and Male Masters

“Disillusion,” Chen’s first published poem written at the age of fifteen, is not only curiously prophetic of her life and literary pursuits from 1932 to 1945, but showcases her

¹⁸ Tang Shi, “Yansu de xingchenmen” [Solemn stars], in *Shi chuangzao* [Poetic creations], No. 12, 1948, see *ibid.*, 46.

¹⁹ Zhang Songjian has a detailed account of this debate and uncovered many of the articles buried in newspaper archives. Yet he does not call attention to this gender issue. See Zhang Songjian, *Xiandai shi de zaichufa: Zhongguo sishi niandai xiandai zhuyi shichao xintan* [The re-departure of modern poetry: new explorations in the modernist poetic trends in the 1940s China] (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2009), 84-88.

early aspirations for May Fourth ideals such as the absolute freedom of a Romantic individual, and one critical concern that would set her apart from her male counterparts – the suffering woman. Let us look at the poem itself:

在深夜里我默默独坐，对着幽暗的灯光
俯首思量，-- 我仿佛住在翡翠似的
竹林中，接受大自然伟大的赐予：破晓时
我便从被中跃起，听鸟雀的清歌，看溪流的
澄清，并且拾取青草上的露泉当作食品。

...

...这时我便想
这里决不有尘世的喧哗，在这里
可以让我不安定的灵魂，自由地在真理的清泉中
沐浴。-- 但我正当我这样陶醉，这样迷离，
隔壁却传来了母亲痛苦的呻吟，摘断了
我不可思议的幻想。我只得对着孤灯，俯首沉思，
叹息我从未翻起过一朵浪花的平凡的生命。

Late at night I sit alone, silently, head lowered in thought
Toward the dim light, -- as though I am living in a jade-green
Bamboo grove, receiving the great gifts of Nature: at daybreak
I jump out of bed, listen to the birds' pure songs, admire the clarity
Of the stream, and for food I gather spring dew atop the green grass.

...

..At this moment I think
Here the din of the dusty world definitely do not exist, here
My restless soul is allowed to bathe freely in the clear spring of
Truth. -- yet just when I am so enchanted, so bewitched,
The pained groans of my mother come from next door, cutting short
My incredible fantasy. I have no choice but to face the solitary light, head lowered
in deep thought,
And let out a sigh about my ordinary rippleless life.

The poem features a sharp contrast between fantasy and reality. The lion's share of the poem, the lines between the dashes, seems to offer an elaborate rendering of the Romantic ideal laid out by early May Fourth intellectuals such as Guo Moruo in the 1910s and 1920s: the solitary poetic soul of the Romantic individual in absolute free pursuit of Truth, which is symbolized by affinity to Nature and isolation from "the

hubbub of the dusty world.” However, while employing terms such as the solitary poetic soul, Nature, and Truth (all neologisms adopted from European Romanticism by early May Fourth intellectuals whose works Chen read extensively during her junior high school years),²⁰ the speaker in this poem does not seek to claim a privileged position higher than Nature as the speaker in Guo’s poetry does; rather the speaker’s complete and joyful immersion in Nature and isolation from the “the hubbub of the dusty world” is more akin to the Daoist harmony between human and nature, a rebellious gesture against the corruptions in society.²¹

Further, similar to Guo Moruo’s well-known “Night Song of a ‘Misanthrope,’”²² the speaker’s fantasy for absolute spiritual freedom in Chen’s poem is in violent conflict with harsh reality. Yet, unlike the poetic speaker in Guo’s poem, who leaves the tormenting reality behind and opts to embrace the fantasy of complete individual freedom, the speaker in Chen’s poem is pulled out of that fantasy by the reality of the “painful groans of my mother,” similar to Wen Yiduo’s disillusion with the Romantic ideal in the “dusty world” of Chicago.²³ With the poem ending on the anti-climax of a woman’s suffering, this poem bears much closer affinity to Wen Yiduo’s painful yet rewarding contemplations of the complexities of reality than Guo’s creation of Romantic fantasies.

While Guo wove one idealist fantasy of individual freedom after another by erasing from

²⁰ As Chen recalls, she had the opportunity to read extensively prose works by early May Fourth writers and poetry such as Guo Moruo’s *The Goddesses*, poetic works by Bing Xin (1900 - 1999) and Wen Yiduo during her junior high school years. see Chen Jingrong, “Xu” [Preface] in Chen Jingrong, *Chen Jingrong xuanji* [The Selected works of Chen Jingrong] (Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1983), 1-2.

²¹ Chen did start reading and reciting classical Chinese poetry extensively from a very tender age. From age 5, Chen’s grandfather started to teach her to read and recite classical Chinese poetry. see Chen Jingrong, “Xu” [Preface] in Chen Jingrong, *Chen Jingrong xuanji* [The Selected works of Chen Jingrong], 1.

²² See Chapter One for detailed analysis of the poem.

²³ See Chapter Two for detailed analysis of Wen’s disillusion and transformation.

his poetic realm the complexities of his marriages, arranged or new-style, Chen juxtaposed that fantasy and the suffering woman at the start of her poetic career.

The physical pain of “my mother” in the poem is but a synecdoche of the tragic fate of Chen’s mother. Prevented from new-style education despite her dearest wish and confined to the narrow domestic life after marriage, the resulting mental pain accompanied Chen’s mother for life. That was why she firmly supported Chen Jingrong in her new-style education.²⁴ The poor health she suffered was caused at least partly by her mental distress. Chen’s mother’s painful experience would impel Chen to run away from her family to pursue the May Fourth ideals and escape the confined fate of her mother. And the tension between the restrictions on women and Chen’s pursuit of individual freedom, independent career and social position would remain a constant theme in both her personal life and poetics.

Chen’s deep commitment to the early May Fourth ideal of women’s liberation did not result from witnessing her mother’s experience alone. The elitist new-style education Chen received at the Leshan Girl’s School in Leshan, a small city in Sichuan, not only offered her the opportunity to read works by early May Fourth writers and poets, but imbued her with “ideals of gender equality as well the ambition and confidence in developing a great career in society.”²⁵ For instance, the school song clearly instills the

²⁴ Chen Li, “Chen Jingrong shengping ji chuanguo nianbiao” [A chronicle of Chen Jingrong’s life and literary writings], in Luo Jiaming and Chen Li, eds., *Chen Jingrong shiwen ji* [Poetry and prose of Chen Jingrong], 725.

²⁵ Chen Li, “Ren yu ziran de fenlie yu tongyi -- Chen Jingrong shige ‘genxing’ jiedu” [Fission and Identity between Human and Nature -- Interpretation of “Root Character” of Chen Jingrong’s Poetry], *Zhonghua wenhua luntan*, no. 4, 2009.

girls with such aspirations, “equal rights between men and women, education first, career follows...”²⁶

Chen never gave up these ideals, not even when the dominant discourse among mainstream intellectuals shifted from individual liberation and women’s emancipation to the revolution of the masses, i.e., workers and peasants, in the late 1940s. Her pursuit of a literary career in the male-dominated field was always complicated by and accompanied by her constant effort as a woman to shake off the shackles of the patriarchal authority. Ironically, the oppressive patriarch was often the fellow modern male poet and lover who was pursuing the same literary career as Chen and who emancipated Chen from a patriarchal power in the first place. The tension between the May Fourth ideal of individual freedom and the reality of Chinese women would eventually lead to Chen’s reevaluation of those ideals and the development of a poetics of irony in the late 1940s.

In fact, in May 1932, encouraged by Cao Baohua (1906-1978), a rising young poet of the New Crescent School²⁷ and Qinghua graduate who taught Chen English at her junior high school,²⁸ Chen attempted to run away from home for the first time with Cao, but was prevented by her father. Instead of Chen, Cao brought “Disillusion,” the poem quoted above, to Beijing and published it in *Qinghua Weekly*, the student-run literary journal at Qinghua which Wen Yiduo contributed to as a student and later edited. Early in 1934, Cao got in touch with Chen again through friends, frequently exchanged

²⁶ *Leshan shi zhongqu jiaoyu zhi* (Leshan: Leshanshi zhongqu difangzhi bianxie weiyuanhui, 1990), 187, see *ibid.*

²⁷ Cao published his first poetry collection *Ji shihun* [To the poetic soul] in December 1930, then *Ling yan* [The fire of soul]. Wen Yiduo, Xu Zhimo and Zhu Xiang all thought highly of his poetry. See Fang Xide, “Wen Yiduo, Xu Zhimo, Zhu Xiang zhi Cao Baohua de san feng xin” [Three letters to Cao Baohua by Wen Yiduo, Xu Zhimo, and Zhu Xiang], *Beijing daxue xueba*, no. 4 (1983), 69-73.

²⁸ According to Shiu-Pang E. Almborg, Chen met Cao Baohua for the first time when he became her English teacher at the Girl’s School in Leshan, Chen’s hometown, a small town in Sichuan province, in 1930. See “A Chronological Table of the Life and Work of Chen Jingrong up to 1987,” in Shiu-Pang E. Almborg, “The Poetry of Chen Jingrong: a Modern Chinese Woman Poet,” 327.

correspondence with her, encouraged her to pursue college education in Beijing and offered to help her financially.²⁹ At the end of 1934, Chen finally ran away from home with the money sent by Cao and broke with her family,³⁰ including her beloved mother and the grandfather who supported her new-style education.³¹

Up to this point, the relationship between Chen Jingrong and Cao Baohua resembled that between Satō Tomiko and Guo Moruo before they moved in together. Like Satō, Chen was a modern new woman with new-style education and aspirations for a woman's social role rather than the domestic role assigned to her by tradition. Similar to Guo, Cao was a modern man who showed support for the modern woman's aspirations by encouraging her to escape the shackles of her traditional family and join him in the pursuit of a modern career. Yet, unlike Satō who got trapped in the domestic roles of a wife and mother in her new-style common-law marriage with Guo and had to give up her own pursuit of a modern career, Chen did not move in with Cao and enter a common-law marriage with him immediately after arriving in Beijing. Instead, she lived in various dorms and was able to launch her literary career during the first one and a half years there, with Cao's help.

Through Cao Baohua, Chen joined the literary circle surrounding *Wenxue jikan* (*Literature Quarterly*) (1934-1935) and *Shuixing* (*Mercury*) (1934-1935) in Beijing, literary journals mainly edited by Jin Yi (1909-1959), Ba Jin (1904-2005), Zheng

²⁹ Chen Li, "Chen Jingrong yu Cao Baohua de Qinghua shiyuan: zaoqi yishi yu lixiang chuzou shijian" [The Qinghua poetry connection between Chen Jingrong and Cao Baohua: uncollected early poetry and the runaway incident], *Xin wenxue shiliao*, No. 3, 2008.

³⁰ Chen Li, "Chen Jingrong shengping ji chuanguo nianbiao" [A chronicle of Chen Jingrong's life and literary writing] in Luo Jiaming and Chen Li, eds., *Chen Jingrong shiwen ji* [Poetry and prose of Chen Jingrong], 726-727.

³¹ These two figures would recur constantly in her poems.

Zhenduo (1898-1958) and Bian Zhilin (1910-2000),³² all major male modern Chinese writers or poets. Chen Jingrong's literary network was mostly developed during this period. In her 1947 essay "Huai 'Shuixing'" (In memory of *Mercury*), Chen recalled the editors and writers she was most familiar with,³³ many of whom published Chen's works in the journals and newspapers they edited and helped Chen in her life and literary career in Beijing and later on.³⁴ Chen soon started to publish poetry and prose in literary journals edited by Cao Baohua. Her works also appeared in *Literature Quarterly* and main newspapers. From May 1935 to September 1936, Chen published twelve poems and five prose pieces before she reached the age of twenty.³⁵ There is no doubt that Cao Baohua played a critical role in Chen's initiation into her literary career. Thanks to Cao, Chen was able to escape her mother's fate of confinement in an arranged marriage³⁶ and was well on her way toward realizing the ideals of personal freedom and accomplishment.

However, things started to change after the couple moved in together in the fall of 1936. During the year they lived together as common-law husband and wife from September 1936 to July 1937, Chen did not have a single piece published. Little is known about what happened during that time. In the most recent and elaborate chronology of

³²For more information on the journal of *Mercury*, see Bian Zhilin, "Xinghui weimang yi shuixing" [Recalling *Mercury* in blurry stars and water], *Dushu [Reading]*, No. 10, 1983, 68-79; also see the editor's note on the inner cover of *Mercury* (Beiping: Wenhua shuju, 1935), vol. 1.

³³Chen Jingrong, "Huai 'Shuixing'" [In memory of *Mercury*], in supplement to *Wenyi chunqiu*, vol. 1. no. 2, February 1927, see Luo Jiaming and Chen Li, eds., *Chen Jingrong shiwen ji* [Poetry and prose of Chen Jingrong], 705-706.

³⁴He Qifang and Ba Jin for example.

³⁵Chen Li, "Chen Jingrong shengping ji chuanguo nianbiao" [A chronicle of Chen Jingrong's life and literary writing] in Luo Jiaming and Chen Li, eds., *Chen Jingrong shiwen ji* [Poetry and prose of Chen Jingrong], 727-728.

³⁶As Chen recalled, the main reason for her running away from home was that her family had been unwilling to let girls go to school and she could be forced to drop out of school at any time. Chen Jingrong's letter dated December 16, 1983 in *Leshan shizhi ziliao*, No. 2, 1983, see Chen Li, "Chen Jingrong yu Cao Baohua de Qinghua shiyuan: zaoqi yishi yu lixiang chuzou shijian" [The Qinghua poetry connection between Chen Jingrong and Cao Baohua: uncollected early poetry and the runaway incident], *Xin wenxue shiliao*, No. 3, 2008.

Chen's life and literary writings, this period of time is briefly described thus: "from fall 1936 to summer 1937, [Chen] regularly visited a female French teacher at home to study French and started to live together with Cao Baohua."³⁷ Shiu-Pang Almberg learned through interviews with Chen in the 1980s that "to earn her living, she [Chen] copied manuscripts for Cao Baohua who was translating Poe and Conrad" in 1935-1937.³⁸ When Chen broke her long silence and started writing again after they escaped to Chengdu upon the outbreak of the Anti-Japanese War in July 1937, the speaker in Chen's poems is frequently depicted as an imprisoned figure. Chen and Cao broke up in the spring of 1939. Both of them remained silent about their life together and the reasons for the breakup. Scholars who talked with Chen personally only learned that the reason was the deepening disagreement between them.³⁹ In the hope of glimpsing Chen's thoughts at the time, I want to focus on Chen's "Tianshi zhiqiu" (The Angel Prisoner), a prose poem dated fall 1937 in Chengdu, one of the first pieces Chen wrote after the long silence.

The piece opens with an elaborate depiction of an imprisoned bird:

我的翅膀忧伤地垂折着，羽毛间抖索着零落的记忆。我的屋角被愁叹的云雾幻成灰色的了；灰色的，灰色的时光像一条细弱的蠕虫，迟缓地从铁窗上爬过。⁴⁰

My wings hang folded in sadness, withered memories shivering between the plumes. The corner of my room has been transmuted into gray by doleful clouds; gray, gray times are like a slim and feeble worm, crawling slowly pass the iron window.

The rest of the piece is structured around the contrast between the speaker's "memories" of dancing freely and joyously together with members of her female community and the

³⁷ Chen Li, "Chen Jingrong shengping ji chuanguo nianbiao" [A chronicle of Chen Jingrong's life and literary writing] in Luo Jiaming and Chen Li, eds., *Chen Jingrong shiwen ji* [Poetry and prose of Chen Jingrong], 728.

³⁸ Shiu-Pang E. Almberg, "The Poetry of Chen Jingrong: a Modern Chinese Woman Poet," 5, 327.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 6; my interview with Zhao Yiheng.

⁴⁰ Chen Jingrong, *Xingyu ji* [Star rain] (Shanghai: Wenhua shenghuo chubanshe, 1946), 50.

present reality of her lonely imprisonment. Tropes of Nature such as the sun, the moon, the stars, the wind and water, are all figured as the speaker's female friends and companions. Following several passages of elaborate descriptions of their joyous memories, the speaker comes back to highlight the warm emotional ties between her community and herself, and the chilling relationship between her and her captor:

她们念我的，我底那些朋伴们 – 太阳会说怎么久不听见我底笑声了，月亮会含着一脸愁思，时常问起我，星子们会闪着欲泪的眼，风幽幽叹息，水喃喃怨诉...可知我每天在铁窗下，以憔悴的手指抚弄着欲折的翅膀，而自伤这无故的陷落吗？

隔壁有一阵抖动铁链的声音—

我陷落了，陷落而且迷失了！什么时候我才得回去呢，回到我底往日，我底欢乐？记得是在一次银色舞蹈中，我不知想起什么，失足滑了一跤，也不知跌落在什么地方，就这样被囚了起来。

铁窗下的日子像是走一步退一步的，且走且不完呢。当我垂手自伤的时候，窗外偶尔仿佛浮动着可怕的丑恶的脸，嘴唇露出冷嘲的笑，我听见吃吃的怪声，在墙角，在地下，在我梦中：“陷落的天使！”⁴¹

They [in Chinese, “they” here is gendered female] missed me, my friends and companions – the sun would say, how come I have not heard your laughter for so long, the moon would often ask about me, her face full of melancholy. Stars would glisten with teary eyes, the wind would sigh faintly, the water mutter her complaints...yet do they know I am under the iron window every day, stroking my near snapping wings with pallid fingers and grieving alone over this unexplained fall?

From next door comes the sound of someone giggling iron chains –

I have fallen, fallen and ended up lost! When could I go back, go back to my past, my joy? I remember it was during a silvery dance that my mind wandered and I fell, not knowing where I have fallen, but I was thus imprisoned.

Days under the iron window are as if stepping forward and then back, endless walking. When I lower my head in grief, once in a while there seems to be a horrifying and hideous face floating outside the window, the corners of its mouth showing a jeering smile. I hear peals of eerie laughter, in the corners of the room, in the underground, in my dreams: “Fallen angel!”

⁴¹ Ibid., 52-53.

Written shortly after the full-scale Japanese invasion of China in July 1937, the speaker's loss of freedom and her hideous captor could be easily interpreted as symbolizing China and the Japanese invaders. It is possible that Chen used the figure of fallen and imprisoned angel to register the general mental state of Chinese intellectuals at the start of this horrifying war. Yet, this framework of national revolution obscures Chen's distinctly gendered poetics. In the preface to *Xingyu ji* (Star rain, 1946), a collection of prose and prose poems she wrote before 1945, Chen's periodization of her works did not follow the national history of foreign invasion and anti-invasion; instead she marked the two periods of her literary writings with her relationships with men. It is evident that Chen's personal history as a woman striving for a literary career figures no less prominently in her literary writings than the national history of revolution:

Most pieces in part one [where "The Angel Prisoner" was collected] are oppressed and stifled voices from a shut-in life; part two [pieces written right after leaving her second relationship] are relatively free and hearty songs from a relatively open life.⁴²

As I mentioned earlier, Chen never openly remarked on her common-law marriage with Cao; her comments about "a shut-in life" here and the "oppressive domestic life" she mentioned in her essay situating her "Baudelairian" poetry⁴³ were both in the immediate context of her walking out of her marriage with Sha Lei. Yet Chen never commented on her common-law marriage with Cao as constructive to her literary career either. Including "The Angel Prisoner" in a section where "most pieces" were "oppressed and stifled voices from a shut-in life" seems to be a disguised comment on her marriage with Cao.

⁴² Chen, "Preface," *ibid.*, i-ii.

⁴³ Chen Jingrong, "Tan Wode shi he yishi" [On my poetry and poetry translation], "Bihui," *Wenhui bao*, No. 161, February 7, 1947.

Let us go back to “The Angel Prisoner.” The main conflict in the piece is between the fallen angel and the devil captor. It should be noted that, similar to many modern Chinese literary works, these biblical allusions in Chen’s prose poem no longer carry their religious connotations. Rather, they are transformed into literary tropes and infused with new symbolic connotations. The bird in captivity, the wounded wings, the jeering laughter of the captor, all seem to evoke Baudelaire’s “The Albatross” where the poet is an elegant bird figure belonging to heaven, but captured and ridiculed by the worldly people. Chen might have read Chinese translations of Baudelaire or critical works discussing his poetry since Chinese intellectuals had started to introduce Baudelaire into China in 1919. And the literary circle Chen was involved in Beijing before 1937 was actively introducing and experimenting with Western modernist literature and theory. Or she might have learned about Baudelaire from her French teacher during her years in Beijing. Or Chen might have adopted these tropes from her new-style education in a primary school established by French missionaries.⁴⁴ Chen never mentioned specifically reading Baudelaire before 1937, yet she did mention that she had read French poetry extensively in her earlier years before translating Baudelaire and other modern French poets from French to Chinese in 1946.⁴⁵ Wherever Chen obtained the inspiration for these tropes, one thing is clear: She did not simply replicate the original connotations of these tropes; rather, she used them as building blocks for her own poetic constructions.

⁴⁴ Chen’s primary school education is in a girl’s school established by French missionaries. See Chen Li, “Chen Jingrong shengping ji chuanguo nianbiao” [A chronicle of Chen Jingrong’s life and literary writing] in Luo Jiaming and Chen Li, eds., *Chen Jingrong shiwen ji* [Poetry and prose of Chen Jingrong], 725-726; also see Chen Li, “Ren yu ziran de fenlie yu tongyi: Chen Jingrong shige ‘genxing’ jiedu” [Fission and Identity between Human and Nature—Interpretation of “Root Character” of Chen Jingrong’s Poetry], *Zhonghua wenhua luntan*, no. 4, 2009.

⁴⁵ Chen Jingrong, “Tiji” [Preface], in Chen Jingrong, trans., Charles Baudelaire, Rainer Maria Rilke, *Tuxiang yu huaduo* [Images and flowers] (Changsha: Hunan renmin chubanshe, 1984), 2-3.

The trope of angel in the piece, rather than a messenger for God, serves as a symbol for freedom, the freedom to fly freely in the open and enjoy the company of a female community of kindred spirits. The gender of the angel is explicitly female. The joyous and free dancing within a female community evokes Chen's pleasant past of free literary expression and exchange as well as the strong bond she shared with her female literary community in the Leshan Girls' School. As Li Simin, Chen's friend and classmate at the time, recalled, she, Chen and two other girls were very close. They enjoyed spending time together because of their shared love for literature. They used to go on short trips together to a nearby village on Sundays.⁴⁶ The devil, rather than an agent of temptation, is the antithesis to the female community of kindred spirits. While the female community offers freedom of self-expression, the imprisonment the devilish figure imposes implied deprivation of that freedom; while the female community offers emotional bonding and support, the devilish figure haunts the speaker with sarcasm and mockery with "a jeering smile" and the emphatic "Fallen angel!" The devil ridicules not only the fallen state of the speaker but her self-identification as an angel. If Chen uses the trope of angel to symbolize the poet (as Baudelaire did), is the devil figure being sarcastic of her self-identification as a poet? Before pursuing this question further, I want to look at Chen's second relationship.

After breaking up with Cao, Chen soon fell in love with Sha Lei, another established poet and writer, five years older than Chen who had published his first poetry

⁴⁶ Chen Li's interview with Li Simin in January 2005. See Chen Li, "Chen Jingrong yu Cao Baohua de Qinghua shiyuan: zaoqi yishi yu lixiang chuzou shijian" [The Qinghua poetry connection between Chen Jingrong and Cao Baohua: uncollected early poetry and the runaway incident], *Xin wenxue shiliao*, No. 3, 2008, 160.

collection in 1933.⁴⁷ In the fall of 1940, they moved to Sha's hometown Lanzhou, a city on the highlands in northwest China, far from the war zone. In the four years between fall 1940 to January 1945, Chen lived the life of a housewife and gave birth consecutively to two daughters.⁴⁸ Once again, the trajectory of Chen's life resembled that of Satō Tomiko, this time, in terms of the complete transformation from a new woman aspiring to a modern career to a full-time housewife trapped in the domestic roles she had tried to run away from. Unlike Satō though, Chen did not abandon her ideals for a literary career because of the heavy burden of family responsibilities. She continued to write poetry. In January 1945, she finally left her marriage and resumed her pursuit of a literary career. "Qishi zhi lian" ("The Knight's Love"), written on June 1, 1944, reveals deeper reasons for Chen's flight than she openly admitted. Similar to "The Angel Prisoner," the poem depicts a female bird figure deprived of the freedom to fly and sing, and the force that caused this was once again violent language. This time, the poet used the "knight," another Western trope to represent the oppressor. The whole poem reads:

“你用什么利箭
射落了那高飞的鸟—
说呵，我的骑士？”

“With what sharp arrow have you
shot down the high-flying bird-
tell me, my knight?”

“用我的鲜红的心，
涂上一些更红的谎语。”

“with my bright red heart
painted with redder lies.”

“啊，我的骑士，
你又用什么良药
重振那带血的羽毛？”

“Oh, my knight,
and with what good medicine have you
revived the blood-stained feathers?”

“用了一些适当的谴责，
和及时的暴戾。”

“with some fitting denunciation,
and timely tyranny.”

⁴⁷ Sha Lei, *Xintiao jinxingqu* [March of the heart beat] (Shanghai: Kaiming shudian, 1933).

⁴⁸ Chen Li, "Chen Jingrong shengping ji chuanguo nianbiao" [A chronicle of Chen Jingrong's life and literary writings], in Luo Jiaming and Chen Li, eds., *Chen Jingrong shiwen ji* [Poetry and prose of Chen Jingrong], 728-729.

“她可还能快乐地高飞，
我的骑士？她可依旧
在四月的阳光下歌唱？”

“不呵，她再不高飞也不能歌唱，
只在我的园中默默地低翔。”

“那么，请你回到你的园中，
让我在这儿独自瞭望，
看白云自在地飘航……”⁴⁹
--于兰州，六，一，一九四四

“But can she still fly happy and high,
my knight? Does she still
sing in the April sun?”

“Oh, no, no longer does she fly high nor can she
sing,
she only hovers in my yard, silent and low.”

“Then go back to your yard, please,
leave me here alone to look far,
watch white clouds sailing free.”

--Lanzhou, June 1, 1944⁵⁰

This poem is more explicit than “The Angel Prisoner” in its depiction of the relationship between the speaker and her oppressor. The knight, like the devil, is implicitly male. This time, the reason for the bird’s fall is the knight’s lies of love. And the loss of her voice to sing and power to fly is due to “fitting denunciation, / and timely tyranny.” Note the sense of irony in Chen’s use of oxymoron. This sense of irony, originating from the acute insights gained from the painful disillusion in the discourse of love, would lead to a poetics of irony that made Chen’s male contemporaries, even her supporters, feel ill at ease. The poem ends with her resolute request for the knight to return to his territory and leave her alone with the ideal of flying; the speaker has obviously outgrown the powerless and plaintive prisoner in the “The Angel Prisoner” and is poised to reclaim her freedom.

In January 1945, Chen finally left her second relationship and her two baby daughters behind and started her new life. From then to the summer of 1946, Chen

⁴⁹ Chen Jingrong, *Yingying ji* [Overflow] (Shanghai: Wenhua shenghuo chubanshe, 1948), 85-87.

⁵⁰ Adapted from Shiu-Pang Almberg’s translation, see Shiu-Pang E. Almberg, “The Poetry of Chen Jingrong: a Modern Chinese Woman Poet,” 64.

experienced one of the most productive periods of her literary career.⁵¹ The trope of a bird still frequently appears in her poetry, only, rather than being imprisoned and silenced, it is often flying far and high. For instance, “Feiniao” (Flying Birds), the first poem Chen wrote after settling down in the suburb of Chongqing in April 1945, a mountain city close to her hometown, reads like a sequel to “The Knight’s Love”:

负驮着太阳，
负驮着云彩
负驮着风……

Carrying the sun,
carrying the clouds
carrying the winds ...

你们的翅膀
因此而更轻盈；
当你们轻盈的翔舞，
大地也记不起它的重负。

Your wings
become all the more light because of this;
when you glide, light and graceful,
even the earth forgets its onerous burden.

你们带来心灵的春天，
在我寂寥的窗上
横一幅初霁的蓝天。

You bring Spring to the heart,
and on my lonesome window
unfurl a scroll of blue sky after rain.

我从疲乏的肩上
卸下艰难的负荷：
屈辱，苦役，
和几个囚狱的寒冬……

From tired shoulders
I unload the arduous burden:
humiliation, hard labor,
and several imprisoned cold winters ...

将这一切完全覆盖吧，
用你们快乐的鸣唱—
随着你们的歌声
攀上你们轻盈的翅膀，
我的生命也仿佛化成云彩，
在高空里无忧地飞翔。
--四月二十六晨重庆盘溪⁵²

Cover up all this,
with your happy singing—
following your songs
riding on your light wings,
my life seems too to have transformed into
clouds,
flying carefree and high in the sky.
--Panxi, Chongqing, morning of 26, April
1945⁵³

⁵¹ Chen Li, “Chen Jingrong shengping ji chuanguo nianbiao” [A chronicle of Chen Jingrong’s life and literary writings], in Luo Jiaming and Chen Li, eds., *Chen Jingrong shiwen ji* [Poetry and prose of Chen Jingrong], 729.

⁵² Chen Jingrong, *Yingying ji* [Overflow], 107-109.

⁵³ Adapted from Shiu-Pang E. Almborg’s translation. See Shiu-Pang E. Almborg, *The Poetry of Chen Jingrong: a Modern Chinese Woman Poet*, 72.

In this poem, “humiliation” echoes the “denunciation” and “tyranny” in “The Knight’s Love,” “several imprisoned cold winters” echoes the image of the confined bird hovering silent and low in the yard, “hard labor” calls to mind Chen’s arduous responsibilities of housework with two baby daughters while Sha Lei was working in another city.⁵⁴ Yet, while “The Knight’s Love” ends with the speaker watching “white clouds sailing free,” this poem ends with the speaker “transformed into clouds, / flying carefree and high in the sky.” On the morning of July 9, 1946, shortly after moving to Shanghai, Chen thus recalled the period of her life in the suburb of Chongqing:

I remember the days when I just returned from the northern frontier and chose to live in the suburb of the mountain city. Every morning I would get up at the sound of a bugle from a school nearby and welcome a quiet and pleasant day. In those days, having shaken off my weathered memories, my heart was as if on wings, flying tirelessly all day.⁵⁵

Thus, in her poetry and biographical writings alike, the trope of bird is closely related to Chen’s struggle for a poetic voice against the derisively negative attitude of a male speaker. On the evening of October 23, 1945, nearly a year after leaving her “oppressive domestic life” and starting a new life, Chen wrote the poem “Xiao ernü de aiyuan liuqu ba” (Flow off, the complaints of young boys and girls). Placed at the end of *Yingying ji* (Overflow, 1948), a selection of Chen’s early poems from 1935 to 1945, Chen seems to use this poem to confront and bid formal farewell to her previous life and poetics. In this poem, the trope of the poetic bird appears again; the content and impact of previously invoked issues of violent language against her literary pursuit, to be specific, her identity as a poet, are explicitly laid out. The following is an excerpt from the poem:

⁵⁴ As Chen recalled, from 1940 to early 1945, she lived an isolated life for nearly five years in the northwestern highlands far from the war, buried in housework everyday and not writing much. See Chen Jingrong, “Tiji” [Preface], Chen Jingrong, *Yuanfan ji* [Distant sail] (Guangzhou: Huacheng chubanshe, 1984), 2.

⁵⁵ Chen Jingrong, “Hao jiao” [Bugle] in Chen Jingrong, *Yuanfan ji* [Distant sail], 34.

那些时候我长久地
被人当作孩子
被人当作孩子而且漠视
漠视我的情感，我的思想，
也漠视我的诗—
而你说：“他们不相信
你自己写诗。”

那些时候我长久地
将自己关闭在
暗淡的心的囚牢里，
我不习惯坦白地谈话，
不习惯自由的行走，
就是哭泣，也不愿
让人知道什么原因。

...
突破了一个噩梦
又坠入另一个；
走出了这些梦境
我象在清晨醒来，
惊异地看到明亮的阳光，
在阳光下拍一拍
我满载风霜的翅膀。⁵⁶

At that time I was perpetually
treated like a child
treated like a child and with indifference,
indifferent to my emotions, my thoughts,
and indifferent to my poetry –
yet you say: “they don’t believe
you yourself write poetry.”

At that time I perpetually
shut myself in
the dim prison of my heart,
I am not used to speaking frankly,
nor used to walking freely,
even when weeping, I am unwilling
to let people know for what reason.

...
Breaking out of one nightmare,
and falling into another;
walking out of these dreams,
as if waking up in the morning,
I see in surprise the bright sunlight,
in the sunlight I flap
my wind-and-frost laden wings.

The first two lines of the first stanza quoted above play on the reader’s common sense association. The seemingly innocent simile of comparing the speaker to a child and the absence of punctuation marks in those lines allow the reader to fill in the blanks for a moment before reading on: if the speaker was treated like a child, she must have been loved and cared for. Yet, contrary to the common sense association, the speaker repeats that simile and swerves it in a completely different direction: she is treated like a child in the sense that the child is naïve and therefore what the child thinks, feels and writes do not matter and should be disregarded. And it is assumed that the child can not write

⁵⁶ Chen Jingrong, *Yingying ji* [Overflow], 186-188.

poetry. There is no specific references as to who the “you” and the “they” are. The only information given is that, in the Chinese version of the poem, “they” is masculine.

The second stanza quoted above calls to mind Chen’s repeated use of the trope of imprisonment in poems such as “The Angel Prisoner” and “The Knight’s Love.” In all these poems, the speaker’s identity as a poet was jeered at, denounced or negated by an implicitly male speaker. As is discussed earlier, Chen never talked about the details of her two relationships. Especially after 1949, she usually only briefly mentioned that she did not write much during her marriage with Sha Lei because she was busy with housework.⁵⁷ The only time she touched cursorily upon her second relationship was when she was defending herself in the face of ruthless attacks against her poetry and translation in 1947. In an article titled “Tan wode shi he yishi” (On my poetry and poetry translation), Chen employed the established May Fourth discourse of the historical oppression of women and referred to the relationship as “an oppressive domestic life.”⁵⁸ Scholarship on Chen’s poetry has mostly followed this framework of personal misfortune. For instance, Tang Shi, one of the Nine Leaves poets, critic and Chen’s close friend, interprets “The Angel Prisoner” as “her own youthful tragedy,” and “Flying Birds” as the poet’s joy after “leaving the prison of ‘home’ on the northern highlands.”⁵⁹ Jiang Dengke, in his book on the Nine Leaves poets, also quotes Chen’s narrative and comments that “Chen’s early poetic writing pays much attention to personal sentimental experience.”⁶⁰

Few have read beyond the personal narrative Chen provided and realized that her

⁵⁷ Chen Jingrong, “Xu” [Preface] in Chen Jingrong, *Chen Jingrong xuanji* [The selected works of Chen Jingrong], 3; See Chen Jingrong, “Tiji” [Preface], Chen Jingrong, *Yuanfan ji* [Distant sail], 2.

⁵⁸ Chen Jingrong, “Tan wode shi he yishi” [On my poetry and poetry translation], “Bihui,” *Wenhui bao*, No. 161, February 7, 1947.

⁵⁹ Tang Shi, *Jiuye shiren: Zhongguo Xinshi de zhongxing* [The Nine Leaves poets: the resurgence of Chinese New Poetry], 113, 118.

⁶⁰ Jiang Dengke, *Jiuye shiren lungao* [Thesis on the Nine Leaves Poets] (Chongqing: Xinan shifan daxue chubanshe, 2006), 31.

employment of this narrative was probably done out of strategic consideration. In the next section, I will analyze the poetics of irony Chen developed in the late 1940s after breaking free from her “prison.”

The Poetics of Irony

To better understand Chen’s poetics of irony, it is necessary to note the general trends in the field of literature at the time. Since the full-scale Japanese invasion of China in July 1937, China had been in an intensely combative mood. On May 23, 1942, Mao Zedong (1893-1976) gave the well-known “Zai Yan’an wenyi zuotanhui shang de jianghua” (“Talks at the Yanan Forum on Art and Literature”). Targeting the urban elite who had just arrived in the CCP controlled areas, the main purpose of the talk, as Mao phrases it, was “to fit art and literature properly into the whole revolutionary machine as one of its component parts.” In the talk, Mao laid out the guiding principles for literature and art in the CCP controlled areas: Art and literature should be “revolutionary,” that is, assist the military front to “accomplish the task of national liberation”; since the standpoint of the Party is that of “the proletariat and the broad masses of the people,” that is, the “workers, peasants, soldiers and revolutionary cadres,” revolutionary art and literature should take this standpoint of the Party and extol the proletariat. At the end of the talk, Mao drew a clear line between bourgeois and proletarian art and literature, “If you are a bourgeois artist or writer, you will extol not the proletariat but the bourgeois, and if you are a proletarian artist or writer, you will extol not the bourgeoisie but the proletariat and the working people: you must do one or the other.”⁶¹ In her seminal book

⁶¹ Mao Zedong, “Talks at the Yanan Forum on Art and Literature” in Anne Fremantle, ed., *Mao Tse-Tung: An Anthology of His Writings* (New York: New American Library, c1972), 242-263.

Translingual Practice, Lydia Liu calls attention to the male-centered nature of the discourse of national revolution. Reading Xiao Hong's (1911-1942) novel *Shengsi chang* (*The Field of Life and Death*), Liu acutely points out that, joining the revolution, women must reject their female identity and assume the national identity. Yet with men, "Not only does nationalism give them a new sense of identity, but it enhances their manhood at the same time."⁶² Though in actual practice, the CCP women integrated "women" into the category of "proletariat" and introduced a gender tension to the nationalist and revolutionary discourse, and although Mao emphasized gender issues in other places, the class-bound principles laid down in this extremely important talk eclipse the specificity of women's experience just as does the male-centered critical tradition Liu criticized in her book. As I will demonstrate later in the chapter, this specific text deeply shaped the discursive framework of the Leftist critics even in Nationalist-controlled areas such as Shanghai.

At the time when Chen Jingrong moved to Shanghai in 1946, the war against Japanese invasion had ended and the civil war between the CCP and the Nationalist Party had begun. In the areas controlled by the CCP, it had long been established that literature should conform to the larger course of national survival and serve to mobilize the masses. In the Nationalist Party controlled areas such as Shanghai, the CCP's influence had permeated many institutions through its underground organization. The same kind of propagandistic political poetry advocating "revolutionary realism" had become

⁶² Lydia Liu, *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity – China, 1900-1937*, 208.

mainstream poetry in the literary field in Shanghai.⁶³ It was under these circumstances that Chen published her heatedly criticized essay “Bodelaier yu mao” (Baudelaire and Cat) on December 19, 1946.⁶⁴ On December 28, 1946, Lin Huanping published an article titled “Bodelaier buyi zanmei” (It is inadvisable to praise Baudelaire), initiating the first of a series of attacks on Chen.

Though the subject of debate was Baudelaire, the real disagreement between Chen and her critics lay in their different understandings of reality. In her essay “Baudelaire and Cat,” opposing Baudelaire against nineteenth century European Romanticism, Chen indirectly criticized the passion extolled in the propagandistic poetry as “exaggerating” and “hollow.” In contrast, she praised Baudelaire’s emotion and wisdom as coming from “actual life,” “sincere and profound, not in the least superficial or exaggerating.” What Chen valued in Baudelaire, besides the formal elements, was:

He was a true lover of life... he voiced grievances for all the unfortunate in the crowd: the poor, the handicapped, ugly women, widows, orphans, even lost birds and homeless dogs. He also loved the clouds, storms, the sea, the scorching sun and the icy moon; he also loved a tiny flower, a small pipe. He also loved cats.⁶⁵

There seems to be no real difference between Chen’s understanding of Baudelaire and Mao’s guiding principle for art and literature. “All the unfortunate in the crowd” seem to be the same as “the proletariat.” In Mao’s influential *Talks* though, “proletariat” is a strict class category; it does not include gender and others. For Chen, however, class was one major category (the poor); other categories such as physical condition, gender, age and

⁶³ For more detailed information about the mainstream poetry in the 1930s and 1940s, see You Youji, *Jiuye shipai yanjiu* [Studies on the Nine Leaves Poetry School], 41-42; Jiang Dengke, *Jiuye shipai de hebi yishu* [The Nine Leaves Poetry School’s art of fusion] (Chongqing: Xinan shifan daxue chubanshe, 2002), 78-87.

⁶⁴ Chen Jingrong, “Bodelaier yu mao” [Baudelaire and cat], in “fushi hui” in *Wenhui bao*, December 19, 1946.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

species were no less significant. It is clear that Chen's perception of reality was more nuanced and multifaceted.

Chen's critics invariably attacked her from the framework of nation, class and revolution Mao set in place in 1942. Lin Huanping, the first Leftist critic to attack Chen, followed Mao's class principle exactly in his criticism of Chen's essay "Baudelaire and Cat." In "It is inadvisable to praise Baudelaire," Lin argued that literary works should serve the taste of the masses and be easily understandable to them, unlike Baudelaire's. To illustrate the right kind of art, he gave the example of a piano professor, who was "truly serious, loyal to art, loyal to revolution, and loyal to the people." The irony is that he wrote, "Art needs freedom; art should serve the cause of fighting for freedom."⁶⁶ This is exactly what Chen would say and what Bei Dao's generation advocated in their rebellion against the hegemony of official propagandistic poetry in the 1970s. Yet, what Lin meant here was that art needs national freedom and art should serve the cause of fighting for national freedom. In his "Cong bodelaier de shi tanqi" (Speaking of Baudelaire's poetry), Li Baifeng, another Leftist critic, followed the same discourse and criticized Chen's recent poetry as "Baudelairian or near Baudelairian symbolist poetry," "sad and blurred," expressing the "fragile sentiment of declined petty Bourgeoisie or intellectuals," "an unhealthy and detrimental tendency." He condemned that "Mr. Chen's poetry is divorced from reality and of course cannot avoid being discarded by the masses that are facing reality."⁶⁷ Li Baifeng was not the only one who assumed Chen Jingrong was a man. Tan Zihao, another of Chen's harshest critics assumed Chen was a man as

⁶⁶ Lin Huanping, "Bodelaier buyi zanmei" [It is inadvisable to praise Baudelaire], in "bihui," *Wenhui bao*, No. 132, December 28, 1946..

⁶⁷ Li Baifeng, "Cong bodelaier de shi tanqi" [Speaking of Baudelaire's poetry], in *Wenhui bao* (Shanghai), No. 153, January 30, 1947.

well and criticized “him” as a follower of Baudelaire.⁶⁸ A milder critic named Tie Ma argued that “He [Chen] could indeed quite epitomize the mood and experience of intellectuals in the new era,” but is “still quite distanced from the surging time and complex reality.”⁶⁹ Such ready assumptions that Chen was male not only demonstrate to what extent the literary field was dominated by men, but how much the category of gender had been eclipsed by the discourse of nation, revolution and class.

In her own defense, Chen published “Tan Wode shi he yishi” (On my poetry and poetry translation) on February 7, 1947. Chen chose a strongly gendered approach to open her article by placing her literary career in the context of women’s oppression in China both in history and the present, making clear that her engagement with reality as a woman was more intense than men’s due to the extra layer of oppression women suffered:

I have written a lot in the past two years [1945-1946] mainly because I have finally walked out of the oppressive domestic life (it is not hard to imagine how torturing the narrow domestic life is for Chinese women)...Chinese women have suffered all kinds of oppressions in the past thousands of years of feudal tradition. Up to today, even though the equality of men and women has been recognized in principle, yet in reality, social, financial and many other issues have not reached reasonable solutions entirely. Women are still under stifling oppression. Therefore we have a more pressing longing for a reasonable life in the future, for the truth, justice and light. At the same time, we have more hatred for the feudal tradition and various unreasonable phenomena.⁷⁰

Situating her personal experience in the broader experience of Chinese women in history, Chen indicated that her personal experience was not an individual case, but symptomatic of broader social issues. Keep in mind that Chen was not an old-style Chinese woman of

⁶⁸ Tan Zihao, “Xiaomie xiesiteli de qingxu” [Eliminating the sentiment of hysteria], in *Wenhui bao* (Shanghai), No. 163, February 9, 1947.

⁶⁹ Tie Ma, “Lüelun Chen Jingrong de shi – dule ta zhi yige mosheng duzhe de xin yihou de ganxiang” [A brief note on Chen Jingrong’s poetry – thoughts after reading his letter to an unfamiliar reader], in *Wenhui bao* (Shanghai), December 30, 1946, see Wang Shengsi, ed., “*Jiuye shiren*” *pinglun ziliao xuan* [selected critical resources on the “Nine Leaves Poets”], 222-223.

⁷⁰ Chen Jingrong, “Tan Wode shi he yishi” [On my poetry and poetry translation], “Bihui,” *Wenhui bao*, No. 161, February 7, 1947.

the “feudal tradition” and her marriage with Sha Lei was not arranged according to the “feudal tradition” either. Both of them were part of the “enlightened” modern Chinese intelligentsia. By comparing her case to that of the Chinese women from the feudal tradition, Chen gave a well-disguised yet penetrating critique of the sharp discrepancy between modern Chinese male intellectuals’ discursive promotion of gender equality and their actual practice of the traditional patriarchal values in reality.

Feminist scholars of today have offered insightful criticisms of this discrepancy.

As Wang Zheng writes,

After they rose to the center of intellectual discourse in the early 1920s, the New Culturalists were quite complacent with their new authoritative position in defining women’s issues. They could be extremely condescending toward women’s own efforts at self-emancipation. Shen Yanbing, the renowned champion of the Chinese feminist movement, revealed his sense of superiority clearly in “On *The New Woman*,” a critique of the newly published women’s magazine.... he admonished them in the voice of the guardian of the New Culture: “I advise the women in *The New Woman*, when in the future you have read a lot of books and want very much to express your opinions, it will still be better not to publish your own magazine. Because the New Culture movement does not need publications in larger numbers, but publications with higher standards.” The male champions thus simultaneously disrupted and maintained hierarchical gender relationships. It was liberating to many women that the patriarchal power of Confucianism was challenged severely by the New Culturalists. But then women found a new male authority in the New Cultural elite.⁷¹

Mao Dun’s statement strangely resonates with Ezra Pound’s criticism of Amy Lowell’s feminist effort to publish more women authors in *Poetry* in the 1910s.⁷² It is uncanny to think how men in different countries and in different times would find the same reason to disqualify women. Not equipped with the feminist theories and historical hindsight of

⁷¹ Wang Zheng, *Women in the Chinese Enlightenment: Oral and Textual Histories*, 62. Shen Yanbing’s comment is from Pen Wei (Shen Yanbing), “Ping xinfunü” [On the new woman], *Funü zazhi* [The ladies’ journal], 6, no. 2 (1920), 1-3.

⁷² There is a detailed discussion about this in Chapter Two.

scholars today, it is intriguing that Chen offered her criticism of this issue in a roundabout way.

Wang Zheng also points out, “Male-centeredness and patriarchal language were not only present in many New Culturalists’ written works but also openly maintained in their private lives.” Wang gave the example of Xu Guangping, a new woman who received a new-style education and was infused with the May Fourth ideals. In rebelling against the “old” ethics of the patriarchy and seeking free love, she became the common-law wife of Lu Xun (1881-1936), her teacher and a prestigious intellectual, and found herself turned into Lu’s secretary and homemaker, her own pursuit of an independent career thwarted.⁷³ As I have demonstrated in chapter one, Guo Moruo’s relationship with Satō Tomiko is another case in point. A Japanese new woman seeking free love and an independent career, Satō fulfilled her dream of free love by becoming the common-law wife of Guo, defying the patriarchal family on both sides. Once they moved in and had children, however, Satō had to give up her ideals and become a full-time housewife so Guo could continue his pursuit of a modern career. Chen’s extreme lack of literary production and the few poems written during her relationships suggest a similar situation, although she never openly commented on her relationships with Cao Baohua and Sha Lei. Unlike Xu Guangping and Satō Tomiko, however, Chen refused to succumb to the patriarchal authority of the male intellectual and give up her aspirations for an independent career. As I will demonstrate in the rest of the section, Chen’s painful struggle for her own literary career not only enabled her to gain acute insights into the discrepancy between modern Chinese male intellectuals’ discursive promotion of gender equality and their actual practice of traditional patriarchal values in reality, but

⁷³ Wang Zheng, *Women in the Chinese Enlightenment: Oral and Textual Histories*, 64-66.

discrepancies between other promoted discourses and reality, which resulted in a brilliant poetics of irony. What is ironic is that this poetics of irony, impelled by a modern woman's struggle for an independent career and voice against male restriction, was criticized or praised as masculine by the male critics.

Refuting the charge of her poetry being divorced from reality, Chen cited and listed a number of her poems in "On my poetry and poetry translation." "Diyu de tangewu" ("The Inferno Tango") and "Shijie de weizhuang" ("The Camouflage of the World") were two of the poems given as examples of her "satire against the darkness and contradictions of the society."⁷⁴ "The Inferno Tango," written on March 1, 1946, is also a perfect example to illustrate how Chen integrated insights gained from her personal experience into the broader social reality. Here is an excerpt from the poem:

假若我相信原子弹
只是另一世界的谷粒
暴戾是爱的果子

...
那么当鸱梟狞笑的午夜
跳起地狱的探戈舞吧
它将会带给你
比一个比夜更黑的白昼⁷⁵

If I believed atom bombs
Were only grains from another world
And tyranny the fruit of love

Then at midnight when owls laugh
hideously
Start to dance the inferno tango
It would bring to you
A day darker than night⁷⁶

The first two lines evoke the ending of World War II and the eight-year Japanese invasion of China with the U.S. dropping two atomic bombs on Japan half a year earlier. The third line brings to mind the "fitting denunciation, / and timely tyranny" imposed on the speaker by her knight lover in "The Knight's Love." The juxtaposition of the two

⁷⁴ Chen Jingrong, "Tan Wode shi he yishi" [On my poetry and poetry translation], "Bihui," *Wenhui bao*, No. 161, February 7, 1947.

⁷⁵ Chen Jingrong, *Jiaoxiang ji* [Symphony] (Beijing: Zhongguo wenlian chuban gongsi, 1996; first edition: Shanghai: Xingqun chubanshe, 1948), 11-12.

⁷⁶ The translation is by Almberg with slight adaptation. See Shiu-Pang E. Almberg, *The Poetry of Chen Jingrong: a Modern Chinese Woman Poet*, 99.

sheds chilling light on the relationship between love and violence. At a time when the whole world was celebrating the victory of the war, Chen was reflecting on the war from a different perspective. Chen raised her doubts over the general attitude of treating the dropping of the atom bombs as insignificant and irrelevant as grains from another world. She questioned the act of violence with the excuse of love. When the prevailing discourse was in the “upbeat” and “optimistic” tune of national victory, Chen forcefully condemned the reality as dark as hell, “a day darker than night.”

In “The camouflage of the World,” written in 1945 but revised in September 1946 in Shanghai, Chen was determined to take off the mask of those who promoted a glorious discourse regardless of the dark reality:

聪明人先掩住自己耳朵
再去偷盗别人的铃子
纵火者也从来烧不到自身

The clever one covers his eyes first
Before stealing the other’s bell
The arsonist never burns himself either

那么，让我为你们祝福吧—
聋者，盲者，哑者，痴者……
让世界在千万遍毁灭后
依旧无恙地去装饰
你们辉煌的园子⁷⁷

Hence, let me offer my benediction to you –
The deaf, the blind, the dumb, the idiotic...
Let the world be destroyed ten million times
And still decorate safe and sound
Your glorious garden

The first two lines rework a familiar Chinese cautionary tale against self-deception that originally appeared in *Lüshi Chunqiu* [Annals] around 239 BCE.⁷⁸ The poem gives the gist of the original tale, except that the stupid thief is now ironically called “the clever one.” Both “the clever one” and “the arsonist” are metaphors for the plural “you,” which are metaphorically referred to as “the deaf, the blind, the dumb, the idiotic” in the next stanza. Note that “the deaf, the blind, the dumb, the idiotic” here are not the unfortunate

⁷⁷ Chen Jingrong, *Jiaoxiang ji* [Symphony], 39.

⁷⁸ Lü Buwei, *Lüshi Chunqiu* [Annals], see Xu Fu et al, eds., *Guhanyu dacidian* [Dictionary of classical Chinese] (Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 2000), 814.

handicapped people Chen sympathized with in “Baudelaire and Cat,” but those who refused a profound experience of the complex reality with their senses and chose to maintain a glorious illusion in a limited domain, that is, simply limiting their writing to propagandistic poetry extolling revolution, regardless of the larger, more complex reality in the world. “The world be destroyed ten million times” once again evokes the mass destruction that resulted from the atomic bombs ending World War II. In her 1948 article titled “Zhencheng de shengyin” (“Sincere voices”), Chen explicitly criticized the propagandistic poetry as hypocritical and removed from the complexity of reality. The article best illustrates the implications of this poem. In the article, Chen argues for “modern poetry” against “propagandistic poetry” in terms of different approaches to reality. She points out that “The current Chinese poetry scene is full of mumbling propagandistic poetry...and many poems seem to be bustling with noise and excitement, yet are actually devoid of content and unreasonably hypocritical.”⁷⁹ Instead, she pleaded for a more profound engagement with reality:

Modern poetry (and all art works), first of all should take root in reality, but not be bound by reality. We have too many harsh demands on modern poetry because this age has too many harsh demands on us. The Modernity⁸⁰ of poetry, as I understand it, is to emphasize the profound and true experience of various modern phenomena: whether the experience draws on the aural, the visual, the internal or the external life.⁸¹

She offered a straightforward depiction of those who insist on decorating their own “glorious yard” no matter what happens:

⁷⁹ Chen Jingrong, “Zhencheng de shengyin – luelun Zheng Min, Mu Dan, Du Yunxie” [The sincere voice – on Zheng Min, Mu Dan, Du Yunxie], *Shi chuangzao* (1948. 6), no. 12, see Wang Shengsi, ed., “*Jiuye shiren*” *pinglun ziliao xuan* [selected critical resources on the “Nine Leaves Poets”], 67.

⁸⁰ The English word is in the original, placed in parenthesis after its Chinese equivalent “xiandai xing.”

⁸¹ Chen Jingrong, “Zhencheng de shengyin – luelun Zheng Min, Mu Dan, Du Yunxie” [The sincere voice – on Zheng Min, Mu Dan, Du Yunxie], *Shi chuangzao* (1948. 6), no. 12, see Wang Shengsi, ed., “*Jiuye shiren*” *pinglun ziliao xuan* [selected critical resources on the “Nine Leaves Poets”], 62.

For those who do not understand and never plan to understand anything except for what they themselves are used to, maybe it is...so long as one is unwilling to laze around in a tiny corner, to refuse to make progress, to lag behind willingly, one could always step forward, get rid of prejudice and accept what is true.⁸²

While Chen only articulated these poetic principles in 1948, she had been practicing these principles in her poetry before that. Her ingenious use of metaphors, unconventional combination of images and use of symbolism created myriad possibilities for interpretations of her poetry. This complexity enabled her to express powerful anti-war messages and scathing criticism of the political, social and cultural realities in Nationalist-controlled Shanghai without falling into immediate danger.

“Luoji bingzhe de chuntian” (“A Logic Patient’s Spring”), a poem written in April 1947 is one such example. As Zhao Yiheng observes, Chen daringly satirizes the famous intellectuals as logic patients.⁸³ In the poem, criticizing the fixed symbolic system in the propagandistic poetry, Chen demonstrates a powerful way of engaging with the reality of war:

多少形象，姿势，符号和声音，
我们早已厌倦。咦，
你倒是一直不老啊，这个蓝天！
温暖的春天的晨朝，
阳光下有轰炸机盘旋。⁸⁴

Too many forms, gestures, signs and
sounds
We have long become tired of. Why,
But you never seem to get old, blue sky!
In a warm Spring morning,
Bombers are circling in the sunlight.⁸⁵

The stanza is a typical example of the obscure quality in Chen’s poetry that the Leftist critics latched onto. The first line is a laundry list of categories that “we have long

⁸² Ibid., 67.

⁸³ Zhao Yiheng, “Shihang jian de zhuanji: xu Chen Jingrong shiwen ji” [Biography between the lines of poetry: preface to *The Collection of Chen Jingrong’s poetry and prose*] in Luo Jiaming and Chen Li, eds., *Chen Jingrong shiwen ji* [Poetry and prose of Chen Jingrong], 8.

⁸⁴ Chen Jingrong, *Jiaoxiang ji* [Symphony], 64.

⁸⁵ Wai-Lim Yip, trans., *Lyrics from Shelters: Modern Chinese Poetry 1930-1950* (New York & London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1992), 167.

become tired of.” However, what do these “forms, gestures, signs and sounds” refer to? Chen leaves it open for the reader to interpret. In the third line, teasing the blue sky about its agelessness as if teasing a long-time acquaintance, the speaker seems to indicate the important status of this symbol without explicitly stating its implications, again leaving the reader to fill in the missing information. The following line seems to deviate from the ironic tone and give a straightforward depiction of a natural scene. The image of “a warm Spring morning” easily evokes a peaceful moment, a setting for some pleasant activities such as going out in nature or simply lazing around enjoying the good weather. However, the introduction of the bombers circling in the sun abruptly interrupts the brief moment of relief and plunges the reader into the chilling reality of war. The sharp contrast between peace and violence conveys one of the most powerful anti-war messages in Chen’s poetry.

From “Disillusion,” her first published poem in 1932, to “A Logic Patient’s Spring” in 1947, Chen had come a long way in developing her poetics. Scholars have duly noted Chen’s maturity as a poet in the late 1940s and the shift of her poetic subjects from narrow personal feelings to broader socio-political issues. Yet, carefully tracing the long journey of her poetic explorations, we discern the issue of gender underlying this change. The very start of her poetic career was marked by the female speaker’s fantasy reproduction of the Romantic ideal of absolute individual freedom set forth by her male predecessors shattered by the cruel reality of the suffering woman. Her early poetic career was often accompanied by the female speaker’s struggles against an abusive and derisive male authority trying to thwart her poetic aspirations. If, in “Disillusion,” Chen was still an apprentice trying dutifully to repeat conventions set by her male predecessors such as

Guo Moruo, for example, using complete immersion in Nature to symbolize absolute individual freedom, “A Logic Patient’s Spring” reveals a fully grown poet whose acute sense of irony regarding the dominant discourse was catalyzed by prolonged and painfully intimate engagement with it.

As I have noted at the beginning of the chapter, the debate about different poetic approaches to reality between Chen and the Leftist critics happened shortly before the CCP took power in 1949 and enthroned propagandistic poetry as the official poetry. Like many intellectuals who practiced approaches other than what was embodied in the propagandistic poetry, Chen was compelled to give up poetry writing. However, for sometime, she was able to continue her translation work and mainly translated revolutionary works by authors from other socialist countries. In 1957, she was able to publish nine poems by Baudelaire in the July issue of *Translation*. During the Cultural Revolution, many young poets were greatly inspired by these nine translated poems in their search for an alternative poetics from the dominant official poetry. While these young poets might think they were reading Baudelaire through Chen, for Chen, a poet who wrote radically different poetry from the officially stipulated propagandistic poetry, translation was a disguised form of expression, an alternative way of writing. I want to conclude this chapter by taking a look at these translated poems. Rather than reading them against the French originals and testing the accuracy of Chen’s translation, I attempt to see whether and how the choice of poems, the arrangement of order and the experiment with language conveyed a continued sense of struggle for a distinct poetics on Chen’s part.

According to order of appearance in Chen’s translation, the nine poems are “Le Crépuscule du matin” (“Morning Twilight”), “Le Crépuscule du soir” (“Evening Twilight”), “Le Cygne” (“The Swan”), “La Mort des pauvres” (“Death of the Poor”), “Sonnet d’automne” (“Autumn Sonnet”), “L’Ennemi” (“The Enemy”), “Le Flambeau vivant” (“Living Torch”), “Spleen” (“Spleen” IV) and “Harmonie du soir” (“Evening’s Harmony”).⁸⁶ Those who are familiar with Baudelaire’s *Flowers of Evil* will notice that Chen did not follow Baudelaire’s arrangement of the poems. The first poem in Chen’s translation appears as No. 103 in the original; the second, No. 95; the third, No. 89; the fourth, No. 122; the fifth, No. 64; the sixth, No. 10; the seventh, No. 43; the eighth, No. 78; the ninth, No. 47.⁸⁷ Starting with “Morning Twilight” and ending with “Evening’s Harmony,” Chen Jingrong seems to be depicting the process of one long day, but if we read the poems, we see the condensed version of Chen’s life-long struggle for a poetic career as a woman poet:

“Morning Twilight” starts with a “dark-haired youth,” and

灵魂载着倔强而沉重的身躯，	The soul, under the unyielding and heavy weight of the
模仿着灯光与日光的斗争。 ⁸⁸	body,
	Imitates the battle between lamp and daylight. ⁸⁹

These lines call to mind Chen’s “unyielding” battle first with her patriarchal family, then with her dismissive poet lovers, in order to realize her aspirations as a poet. Also in this poem, the miseries of women are elaborately depicted through “the women of pleasure,” “the beggar-women” and “the laboring women.” Chen misunderstood “the women in

⁸⁶ The English translation of the titles is by Keith Waldrop. See Keith Waldrop, trans. Charles Baudelaire, *The Flowers of Evil* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2006), v-ix.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ Zhou Xuliang, ed., *Waiguo wenxue zuopin xuan* [Selections of foreign literature], 88.

⁸⁹ Adapted from Waldrop’s translation, see Keith Waldrop, trans. Charles Baudelaire, *The Flowers of Evil*, 135.

labor” in the original poem as the women who undergo hard labor. It is exactly this mistake that reveals what weighed heavily on Chen’s mind in her choice of this poem as the first poem. The couplet where the phrase “laboring women” appears reads as follows:

这正是那种时辰：在寒冷与穷困当中 劳动妇女的苦难更加深重； ⁹⁰	It is exactly the hour: in coldness and paucity The suffering of the laboring women is aggravated;
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The couplet echoes Chen’s repeated mentioning of her personal experience of hard labor in her marriage with Sha Lei from 1940 to 1945, the several long cold winters she had to go through imprisoned in the oppressive domestic life, especially her 1947 article titled “On My Poetry and Poetry Translation,” where she shared her acute insight into the condition of the continued oppression of women in China due to social, financial and other issues despite general recognition of the gender equality discourse.

In “The Swan,” the image of the swan, a symbol of the poet figure that does not fit into the world, is associated with a suffering widow searching for hope:

卢浮宫前有一个形象使我窒息； 我想起我那硕大的天鹅，带着痴呆的 神情， 象那些流放者，又可笑又崇高， 被一个无尽的愿望所吞噬！然后我想 起你，	Before the Louvre an image presses down on me; I recall my great swan, with an idiotic expression, Like those in exile, absurd and sublime, Devoured by a ceaseless craving! And I think of you,
--	--

... 我想起那瘦弱憔悴的黑女人， 在泥泞中行走，她的眼睛 偶尔从浓浓的大雾后面 找寻非洲的美好的可可树； ⁹¹	... I think of the black woman, frail and wasted, Trudging the mud, her eyes Occasionally from behind the thickness of the fog Looking for the wonderful palms of Africa; ⁹²
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⁹⁰ Zhou Xuliang, ed., *Waiguo wenxue zuopin xuan* [Selections of foreign literature], 89.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 93.

⁹² Adapted from Waldrop’s translation, see Keith Waldrop, trans. Charles Baudelaire, *The Flowers of Evil*, 116.

Once again, from the many poems by a poet such as Baudelaire better known for his negative even misogynistic views toward women, Chen chooses and translates a poem where Baudelaire associates the poet figure with a suffering widow, clearly a carefully made choice.

Besides her distinct emphasis on a gendered perspective, Chen's translations continued to convey a more complex engagement with reality against the stylized presentation of reality of the officially sponsored propagandistic poetry. For example, "The Enemy" starts with a depiction of "my youth" radically different from the rosy and upbeat image popular among the official poetry of the time:

我的青春只是一场阴暗的暴风雨， 星星点点，透过来明朗的太阳， 雷雨给过它这样的摧毁，如今 只有很少的红色果子留在我枝头上。 ⁹³	My youth was nothing but a dark storm, Pierced here and there, by beams of sunlight, Lightning and rain damaged it so, and now The rosy fruit on my branches is rare. ⁹⁴
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Once again, these lines remind us of Chen's painful struggle for a poetic career in her youth. Yet, for the urban elite youth whose educations were interrupted by the Cultural Revolution and who spent their teens and twenties in rural China, these lines speak perfectly to their experience as well. Other lines in the translation work in a similar way. For example: the emphasis on the sincerity of the heart: "Everything throws my heart/ into a rage, except for the sincerity of a primitive beast" ("Autumn Sonnet"); the call for love: "Let us love in silence. The dim, lurking / love, stretching the bow of fate in its position" ("Autumn Sonnet"); the disillusion with the CCP represented by the red flag:

⁹³ Zhou Xuliang, ed., *Waiguo wenxue zuopin xuan* [Selections of foreign literature], 95-96.

⁹⁴ Adapted from Waldrop's translation, see Keith Waldrop, trans. Charles Baudelaire, *The Flowers of Evil*, 21.

“cruel and violent bitterness / plants a black flag on my lowered head.”⁹⁵ As I will demonstrate in the next chapter, young male poets who explored an alternative poetics during the Cultural Revolution would advocate a poetics similar to what Chen conveyed through her translation of Baudelaire, yet Chen’s distinctly gendered perspective was somehow lost in the process.

⁹⁵ Chen Jingrong, trans. “Poem Selections,” in Zhou Xuliang, ed., *Waiguo wenxue zuopin xuan* [Selections of foreign literature], 95-98; originally published in *Translation*, July 1957.

Chapter Four

The Birth of *Today!* Poets in 1978: Gender Politics and Underground Literature in China

What form do women take?
--Elizabeth Willis¹

On March 19, 2006, during the opening remarks at a conference commemorating the 25th anniversary of *Jintian (Today!, 1978-1980, 1990-)*,² Bei Dao succinctly summarized the history of this literary journal and its historical connection with contemporary Chinese avant-garde literature and art:

At the end of the year 1978, *Today!* was born in secret in a cramped farm house in the suburb of Beijing. As the first unofficial literary journal since 1949, *Today* was posted on the outer walls of government offices, publishing houses and the college districts. Two years later, *Today!* was closed down by the police. In the summer of 1990, *Today* was re-launched abroad. Up to this moment, the commemorative event at the University of Notre Dame in the United States, a quarter of a century has passed. History seems not to be able to look forward, but only to look back. Through the winds and dust of the years, we see those few young people bustling around a worn-out mimeograph machine. Yet they could not see us.

The appearance of *Today!* in China is undoubtedly related to the generation who grew up during the Cultural Revolution. They searched for a way out while lost, gained strength while sinking, crying out in the silence of collective aphasia, even at the expense of their lives. The influence of *Today!* reaches far beyond literature. Permeating fine arts, film, drama, photography and other artistic categories, *Today!* marks the beginning of avant-garde literature and art in contemporary China.³

¹ Elizabeth Willis, *Meteoric Flowers* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2006), 6.

² This commemorative event happened several years after *Today!*'s 25th anniversary for various reasons.

³ Bei Dao, "Kaimushi zhici" ["Opening Remarks"] at "Crisis and Detour: 25 years of *Today!*," March 19-21, 2006, University of Notre Dame. I obtained the transcription from Bei Dao. For a more detailed account of the beginning of *Today!*, see Bei Dao, "Duan zhang" ["Fragments"], in Bei Dao, Li Tuo, eds., *Qishi niandai* [The Seventies], 31-49.

From its debut appearance on the street walls of major cultural and political institutions in Beijing on December 23, 1978, to its final closedown by the state police at the end of December 1980,⁴ the literary activists of *Today!* published nine issues, four book series, and three volumes of *Materials for Internal Circulation*, all together 1008 pages. As loose pages of *Today!* were posted on the street walls in Beijing, retail copies were sold at the Democracy Wall and distributed nationwide through the postal system, poems published in the journal were read in the parks, and mimeograph copies were privately shared among poetry lovers, the readership of *Today!* far exceeded the 682 subscribers listed in the “Records of Outgoing Mail”⁵ or 1000 copies per issue.⁶

As recent scholarly and popular attention on *Today!* has so far focused mostly on its role in bringing a new form of poetry to national attention,⁷ Bei Dao has good reason

⁴ *Today!* was ordered to close down on September 12, 1980 by the Municipal Police Department in Beijing. However, it continued to exist in the name of “Jintian wenxue yanjiuhui” [“Today Literary Study Association”] and produced three more issues entitled *Neibu jiaoliu ziliao* [Materials for Internal Circulation]. See Ao Fuming, “*Today!*: a Chronicle of Events” in a chapbook he compiled in 1988 for the tenth anniversary of *Today!*. He kindly gave me a copy for my research.

⁵ Besides a copy of the “Records of Outgoing Mail,” I also obtained copies of thousands of pages of readers’ letters and literary contributions from Ao Fuming. From these letters, numerous readers shared their excitement at discovering *Today!* and stories of how they got hold of this journal. Many of them said they borrowed it from friends, roommates and relatives. Some college students said the whole dorm shared one copy. Some even mailed mimeographed selections of poetry from *Today!* and their own literary journals to show how *Today!* had served as a huge inspiration to them.

⁶ Ao Fuming, ““Bianyu suoji (3): huiyi 76 hao” [Trivial records after the compiling work (3): Remembering No. 76].” I obtained the unpublished version of the essay from Ao. From my interviews with Ao, I learned that 1500 copies of the first issue of *Today!* were printed (500 copies in December 1978 and another 1000 copies later due to the readers’ demand). The three issues of *Materials for Internal Circulation* were each printed 600 copies.

⁷ Most poets published in *Today* became household names of the immensely popular Obscure Poetry in the 1980s. Since 1979, when some *Today* poets such as Bei Dao, Shu Ting, Gu Cheng, Yang Lian appeared in a few official journals, their poetry was fiercely attacked as obscure by some official critics and poets. Together with some poets from an earlier generation and some younger poets who also started to publish poems deviating from the conventionalized socialist poetry, they were dubbed the “Obscure Poets.” Yet, they became immensely popular among young people across China despite or thanks to this negative attention. Recent revisionist scholarship has added poets who were not published in the official journals in the 1980s to the group of Obscure Poets, such as Mang Ke and Guo Lusheng. See Cheng Guangwei, Hong Zicheng, eds. *Menglong shi xinbian* [A New Edition of Obscure Poetry] (Wuhan: Changjiang wenyi chubanshe, 2004); Hong Zicheng, Liu Denghan, *Zhongguo dangdai xinshi shi* [A History of Contemporary Chinese New Poetry] (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2005), 175-206.

to pointing out the fact that *Today!* had not only served as the mouthpiece of the avant-garde poetry that emerged from the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), but avant-garde literature and art in general. The *Today!* literary activists had not only published poems by twenty-four poets, but also novellas, short stories, critical essays, drawings, photographs, and woodblocks as well as translated Western poems, short stories, essays and literary theory by more than twenty authors and artists. Many *Today!* authors and artists who did cover designs and illustrations, and contributed photographs, artwork and stories for *Today!* have become leading figures in contemporary Chinese avant-garde art, fiction, film, drama and photography.⁸

Importantly, *Today!*'s impact had gone far beyond the elitist genealogy of avant-garde literature and art, and reached a broad readership at the level of popular culture. Although quite a number of readers of *Today!* were inspired to start their own poetic experimentations, launch their own unofficial literary journals and become the well-known "Third Generation" poets,⁹ the majority of readers became "poetry lovers" and the constitutive elements in the nationwide poetry fever of the 1980s. Poets were treated like pop stars wherever they went, and young men and women from remote places plunged themselves into a passion of reading and writing poetry and adopted poetic visions as

⁸ To name a few: Ai Weiwei, leading Chinese artist who served as the artistic consultant for the project of the Beijing National Stadium, dubbed the "Bird's Nest" for the Beijing Olympics in 2008, contributed illustrations to *Today*. Huang Rui, who was the first to turn deserted factory buildings in the suburb of Beijing and the major architect behind the well-known 798 Art District in Beijing, was one of the founders and artists of *Today*. Chen Kaige, one of the "fifth-generation directors" of Chinese cinema, who directed films such as "Yellow Earth" and "Farewell My Concubine," published his first story in *Today*.

⁹ Ouyang Jianghe and Tang Xiaodu both described their excitement upon discovering the new ways of writing poetry in *Today* during my interviews with them. Shen Rui and Wang Jiaxin were in the list of subscribers that Ao Fuming has carefully kept. Among the thousands of letters from the readers, I also discovered a letter and a few poems submitted by Han Dong, also a well-known poet now. Bai Hua described a similar experience in his "Shiyu 1979 – bi bing he tie geng ci ren xinchang de huanle" [Beginning from 1979 – Joy More Piecing Than Ice and Iron], see Bei Dao, Li Tuo, eds., *Qishi niandai* [The Seventies], 531-546.

their life ideals. Bei Dao attributes this poetry fever and idolization of poets¹⁰ to “a misunderstanding on the readers’ part.”¹¹ Misunderstanding or not, the fact is that the avant-garde poetry *Today!* brought aboveground reached a broad readership and influenced the life of a generation of Chinese youths.



Figure 1. Front Covers of *Today!*: the image on the left is the cover of the first issue of the journal; the image on the right is the cover of a reprint of the first issue. From the second issue on, the cover of *Today!* remained the same as the latter. Courtesy of Ao Fuming and Huang Rui.

When the first issue of *Today!* made its debut on the outer walls of state

¹⁰ Michelle Yeh accurately describes this poetry fever as “the cult of poetry.” See Michelle Yeh, “Death of the Poet: Poetry and Society in Contemporary China and Taiwan,” in Pang-yuan Chi and David Wang, eds., *Chinese Literature in the Second Half of the Twentieth Century: A Critical Survey* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 223.

¹¹ Bei Dao describes one instance of his pop-star experience in Sichuan province in China in “The Importance of being ‘ordinary’: Bei Dao in conversation with Michael March,” *Index on Censorship*, 1746-6067, Volume 17, Issue 10, 1988, Pages 26 – 28. I am grateful to John Rosenwald for generously sharing this article with me.

institutions in the form of “big-character posters”, its front cover depicted the word *Today!* in Chinese (see the left image in figure 1) breaking through the iron bars of prison in the form of patches of blank space, an unmistakable gesture of opposition to the state autocracy. Yet from the second issue on, the front cover of *Today!* was switched to the profiles of a young man and a young woman in the color of blue sky and white cloud. It is not that this unofficial literary magazine’s oppositional position had changed, but the emphasis had shifted from a simple declaration of its position to a concrete and more accurate representation of this journal’s strategy. On the first page of the first issue of *Today!*, Bei Dao adopts the official discourse after the Cultural Revolution and attributes the official monopoly of literature to the “Cultural autocracy of the ‘Gang of Four’” rather than the current official ideology, thus avoiding direct confrontation with the state. He writes, “history has finally given us this opportunity and allows our generation to sing out the songs that have been buried in our heart for as long as ten years without being punished by the thunderbolts.” In a letter to Wu Lixian, a fellow poet, dated November 17, 1978, Bei Dao includes these opening lines, yet in a slightly different version. In that letter, the songs are buried both “underground and deep in our heart”¹² rather than “in our heart.” The juxtaposition of “underground” and “heart,” shows clearly the intimate antagonism of *Today!* and the official propaganda machine it rebelled against. Yet the final editorial decision to omit the word “underground”¹³ from the published version illustrates Bei Dao’s positioning of *Today!* as a journal of “pure” literature. As Bei Dao explains, “pure” means “not directly touching upon politics, though it is impossible not

¹² Bei Dao’s letter to Wu Lixian (whose pen name is Ya Mo), November 17, 1978. My thanks to Li Tuo and Lydia H. Liu for providing the letter.

¹³ As a number of scholars both in China and abroad have recounted the underground literary activities during the Cultural Revolution, I will not go into the details.

to.”¹⁴ Hence, rather than staging a direct confrontation against the state as other explicitly political unofficial journals did, *Today!* emphasized the mission of “our generation” to “reflect the spirit of the new age,” “establish the meaning of each individual’s existence,” “deepen people’s understanding of the spirit of freedom” and “reestablish China’s position in the world.”¹⁵ In the second issue, Bei Dao reiterates the role of *Today!* as “a mouthpiece of the younger generation,” sending out “echoes of justice in terms of people’s social life and spiritual space today.”¹⁶ Thus, by focusing on creating a new paradigm of life for the younger generation rather than going directly against the state, *Today!* was able to find freedom in “the distance between the hunter and the hunted,”¹⁷ survive the longest, be distributed most widely and exert the most profound and extensive impact as described above.

Despite the plurality of their practices, the new poets who emerged from *Today!* were dubbed Obscure Poets for the obscurity noted by official critics, after they found their way into official poetry journals from early 1979¹⁸; the Obscure Poets, especially Bei Dao, co-founder, co-editor-in-chief and a prominent author in the journal, were associated with the democracy movement. When Allen Ginsberg first met Bei Dao in Beijing in 1984,¹⁹ and started their lasting friendship, he only knew Bei Dao as a dissident poet and a political figure in China’s democracy movement. Till now, Bei Dao

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Bei Dao, “To the Reader” in *Today*, December 23, 1978, No. 1, 1.

¹⁶ “Notice,” *Today*, February 1979, No. 2, 20.

¹⁷ Bei Dao, “Tongmou” [Accomplices], in Bei Dao, *The Rose of Time: New and Selected Poems*, edited by Eliot Weinberger, translated by Yanbing Chen et al (New York: New Directions Publishing, 2009), xii, 39.

¹⁸ Bei Dao’s “The Answer” was published by the *Poetry Journal* in March 1979; Shu Ting’s “To the Oak Tree” was published in the same journal in April 1979. Gu Cheng, Yang Lian, Jiang He’s works soon became published by the official journals as well.

¹⁹ In October 1984, Allen travels to Beijing with Gary Snyder, Toni Morrison, Francine du Plessix Grey, William Gass and Harrison Salisbury as part of an American Academy of Arts & Letters delegation for a 4-day writers conference. He remains in China for an additional 8 weeks.

<http://www.allenginsberg.org/index.php?page=lifeline> (accessed June 10, 2010).

is still best remembered and applauded by many both in China and abroad for his dissident status, his slogan-like poems such as “The Answer,”²⁰ and his role in the democracy movement. Scholarship on Bei Dao’s early poetry has mostly focused on its opposition of the authoritarian state ideology. For example, Michelle Yeh accurately observes that the new poetry emerging after the Cultural Revolution “embodies a conscious departure from the official Communist ideology and a vigorous search for an alternative discourse beyond the pale of the dominant discourse.”²¹ Few have looked closely at the historical issues embedded in this literary movement initiated by the literary activists of *Today!*.

In this chapter, through close readings of texts and images, I re-examine the relationship between literature and politics in the historical contexts of the life of *Today!*, not only the immediate history of the Mao era, but the historical tradition since the May Fourth era. I want to call attention to the fact that, despite the gender- and class-neutral language such as “heart,” “individual” and “people,” the alternative paradigm of life envisioned by this new generation of avant-garde poets and artists is highly gendered and classed. Similar to the old generation of writers since the May Fourth generation that “had fallen behind,”²² the new generation of poets and artists were mostly male and from an elite class. I focus on the gendered poetics conceived by these elite male avant-garde poets and its materialization in the production and circulation of *Today!*. I hope to

²⁰ “The Answer” was chanted by the demonstrators on Tiananmen Square in June 1989. During my interviews with *Today* members in 2005 and 2006, some still preferred poems such as “The Answer” for their powerful political message. In his monograph on Bei Dao, Dian Li continues to identify Bei Dao’s early poetry as a voice of dissent and focuses on the poems closer to the slogan-like socialist poetry in form. Dian Li, *The Chinese Poetry of Bei Dao, 1978-2000: Resistance and Exile* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellon Press, 2006), 10-19.

²¹ Michelle Yeh, “Light a Lamp in a Rock: Experimental Poetry in Contemporary China,” *Modern China* 18, no. 4 (1992), 379.

²² Bei Dao, “To the Reader” in *Today*, December 23, 1978, No. 1, 1.

demonstrate that the creation of a new symbolic system in avant-garde poetry and art was not simply part of the pro-democracy movement; instead, in their struggle with the state patriarchy for political democracy and artistic autonomy, these male poets and artists were also trying to regain their gender privilege and superiority which they had been deprived of by the socialist state. I demonstrate that the male poets and artists attempted to reclaim their artistic autonomy and their individual masculinity by taking the position of the feminine against the state patriarchy. They attempted to reclaim their masculinity and gender privilege by reviving the image of the “feminine woman” from the May Fourth tradition against the “masculine woman” upheld by the socialist state and by re-establishing a gender hierarchy against the state policy of gender equality in the Mao era.

This chapter includes four parts. In part one, I analyze the gender and class nature of the “underground literature” that *Today!* had brought aboveground. In part two, by closely examining the illustrations in the two most popular poetry selections issued by *Today!* in 1980, Bei Dao’s *The Strange Seashore* and Mang Ke’s *Things in Mind*, I tease out a few visible features of the new paradigm envisioned by this predominantly male group of poets and artists. Lu Shi (pseudonym for Qu Leilei) is the artist who drew all the illustrations for these poetry selections. In part three, I focus on the poems in the two poetry selections mentioned above as well as poems published in *Today!* from 1978 to 1980. I demonstrate how the poets attempted to reconstruct the integrity of self against the paralyzing socialist model of the “screw individual,” automatic machine parts without autonomy or personal feelings, by turning to traditionally feminine tropes such as Nature, woman and feelings. I will focus on three poets published in *Today!*: Bei Dao, Mang Ke and Shu Ting (the only major female poet in this predominantly male group). I choose

Bei Dao and Mang Ke out of the 23 male poets published in *Today!* for a number of reasons. Not only were they the two editors-in-chief, but they published the most poems in *Today!* and were the only two poets who appeared in every issue. Besides, among the three poetry collections published by *Today!*, theirs include the illustrations by Lu Shi as I mentioned previously while the other poetry collection only includes one illustration by Lu Shi and does not create the interesting parallelism between poetry and drawing. The focus on Shu Ting is not out of choice, but of necessity. Compared with Bei Dao (28 poems in *Today!*, 4 in *Today! Literary Study Association: Materials for Internal Circulation*) and Mang Ke (17 poems in *Today!*, 2 in *Materials for Internal Circulation*), Shu Ting (6 poems in *Today!*, 1 in *Materials for Internal Circulation*),²³ with no poetry collection published by *Today!*, seems to stand out in this group as the only female poet rather than one of the major poets. However, the number of her poems is less than only Shi Zhi and Fang Han²⁴ in addition to Bei Dao and Mang Ke, and the same number as Jiang He. Further, she was featured in the first issue of *Today!* together with Bei Dao, Mang Ke and Qiao Jia,²⁵ and more readers wrote admiring comments under her two poems than any others in the journal.”²⁶ Shu Ting seemed to be poised for a much more important role in this journal than the number of her poems indicates.

In the fourth and last section, I look at how a gendered poetics materialized in the

²³ Thanks to Ao Fuming for giving me the whole set of facsimile copies of *Today* and a chapbook including the full content of works published in *Today* which he compiled in 1988 for *Today*'s tenth anniversary.

²⁴ These are two extremely important poets among the sent-down youth whose poetry became popular around the time Bei Dao and Mang Ke started to experiment with poetry. They both had 8 poems published in *Today*.

²⁵ Pen name for Cai Qijiao (1918-2007), an older generation poet who was involved with and supported this group.

²⁶ De-an Wu Swihart, "Introduction." *Ibid.*, 7. The author was quoting indirectly from Shu Ting. The editor who wrote to her telling about this should be Bei Dao as he was the only editor of *Today*, who was in frequent correspondence with Shu Ting at the time.

daily practices of the literary group and in the production and nationwide circulation of *Today!*. Because of the institutionalization and state monopoly of advanced media technology such as movable type, the production of *Today!* mainly happened in the homes of group members and depended on low-end technologies such as stencils, mimeograph machines and typewriters. A large amount of manual labor was involved in this process. Nevertheless, the magazine created a gendered division of labor and a gendering of technology. I demonstrate how the materialization of this new male dominated vision was made possible only by shoving out the female members of the family and relegating women members to subsidiary positions.

The Gender and Class of the Underground

Just as Bei Dao highlights the birth of *Today!* in a cramped farm house outside Beijing, the literary activists of *Today!* often took pride in the grassroots status of this unofficial literary journal. While it was true that major authors of *Today!* such as Bei Dao and Mang Ke were workers at the time, and most literary activists who participated in the production and circulation of *Today!* came from ordinary backgrounds, it was also true that “the works of our generation buried underground and deep in our heart”²⁷ that *Today!* brought aboveground and distributed nationwide came mostly from a small number of cultural and literary elites who had close ties with the underground literary circles in Beijing during the Cultural Revolution. Scholars of Chinese literature both in China and abroad have duly noted *Today!*'s connection with underground literary circles and its

²⁷ Bei Dao's letter to Wu Lixian (whose pen name is Ya Mo), November 17, 1978. My thanks to Li Tuo and Lydia Liu for providing the letter.

oppositional stance to the ideological control of the state,²⁸ but few have paid critical attention to the implications of gender and class in the term “underground.”

To better grasp the term “underground,” it is necessary to understand the condition of literary journals after 1949. As Shuyu Kong demonstrates in her study of literary production in contemporary China, the publishing industry became increasingly controlled by the government of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) after 1949. Since the government took over the publishing industry and nationalized cultural enterprises in the early 1950s, literary production became an integral part of the state’s plan. The government funded it and at the same time regulated it. During the Cultural Revolution, all literary journals save one ceased publication. The only journal that continued publishing during those years was *Jiefangjun wenyi* (People’s Liberation Army Art and Literature).²⁹ The political environment in China after 1949 made literature central to the fostering of morality, social cohesion, and politics at every level. The literary journals, which constituted the primary official outlet for writers, played a vital public role, both for the government and for writers and readers. Literary magazines became a place where both the leadership and the public looked for significant political messages.³⁰ The situation Kong describes applies to most people in China with the exception of a small number of young people associated with the literary and cultural elites especially in Beijing because of the high concentration of political and cultural institutions in this city.

During the three decades between 1949 and 1979, considerable numbers of

²⁸ To name a few: McDougall, Bonnie S. "Dissent Literature: Official and Nonofficial Literature in and about China in the Seventies." *Contemporary China* 3, no. 4 (1979): 49-79; Yeh, Michelle. "Light a Lamp in a Rock: Experimental Poetry in Contemporary China." *Modern China* 18, no. 4 (1992): 379-409; Crevel, Maghiel van. *Language Shattered: Contemporary Chinese Poetry and Duoduo* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Research School CNWS, 1996).

²⁹ Shuyu Kong, *Consuming Literature: Best Sellers and the Commercialization of Literary Production in Contemporary China* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2005), 121, 146.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 147.

“politically incorrect” Western modernist and Soviet “revisionist” works were being translated and introduced into China through “internal publication” (*neibu faxing*). Commissioned by the government, translated and edited by carefully chosen intellectuals, researchers, translators, and editors from the Institute of Foreign Literature in the Chinese Academy of Social Science and the People’s Literature Publishing House, these books were brought out exclusively by a handful of privileged publishers. They were meant to circulate only among high-ranking officials in the Propaganda Department, government cultural bureaus and among a handful of intellectuals, to equip these people with updated knowledge of modern life and contemporary ideologies in the West and the former Soviet Union.³¹ As Yang Jian shows in his study of underground literature during the Cultural Revolution, underground literary circles first emerged in 1961-1963 in Beijing. From 1972, literary circles in Beijing intermingled frequently and formed complicated interrelated networks.³² But what has been overlooked in scholarly investigations is that members of these literary circles bore close ties to the state. The central figures were mostly children of high cultural officials and respected intellectuals. When many of these high officials and intellectuals were removed from office during the Cultural Revolution, they were also removed from the patriarchal position in the family and lost control of these books. Thus, translated Western works such as Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road* (Zai lushang, 1962), T.S. Eliot’s *Selected Essays* (Tuo shi ailuete lunwen xuan, 1962), Jean Paul Sartre’s *Nausea and Other Stories* (Yanwu ji qita, 1965), J.D. Salinger’s *The*

³¹ Shuyu Kong, *Consuming Literature: Best Sellers and the Commercialization of Literary Production in Contemporary China*, 122, 123.

³² Yang Jian, *Wenhua dageming zhong de dixia wenxue* [Underground literature during the Cultural Revolution] (Beijing: Zhaohua chubanshe, 1993), 35, 220.

Catcher in the Rye (Maitian li de shouwangzhe, 1963),³³ originally meant by the CCP party to serve the officialdom, served different purposes in the underground literary circles. Other resources included translation journals that circulated in public but received less censorship than other publications. For example, Chen Jingrong's selected translations of Baudelaire's *The Flowers of Evil* were published in *Yi Wen* (Translated Literature) in 1957 and became an important inspiration for many of these avant-garde poets when they started searching for a new poetic language in the early 1970s.

Either coming from families of high officials or intellectuals in Beijing, or having access to those resources because of association,³⁴ members of these literary circles formed a small elite group compared to the majority of young people in China. I use "elite" because though not all people in these literary circles were from families of high officials and high intellectuals, even people with ordinary family backgrounds in these literary circles in Beijing were able to gain access to the translated Western works such as *On the Road* since early 1970s, whereas young people outside Beijing did not read these books until 1978.³⁵ Just as what the term "avant-garde" often means, the writing and reading of this new poetry was limited to a small elitist readership, until *Today!* took it from underground to aboveground, from the limited circulation of manuscripts to nationwide distribution of printed texts, from narrow elitist circles³⁶ to a broad spectrum

³³ Zhongguo banben tushuguan, *Quanguo neibu faxing tushu zongmu 1949-1986* [Catalogue for National Internal Distribution 1949-1986] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1988).

³⁴ The resources included not only the translated Western works meant only for "internal circulation," among the high officials and intellectuals, but also various forms of legacy inherited from previous generations of modern Chinese intellectuals such as their private collections.

³⁵ My interviews with Han Shaogong and Tang Xiaodu who were in cities other than Beijing at the time.

³⁶ These male poets and artists were not as "grassroots" as it might seem from their occupations and the birthplace of *Today!*, even though the two chief editors, Bei Dao and Mang Ke, were a construction worker and a worker in a paper mill respectively, and Huang Rui, another key member, worked in a propaganda office in a factory. For other narratives of underground literature and *Today!*, see also Crevel, Maghiel van.

of readers across the country.³⁷

Many of the experimental poems *Today!* published were written and circulated underground during the Cultural Revolution mostly in small literary circles in Beijing or by poets from those circles. These young intellectuals, all from families of high officials or intellectuals and educated at some of the best high schools in Beijing, would have become “masters of the country” and joined the “old fortresses” had the Cultural Revolution not interrupted their route to universities. When Mao interrupted their education and sent them to the countryside and factories, they not only experienced a rude awakening of the cruel reality of rural life and the falseness of the state propaganda, but fell from their privileged position as future masters and were turned into social outcasts. This is especially the case with the young men, as despite the gender equality policy of the Mao era, the state remained a patriarchal system. Therefore, even though Bei Dao seems to claim the grassroots status of *Today!* by emphasizing its humble origin in the countryside, these “underground” avant-gardes bear close ties of kinship to the institutional power they rebelled against.

The term “underground” is also gendered. Those few young people bustling around the worn-out mimeograph machine, as Bei Dao depicts in his speech, were mostly men. And the young poets, writers and artists who grew into leading figures in the contemporary avant-garde art and literature were mostly men.³⁸ Of the 24 poets published

Language Shattered: Contemporary Chinese Poetry and Duoduo (Leiden, The Netherlands: Research School CNWS, 1996).

³⁷ Hundreds of readers’ letters I copied from the *Today* archive could testify to that. I will discuss this later on in the chapter.

³⁸ In his book on literature since the Cultural Revolution, Yibing Huang notices the predominance of male writers in modern Chinese literary history; however, rather than taking a critical stand, he marks the gender of the modern “individual subject” as a male who “longed to give birth to itself as a ‘new man.’” See Yibing Huang, *Contemporary Chinese Literature: From the Cultural Revolution to the Future* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 2-5.

in *Today!*, only two were woman, and one of them, Ying Zi (pen name for Cui Deying), only had one poem published in *Today!*.³⁹ If *Today!* was meant to be the “mouthpiece of the younger generation”⁴⁰ regardless of gender as Bei Dao writes in its mission statement and represent a new paradigm of life for both men and women, as Huang Rui depicts on its front cover, why had there not been more women among these avant-garde poets?

As Wendy Larson acutely observes in her *Women and Writing in Modern China*,

Literary talent ... entered the modern era as male, and the mere participation of women as writers did not create a niche for them. Although the new woman in theory should have faced no obstacles to becoming a writer of the new literature, the categories of moral virtue and literary talent were strongly gendered. A cultural bias against the combination of *woman* with *literary talent* meant that the two modernizing discourses of the autonomous aesthetic and women’s liberation, when put together, produced a problematic result. In critical discourse, many critics and commentators argued that women naturally lacked skill in written language and had minds (and bodies, it was implied) too concrete to produce excellent literature. In other words, women’s ‘nature’ that emerged from the bodily tradition of the performance of virtue was physical, material, and concrete, rather than transcendent and intellectually profound, as the concept of literary talent, or *cai*, implied.”⁴¹

When they declared that the old generation had “fallen behind” and it was up to the younger generation to “reflect the spirit of the new age,”⁴² did these young male avant-gardes continue to carry the deep-rooted distrust of women’s literary talent of the “old generation”?

In one of the first critical articles on Bei Dao outside China, Bonnie McDougall rightly points out that the poet created an “alternative reality” in his poetry to “challenge the orthodoxy of the entire post-1949 period.”⁴³ When these avant-garde poets, artists and

³⁹ Thanks to Ao Fuming for generously sharing the materials of *Today* authors he compiled, so that I could tell the authors from their pen names.

⁴⁰ “Notice,” *Today*, February 1979, No. 2, 20.

⁴¹ Wendy Larson, *Women and Writing in Modern China*, 4.

⁴² Bei Dao, “To the Reader” in *Today*, December 23, 1978, No. 1, 1.

⁴³ Bonnie S. McDougall, “Bei Dao’s Poetry: Revelation & Communication,” in *Modern Chinese Literature*, Vol. 1, No. 2, Spring 1985, 225-226.

writers were mostly male, what kind of “alternative reality” did they create? When they promoted the concepts of “individual” and “personal” as opposed to the discursive hegemony of the official ideology, were these concepts as gender-neutral as they seemed? What kind of “personal feeling” was expressed in this new literature and art in opposition to the official propaganda? What role did gender play in their struggle to achieve artistic autonomy from the dominant official discourse?

Of course, these avant-garde poets and artists were far from the only urban youths who experienced a rude awakening upon close contact with rural reality in the Mao era. It is a recurrent theme in the narratives of *Today!*'s members during my interviews with them, in hundreds' of readers' letters to *Today!* in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and letters exchanged between sent-down youth who were not *Today!*'s members.⁴⁴ The pervasive sentiment of disillusionment among the sent-down urban youth partly explains why *Today!*'s avant-garde poetry could enjoy such a broad readership.

Illustrations: Poetry Visualized or a Vision of Its Own

Leafing through Mang Ke's *Xin shi* (Things in Mind, 1980) and Bei Dao's *Mosheng de haitan* (The strange seashore, 1980),⁴⁵ two of the three poetry collections⁴⁶ published by *Today!* before its closure in 1980, the reader is immediately impressed by not only Mang Ke's 19 poems written between 1973 and 1978, and Bei Dao's 32 poems

⁴⁴ I am grateful to Ao Fuming, who carefully kept hundreds of readers' letters to *Today*, and to Li Nan, a member of *Today*, who generously shared the letters exchanged between her friends and her. See also Xu Xiao, ed., *Minjian Shuxin: Zhongguo Minjian Sixiang Shilu* [Unofficial letters: Historical records of unofficial Chinese thoughts] (Hefei: Anhui wenyi chubanshe, 2000).

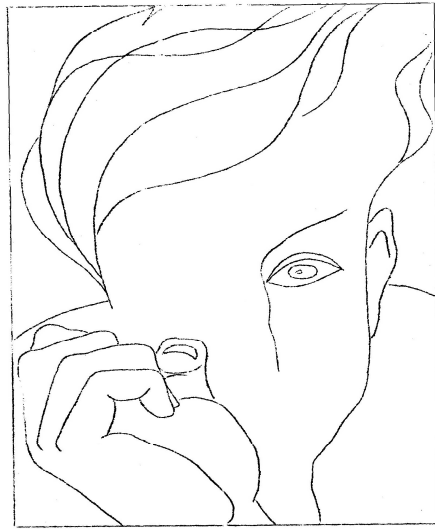
⁴⁵ Bei Dao first printed *The Strange Seashore* in the spring of 1978, but it was through the version distributed by *Today* that it reached a nationwide readership. According to Bei Dao, “most of the poems in this selection were written in 1972-1976, that is, ‘the darkest period in Chinese history.’ Because of these poems, we were watched and investigated by the police, under administrative pressure and almost went to prison.” See Bei Dao's letter to Wu Lixian on November 17, 1978 in my original archival materials.

⁴⁶ The other poetry collection is *Cong zheli kaishi* [Starting from Here, 1980] by Jiang He. Bei Dao also has a novella titled *Bodong* [Waves, 1980] published in this *Today* series.

written between 1972 and 1978, but the 27 pen-drawings by Lu Shi serving as illustrations, 8 for *Things in Mind* and 19 for *The Strange Seashore*.⁴⁷ What is the relationship between these drawings and the poems in these collections? Do they serve pure illustrative functions for the new poetics of the poets or embody new visions of the artist or both? Whatever the answers are, because of the intertwined arrangement of the drawings and the poems, they are bound to be viewed or read as an integral whole representing a counter voice or vision against the hegemonic control of the official symbolic system. In this section, looking closely at four illustrations in the two most popular poetry selections issued by *Today!* in 1980, I examine the new life paradigm envisioned by these avant-garde poets and artists in the light of gender and class.

Mang Ke's poem "I am a Poet -- to Bei Dao," written in October 1978, during the months when the small group of literary activists was busy preparing for the publication of the first issue of *Today!*, can be seen as a group portrait of these male avant-garde poets and artists. Lu Shi's full-page illustration for this poem is a perfect point of departure for the analysis of this avant-garde group.

⁴⁷ Lu Shi is the pen name of Qū Leilei (1951-), a Chinese calligrapher, painter and author currently based in the UK. His father is Qū Bo, a well-known writer in the Mao Era, whose first novel *Lin hai xue yuan* [*Tracks in the Snowy Forest*, 1957] was adapted into a film of the same title in 1960 and Beijing Opera titled *Zhi qu wei hu shan* [*Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*] during the Cultural Revolution, one of the eight model plays allowed during that period. Like the poet, the artist did his drawing with a pen. The power relations between the poets and artists are an interesting topic that I'll explore later on.



我是诗人

38-39

Figure 2. Illustration of Mang Ke's poem "I am a Poet -- to Bei Dao." Courtesy of Ao Fuming.

Judging by today's standard, this portrait is not distinctively gendered. The up-flying hair, the delicate facial features and slender fingers could belong to either a young man or a young woman. The up-flying motion of the hair, resembling that of a burning fire, sets off the unflinching gaze of the eye. Together with the clenched fist, they seem to embody the determination to fight. The eye is the most prominent feature on the face. Often regarded as the "window to the heart", the eye, not the eyes, serves as the sign of the heart, the source of strength.

Yet, seen in the context of the illustrations in these poetry selections, the portrait is distinctively male. For, in these illustrations, female figures are inevitably portrayed with long and often curly hair reaching to the waist, while male figures are always short-haired. To better understand why the male poet figure is depicted with this feminine

quality, one needs to bear in mind that this drawing is from 1978 and it bears “the spirit of the new age,” to quote Bei Dao.

During the thirty years of the socialist period from 1949 to 1978, while no direct orders were issued, the hair code for men was flat short hair usually no longer than one inch, while women wore short hair above the shoulder or, if long, in two plaits. Free-flowing hair would be a clear expression of individuality unbound, a symbolic gesture of rebellion against the state monopoly. In the 1980s, long sometimes curly hair would be a signature of the rebellious male poets or artists. Hence, to rebel against the hegemony of the state patriarch, these young avant-gardes turned to tropes of femininity to reclaim their individuality.

Everything seems fine until it comes to the presentation of the female. The following illustration from Bei Dao’s *The Strange Seashore* is a case in point. It is a full-page illustration between pages 24 and 25, the only drawing not sharing the page with poetry. The page does not have a page number, standing alone close to the center of this 57-page collection, as if inserted into the collection as a last-minute decision or as if carefully designed to play a central role. Either way, both its size and location seem to indicate its special position in this collection.

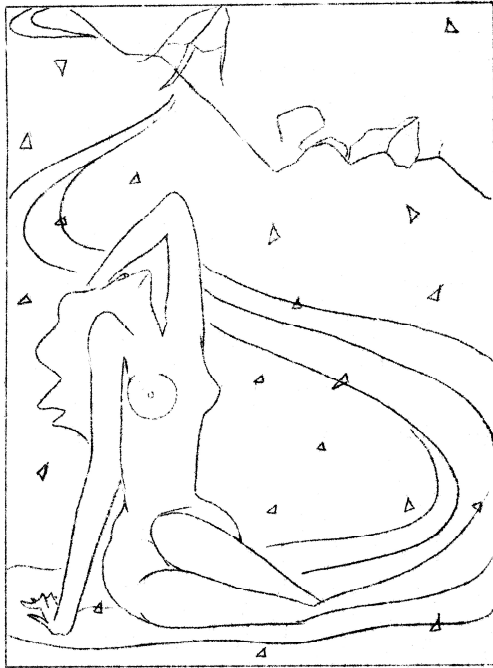


Figure 3. Illustration in Bei Dao's *The Strange Seashore*. Courtesy of Ao Fuming.

The drawing features a female nude in a landscape of meandering water and faraway mountains. With her feet submerged under water, the lines of the female nude flow right into the brook. It is as if the swift current of the mountain brook reaches a flat area and stretches into a pond with the shape of the female nude figure, seamless integration of the female nude and nature. There is a long tradition of modern Chinese male intellectuals using female nudes to embody their literary, artistic and political aspirations. In “The Bare Truth: Nudes, Sex, and the Modernization Project in Shanghai Pictorials,” Carrie Waara convincingly demonstrates that Chinese artists frequently used female nudes in Western fine arts as part of their modernization project: to foster “a commanding view of the world” and to develop the human ability to control in terms of truth, authenticity

and/or beauty.⁴⁸ In “Artwork, Commodity, Event: Representations of the Female Body in Modern Chinese Pictorials,” Yingjing Zhang rightly points out that the female body as artwork was regarded as the embodiment of the essence of feminine beauty and male aesthetic taste. It worked to solicit a “privatized” aesthetic gaze and confirm the male viewer’s self-confidence in erotic connoisseurship.⁴⁹ Also, as I demonstrated in chapters one and two, both Guo Moruo and Wen Yiduo employed female nudes to express their visions of modernity. What is the function of the female nude for the male avant-garde poets and artists who emerged from the Cultural Revolution?

The extraordinary significance of this female nude image can be best understood in the light of the dress code in the Mao era. Simone de Beauvoir gives an accurate sketch of the Chinese women from the Mao era upon her first visit to China in 1955: “The women wear their hair cut short or, if long, in two plaits, one falling on either side of the face; like the men they have on blue trousers and matching jackets or white blouses.”⁵⁰ In a few lines, de Beauvoir captures the gist of the gender equality policy in the Mao era, that is, women are “like the men.” During the Cultural Revolution, Mao Zedong’s maxim that “men and women are the same, and whatever men comrades can achieve, women comrades can achieve, too” was the most authoritative interpretation of that policy.

After the Cultural Revolution, much was written about the first part of Mao’s maxim. As “men and women are the same” also means the de-gendering of women, the sexualized female body was dismissed by the official discourse. Wearing close-fitting

⁴⁸ Carrie Waara, “The Bare Truth: Nudes, Sex, and the Modernization Project in Shanghai Pictorials,” Jason C Kuo, ed., *Visual Culture in Shanghai: 1850s-1930s*.

⁴⁹ Yingjing Zhang, “Artwork, Commodity, Event: Representations of the Female Body in Modern Chinese Pictorials,” in Jason C Kuo, ed., *Visual Culture in Shanghai: 1850s-1930s*.

⁵⁰ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Long March*, trans. Austryn Wainhouse (Cleveland and New York: The World Publishing Company, 1958), 12-13.

clothes and showing the curves of the female body would be criticized as bourgeois, while wearing loose clothes to hide one's figure and wearing one's hair short or tied back as de Beauvoir observes is deemed "proletarian" and "revolutionary." Women writers and poets in the post-Mao era have written frequently about the confining effect of the dress codes of the Mao era. Whether calling the era an age of "revolutionary spirit and medieval-style sexual suppression,"⁵¹ or "communist puritanical society,"⁵² or "simple and plain,"⁵³ they viewed the official gender equality discourse as suppressing women's bodily desires and making them ashamed of their own sexuality. Women writers and poets in the post-Mao era have successfully reclaimed legitimate sexual identity though not without mixed effects.⁵⁴

On the other hand, in recent years, scholars have started to reveal a more complex effect of the gender equality policy in the Mao era. In her article "Rethinking the 'Iron Girls': Gender and Labour during the Chinese Cultural Revolution," Jin Yihong reexamines the Iron Girl (Tie guniang), the model image for young women in the Mao Era, which was continuously enhanced by state media and imbued with different political meanings including "the women's heroic models who embodied liberated ideals of gender equality."⁵⁵ Jin explains that the Iron Girl image originated from the Dazhai Iron Girl brigade in 1963 who worked during an enormous flood, "a model production squad

⁵¹ Zhai Yongming, "Qingchun Wunai" [Helpless Youth], in Bei Dao, Li Tuo, eds., *Qishi niandai* [The seventies], 508.

⁵² Shen Rui, "Yao jinyun he wode gushi" [Stories of Yao Jinyun and Me]. I obtained this article from Ao Fuming.

⁵³ Wang Anyi, "Wei Zhuang" [The Wei village], in Bei Dao, Li Tuo, eds., *Qishi niandai* [The seventies], 161.

⁵⁴ For a more detailed analysis, see Zhong Xueping, "Who is a Feminist? Understanding the Ambivalence towards Shanghai Baby, 'Body Writing,' and Feminism in Post-Women's Liberation China," in a special issue "Translating Feminisms in China" edited by Wang Zheng and Dorothy Ko, in *Gender & History* (vol. 18 no.3, 2006), 635-660.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 617.

that could bear any hardship and shoulder heavy burdens with iron-like shoulders.”⁵⁶ The following is a picture of the Dazhai Iron Girls in the 1970s.⁵⁷



Figure 4. Dazhai Iron Girls in the 1970s. Courtesy of news.xinhuanet.com.

Jin convincingly argues in her article that this official ideology of gender equality “provided women of that era with the possibility to challenge the traditional gendered division of labour. It especially provided new discursive space for working-class women, who were at the lowest level of the social stratum, to express themselves.”⁵⁸ Other

⁵⁶ Yihong Jin, Kimberley Ens Manning, and Lianyun Chu, “Rethinking the ‘Iron Girls’: Gender and Labour during the Chinese Cultural Revolution,” in a special issue “Translating Feminisms in China” edited by Wang Zheng and Dorothy Ko, in *Gender & History* 18, no. 3 (November 2006), 616.

⁵⁷ The image is from “Gaijie kaifang 30 nian, jianzheng lishi: nashi de Dazhai [zutu]” [30 years of reform, witness history: Dazhai then [picture series]], see http://news.xinhuanet.com/photo/2008-11/30/content_10434010_4.htm (accessed June 10, 2010).

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 629. Other scholars have also written on the multilayered and complex interactions of official ideology.

scholars such as Wang Zheng have also written about the empowering effect of Mao's gender policy for women despite its limitations.⁵⁹

With the historical context in mind, what kind of message does the artist intend to relay with this idealized female nude figure integrated into the natural landscape? It is worth noting that nature is not explicitly associated with the female in the mission statement of *Today!*, though the challenge posed by these young avant-garde poets, artists and writers against the official hegemony is expressed through a Nature analogy: "The cultural hegemony of the 'Gang of Four' allows only one form of existence, that is, a hypocritical form; it allows only one kind of flower in the literary world, that is, black flowers. Yet today, when the dawn of the day arises from a pool of blood, what we need are flowers riot with colors, flowers truly belonging to Nature, flowers blooming in people's heart of hearts."⁶⁰

By merging the female nude with nature, the artist seems to present a strongly gendered message. Is this a bold statement of the liberation of women's (as well as men's) suppressed sexuality and a symbolic gesture against the control of the official ideology? Is the female nude here serving as the embodiment of undisguised truth in the heart of the new generation of young people? Is the male artist speaking on behalf of the female poets, artists and readers as well in this defiant gesture?

⁵⁹ Wang Zheng, "Call me 'Qingnian' but not 'Funü': A Maoist Youth in Retrospect," in Zhong Xueping, Wang Zheng, Bai Di, eds. *Some of Us: Chinese Women Growing up in the Mao Era* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 27-52. Other articles in this collection also provide complex pictures of the multilayered intersections of the official ideology and lived experience of young women growing up in the Mao Era, rather than giving a clear-cut picture of sexual suppression in that era.

⁶⁰ Bei Dao, "Zhi duzhe" [To the Reader], *Today*, No. 1, 1. Other works in the issue embody the same theme. For example, the first poem is titled "Landscape Painting" by Qiao Jia (Pen name of Cai Qijiao, one of the few poets in this group from an older generation); the first critical writing is titled "Daziran de gesheng: ping 'Faguo shijiu shiji nongcun fengjinghua zhan' ji qita" [Songs of Nature: On "the 19th-century French rural landscape painting exhibition" and others] by Xia Pu (Pen name of Huang Rui).

If we trace the current of the mountain brook back to its source at the top of the page, we notice that the contour of the faraway mountain is in fact that of a male face resembling that of a marble sculpture of Western origin, for example, *David*, one of Michelangelo's most influential sculptures; the brook issues right out of his down-gazing eye.⁶¹ By contrast, the female nude, with her head leaning backward, is almost faceless. Her most prominent quality is the soft curvy lines of her slender limbs, long wavy hair, full breasts, thin waist and round buttocks.⁶²

Suddenly the implications of the female nude figure become infinitely more complicated. The artist seems to be not only challenging the suppression of sexuality in the Mao era, but also its discourse of gender equality on a more fundamental and profound level. Instead of emphasizing the equal qualities between men and women, whether the dress code or the capability for achievements, the artist seems to be sketching out a new paradigm for gender relationships: With the male face at the top of the page taking up nearly the same space as the body of the female nude at the bottom, the artist not only highlights a stark contrast between the spiritual quality of the male face and the sensual quality of the female body, but also a hierarchical relationship between them.

Further, just as the mountain is the source of the brook, the male eye is figured as the origin of the female body. What does this suggest? What trickles down from the male eye that brings this idealized female nude into being, the male gaze of desire or his tears of love? Either way, this drawing seems to suggest that the male is the creator

⁶¹ I am grateful for the insights from Yoichi Aizawa and others at Colgate University.

⁶² As the prototype of the female nude figure is Venus, the goddess of love, from Greek and Roman mythology, it is not surprising that the figure often has long curly hair. Permed hair was a common fashion for women and a rebellious gesture for young men in the 1980s in response to the dress code of the socialist period.

/connoisseur of the female nude beauty. Some readers may have also noticed the distinct Western qualities of both the male face and the female figure.

Qu depicts the female figure with her head turned up so her face is in full view of the male face, but invisible to the outside viewer. The locked eyes of the mountain/man and water/woman in this drawing seem to be a perfect illustration of the vision of Nature/personal versus the monolithic official hegemony. Only this vision is embodied in highly-gendered terms and is explicit of a gender hierarchy that is not apparent in gender-neutral terms such as “natural,” “personal” and “people.” If the artist is also trying to convey a message of beauty to the world as a defiant gesture against the sexual suppression of the dominant discourse, the message also says: this female beauty is only meant for full appreciation by the male creator. Does this mean that women’s feminine qualities are created solely by and for the male gaze? By creating this Westernized ideal form of the female nude body, is the male gaze liberating the suppressed female sexuality or making ordinary women more ashamed of their less-than-ideal bodies?

Considering that there has been a long tradition of Chinese male intellectuals using female nudes to embody their literary, artistic and political agendas, what is the function of the female nude form in this case then? Is the nakedness of the female nude intended to represent a natural form of existence as opposed to the heavily-masked hypocritical existence required of the official hegemony? Since water often functions as a natural mirror reflecting the mountain, is the idealized female nude form also a pure, undisguised, truthful projection of the male self? Does the male figure create a female form in identification with himself? Is the role of the female nude / Nature to reproduce the male ideal?

Before moving on to a close reading of the new poetry to examine whether this paradigm is better disguised behind words, let us look at two other illustrations by the same artist. Similar to the illustration we have just examined, the pair of illustrations once again highlights the generative or creative function of the male gaze, only this time the creation is not an idealized female nude form, but a child.

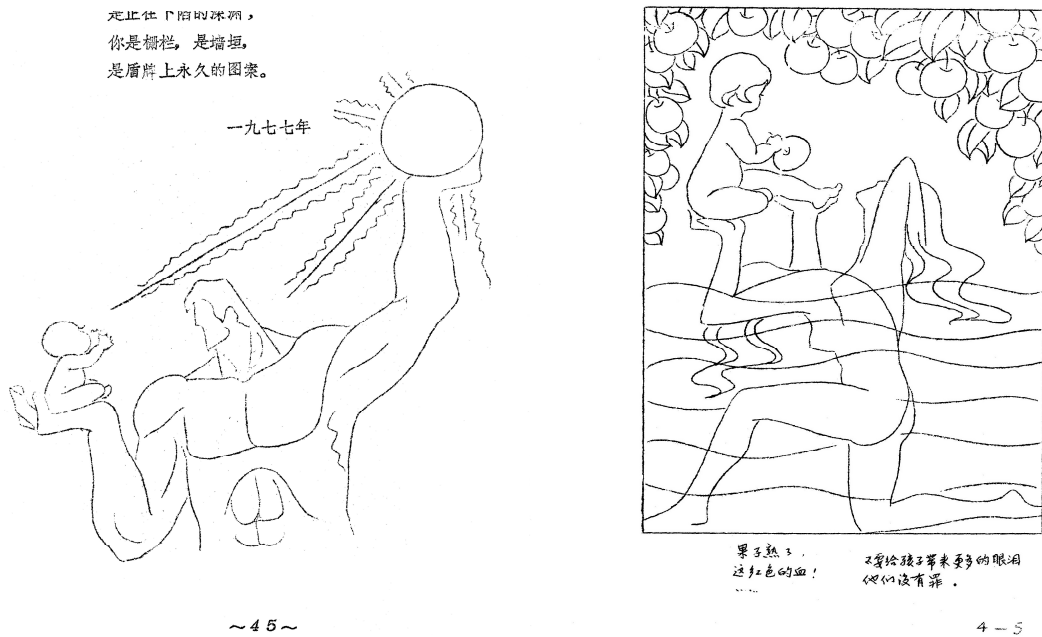


Figure 5. Illustrations of Bei Dao and Mang Ke's poetry. On the left is an illustration from Bei Dao's *The Strange Seashore*; on the right is an illustration from Mang Ke's *Things in Mind*. Courtesy of Ao Fuming.

The drawing on the left is an illustration from the same collection by Bei Dao, whereas the one on the right is from Mang Ke's *Things in Mind* (1980). Though the two drawings are from two different poetry collections, they share a striking resemblance in terms of structural and thematic elements. What is striking in this pair of drawings is not only the highly gendered depiction of the male and the female figures, the sharp contrast between

the bulging muscles of the male torso versus the soft lines of the muscleless female body, once again faceless, but also the hierarchical relationship between the male and the female mediated through the child.

The male figure, with the physical prowess of a hyper-masculine demi-god, holds up the blazing sun with one hand and the child in the palm of the other with no sign of physical exertion. His gaze, projecting down onto the child in the manner of the sunlight, seems to be infusing the child with energy and life as the sun does. The female figure, however, is down on her knee with split upper bodies, one with her head and back bent down while holding up the child with both hands, the other is gazing (longingly?) at the fruits above, similar to the female figure in Bei Dao's *The Strange Seashore*, her face invisible to the outside viewer. What do the child and fruit signify? Why does the female figure need to perform the functions of physical support for the child and of spiritual admiration of the fruit down on her knee? By creating this hierarchy between the male figure, the child and the female figure, the artist seems to foreground the male's life-giving role to the child while relegating the physical tie with the child to a subsidiary position.

What is also striking about this male figure is that, unlike the Western portrayal of David or Hercules, both hyper-masculine figures, it is portrayed without showing the lower body. If physical sensuality represents the liberation from sexual suppression, why is the representation of male sexuality absent from the drawing? By emphasizing female sexuality / sensuality and downplaying its role in the birth of the child, by highlighting the male spiritual and physical prowess, is the artist claiming the child to be more the offspring of the male than the female?

Why is there this sharp gender difference both in terms of physical features, social roles and hierarchical positions between the male figure and the female figure? If the male figure is the fantasized self-portrait of the avant-garde poet/artist, then who is the female figure -- readers and supporters of this avant-garde journal? Who is the child -- the new paradigm of life, the new-born avant-garde journal called *Today!*, the new generation of readers, or something else? Where do women artists and poets stand in this new paradigm? Do they share the same gaze of the male figure, the same notions of autonomy and individuality? Has the artist simply made the gendered poetic visions of the poets more visible, or is he visualizing a gendered paradigm of his own? To answer all these questions, let us read the poems illustrated in these collections as well as a few other poems published in *Today!*.

In July 1991, twelve years after *Today!*'s closedown and a year after its re-launch abroad, Bei Dao explained the original impetus of *Today!* from his personal experience. In 1969, like many urban youth of his time, Bei Dao left his high school education in the city and became a construction worker in the suburbs of Beijing. From his co-workers, mostly peasants from the countryside, Bei Dao learned about the harsh realities of village life: "They were the first to tell me that thousands of people had starved to death in the so-called 'society mastered by the people.'" This made him realize that "the education I had received from the communist propaganda machine was a lie ... For thirty years, propaganda had been our literature. No writings could express personal feeling. The word 'people' was a term without its real meaning. The authorities used controlled language to control people's thinking. The appearance of *Today!* challenged this language control."⁶³

⁶³ July 18, 1991, "Banquet Speech," Summer Writers Program, Hofstra University, New York. I obtained this translated script from John Rosenwald, a long time mentor and friend. As Bei Dao says in the "opening

In her memoir written in 1980, Shu Ting told a similar story. Her “bittersweet experiences of life in the mountain village” since 1969 and later on in the factories contributed to her “consciousness that questioned and challenged the established ideology and that sought to restore the true face of life. Don’t tell us what we should do, let us think why and what we want to do. Let us make our own choices and be able to feel our personal responsibility to history and to our nation.”⁶⁴

While both poets saw the established ideology as blocking the independent thinking of the individuals and resorted to the “personal” to create a new paradigm of life in poetry, I want to examine in this section the gendered implications of the trope of the personal.

Feminization of the poetic message

First, I want to pause and clarify why the new poets who emerged from the Cultural Revolution would place so much emphasis on the “personal” and frequently use feminine tropes of “heart” and “nature” to build their new poetry. Why did sentimentality become a powerful sign of the avant-garde?

The old discourse being dismantled was the mechanization of the people in the over-enthusiastic pursuit of industrial progress in the Mao era, best represented by the

remarks” I quote above, Bei Dao is not alone in this disillusionment with the official discourse. My interviews with *Today!*'s members such as Li Nan, Ao Fuming and others all tell similar experiences of the rude awakening of urban youth in the countryside. Yibing Huang also observes that “for many of them [the Red Guards], their initial idealistic “It is right to rebel” would eventually evolve into a discontent with and rebellion against the ideological dictates of the Cultural Revolution itself, which would later be most powerfully voiced in Obscure Poet Bei Dao’s famous “The Answer.” See Yibing Huang, *Contemporary Chinese Literature: From the Cultural Revolution to the Future* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 10.

⁶⁴ Shu Ting, “Life, Books, and Poetry,” in Shu Ting, *The Mist of My Heart: Selected Poems of Shu Ting*, edited by William O’Donnell and translated by Gordon T. Osing & De-an Wu Swihart. (Beijing: Panda Books, 1995), 92-96.

idiom “rending shengtian” (people will definitely conquer Nature), in order to “chaoying ganmei” (overtake the British and catch up with the American), the two most advanced industrial nations in the world. As a propaganda machine for the official ideology, the socialist poetry at the time is filled with this progressive zeal. Whole-hearted devotion to this course is best expressed through the seamless integration / transformation of each individual into the mechanical instruments used to realize this goal. The most well-known poetic elaboration of this ideal in the Mao era is He Jingzhi’s “Song of Lei Feng.” Lei Feng, a young soldier who died in an accident in 1962, was made an idol by Mao in early March, 1963. The poem was written on March 31, 1963, shortly after Mao’s call to “Learn from Comrade Lei Feng.”⁶⁵ In the poem, Lei Feng’s feelings (“love and hate”) are

象阴电、阳电一样	Like negative electricity and positive electricity
相反相成——	Opposing yet complementing each other
在你生命的线路上，	On the circuit of your life
闪出	Shining forth
永不熄灭的火花，	Never-dying sparks，
发出	Giving forth
亿万千卡热能!..... ⁶⁶	Millions upon millions of calories of thermal energy!.....

These lines in many ways evoke Guo’s “The Sky Dog” in its transformation of human life into energy. However, rather than empowering the poet figure as in Guo’s poem, the limitless thermal energy of the individual in He’s poem did not turn him/her into an all-powerful superhero, but is tamed to help the socialist machine function as an omnipotent entity: “a plain, yet / great --/ never-rusting screw!” in “our revolutionary/ omnipotent

⁶⁵ See *Zhongguo qingnian* [China Youth], March 2, 1963, *Renmin ribao* [People’s Daily], *Guangming ribao* [Guangming Daily], *Zhongguo qingnian bao* [China Youth Daily], etc., March 5, 1963.

⁶⁶ He Jingzhi, *He Jingzhi shixuan* [Selected poems by He Jingzhi] (Jinan: Shandong renmin chubanshe, 1979), 398-399.

machine tool.”⁶⁷ Thus, in order for China to grow stronger than the advanced, industrialized, capitalist countries, the people have to be transformed into an indistinguishable part of the machine and their feelings in line with the upward, optimistic and hyperbolic tune of industrial progress. The ideal individual for the socialist project represented in the image of proletarian workers is hyper-masculine in terms of physical stamina yet completely impotent in terms of autonomy. The new discourse of the “heart” and the tropes of love, desire and nature these new poets held up are rebelling against this official mechanization and homogenization of people’s psychology.

“Art,” a segment from “Notes from the City of the Sun,” a long sectional poem Bei Dao wrote in 1974, shows exactly how the avant-garde poets emerged from the Cultural Revolution destabilized by the intellectually foreclosed symbolic system in the official poetry:

亿万个辉煌的太阳
显现在打碎的镜子上⁶⁸

Billions of glorious suns
Appear in the shattered mirror

In the Mao era, the sun is a familiar trope in the official poetry and discourse that always conjures up Mao and the monopoly of his discursive control, not only on literature and art, but also on people’s everyday life. There is only one sun and it is always red, glorious and rising. “Billions” evokes “the people” in the official discourse as in the phrase “billions of people,” a political term referring to the masses in China. By grafting together two familiar tropes from the official discourse, the poet simultaneously elevates the status of each individual of the people to that of the sun and takes away the sun’s unparalleled status high above. The mirror, an everyday object, when placed in the

⁶⁷ Ibid., 402.

⁶⁸ Bei Dao, *Mosheng de haitan* [The Strange Seashore] (Beijing: Jintian bianjibu, 1980), 29; also see Bei Dao, *Bei Dao shige ji* [Poems by Bei Dao] (Haikou: Nanhai chubanshe, 2003), 5.

context of the two official tropes, brings to mind the role of art and literature in the Mao era, which is to faithfully reflect the image of the sun, the only sun. The word “shatter,” understood in the context of the Cultural Revolution, often connotes the campaign “Smash the Four Olds.” Called on by Mao in the early stages of the Cultural Revolution, the Red Guards ransacked examples of Chinese architecture, burned Chinese classics, and shattered antiquities. Bei Dao himself actively participated in the Red Guard movements when he was young. “The shattered mirror” seems to indicate the double-edged consequences of that and other movements during the Cultural Revolution: it simultaneously reminds the reader of the many things shattered in the “Smash the Four Olds” movement and indicates the shattered beliefs in the monolithic Maoist ideology when Mao stripped the Red Guards of the privilege and power he gave them at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution and sent them to the countryside for “re-education” in 1968. Hence, the reflections of the multifarious constellation of individuals in the mirror are made possible by the mirror being shattered, that is, the monolithic symbolic system of the official ideology being destabilized.

For Bei Dao and Mang Ke, the heart is often in direct dialogue with the sun. In their poems, instances of turning the monolithic symbol of the sun into personalized tropes to break the fixed “relationship between word and object”⁶⁹ in the official poetry are abundant. For example, “The river sluggishly drags the sun, / the long stretch of water is dyed bright yellow”⁷⁰; “The sun went down. / She seems to remind me: / you will

⁶⁹ Shi Jianfeng, “Bei Dao tan dangdai hanyu shige de kunjing” [Bei Dao on the predicament of contemporary Chinese poetry], *Dongfang zaobao* [Oriental Morning Post], January 17, 2010. http://epaper.dfdaily.com/dfzb/html/2010-01/17/content_184062.htm (accessed January 18, 2010).

⁷⁰ Mang Ke, “Dong tudi” [Frozen earth], in Mang Ke, *Xinshi* [Things in mind] (Beijing: Jintian bianjibu, 1980), 1. The poem is written in 1973.

never see me again”⁷¹; “the sun sinks toward an abyss / Newton is dead”⁷²; “Hey, sun – kaleidoscope, / start revolving / and tell us innumerable unknown dreams”⁷³; “chasing trails in the virgin forest, / the green sunlight is swiftly fleeting through the cracks”⁷⁴; “the young grasses’ tender arms hold up the sun.”⁷⁵ By resituating the sun into varied relations with different elements of Nature, the poets make it possible for the feminine Nature / personal to reclaim the sun and re-open its symbolic flexibility. The sun’s upward motion, color, even its gender are shifted. The last example in particular has an interesting correlation with Lu Shi’s depiction of the male figure holding up the sun. Thus, by drawing upon a form of femininity that often risks being sentimental, the avant-garde poets were able to reclaim both individual and artistic autonomy from the hyper-masculine discourse of the state patriarchy.

The strategy of using feminine tropes of Nature as a means of writing back at the patriarchy resonates with the earlier attempts of the May Fourth generation. “The Answer” belongs to a cluster of Bei Dao’s poems that are closer to socialist poetry, both in terms of its hard staccato rhythm and its resounding slogan-like message. More interestingly, this poem clearly echoes Guo Moruo’s “Earth, My Mother!” both in its defiant declarations against authority and repetition of the pattern “I do not believe.”

While Guo Moruo howls,

我不相信你只是个梦幻泡影，
我不相信我只是个妄执无明。

...

⁷¹ Mang Ke, “Taiyan luole” [The sun went down], *ibid.*, 10. The poem is written in 1973.

⁷² Bei Dao, “Lengku de xiwang” [Cruel hope], in his *Mosheng de haitan* [The strange seashore], 20. The poem is written in 1973.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁷⁴ Bei Dao, “Nihao, Baihuashan” [Hello, Hundred-Flower Mountain], see Bei Dao, *Mosheng de haitan* [The strange seashore], 6. The poem is written in 1972.

⁷⁵ The translation is adapted from Bonnie S. McDougall’s translation. See Bei Dao, edited and translated by Bonnie S. McDougall, *Notes from the City of the Sun: Poems*. (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University, c1983), 56.

我不相信那缥缈的天上，
还有位什么父亲。⁷⁶

I do not believe that you are merely a bubble and illusion,
I do not believe that I am merely stubborn and ignorant.

...

I don't believe that in the shadowy heaven above,
There exists a certain father.⁷⁷

Bei Dao calls out,

我不相信天是兰的；
我不相信雷的回声；
我不相信梦是假的；
我不相信死无报应。⁷⁸

I do not believe the sky is blue;
I do not believe in thunder's echoes;
I do not believe that dreams are false;
I do not believe that death has no revenge.

Of course, Guo does not own the phrase “I do not believe.” Yet Bei Dao’s employment of the same pattern shows the tie between Bei Dao’s generation and their May Fourth predecessors in their defiant gesture against the authoritative patriarchy. Like Guo, Bei Dao and his friends also turn to Mother Earth / Nature for strength. Unlike Guo, who also uses the most advanced science and technology as literary tropes to empower the new poet figure by transforming him into a super human with mythical and high-tech power, Bei Dao’s generation goes in the opposite direction to achieve the same effect, imbuing the new poet figure with super power by completely de-technologizing the poet, making him take the position of the feminine, and rendering the feminine more feminine.

⁷⁶ Guo Moruo, *Niushen* [The Goddesses], 89.

⁷⁷ Adapted from Lester and Barnes’ translation, see John Lester and A.C. Barnes, trans., Kuo Mo-jo (i.e. Guo Moruo), *Selected Poems from The Goddesses*, 30.

⁷⁸ Bei Dao, *Mosheng de haitan* [The Strange Seashore], 31; also see Bei Dao, *Bei Dao shige ji* [Poems by Bei Dao], 7-8.

Feminization of the Poet and Hyper-Feminization of the Woman

In “Life, books and poetry” (1980), Shu Ting retraces her path to poetry and to *Today!*. Having begun writing poetry in 1969, Shu Ting became well-known in the southern provinces of China in the early 1970s. It is because of the circulation of her poems through personal correspondence among friends that she got to know Cai Qijiao and was later introduced to Bei Dao. As Shu Ting recalls, when she “first read Bei Dao’s poetry in 1977, it was as if experiencing an 8.0 magnitude earthquake.” Yet “the appearance of Bei Dao’s poetry moved me more than his poetry itself.” She then writes,

I do not want to comment on Bei Dao’s poetry here, the same as I will not critique works by Jiang He, Mang Ke, Gu Cheng and the like, because I do not have the ability. However, the impact they had on me was immense, so that I almost dared not pick up my pen in 1978-1979. I now still don’t think that they are what we usually regard as the “modernists.” They are different, yet share something in common, that is, the spirit of exploration. And as far as I know, they, like many young people of high aspirations in our time, rather consciously related their own fate with that of our nation. Their conscientiousness and spirit of self-sacrifice moved me.⁷⁹

When Shu Ting writes, “I do not have the ability” to critique these male avant-garde poets, is she being honest, polite or ironic? What is it in these male poets that made this female poet, having established her position as a “new poet” in her circle earlier than most of them started writing, stop writing for a year? The only leads suggested here are her observations of their high aspirations, the conscious association of their fate with the nation and their spirit of self-sacrifice, qualities that moved her yet seemed to be aloof from her. In the following section, I analyze poems by Bei Dao, Mang Ke and Shu Ting in an attempt to find answers to these questions.

⁷⁹ Shu Ting, “Shenghuo, shuji yu shi” [Life, books and poetry], in Liu He (Lydia H. Liu), ed., *Chideng de shizhe* [The bearer of the Lamp] (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 2001), 169-176. For an English version, see “Life, Books, and Poetry – and to answer letters from my readers” (1980), in William O’Donnell ed., Gordon T. Osing & De-an Wu Swihart, trans., *The Mist of My Heart: Selected Poems of Shu Ting*, 89-101.

Mang Ke's poem "I am a Poet – to Bei Dao," written in October 1978, around the time when they were actively preparing for the publication of the first issue of *Today!*, serves as a group portrait of these male avant-garde poets and the perfect poetic illustration of Shu Ting's acute observations. This poem not only appears with a full-page illustration by Lu Shi in *Things in Mind*, but also in the first issue of *Today!*.

我是诗人，
我是叛逆的影子。
就让它被撕得粉碎吧，
而滴下的血会映出光辉一片。

I am a poet,
I am a rebel's shadow.
Let it be torn to pieces,
And the dripping blood will reflect the
glory.

我是诗人，
我是带血的纸片。
就让它人们在手中传阅吧，
让心和心紧紧相连。

I am a poet,
I am a blood-stained piece of paper.
Let it be passed around from hand to hand,
Let heart and heart join tight.

我是诗人，
我是一面旗帜。
就让它高高地飘扬吧，
印着我忠诚的灵魂。

I am a poet,
I am a flag.
Let it fly high and sky high,
Printed with my faithful soul.

我是诗人，
我是历史的见证。⁸⁰

I am a poet,
I am the witness of history.

The poet figure in the poem shares with Lu Shi's illustration the same emphasis on the poet's determination to fight and strength in fragility. Through self-sacrifice ("be[ing] torn to pieces"), the rebellious spirit of the poet is able to be transformed from its lowly position on the ground ("rebel's shadow") to an elevated position among the crowd ("be[ing] passed around from hand to hand"), further elevated to the position of a token (a flag "fly[ing] high and sky high"), and eventually reach the level of history. Note the function of the personal trope of the heart in this poem: "let heart and heart join tight" is

⁸⁰ Mang Ke, *Xinshi* [Things in mind], 39.

not the ultimate purpose of the poet, but a means for the poet figure to achieve the height of history.

The striking repetitions of the trope of blood in the first two stanzas and the red flag in the third stanza direct our attention to the state power in China. In the symbolic system of the socialist discourse, blood always represents the revolutionary martyrs who shed their blood for the good of the country, to be specific, the communist regime. The bright red color of the national flag also symbolizes the martyrs' blood. In the poem though, the poet figure resembles a revolutionary martyr from the socialist symbolic system, yet he is not sacrificing himself for the sake of the socialist state. On the contrary, he is sacrificing himself to oppose the socialist state. By this radical gesture of rebellion, i.e., by standing up to the state at the expense of his life, the male poet figure not only attains the same authoritative power as the state, but a strong masculine adulthood.

What exactly is the male poet figure sacrificing his life for in this poem? The second stanza offers some useful hints. The image of "the blood-stained piece of paper," passing "around from hand to hand" points to the underground reading and writing among the small literary circles in Beijing during the Chinese Cultural Revolution. Members of these literary circles were either children of high officials or intellectuals, or friends of these children; the avant-garde poems written by these members were often passed around as handwritten copies in these elite circles during the Cultural Revolution. Both Bei Dao and Mang Ke and most of the avant-garde poets of *Today!* belonged to these circles. As these activities were often interfered with by the state police and some members were imprisoned, these poets were well aware of the danger they faced when engaging in these activities. In the letter to Wu Lixian, after telling him about their

preparation of *Today!*, Bei Dao refers to the reality of the time, “in fact, the threat and punishment of these thunderbolts still constantly hover above our heads. They are also waiting for opportunity. My friends and I are well-prepared to lose freedom.”⁸¹

Further, the heart, a seemingly gender-neutral trope in Bei Dao’s mission statement for *Today!* and Mang Ke’s collective portrait of these new poets, became unambiguously male in the following poems by Bei Dao. Let us first look at “Song of the Footprints” in *The Strange Seashore*.

关于足迹的歌

Song of the Footprints

你踏上覆雪的台阶
打开门，影子投在墙上
仿佛打开一本带肖像的书
你踮起脚，走过浅滩
在动荡的晕眩中吐下果核
仿佛吐下沉甸甸的锚
你走进林间的空地
把手帕系在蘑菇的小白帽上
仿佛系上一片迟来的早霞
你不顾头上盘旋的雷霆
摘掉发卡，让温柔的瀑布
流进每颗沉重的心里
一九七七年⁸²

you tread onto the snow-covered steps
open the door, your shadow thrown onto the wall
as if opening a book with a portrait
on your toes, you walk past the shallows
in turbulent dizziness spitting out the pits
as if spitting out the leaden anchor
you walk into the clearing in the woods
tie your handkerchief onto the mushroom’s tiny white
cap
as if tying a slice of belated morning glow
you ignore the wheeling thunder overhead
take off your hairclip, let the gentle waterfall
flow into every heavy heart
1977

The female figure, who is also the addressee in this poem, is not explicitly nude, yet it shares with the illustration a soft and tender quality. Interestingly, in the opening lines, the female figure’s shadow projected onto the white space of the wall is compared to a portrait in a book, which is exactly how the illustration of the female figure is printed in Bei Dao’s poetry collection. As in the illustration, the only significant quality of the

⁸¹ Bei Dao’s letter to Wu Lixian (whose pen name is Ya Mo), November 17, 1978. My thanks to Li Tuo and Lydia Liu for providing the letter.

⁸² Bei Dao, *Mosheng de haitan* [The strange seashore], 43.

addressee's shadow is the soft contour of her female figure. As in Qu's illustration, Nature is closely associated with the feminine. In contrast to the masculinized female in the CCP's gender equality discourse, both the female addressee and Nature are instilled with ultra-feminine qualities of softness, purity and gentleness as is expressed in the female figure's gesture of tying her "handkerchief onto the mushroom's tiny white cap."

If we understand these tropes of femininity as a means for the poet to write against the state's masculinization of women, the last three lines of the poem points to another connection between the female addressee, the male poet and the state authority. As the wheeling thunder overhead represents the state patriarchy, the female figure is depicted in rebellion against it by taking off her hairclip and freeing the soft lines of her long hair. As discussed earlier, the significance of this gesture could only be understood in the context of the dress codes under the socialist regime; that is, equal rights for men and women meant women could do everything men could do, including dress the way men dress. Women always wore loose clothes and wore their hair short or tied their hair back if it was long. Taking off the hairclip would mean defying the state authority and revealing the female figure's feminine qualities, but for what purpose? Is it to free her suppressed female subjectivity? It does not seem to be entirely the case in this poem. The role of the freed soft curves of the female figure is to comfort the male speaker by flowing into "every heavy heart." Even though "heart" here is depicted in a gender-neutral light, this "heaviness" seems to be only characteristic of the self-sacrificing male poet figure as depicted in Mang Ke's "I am a Poet."

A few months before posting the first issue of *Today!* on the street walls of Beijing, Bei Dao, with the help of friends, printed *Window on the Cliff*,⁸³ a small collection of his poems written during the Chinese Cultural Revolution, and passed it around among his friends. "Rainy night," the first poem in this collection, once again features a self-sacrificing story of the male poet in conflict with the oppressive state, and once again, the female addressee is portrayed as a means to transmit the male poet's rebellious message.

当水洼里破碎的夜晚
摇着一片新叶
像摇着自己的孩子睡去
当灯光穿起雨滴
缀饰在你的肩头
闪着光，又滚落在地
你说：不
口气如此坚决
可微笑却泄露了你内心的秘密

低低的乌云用潮湿的手掌
揉乱你的头发
揉进花的芬芳和我滚烫的呼吸
...

即使明天早上
枪口和血淋淋的太阳
让我交出自由、青春和笔
我也决不会交出这个夜晚
我绝不会交出你
让墙壁堵住我的嘴唇吧
让铁条分割我的天空吧
只要心在跳动，就有血的潮汐
而你的微笑将印在红色的月亮上
每夜升起在我的小窗前

As the shattered night in the flooded ditch
Was rocking a new leaf,
As if rocking its child to sleep
As the lamplight-threaded raindrops
Studded your shoulders
Gleaming and rolling down
You said no
In such a resolute tone
But a smile revealed your heart's secret

with moist palms the low black clouds
kneaded your hair
kneaded the fragrance of flowers and my
burning breath
...

even if tomorrow morning
the muzzle and the bleeding sun
make me surrender freedom, youth and pen
I will never surrender this evening
I will never surrender you
let walls seal my lips
let iron bars carve up my sky
as long as my heart keeps pounding, the
blood will ebb and flow
and your smile will be printed on the red
moon

⁸³ This poetry collection was not mentioned in any works on Bei Dao or *Today*. I obtained a photocopy of it from Ao Fuming, a key member of *Today* and the current keeper of a major *Today* archive in Beijing, China.

唤醒记忆⁸⁴

rising each night outside my tiny window
recalling memories⁸⁵

Tropes of femininity (the addressee's [long] hair), feminine Nature ("the fragrance of flowers") and male desire (the male speaker's "burning breath") are "kneaded" into one rebellious message of sexual liberation. Yet the female addressee functions only as the most vital component of the poet's rebellion, not an equal player in the conflict between the avant-garde poets and the state. Her "smile" that acknowledges her love for the male poet, similar to the "gentle waterfall" of long hair in "Song of the Footprints," serves only as a comforting sign for the heavy-hearted male poet who sacrifices himself in a heroic action of shielding her from the state patriarch. Yet in his genuine gesture of protection, the male poet speaker also deprives the woman of the right of articulation. The pen, a symbol of writing, remains an object of the battle between the male poet and state patriarchy; the female, a message inscribed on the "red moon," remains the message inscribed by his pen.

This same paradigm of different gender roles has been practiced in the literary activism of *Today!*. After the first issue of *Today!* was posted on the Democracy Wall, Li Nan, Chen Binbin and Cheng Yu, all female, volunteered to help with *Today!*. When they first met with Bei Dao and Mang Ke, Bei Dao said to them with utter sincerity: if the police seek trouble with you, just push everything onto us [Bei Dao and Mang Ke]. They did not need to be responsible. Li Nan, Chen Binbin and Cheng Yu responded to the male poets' sincere gesture of protection with extreme indignation and felt this was a huge humiliation. They made it clear that they were adults and could be responsible for what

⁸⁴ *Today!*, June 20, 1979, No. 4, 9.

⁸⁵ The translation is by McDougall with minor changes. See Bei Dao, edited and translated by Bonnie S. McDougall, *Notes from the City of the Sun: Poems*, 47.

they did.⁸⁶ This is a typical moment of conflict between the gender equality policy of the Mao era and the new gender roles assigned by the avant-garde poets. This well-intentioned gesture of protecting women was at the same time a gesture of performing masculinity and deprived the female members of the opportunity to take on greater responsibilities in the group, keeping them in the less dangerous and therefore more peripheral positions. By taking on the dangerous role of self-sacrifice, the male avant-garde poets and artists made it clear that the battle was between the rebellious sons and the state patriarchy. The women should be kept out of this battle. Therefore, even though many female members volunteered to participate in the production of *Today!*, they were assigned the less essential roles.

How did Shu Ting, the only main female poet published in *Today!*, envision gender relations in her poems then? As Swihart acutely points out, there is a strong feminist consciousness in Shu Ting's poetry.⁸⁷ "To the Oak Tree" (1977),⁸⁸ her best-known poem, originally published in the first issue of *Today!*, was written the same year she was introduced to works by Bei Dao and other avant-garde poets in Beijing. Though it is unclear whether the poem was written before or after that event, it certainly reads like a direct response to the gender dynamics depicted by her male counterparts.

我如果爱你——
 绝不像攀援的凌霄花，
 借你的高枝炫耀自己：
 我如果爱你——
 绝不学痴情的鸟儿，
 为绿荫重复单调的歌曲；

if I really loved you –
 i wouldn't climb over you like the trumpet-
 vines
 standing on your highest branch to show.
 if I really loved you –
 I wouldn't imitate the infatuated bird,
 Repeating monotonous tunes to your green

⁸⁶ From my interview with Li Nan; also see Liao Yiwu, Chen Yong, "Li Nan fangtan lu" [Interview with Li Nan], in Liu, ed., *The bearer of the Lamp*, 372-373.

⁸⁷ De-an Wu Swihart, "Introduction," in Gordon T. Osing and De-an Wu Swihart, trans. *The mist of my heart: Selected Poems by Shu Ting*, 11-13.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.

也不止像泉源，
常年送来清凉的慰藉；
也不止像险峰，增加你的高度，衬托你的威仪。
甚至日光。
甚至春雨。
不，这些都还不够！
我必须是你近旁的一株木棉，
做为树的形象和你站在一起。
根，紧握在地下，
叶，相融在云里。
每一阵风过，
我们都互相致意，
但没有人
听得懂我们的言语。

⁸⁹
...

shade;
I will not be merely the available spring
That comforts you with cool waters year
round,
Nor merely a dramatic precipice either,
That sets off your grandeur, or heightens
your dignities,
Nor even your sunlight,
Nor even your spring rains.
No, all of these are not enough for me!
I must be another, a kapok tree, near you,
Definitely another tree standing there with
you,
Roots—intertwined in the earth,
Leaves—brushing each other in the mists.
Each time when a breeze sways us
We nod at each other
But no one understands our language.

⁹⁰
...

One by one, the female speaker denies the subsidiary roles possible for her, not a dependent (“trumpet-creeper”), not an admirer (“infatuated bird repeating monotonous tunes”), not a source of comfort (the spring that “comforts you with cool waters”), not a foil (“that set off your grandeur, or heightens your dignities”), nor a nurturer (“sunlight” and “spring rain”). Rather, she demands to be the exact equal to the male addressee, that is, to retain the status of an independent individual in their relationship. Most importantly, rather than simply being the embodiment of the rebellious message, she claims the right to language, so the sign of rebellion for her is their shared secret language that “no one understands.” It should be noted that the female speaker’s demand for gender equality is not the same as the gender equality in the socialist discourse. She acknowledges gender differences rather than following the latter’s masculinization of woman. In Shu Ting’s

⁸⁹ *Today!*, No. 1, 25-26.

⁹⁰ The translation is by Osing and Swihart with slight adaptations. Gordon T. Osing and De-an Wu Swihart, trans. *The Mist of My Heart: Selected Poems by Shu Ting*, 8.

own words, the poem is “a declaration of equality, independence, and freedom for women in China and for all humanity.”⁹¹

In “By the Beidaihe,” one of the poems Shu Ting wrote after her year-long silence from 1978 to 1979, the female speaker seems to find a voice of resignation bordering on irony in response to the “high aspirations” of her male counterparts, a strategy similar to the one adopted by Chen Jingrong in the 1940s. The poem begins with the rendezvous of two lovers by the sea. In the second stanza, the male lover suggests a breakup in the new symbolic language of the avant-garde poetry. Rather than saying something plainly to the effect of “I do not see a future for us,” the male speaker uses the familiar tropes of Nature to hint at a breakup. The shared secret language of the new generation, once a powerful tool of communication against the language control of the state, becomes an inadequate tool of dodging direct confrontation on the male speaker’s part when placed in the new love relationship.

发红的烟头	the red cigarette butt
在你眼中投下两瓣光焰	projects two fire petals in your eyes
你嘲弄地用手指	mockingly you use your fingers
捺灭那躲闪的火星	to stub out the dodging spark
突然你背转身	you turn away abruptly
掩饰地	trying to conceal
以不稳定的声音问我	and ask me in an unsteady voice
海怎么啦	what is wrong with the sea
什么也看不见 你瞧	i cannot see anything look
我们走到了边缘 ⁹²	we have reached the edge

The female speaker’s response resembles nothing of the gentle and comforting female figure that serves as a faithful reflection of the male ideals in the illustrations and poetry

⁹¹ Ibid., 11-12. From the author’s personal interview with Shu Ting, July 15, 1994.

⁹² Shu Ting, Gu Cheng, *Shu Ting, Gu Cheng shuqing shixuan* [Lyric poems by Shu Ting and Gu Cheng] (Fuzhou: Fujian renmin chubanshe, 1982), 52.

by the male avant-garde poets and artists. With no tears of surprise or emotional messiness, the female speaker let the male lover go back to his historical mission.

那么恢复起
你所有的骄傲与尊严吧
回到冰冷的底座上
献给时代和历史
以你全部
石头般沉重的信念

把属于你自己的
忧伤
交给我
带回远远的南方
让海鸥和归帆
你的没有写出的诗
优美了
每一颗心的港湾
1980.2⁹³

in that case, regain
all your pride and dignity
return to the icy pedestal
offer yourself to time and history
with all your
rock-heavy beliefs

hand over your own
sadness
to me
let the seagull and the homecoming sail
take it back to the far south
your unwritten poetry
has beautified
every heart's harbor

1980. 2

In a seemingly matter-of-fact tone of resignation, the female speaker gives a scathing critique of the male lover's giving up his personal feeling (his "own sadness") for his grand ideals (pride, dignity, the time and history). Note that these ideals have been prominent in the mission statement of *Today!* as well as the poems of the male avant-garde poets. Further, as discussed earlier, despite these male avant-garde poets' claim of leaving the May Fourth generation behind, these values are exactly the same humanistic values their May Fourth predecessors adopted from the male intellectuals of the Western Enlightenment in order to construct a modern identity and regain their lost prestige in an age of change and crisis. For the female speaker in Shu Ting's poem, to cling to those ideals means to lose the individuality they struggled to regain and turn oneself into a historical sculpture, grand yet devoid of life.

⁹³ Ibid., 52.

In “Assembly Line” (January-February 1980), another of the well-known poems written after her year-long silence, Shu Ting sketches out a relationship between the speaker, the machine and Nature in sharp contrast to that of her male counterparts. Rather than holding up tropes of Nature as a means to counter the mechanizing power of the assembly line, the speaker sees the people (“we”) and Nature alike succumb to mechanized routine. The speaker identifies with Nature (“trees” and “stars”) because of their shared loss of the sense of self.

在时间的流水线里
 夜晚和夜晚紧紧相挨
 我们从工厂的流水线撤下
 又以流水线的队伍回家来
 在我们头顶
 星星的流水线拉过天穹
 在我们身旁
 小树在流水线上发呆

星星一定疲倦了
 几千年过去
 他们的旅行从不更改
 小树都病了
 烟尘和单调使他们
 失去了线条与色彩
 一切我都感觉到了
 凭着一种共同的节拍

但是奇怪
 我唯独不能感觉到
 我自己的存在
 仿佛丛树与星群
 或者由于习惯
 或者由于悲哀
 对本身已成的定局
 再没有力量关怀
 1980年1-2月⁹⁴

Night after night,
 the assembly line of time.
 After work at the factory’s assembly line
 we join the homebound lines
 as stars above assemble to cross the sky.
 Over there
 a line of lost saplings.

Stars must be exhausted
 after millennia
 and no change in the itinerary
 and the fullness, the color
 of the anemic saplings
 dulls in the coal smoke.
 I know this
 by our shared routine

Strangely
 I cannot feel
 my own existence.
 out of misery or habit I’ve become
 like the branching trees, the assemblage of
 stars,
 too enervated to question
 this determined fate.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Shu Ting, *Shuangwei chuan* [Two-masted ship] (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1982), 21.

The speaker in this poem is not gender specific. It could be easily read as an existentialist lamentation of the alienation of self. However, read in the context of the strongly gendered poetics of the male avant-garde poets and Shu Ting's strong feminist consciousness, the poem could also be understood as Shu Ting's frustration over the imposition of male-centered ideals on the part of her male counterparts.

It should be noted that though Shu Ting was one of the major Obscure poets publishing in *Today!*, she was not regarded as a real member of the *Today!* poets. As the only main female poet in this mostly male literary group, Shu Ting has been marginalized for many reasons. One of the reasons was that she only traveled to Beijing occasionally to participate in the group activities as she lived in southern China.⁹⁶ Other reasons are that her intellectual heritage was different from that of the Beijing poets and her poems were not appreciated as much as the male poets because of her overly personal and narrow approach to poetry. However, the above analysis of the highly gendered poetics of Shu Ting and her male counterparts points to yet another deeper reason for her marginalization.

It is worth noting that, for the May Fourth intellectuals, gender equality was a sign of modernity as important as humanistic values such as pride, dignity, and sense of responsibility for the time and history they adopted from the West. The male avant-garde poets and artists of Bei Dao's generation recycled some ideals from the May Fourth intellectuals yet completely abandoned others. This intriguing choice can be understood from the male elite intellectuals' change of status under the socialist state. As Wang

⁹⁵ Tony Barnstone, ed., *Out of the Howling Storm: The New Chinese Poetry* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1993), 60.

⁹⁶ There are more interviews with *Today!*'s authors and literary critics associated with these authors later on.

Zheng points out, although May Fourth male intellectuals held up gender equality as a badge for their modern identity, they never lost their gender superiority. Their social prestige, financial status and political power made sure they had absolute gender superiority in the family. However, under socialist state control, the state's institutionalized gender equality greatly affected the everyday life of Chinese male intellectuals and deprived them of the absolute gender superiority they once enjoyed. The state controlled every aspect of family life, from their jobs to their marriage and their children's education. The father in the family did not have any say at all. What's more, the socialist system allowed no public space for the male intellectuals to satisfy their male desires as their predecessors once had. It seems to be only natural that the new male elites, in their rebellion against the state control, would demand both political democracy and gender privilege.

Lydia Liu has called attention to the highly developed, institutionalized, nation-oriented and male-centered critical tradition and questions the gendered politics in the practice of literary criticism in China.⁹⁷ As she acutely points out, Xiao Hong, a writer from the Republican period, is criticized for not participating in the national struggle in her later novel *Tales of Hulan River* by Mao Dun, a leading critic of the time. Mao Dun says, "It is hard to understand how a woman with her high ideals, who had struggled against reaction, could 'hibernate' in such stirring times as the years just before and after 1940." Liu argues that Xiao Hong does not share Mao Dun's "male-centered notions of society, nation, and war." Her novel subverts the trope of the raped woman in nationalist discourse and relentlessly contested its appropriation of the female body. For Xiao Hong,

⁹⁷ Lydia H. Liu, "The Female Body and Nationalist Discourse: Manchuria in Xiao Hong's *Field of Life and Death*," in Angela Zito and Tani E. Barlow, eds., *Body, Subject and Power in China*, 157.

“the meaning of ‘life’ and ‘death’ resides in the individual body, particularly the female body, more than in the rise and fall of a nation.” Liu continues to point out that Xiao Hong’s dilemma was that “she had to face two enemies rather than one: imperialism and the patriarchy. The latter tended to reinvent itself in multifarious forms, and national revolution was no exception. Women joining the army must reject their female identity to “become Chinese and fight for the nation. With men, it is a different matter. Not only does nationalism give them a new sense of identity, but it enhances their manhood at the same time.” Nationalism gave men an empowered identity and put men in the subject position of a new discourse of power.⁹⁸

In “Complete Silence from the Clarity Gained through Sadness” (1984), Shu Ting wrote in response to criticisms of her devotion to her family as opposed to “our era,” “Even though I revere those women’s [career women’s] devotion to their careers, I can’t imitate them. I’m just a normal woman in my emotions and in my livelihood. I never intended to be a writer or poet ... I don’t want to be an object on display like a potted plant or a rare bird.”⁹⁹ Though written under different circumstances, these lines seem to suggest a similar split between the nation and the personal for this female poet.

Originally a project of male intellectuals, the nationalist movement was at the same time the means to achieve the political and social power they would have achieved through the civil service exam. While the male poets “naturally” associated their personal fate with that of the nation, Shu Ting felt that for her that association was extremely artificial. It is interesting to observe that Shu Ting experienced the same male-centered criticism for the abstention from grand ideals as Xiao Hong did half a century earlier.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 160-162, 170-172.

⁹⁹ Shu Ting, “Complete Silence from the Clarity Gained through Sadness” (1984), in William O’Donnell ed., Gordon T. Osing & De-an Wu Swihart, trans., *The Mist of My Heart: Selected Poems of Shu Ting*, 109.

Another important difference between Shu Ting and the male poets is the means of circulation for their poetry. While she relied on personal correspondence to communicate her rebellion against ideological control of the state, the male poets were obsessed with public media. Not only did Bei Dao declare *Today!* the mouthpiece of the younger generation, but tropes of print media (book, paper, and printing) recurred in their poetry. On the one hand, they used tropes of the feminine to destabilize the hyper-masculine ideological monopoly of the state; on the other hand, they envisioned a space, a life, a media of their own that would elevate them to be on par with the state. In the following section, I focus on the production and circulation of this journal in the daily practices of group members and demonstrate how the gendered paradigm was embodied in the daily practices of this group.

Production and Reproduction

If the poets and artists took the position of the feminine in order to reclaim their masculinity and destabilize the hyper-masculinity of the state propaganda machine, how did they give their vision form when the state not only had tight surveillance of most walled-in spaces, but monopolized the media and their technology? The answer seems to be predictable: by taking the place of the feminine. The production of this unofficial journal relied mainly on low-end technologies such as mimeograph machines, typewriters and manual labor in the domestic space of the family; the distribution took place in the natural spaces of parks and the personal spaces of correspondence.

When asked why they chose to hold public poetry readings in the parks, Bei Dao answered that they had no other choices; the only space not controlled by the government

was in the open air, which was what the parks naturally had. A segment titled “Life” in Mang Ke’s 1974 poem best captures the reasons for this choice, “Best/To settle in a deserted place/ My life.” Of all the parks where *Today!* held their public readings and gatherings, the Yuyuantan Park nestled at the southwest edge of Beijing matched their description best. Originally an open field with a vast body of water, the Park had no enclosing walls or fences, no gate, no management or ticket office as it does today. The only human traces in the park were occasional local residents taking morning walks. The stage for the poetry reading was transformed from a natural slope; the backdrop was a bed sheet decorated with an abstract painting¹⁰⁰ tied between two trees; the background music was Hong Kong electronic music from a personal recorder; electricity was generated through home-made batteries; the sound of poetry was dispersed into the space through state properties such as a speaker and amplifier.¹⁰¹ Despite the surveillance by the state police, the *Today!* literary activists were able to transform a natural space into an alternative space to distribute their new paradigm of life. Similarly, although the distribution through the postal system was not without obstacles,¹⁰² as the circulation and consumption were mainly through personal networks and happened in personal spaces such as homes and dorms, *Today!* was able to reach a large number of readers without disturbing the original structure of spaces.

Yet, the birthplace of *Today!*, “the cramped farm house in the suburb of Beijing,” Bei Dao described at the beginning of his speech in March 2006, did not perfectly match

¹⁰⁰ The painting was by Huang Rui, an avant-garde artist and founder of the journal.

¹⁰¹ Not without danger, they applied for permission to the police, but got no permission. What’s more, just around the anniversary of the April fourth democracy movement? The government had long warned that anyone who gather in the public would be would be arrested. But they went on anyway, Bei Dao and Mang Ke had to play hide and seek with the tailing police to escape.

¹⁰² Issues of the journal were constantly confiscated on their way to the readers. Many readers mentioned this in their letters to *Today!*.

the description of such a “deserted place.” It was deserted in the sense that the farm house was located on the outskirts of Beijing, at the intersections of the city, the suburb and the countryside, at a relatively safe distance from state surveillance. However, it was not an empty house, but the domestic space of a young couple, Lu Huanxing and Shen Liling. Shen Liling, the female member of the family, was not only present at the moment of the “birth” of *Today!* but was actively involved in the process by cooking for the male activists. Yet, she was rarely mentioned as part of the historic moment of birth in the narratives of *Today!* members because of the insubstantial role she played. As was exemplified in Bei Dao’s speech, the birthplace of *Today!* was often emphasized for its grassroots status, and the moment of birth was marked by the mimeograph machine surrounded by the male founders. The female presence, when graciously acknowledged, was relegated to the peripheral role of the kind hostess, who would have cooked for any guests in the house, but was clearly not involved with the actual birth of *Today!* because of her distance from the mimeograph machine. Yet, considering the danger involved in the secret production of this avant-garde journal, the mere fact that Lu and Shen allowed their domestic space to be turned into a printing workshop for these literary activists made them both critical participants in this historic moment. It was intriguing that while Lu was acknowledged for his role as the founding member, the female owner of the house was not.

I want to remind the reader that the significance of the mimeograph machine is two-fold: first, it is a symbol of the grassroots status of this unofficial journal. With low-end technologies such as the mimeograph machine, the young avant-garde poets were able to speak with an alternative voice different from that of the state propaganda

machine. Second, it is also a symbol of the most central roles in the production of this journal, which were both dangerous and important. The failure to acknowledge the significance of Shen's role at the moment of *Today!*'s birth is one of the signs showing that, for the male poets and artists / literary activists, the publication of this unofficial journal was a matter between rebellious sons and their despotic father, and women were meant to be kept out of this "serious" business. Just as Bei Dao asked female members such as Li Nan and Cheng Yu to place all the blame on their male counterparts in times of danger, the male avant-gardes relegated the female members to subsidiary and therefore less dangerous roles. Whether this marginalization of female members was out of genuine motivation of protection or unconscious disregard of the capability of the female, this heroic sense of self-sacrifice served as a critical means for the male avant-gardes to upset the authority of the state patriarchy and regain the superior position in the gender relationship that they had been deprived of by the "gender equality" policy of the CCP.

One might argue that the case of Shen's erasure from history could be a coincidence. In the rest of the section, I attempt a more elaborate study of the gender dynamics in this group by focusing on No. 76, the legendary editorial office of *Today!*. From the second issue on, this place was not only the editorial office, but also the printing workshop, the distribution office, the storehouse, the social space for a new paradigm of life, and a sacred place for numerous readers of *Today!*



Figure 6. Mang Ke and a friend in front of No. 76. Courtesy of Ao Fuming.

Similar to Lu and Shen's cramped farm house, No. 76's dilapidated condition fits the grassroots status of an avant-garde journal. This quadrangle compound in the eastern part of Beijing was probably the remaining building in the back of an old temple where the monks used to live. The courtyard was full of makeshift kitchens and stubble grass. The space that served as *Today!*'s editorial office consisted of the most dilapidated rooms in this compound. What is more, situated in the east wing of the courtyard, the space was cold in the winter and hot in the summer.

The one and a half rooms, no more than 15 square meters altogether, were where the roughly 500,000 sheets of *Today!* were printed, folded and sorted into 20,000,000 pages over sixteen months, then bound and made ready for retail in Beijing or national distribution through the postal system. The half room inside also served as the storehouse for back issues and readers' letters and contributions. The twin-size board bed in the inner room served as Mang Ke's bed, seats for editorial meetings, and, with the quilts

rolled up, the stand for the mimeograph machine at the time of printing. The hand-colored window curtain, with its abstract patterns of triangles and arrows in red, yellow, blue and white, was the token of this new paradigm of poetry, art and life. A large number of volunteers including both young women and men participated in the numerous steps in the production of *Today!* in this cramped space. A great many people did not know each other before coming to work in this place, and a great number of literary youths made pilgrimages to this place.¹⁰³ This was the legendary No. 76, token of this unofficial literary journal and a new paradigm of life, art and literature. For most people, including both *Today!* members and readers, this space belonged to Liu Nianchun, at times, also his brother Liu Qing, who did not live there,¹⁰⁴ that is, a perfect deserted place to start a new life in.

When the members, readers and visitors enjoyed the idealistic vitality of their new life in this space, no one except for Ao Fuming ever noticed that this space was transformed not from an empty space but from the domestic space of another young couple, Liu Nianchun and his wife Li Bo.¹⁰⁵ Yet, it was only thirty years after the closedown of *Today!* that Ao wrote his painful, reminiscent essay titled “Trivial Records.” In this essay, Ao acutely points out the significance of No. 76 as a domestic space for Li Bo: despite its dilapidated condition and cramped space, the one and a half rooms in the east wing of the courtyard were extremely precious for young couples at the

¹⁰³ These descriptions are combinations of my interviews with Ao Fuming; Ao Fuming, “Bianyu suoji (3): huiyi 76 hao” [Trivial records after the compiling work (3): Remembering No. 76]; Xiao Hai (Pen name for Zhang Xiaohai), letter to *Today!* dated June 5, 1980; Xu Xiao, “*Today* and I,” translated by Jenny Putin, John Rosenwald, and a friend. John Rosenwald kindly allowed me to use this unpublished translation. For Xu Xiao’s essay in Chinese, see Xu Xiao, “*Jintian yu wo*” [*Today!* and I] in Liu, ed., *The bearer of the Lamp*, 63-65.

¹⁰⁴ Liu Nianchun was a college student and lived in the dorm, whereas Liu Qing worked and lived in another city.

¹⁰⁵ It was during my phone interviews with him in March 2006 that Ao first revealed this unknown side of No. 76 to me. I am glad he finally wrote about this himself and brought the story out in 2009.

end of the 1970s as the large number of intellectual youths returning to the city had made the already tight residential spaces even worse. Liu's widowed mother gave this space up to Liu and Li after they got married and moved in with her daughter. When Liu offered this space up to *Today!* Li Bo moved out to an even smaller and more cramped space. As Ao recalls,

Li Bo rarely came to No. 76. Indulging themselves in high-sounding conversations, most visitors would not realize that this place still had a female owner. I only met her two or three times there. She treated everyone with geniality and never pulled a long face in front of us. After taking care of her personal affairs, she did not just hurry out, but sat quietly by the side listening to others talk, sometimes asking one or two questions. In a word, I did not notice the usual "preludes" preceding a divorce. And she never made us "intruders" feel awkward.¹⁰⁶

It was during a visit to No. 76 after *Today!* was closed down and the place resumed its former function as a domestic space that Ao experienced a rude awakening. He writes,

A year and a half later on a bleak and chilly day, a little more than a month after the long-term resident Mang Ke moved out, he asked me to go to No. 76 and pick up some letters from Li Bo. In this brief period of time, everything had returned to its normal state. It was as if I stepped into a completely strange courtyard. I knocked on the door of that familiar cramped room. There was only Li Bo herself at home, her face radiant with the health and light typical of her ethnic group. When we sat down, she handed me a stack of letters. Li Bo had received and kept the last batch of letters from *Today!*'s readers. Then, she talked nonstop about the last *Today!* visitors she helped to receive. I was surprised by her utter enthusiasm but managed not to show it. She did not show any traces of sadness, when in fact all this that had nothing to do with her, was exactly the nightmare she should have been hoping to end as early as possible.

In this tiny room that had once again become the neat space of a family, I felt as if sitting on pins and needles. My face blushed with shame, my ears burning, until I could no longer hear her talking. I bowed my head low and wanted to say to her, on behalf of all *Today!* members, "Sorry, sister." Yet I never summed up the courage to do that. At last, I muttered an excuse and ran off like a thief from the once grand and spectacular courtyard.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ The translation is based on an unpublished essay by Ao Fuming.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

This is the first time Li Bo was written back into *Today!*'s history, not by the avant-garde poets and artists, but by a member who participated in the material production of the journal. For thirty years, the male owner of No. 76 became a legendary figure together with *Today!* and was worshipped for his embracing of danger and heroic self-sacrifice: by giving up his home to an unofficial journal such as *Today!* and by putting his true name and address on each issue of *Today!* as contact information, he risked imprisonment if things went wrong. The female owner of the home, while removed from the danger of direct conflict with the state, was also removed from the history of *Today!* despite the sacrifice of her domestic space. It seems that the sacrifice by the female was negligible compared with the grand sacrifice by her male counterparts.

Similar to Shen Liling and Li Bo, Zhao Nan's mother, another female owner of a home turned into a meeting place for *Today!*, was also the kind yet silent lady whose presence was negligible in the narratives of *Today!* members because of their absence in the "serious" business of *Today!*. I argue that the silent presence of these female owners of domestic spaces was not a coincidence, but signified the gendered hierarchy in this predominantly male group of avant-gardes. The realization of the high-sounding ideals of these young male intellectuals was not only through taking the position of the feminine in their battle against the state patriarch, but through literarily displacing the female from her previous position in the gender-equality system of the family in the Mao era.

The trivialization of the female contribution to the production of the journal was also manifested during the process of reproducing the works of the predominantly male avant-garde authors in the form of this unofficial literary journal. As Ao recalls, a large amount of manual labor was involved in the process of the production of *Today!*:

In total, there were 1008 pages over sixteen months, each issue with 1000 copies. In less than two years, using a brayer mimeograph machine (later switched to hand-press), *Today!* members printed more than 500,000 sheets (mimeograph on both sides of an octavo) and used 250,000 sheets of paper. After printing, each sheet needed to be folded in half, sorted into book form according to pages, bound together. Then it needed to glue the cover to the book, smooth out the spine with their fingers, and cut off the unnecessary parts to smooth the edges using special cutting knives for photo paper, and finally, stamp on the issue number and price. Nearly half of the publications needed to be packaged according to the requirements for posting prints at the post office, filled in the name and address before the nationwide distribution.¹⁰⁸

As Lydia Liu insightfully points out, despite the large amount of manual labor involved in the production of *Today!*, most of the names involved in the process had been forgotten by literary history.¹⁰⁹ Of the forgotten names Liu has listed, the majority were female. During my interviews with Ao Fuming, he mentioned another important procedure before the mimeograph printing of the pages of this legendary journal: the transcription of the works of the authors onto the mimeograph stencil. Except for the first issue of *Today!*, the transcription work, whether by hand for the second issue or by typewriting from the third issue on, was mostly done by female members. Of all the female members who transcribed the works by the mostly male authors, Ying Zi¹¹⁰ and Chen Kaiyan¹¹¹ were the only two female members mentioned. No names of the typists have ever been mentioned. They were mostly acquaintances of *Today!* members or workers in the local print shops whose peripheral position was justified by the fact that they were paid for their work.¹¹² No names of those who participated in the numerous

¹⁰⁸ Ao Fuming, “Bianyu suoji (3): huiyi 76 hao” [Trivial records after the compiling work (3): Remembering No. 76].

¹⁰⁹ Lydia Liu, “Editor’s Note,” in Liu, ed., in *The Bearer of the Lamp*, xvii-xviii.

¹¹⁰ Cui Deying (Ying Zi), see Xu Xiao, “*Today* and I,” Liu, ed., in *The Bearer of the Lamp*, 87-88.

¹¹¹ Lydia Liu, “Editor’s Note,” in Liu, ed., in *The Bearer of the Lamp*, xviii.

¹¹² Xu Xiao wrote that they looked for typists through personal networks. The typist she found worked in the office of a democratic party. She used the typewriter in the office to type mimeograph stencil for *Today*. Xu Xiao, “*Today* and I,” Liu, ed., in *The Bearer of the Lamp*, 62. According to my interviews with Ao

steps of the production of *Today!* were mentioned. They were remembered as volunteers and visitors.

Of the many steps involved in the production of *Today!*, the actual printing with the mimeograph machine was foregrounded and repeatedly mentioned as the central procedure. The reason given was that the handling of the machine required relatively higher technical skills. However, the Chinese-character typewriter, a technology that required much higher technical skills, never appeared in the narratives. One cannot help wondering whether the foregrounding of the mimeograph machine was because Mang Ke, a major poet and co-editor of *Today!*, was involved in the operation of this machine.

The picture of two male members standing in front of No. 76 is symptomatic of the position of *Today!*: when the male avant-gardes appropriated the “feminine space,” the feminine space ceased to be a space for women, but the site of enunciation for the rebelling men. Though the literary activists brought gender difference back into public discourse through their art, poetry and daily practice as opposed to the ideological control of the Communist Party, they did not destabilize the value system of a male-centered culture in which men were always seen as superior to women. Rather, by upsetting CCP’s gender-equality policy that takes men as the norm but suppresses sexuality, they created an alternative form of male superiority based on the traditional distrust of women’s capacity to achieve and to shoulder responsibility, a huge step back from both CCP’s gender equality policy and the May Fourth generation’s gender equality ideals.

Fuming, they also turned to typists in the Mimeograph Service under the control of the Neighborhood Committee.

Conclusion

My dissertation research began with an inquiry into the gender politics of the literary activism of *Today!* and evolved into a literary history project tracing the century-long trajectory of the male-dominated modern Chinese poetic canon from 1917 to 1980. Rather than giving a comprehensive historical account, I have focused on the poetic explorations of selected poets and closely examined their responses to and reflections on critical issues of their times. To achieve an in-depth understanding of the poets' gendered positions, I have combined careful readings of their poetry with a detailed analysis of the larger historical contexts, which include the poets' biographical narratives and archival materials newly excavated by other scholars and myself.

My study has shown that the avant-garde poetry and art that germinated underground during the Cultural Revolution and was brought to national attention by *Today!* during its operation from 1978 to 1980, bore closer historical connections with earlier generations of modern Chinese literary intellectuals than they admit. A number of themes such as love, nature and technology have remained central to the formation and transformation of poets' subject positions throughout the history of modern Chinese poetry. For Guo Moruo, the notions of romantic love from nineteenth century European romance novels translated into Chinese at the turn of the twentieth century served as the initial impetus for his pursuit of an identity as a modern man and his rebellion against his arranged marriage in the early 1910s. But the spiritual and moral dimensions of this

notion of Western romantic love as promoted by progressive Christian thinkers to “denounce the carnal aspects of the male-female relationship,”¹ which Guo encountered in Japan, served as more of an obstacle than an empowering factor for his pursuit of a new social, political and cultural position as a modern man. The failure to realize an autonomous modern identity through the pursuit of free love and new-style marriage compelled Guo to turn to other newly available Western resources instead.

In the late 1910s and early 1920s, modern Chinese literary intellectuals adopted free verse as a powerful vehicle to incorporate them into the collective project of modernizing China. This poetic form provided Guo with a most flexible vessel to construct a new modern masculinity through the appropriation of new concepts from Western science, technology, philosophy, literature and the feminist movement as well as the legacy of traditional Chinese culture. In Guo’s widely applauded new poetry, historical or mythical Chinese female figures were transformed into powerful new women symbolizing the new China; at the same time, the male poet managed to secure a gender position by objectifying these female figures in the form of idealized female nudes and therefore relegating them into the new objects of sexual desire. Guo’s other means of establishing his avant-garde position as a modern man was through aggressive adaptation of the poet figure from nineteenth century Romantic poetry and the Futurist embracing of modern machines. Similar to the canonical male Western Romantic poets, Guo attempted to define the privileged position of the male poet through his relationship with feminized Nature. Yet, identifying himself with the most powerful forces from advanced industrial modern technology, recent scientific discoveries and Chinese myths,

¹ Takayuki Yokota-Murakami, “The Creation of a ‘Lady’ [*Kajin*] as a Modern Gendered Subjectivity: Sexual Politics in the Japanese Translations of Walter Scott and Charlotte Brontë” (conference paper delivered at 2009 MLA Annual Convention held in Philadelphia, December 29, 2009), 5.

Guo created an almighty male poetic figure far more omnipotent than and eventually displacing the god figure, the ultimate authority in Western Romantic poetry. In this process, Nature was turned into a mere participatory element in the wild celebration of the poet's futuristic embracing of modern machines and industrial progress. Guo's construction of a new masculinity for the male elite would be transformed into a collective masculinity in the CCP discourse of nation and revolution especially after 1949.

Wen Yiduo's construction of poetic identity in the early 1920s started with the extreme aggrandizement of the male poet figure that Guo set forth. Yet, his weakened physical condition due to the severe air pollution in the industrial environment of Chicago and his lowered social, cultural and racial position in the literary and cultural circles dominated by strong female authoritative figures in the feminist movement compelled him to reevaluate radical May Fourth discourses such as industrial progress, nation-building, the rejection of the Chinese tradition and the opposition to arranged marriages and free love. Wen's Chicago poems witnessed a radical shift of the male poetic position from that of the privileged to that of the weak. Through ingenious adaptations of Chinese Daoist notions of humans and nature, Wen constructed an eco-poetics where the male poetic figure frequently identifies with tropes of the weak, offering insightful criticisms of not only the excessive industrial development and imperial expansion practiced by advanced nations such as the United States, but also the radical discourses of Westernization through the importations of the same paradigms by the radical May Fourth intellectuals of his time.

Also, in the love poems dedicated to his wife of arranged marriage, Wen did not abstract his wife into a victim and symbol of the old family system, but complicated the

relationship between old-style marriage and love by identifying with his wife in face of the power of the old family system and depicting the love between his wife and himself as the most beautiful flower that bloomed from a cruel deed of grafting. Thus, by identifying with the weak rather than fashioning himself as a radical cultural rebel / hero against the old institution like Guo Moruo, Wen showed much more sophisticated insights into the subtlety and complexity of the reality of his time. Yet, Wen's extraordinary poetics has been overshadowed by the dominant discourses of nation and revolution in China and never received adequate critical recognition.

Chen Jingrong, a new woman brought up in the early May Fourth ideals such as free love, individual autonomy, gender equality and woman's social roles, began her poetic career trying to combine two modern pursuits, love and a literary career. Her early poems written during her two relationships with fellow male poets often depicted a male lover thwarting the poetic pursuit of the female speaker and ridiculing the female speaker's identity as a poet. Nature often figured as a female community of kindred spirits sharing and affirming the female speaker's poetic identity. Chen's later poetry in the mid-1940s demonstrates acute insights into the complexities of war-time reality as well as the disconnection between the poetry practiced by Leftist literary intellectuals and the complexity of reality. The painful knowledge of the inconsistency between Chinese male intellectuals' discursive promotion of modern ideals and the actual practice in their intimate lives and love relationships enabled her to gain a deep awareness of the paradoxes between verbal constructions and actual happenings, appearances and actuality, love and violence, nature and war, and infused her poetry with an astute sense of irony.

Like many who did not conform to Mao's literary guidelines of nation and revolution, Chen's poetic production was suspended during the Mao era.

The *Today!* poets' rebellion against the ideological hijacking of literature and art manifested especially in the official propagandistic poetry in the Mao era bore striking resemblance to Wen Yiduo and Chen Jingrong's critical reflections on the limitations of the discursive constructions of their times. Like Wen and Chen, these poets' acute insights into the discrepancy between the official ideological constructions and the complexities of reality were gained from their painful experience of crises and disillusionments during the Cultural Revolution. Their embracing of nature, love and the personal against the mechanization and homogenization of people's psychology led them to a new paradigm of poetry and life radically different from the one officially prescribed. Yet, for the young male avant-garde poets, the creation of a new poetic paradigm advocating the emotions of the individual and the personal was the means through which the rebellious sons achieved autonomy from the state patriarchy. Unlike their May Fourth predecessors who attempted to construct their modern male subject positions through the discursive promotion of feminism, the young male avant-garde poets and artists of the *Today!* group completely abandoned gender equality and inherited the deep-rooted sense of male supremacy and a dismissive attitude toward their female counterparts. The only major female poet published by *Today!* did not achieve her poetic maturity through intellectual interactions with the male poets in this group, but well before she joined this male-dominated literary group.

As the dissertation is drawing to a close, I ask myself: are my findings relevant to today's world? Three decades into the Post-Mao era, many things have changed. As

scholars have noted, the literary, artistic and scholarly fields have seen an increased female intervention since the mid-1980s. Women scholars began to intervene significantly in the previously male-dominated field of literary criticism and historiography.² A large number of women poets have emerged on the literary scene and often take gender issues as essential concerns in their writing.³ Poetry journals devoted to women's poetry have been launched to create a nourishing community for female poets against the deep-rooted distrust of women's literary capacity in the male-dominated literary tradition and environment.⁴ Does it mean that the gender dynamic in the literary field today has completely changed? The answer is no.

In the course of doing research on *Today!* in Beijing in the summers of 2005 and 2006, in addition to visiting and interviewing those who participated in the production and circulation of the journal nearly thirty years ago, I was able to get in touch with the contemporary poetic scene and attend some poetry events held in the city. One of the large-scale poetry readings I attended in the summer of 2006 was held in Jianwai Soho, a core area of the Central Business District (CBD) in Beijing with upscale villas, shopping centers and office buildings. It was a warm early summer night. The stage was set in the open air. My attention was drawn to the poets on the stage as much as to the audience. Besides invited guests seated in several dozen rows of chairs, a huge crowd of several hundred stood around the stage. The air was filled with a happy sense of festivity. People

² For example, Lydia H. Liu, "Invention and Intervention: The Making of a Female Tradition in Modern Chinese Literature," in Susan Brownell and Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom, eds., *Chinese Femininities, Chinese Masculinities: A Reader*, 150.

³ Jeanne Hong Zhang, *The Invention of a Discourse: Women's Poetry from Contemporary China*, 9, 21.

⁴ For example: *Nüzi shibao* [The women's poetry paper], the first unofficial women's poetry journal since 1949, was established in 1988 by a group of women poets, namely Xiao Yin, Zhong Yin, Tan Shi, etc. It now has a web presence at <http://www.nvzishibao.com/>; in 1998, Zhou Zan and her friends launched *Yi: Zhongguo nüxing shikan* [Wings: Chinese women's poetry journal], another poetry journal aimed at creating a literary community that debunks the long-standing and still prevalent male distrust of women's literary talent. It has had a web presence at <http://www.poemlife.com/wings/1280.htm>.

were dressed in their casual summer attire. Some looked like college students. Many looked much older than college students. I noticed some international students whom I had met a few days before at another poetry event. There were also some construction workers holding beer bottles in the crowd. I was impressed by the diversity of the audience, yet cannot help wondering how many people were there because of their interest in poetry.

Pan Shiyi, the sponsor of the poetry event, gave the opening speech. Only later did I learn that Pan was neither a poet nor a critic, but the CEO of Soho China, a leader of the real-estate business not only in Beijing but also in other parts of China. The large areas of upscale buildings in Jianwai Soho, whether finished or in construction, belonged to him. When it was the poets' turn to perform their poetry, a distinct gendered division could be easily perceived. The male poets combined poetry with music performance, experimented with pure sound with music, or rapped their lines, all trying to step over one boundary or another, making them stand out from the rest. The women poets, much younger and fewer in number than their male counterparts, were barely visible. They read their poems in muted voices as if muttering to themselves. This striking division among the poets and the sponsorship of poetic events by the wealthy has been my observation from a number of poetry readings.

Unlike the poets of earlier generations who struggled with political discourses such as nation and revolution, contemporary Chinese poets face a different set of challenges such as increased intervention from commercialism. In his recent book, John Crespi has acutely noted the connection between poetry and land development in the

postsocialist era.⁵ However, do male poets and female poets respond in the same way to the increasingly commercialized world? How should we interpret the gender division among the poets under the new circumstances? What new subject positions have been or are being formed? To gain a deeper understanding of the role of the poet and poetry in the new era, a gendered perspective is indispensable.

⁵ Crespi, John A. *Voices in Revolution: Poetry and the Auditory Imagination in Modern China*, 168-188.

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