POST-MAO NEW POETRY AND "OCCIDENTALISM"
Xianlin Song

In their attempts to come to grips with the accelerated process of reform and globalization, Chinese intellectuals, poets, and critics have employed a discursive practiced which could be called Occidentalism, the reverse of Said's well-known Orientalism. The purpose of this essay is to examine the manifestation of this change through the discursive practices employed by post-Mao new poets of the mid-1980s in relation to their projection of Western modern and postmodern thinking. In particular, I wish to focus on the Chinese poetic transformation of certain aspects of existentialism, Structuralist linguistics and the post-structural critique of language as implemented by these poets.

Introduction

The past two decades have witnessed a period of dramatic changes in Chinese society. Among the major factors that have accelerated those changes is a considerable influx of Western cultural forms and materials, which came about partly as a consequence of Deng Xiaoping's open-door policy. As the country embarked on its journey of the Four Modernizations, whilst the importation of Western technology and products has proved relatively unproblematic, the same cannot be said, however, about the introduction of "cultural" products from Western countries. From the very beginning, the anxiety over Chinese cultural heritage and Western influence has been at the heart of conflicts inside and outside the academy. On the one hand, Chinese intellectuals are anxious to "catch up" with the rest of the postmodern world after years of isolation. The

urgent need to learn from the West 'has resulted in a conscious/ unconscious adoption of a "hybridized" or Europeanized (*ouhua*) academic discourse.[1] On the other hand, there is also the display of an anxiety of being "culturally colonized", even "post-colonized" (*hou zhimin*) by the West.[2] The accelerated process of reform and globalization in the society has no doubt deepened this sense of double-sided anxiety. This article intends to examine the manifestation of this change through the discursive practices employed by post-Mao new poets of the mid-1980s in relation to their projection of Western modern and postmodern thinking. In particular, I wish to focus on the Chinese poetic transformation of certain aspects of existentialism, structuralist linguistics, and the post-structural critique of language.

In his *Orientalism,* Edward Said points out that Orientalism is "a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient's special place in European Western experience"(Said, 1978,1). Orientalism expresses and represents a cultural Other as a mode of discourse. By way of willful discursive construction of "recurring images" of a cultural Other, Orientalism seeks to project the Orient as "a created body of theory and practice" (Said, 1978, 6). The Orient "is not an inert fact of nature" (Said, 1978, 4), but a man-made discourse, "a fact of human production" (Said, 1986, 211). In a parodic sense, the same can be said of the literary representation of certain

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1.   Given the problematic nature of the signification of "the West,"I wish to adopt the term as most Chinese scholars use it to refer broadly to the EuroAmerican societies located in Europe and North America. *Ouhua* is used more as a linguist term instead of *xihua* which generally has a more cultural connotation.

2.   In the first half of 1996, official newspapers such as *Guangming Ribao, Beijing Ribao,* and *Jungji Ribao* have issued warnings of "cultural colonization"and expressed concerns over the adoption of foreign names and businesses. Manifestations of this anxiety can be seen in Zhang Dongping and Qi Xiaofeng's article, "So Many Foreign Names [*yangming he ji duo*]," *Beijing Ribao* (April 15, 1996, p. 1), and in SunYushan and Chen Hongmei's article,"Concern Over Flood of Foreign Names [*yangming fanlan kanyou*]," *Beijing Ribao* (March 12, 1996, p. 1). LeiYi's article,"Background and Dislocation [*beijing yu cuowei*]"in *Dushu* No. 4 (1995, pp. 17-20), on the other hand, focuses on the linguistic terms used by intellectuals. He argues that the type of academic language employed by ZhangYiwu exemplifies"post-colonized academic discourse.

aspects of Euro-American thinking in post-Mao China. In their uneasy attempts to come to terms with the rapid changes in poetic writing, criticism, and theorization, Chinese intellectuals, poets, and critics alike, have employed a certain discursive practice, appropriating a cultural Other which, following Said, could be termed a discourse of "Occidentalism." It is not my wish here to employ the term Occidentalism in the pernicious sense to suggest a rejection of everything to do with the West and hence "an implicit rejection of the legacy of modernization" (Turner, 1994,7). Nor do I intend to focus on the political implications in Chen Xiaomei's definition of "official/anti-official" Occidentalism (Chen, 1995, 3–26). Rather, I use the term to refer to a specific discourse of constructing images of a cultural Other as a way of coming to terms with Western ideas that is based on the West's place in Chinese experience. I intend to explore a particular relationship between Chinese poetic practice and certain aspects of modern and postmodern thinking located in an imagined geographic space called "the West".[3]

If we accept Said's Oriental thesis that the "Orient" is a construction by the "Occident," then we should be able to see a mirror image of Orientalism, that the "Occident" is as much a construction by the "Orient." We should also be able to demonstrate what sort of construction of the Occident emerges from Chinese cultural practices in post-Mao China. The perception that Chinese poetry is the most iconic form of literature in Chinese culture made the new poetry in the 1980s a promising target both for advocates for change and opponents who fear of being culturally colonized. In this case, the Third Generation poetry,[4] with its "interpretive-descriptive discourse" (Clifford, 1986, 264) of the West, serves a good case in point.

3.   I borrow the term "relationship" from Arif Dirlik who refers to Orientalism as a "relationship that is located in "the' contact zone' in which the West or the East, or the Occident or the Orient, are no longer identifiable with any measure of clarity." See Arif Dirlik, "Chinese History and the Question of Orientalism," in *The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism* (Westview Press, 1997), pp. 105-128.
4.   "The Third Generation Poetry" has been referred to as *hou menglong* (post-Misty) by Wan Xia and Xiao Xiao in *Hou Menglong Quanji*.

The Poetic Transformation

The decade following the death of Mao Zedong in 1976 saw the appearances of two poetic groups in Chinese society. First there was Obscure Poetry,[5] and then, Third Generation Poetry. Both have been repeatedly criticized for learning from the "dregs" of the West and "discarding" Chinese tradition. While debates over the Obscure poets were directed to the perceived influence of Western Modernism, the Third Generation poets, on the other hand, were attacked for learning from all sorts of Western "isms" and degenerating themselves into "tribesmen covered with motley feathers" (Gong Liu, 1988, 12). To their critics, the poetic explorations of the Third Generation are manifestations of westernization of an age-old Chinese tradition. The fact that poetry has been the most iconic form of that tradition made it the primary target both for the advocates and opponents of change. Apart from the deliberate political transformation of thought, certain philosophical, theoretical issues emerge from the practice of the Third Generation Poetry in the post-Mao era, many of which are a reworking of certain post-Marxist European ideas, and some of which we could broadly locate in late modernity and post-modernity (since 1955, Lyotard). In the West, the development of modernity into post-modernity, if one accepts this to be the case, may be seen as a diachronic process of history in the making. The exposure of post-Marxist European thinking and its subsequent transformation as integral parts of the official open-door policy, however, appear to be very much a synchronic practice in post-Mao China. To the critics who had not previously been subjected to such exposure, the transformation of Western "isms" stands in for "the West." Consequently, some traces of existentialism, Structuralist linguistics and the post-structural critique of language in the poems of the Third Generation were taken as evidence of Westernization, or post/colonization by the West. It is not the intention of this article to suggest that the poetic transformation by the Third Generation created a "discourse of influence," that is, to show who is influenced by whom. Rather, I will attempt to examine how this

5.   For an in depth study of this group of poets, see, D.E. Pollard, "The Controversy Over Modernism, 1979–1984," *The China Quarterly*, No. 104 (1985), 641–656.

group of Chinese poets transformed what they perceived as Western existentialism, structuralist linguistics, and the post-structural critique of language. I wish to argue that the poets in the mid-1980s, the Third Generation poets in particular, reconstructed certain images of the West in their poetic explorations, developed a discourse of a cultural Other, and as a result contributed to the perceived "Europeanization" of the Chinese language.

While the traumas of the Cultural Revolution seemed to have inspired the Obscure poets who were frustrated by and disillusioned with the social reality in the late 1970s, the Third Generation poets were becoming increasingly drawn to the issues relating to their own ontological existence. In place of passionate expressions like "I do not believe the sky is blue!" (Bei Dao, 1984, 32) and "China, I lost my key!" (Li Lizhong, 1986, 124), the later comers questioned: "Who exactly are you?/what exactly are you?" (Hai Zi, 1989, 217). With the help of some translations of existentialist literature, though sometimes very fragmentary, these poets seemed to find a new way of voicing their sense of alienation and trapped existence. In their poetic statements as well as poetic practice, the Third Generation poets repeatedly projected to the Chinese audiences certain images of Western existentialist thinking. By talking about issues like human predicament, death, anxiety, and absurdity, they developed a poetic discourse alien to the Chinese reader, and the employment of loanwords is seen, by many, as having Europeanised Chinese poetic language. To them, being-in-the-universe is seen as a "misfortune" (Xu Jingya et al., 1988, 294), and because of this, their living "is unbearably depressed" (Xu Jingya et al., 1988, 299). Human beings are "trapped in a dilemma" (Xu Jingya et al., 1988, 291) between birth and death while their alienation "comes along with birth" (Xu Jingya et al., 1988, 337). The ontological existence of human kind is their own "predicament":

> Just who are you?
>
> You really are nobody
>
> You are only a kind of your own
>
> Predicament
>
> (Xu Jingya et al., 1988, 248)

Trapped in Their Own Space

The idea that they were trapped in space is seen in many of their poems. Huang Xiangrong described this existence of human-kind as "a square box" which is reminiscent of Sartre's hell:

A Square Box

the past door and the past door all closed

the future door and the future door all closed

the only door remaining open is the carefree Door of Peace

the lure of detachment comes from the dead room of a
  dream

we are stifled in a square box

"Now" never has any way out

each step is a door

no door has objective

no objective then no address

no address then panic-stricken

………

we live because of illusion

in a stifling square box

in a stifling square box

(Xu Jingya et al., 1988, 334; See Appendix A for Chinese original)

The "square box" is deprived of any "objective." All the doors are closed, there is no other choice but the "Door of Peace" (*Taiping men*) which in its original Chinese connotation is tantamount to the door of death. Like Sartre's *No Exit*, "we" are "stifled" in this square box, deprived of any objective or address.

In the square "we" are "panic-stricken" and suffer from anxiety because our very existence is nothingness. This kind of human condition is pervasive in the writings of the Third Generation poets who felt that they were living a desperate and perilous existence in

a world from which they could not escape. Tang Yaping, who gradu-
ated from the Department of Philosophy in Sichuan University,
apparently was aware of the philosophical implications when she
said the burden of being "is so heavy that one cannot escape from
it, and what's more even if one tries one will find there is really
nowhere to escape to" (Xu Jingya et al., 1988, 254). Tang's poem "Black
Stone" reveals a kind of perpetual possibility of nothingness, "The earth
is nothingness and the sky is nothingness," and "death is stone living is
also stone" (Xu Jingya et al., 1988, 252). Hu Gang, who claimed to be in
the "Marginal Group" (*Bianyuan shiqun*), expressed a similar sentiment
in "The Incurable Disease of the End of the Century," "no way to es-
cape/from the stifling of every window/when the black wall of time/
overflows up to the throat/we are breathing/unconcerned" (Xu Jingya
et al., 1988, 359). His poetry "laments the general existence of hu-
man beings: such dilemmas as anxiety, loneliness and dread" (Xu
Jingya et al., 1988, 359). Chen Yin's feeling of being trapped rings
loud and clear when he says, "We Are Trapped in the House by the
World" (Xu Jingya et al., 1988, 529). In Shao Mianli's poem, her `pale
sky' is seen as nothing but `lonely melancholy' in a world where there is
"no other choice" than death itself (Zhou Jun, 1989, 521–522).

Not only is human existence considered "a square box" from
which we cannot escape, in some Third Generation poems, the whole
world is taken as a hospital ward, a symbol of trapped existence. In
many poems, the obsession with the "ward" is overwhelming. Cao
Hanjun believed that in this modern world human beings are caught
up in a big hospital ward: "The spiritual state of the whole of hu-
mankind is weary and morbid, and what is more the cosmic space
is precisely the symbol of a modern hospital ward" (Xu Jingya et al.,
1988, 346). Only when he is in a ward does he feel safe, "the odor of
the ward tallies with your thought/you feel for the first time safe"
(Xu Jingya et al., 1988, 343). "This ward syndrome," said Cao Hanjun
in his statement, "is not a social phenomenon." It is related to the
being or the being-in-the-being itself. He further explained:

> The characteristic of contemporary social consciousness is precisely
> the "consciousness of the ward." This consciousness is spread world-
> wide, not exclusive to any specific country or nation. The essence of

such consciousness is not melancholy, or dread, or pain. It is a deep, internal anxiety. (Xu Jingya et al., 1988, 345)

To some poets, the whole of humankind is sick. In his "Waiting to be Treated in a Hospital Attached to a Medical College," Hu Qiang observed "In the city, skyscrapers are talking from mouth to mouth about a piece of/news we are sick we are sick we are sick" (Xu Jingya et al., 1988, 313). Zou Jin was concerned about the "I" writing my own case history, "truly, truly/I am a sufferer of phobia/I never know/ what disease landed me/ in this white ward" (Xu Jingya et al., 1988, 301). Fan Hong believed human existence itself is the "cancer ward" in which every one of us is a potential patient (Zhou Jun, 1989:413–414).

What is worse, in this kind of pathological state, no one seems to be concerned: "lying befuddled in a sickbed/dozens of days casually slipped away/no one is concerned." (Zhou Jun, 1989,197) What happens to these patients next is that they calmly rot, no "superfluous expressions" are needed. Just like coming to life from non-existence then from birth to death, waiting to rot in time is the only meaning of being.

<div align="center">Next is to Rot</div>

next is to rot

painless

just like we come into existence from non-existence

and then from existence to non-existence

similar to being in a hospital

showing the inside of the eyelid to the doctor

is the procedure

we may calmly sit aside

watching how we leisurely rot

how leisurely (there is plenty of time)

rot from the date of birth to modern culture

rot from first love to marriage

rot from ringwormed toes

to the thighs

to the lips

to an incomplete sentence

perhaps this is the most honest artistic performance

skeletons are closer to our original shape

in its hollow eye sockets

there are no superfluous expressions.

(Zhou Jun, 1989, 248; See Appendix B for the Chinese original)

The Possibility of Choice

Some poets write about "choice" as another aspect of being-in-the-universe. Human beings are conditioned between the time of birth and death. Time is the "very meaning of existence" (Barrett, 1964, 68). Being is essentially temporal. Within the temporality of being we are free to make choices. In addition to the concept that being is "a square box," Zhou Lunyou created his own "square of freedom." The title "The Square of Freedom" makes an explicit reference to the existentialist idea that human beings are totally free and entirely responsible for what they do. Though the poem by that name emphasizes more the cultural aspect of interpreting the tradition, Zhou's word play indicates an awareness of the existentialist emphasis on free will and choice. Gu Gang revealed his awareness of the necessity of choice in his statement, "We smoke, drink, or write poetry. The only choice we have is that we have to make a choice" (Zhou Jun, 1989, 335).

The anxiety expressed in the Third Generation poems results in a kind of discourse descriptive of the existentialist. Human beings are forever anxious, they are "perpetually caught in anxiety and restlessness" (Xu Jingya et al., 1988, 371), not knowing what will happen "because their anxiety is directed toward the whole world more plainly than any other feeling" (Barrett, 1964, 58):

Christmas

I always feel the letter I put into the postbox

will never reach the receiver

the bicycle I placed alongside the street

will be stolen

I always feel the pressure cooker in my hand

will explode in a second

the television screening a football match

will go wrong...

(Li Lizhong, 1986, 386; See Appendix C for the Chinese original)

if I decide I will be a good student the next day

the alarm clock will stop at midnight

I go to make money as a well-behaved worker

somehow I am asked to conduct a chorus

I want to be a good husband

but sausages are always sold out

this world somehow

is always hard on me

(Li Lizhong, 1986, 282)

The kind of anxiety expressed here is nothing like that of "China, I lost my key!"; it is directed to being-in-the-world itself, and de-notes more a sense of Heideggeran anxiety (*Angst*),

> Anxiety is indefinite: it is not about this or that object, we are simply anxious and we do not know about what; when it is over, we have to say that 'it was about nothing.' This is what the psychoanalysts call free-floating anxiety: anxiety without any discoverable object. Of course, the psychoanalysts are able to discover, in the case of certain patients, the very definite causes and circumstances that engender this anxiety. But the empirical discovery of its genesis does not do away with Heidegger's point since he is concerned not with the genesis but the

content of the state: namely, in what manner we are existing when we exist in that state. (Barrett, 1964, 58)

Playing with Death

Death, another central concern of existentialism, is also reconstructed in Third Generation Poetry. Death, as an end of existence, is forever present in the existence of human beings. "Only through the constant awareness of death will an individual achieve integrity and consistency with his principles. Since there is basically no threat other than real or symbolic death, and since he has accepted that threat, he is well beyond fraudulent bribes and threats alike" (Koestenbaum, 1964, 164).

It is perhaps because of this interpretation of existentialism that some poets chose to face being as the ultimate empirical entity. The case of Hai Zi is as extreme as it is revealing. Entrapped in this inescapable predicament, the only way Hai Zi could exercise his freedom of choice was to take his own life, instead of passively waiting for death. Suicide is to be applauded because it demonstrates the individual's will to defy fate and reality. In his *Sun* (*Taiyang*), Hai Zi realized human beings "have reached the end," the "Ultima Thule." In a time of destitution, "nothing actually exists." Life is but "to go rotting in the blood of god" (*Taiyang*," Hai Zi, 1989, 184). The realization of this dark, utterly meaningless existence eventually became unbearable for Hai Zi who committed suicide at Shanhaiguan on 26 March, 1989. To some Chinese critics, the death of Hai Zi itself is a revelation of the human predicament. Wu Xiaodong and Xie Linglan, in their elegy for Hai Zi "The Death of a Poet" (*Shiren zhi si*), believe that only true poets will contemplate time, death, existence and search for ways out. Quoting Martin Heidegger "What Are Poets For?" these two critics attempt to associate Hai Zi's death with Heidegger's illustration of Holderlin. Heidegger says, "The time is destitute because it lacks the unconcealedness of the nature of pain, death, and love. The destitution is itself destitute because that realm of being withdraws within which pain and death and love belong together. Concealedness exists inasmuch as the realm in which they belong together is the

abyss of Being." Then Heidegger goes on to ponder, "What is the song itself? How is a mortal capable of it? Whence does it sing? How far does it reach into the abyss?" (Heidegger, 1971, 97) When a poet like Hai Zi started to address the ontological questions of poetry in relation to mortal being, the realization of the limitations of the mortals and freedom of choice brought him to follow many of his counterparts in the West who also committed suicide: V.V. Mayakovsky, Jack London, and Ernest Hemingway. When he is faced with the ultimate nothingness and absurdity of existence, he will choose to sacrifice his own life to make a revelation to human kind. To him, death by choice is the only possible way of escaping the inescapable predicament, and the only means to struggle against the fate of waiting for death, to get out of the trap, the prison set by birth (Wu Xiaodong and Xie Linglan, 1989, 132–134).

If we examine this theorization of death in the light of existentialist works, we will be able to see certain images in the making. To Heidegger, death is our "great potentiality" because it allows us to become authentic as "Being-towards-Death," and to construct a poetically thoughtful Dasein. "Death is a possibility-of-Being which Dasein stands before itself in its ownmost potentiality-for-Being. This is a possibility in which the issue is nothing less than Dasein's Being-in-the-world. Its death is the possibility of no-longer-being-able-to-be-there" (Heidegger, 1990, 251).

Hai Zi, instead of waiting for "the call of the ultimate in the finite world," chose to exercise his freedom "to shoulder the burden of his own ultimate impossibility" (Langan, 1959, 36). To other poets, Hai Zi's death is seen not as surrender to life in society, but a challenge to being-in-the-world. Many poets of this group expressed their admiration for those who choose to exercise their freedom. Wu Yuancheng, in a poem written before Hai Zi's death, laughs at those cowards who surrender to the burden of life, and praises those who have the courage to liberate themselves.

> I will now write a memorial speech for you
>
> first your living filled with nothingness
>
> then your death an exercise of choice

and your courage to commit suicide

this is an ancient country

where the faith is

a lousy life is better than a good death

you broke it

you didn't want to live

then you died

this is excellent

I really admire you

and hate those who can't follow suit

(Zhou Jun, 1989, 357)

The Prison House of Language

An aspect of the literary representation of Structualist linguistics and the post-structural critique of language by post-Mao new poets is reflected in their commitment to investigate the nature, the determinants, the limits, and possibilities of language. Liu Zaifu, in his article "Revolution in Literary Form in the Light of Literary Criticism," says there was a "great revolution in literary form" in Chinese literature of the 1980s (Liu Zaifu, 1989, 5). This revolution came with the realization that "Language is not the only means of thinking. When it exists at the same time as speech and as a semiotic system of representation, it restricts human thinking; it may also affect and even control human beings' perception of the world" (Liu Zaifu, 1989, 6). This insight suggests a fundamental change of view towards the nature of language, from the Stalinist "the means of thinking" to "a semiotic system of representation" which "restricts human thinking." Language is no longer considered as a transparent medium as it was by an empiricist Chinese Stalinism. Instead, language now is an independent system for thinking about possible worlds. This shift towards the problematic nature of signification has massive consequences in the Chinese literary world of the time, especially in the shaping of a new poetry.

The structuralist emphasis on language as a system framing human communication, is as strongly felt, if not more, in the statements and poems by the Third Generation poets as in the criticisms of de Saussure's heritage and of postmodernist literature. Terry Eagleton, in his criticisms of structuralism and semiotics, says "the constraints of the language system are consequently fixed and given, aspects of *langue*, rather than forces which we produce, modify and transform in our actual communication" (Eagleton, 1983, 114–115). David Antin, on the other hand, comments on the restraints of language as a system, or "conventionalized discourse" from the point of view of Postmodernism:

> We have no measure of how constraining conventionalized discourse is, because we hardly know what discourse is, or representation, or narration, and what roles they play in the real human psychic economy and transactions, as opposed to the trivial stereotypes that have stood for them for nearly three hundred years. I would like to suggest that this cheerful chaotic ignorance is the postmodern condition, in which we see the reopening of all the issues that were considered settled at the end of the seventeenth century (Antin, 1980, 134).

The constraints of the language system, much talked about by critics of modern linguistics, are acutely present particularly in the works of the post-Mao new poets who felt caught in "the prison of language set up by the Cultural Revolution" (Liu Zaifu, 1989, 7). And these constraints of the language system are seen as fixed and given. The new poets found themselves invariably confined in a language system in which "everyone is tailored, categorized, defined according to certain concepts. In such a way, the very existence of human beings is replaced by absurd, cruel concepts, and is frozen in the dead, one-sided prison of concepts" (Liu Zaifu, 1989, 7). This is reminiscent of the notion of "order words," a term coined by Gilles Deleuze and Felex Guattari to describe the oppressive character of all language (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, 75). The Nietzschean image of the "prison house of language" quoted by Fredric Jameson in his book title is adopted by many poets and critics. A poetic discourse of language as prison no doubt correlates with how the poets felt about language in general as well as the Chinese language in particular. To this new group of poets, the Chinese pictographic

characters have become chains (Xu Jingya et al., 1988, 242), and the language system produced by humankind is increasingly constraining poetry (Zhou Jun, 1989, 327). Many poets expressed their concerns that they had fallen fallen into the trap of language set by themselve (Zhou Jun, 1989, 335). Yu Gang talked about the burden of the Chinese language in his poem "Chinese Characters." Chinese characters are likely to turn the Chinese people into a desolate desert of fossils.

> On me, I have too many Chinese characters
>
> I struggle to digest, in the
>
> maze of my veins
>
> Too many Chinese characters, reminded me
>
>   of layers and layers of fossils
>
> my nose has turned into a fossilized sail, and my
>
>   ten fingers also have elements of stone
>
> . . . .
>
>
> I have too many Chinese characters on me
>
> I have no choice but to be as simple as I can manage
>
> (Xu Jingya et al., 1988, 438–439)

Jiang Shiyuan also seemed to be talking about the notion of "order words" when he said,[6]

> Once human beings created language, they lost their real language, and also with it the state in which human beings are able to freely create language. Thus, from the very beginning, human beings are conditioned by one or several standardized languages. Involuntarily they become dependent upon the inertia of language, leaving their own ideas and views entirely to the distortions of language.[7]

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6. In this instance, one might argue that what Jiang says here is reminiscent of the indigenous Daoist philosophy "the names that can be named are not unvarying names" (Lao Zi, 1994, p. 3).

7. Jiang Shiyuan, "Poetry—the Candlelight in the Graveyard of Language [*Shi— yuyan mudi de zhuguang*]," cited by Cheng Guangwei, "On the Third Generation Poetry [*Disandai shiren lun gang*]," *Hubei shifan zueyuan xuebao* (*Journal of Hubei Normal College*), No. 3 (1989, p. 57).

The post-structural shift towards the problematic nature of signifi-
cation is also appropriated and transformed in the poetic explora-
tions of these poets. The transformation of the idea of
underdetermination/indeterminacy is a case in point. Zhou Lunyou
and Lan Ma, in their "Not-Not Manifesto (*feifei zhuyi*)," assert as
their aim the abolition of "the certainties of language" and "pushing
language into non-certainties" (Xu Jingya et al., 1988, 34). One can
not equate what they were saying with underdetermination or "in-
determinacy," but the Chinese term *quedingxing/fei queding hua* seems
to addresss the nature of signification of language in a similar way.
Having realized the constraints of the Chinese language, their task
was to find a way to escape what they saw as a culturally condi-
tioned linguist prison.

Derrida's image of "play with words" is also constructed by
many Third Generation poets, whose intentions were also to "play
[*wa'r*]" with words. Wu Fei thought that "My poem does not belong
to the reader, or to myself. It is nothing but the arrangement and
combination of words without meaning" (Xu Jingya, 1988, 70).[7] The
relationship between the sentence "poet plays with words" (Xu Jingya
et al., 1988, 242) and Derrida's "play of language" is too tenuous to
be termed influence. It would be better to speak of a certain
intertextual relation with poststructuralist writing. The polysemic
free play of meaning has been a popular uptake of Derrida's em-
phasis on *play (jeu)*. And at least superficially such a reading ap-
pears to be supported when Derrida speaks of "non-totalisation"
in relation to the "concept of play" or the "movement of play" in
relation to the lack or absence of a centre or origin (Derrida, 1978,
289), or when he writes about the "unstable interplay" of the lin-
guistic system (Derrida, 1984, 2–3). Yet, as Derrida explains in an
interview, he uses "play" in a much more specific sense: "the struc-
ture of the machine, or the springs, are not so tight, so that you
can just try to dislocate: that's what I meant by play" (Salusinszky,
1987, 20). The movement of play, in other words, is like the play in
the steering wheel or the clutch. Derrida's free play seems more a
restricted/limited movement than what these poets might have
perceived.

Hu Dong's "The First Poem," for instance is one of the many poems that can be seen as celebration of "the syntactic free-play of differentiation" (Ruthrof, 1995, 79), a poem written for the sake of playing,

> The dictionary is worn out with use
> pondering the secrets of an orange
> the heart is like warm jade
> old acquaintances all disappeared like the yellow crane
> calendar at heart
> go walking on a path
> see a big tree
> fruits fall as willed
> (Wan Xia, 1993, 686)

Da Xian believed "if you hold tight one end of the thread of language with your left hand and the other with your right hand, you can pull the thread apart. Then, in that instant when language is set flying, you will be able to have a go at the elitist game of writing poetry" (Zhou Jun, 1989, 105). In his introduction to himself, Da Xian thus showed how he played at the elitist game of poetry, "That is Da Xian/the Da Xian that is taller than death by a centimetre/the Da Xian that walks out of the transparency of twelve strings of silk/the Da Xian that has turned into mercury after becoming glorious the second time/the Da Xian that drinks the rain of love to his heart's content" (Zhou Jun, 1989, 105).

In this kind of Dadaist experimental verse, it is hard to determine what is expressed, yet it is equally difficult to dismiss the poem as expressing nothing. Such poetry explores no less than the possibility of doing away with the *certainties* of language. The Chinese language used here is forcefully divorced from the traditional concepts of poetry expressing the Way, and with it the fixed rules of language. To the Third Generation poets, poetry itself is the experience of life or a form of life (Zhou Jun, 1989:102, 124). Though many critics question whether these poems are poems at all, a great num-

ber of the Third Generation poems were written this way. Crude as they may appear, they possess the virtue of being experimental and innovative. It is in these writings that the poets explored the possibilities of language by demonstrating "infinite substitutions within the closure of a finite set" (Thiher, 1984, 90). Zhou Lunyou's "The Square of Freedom" suggests exactly what the poet can do with the old Chinese language system by making it a square of freedom instead of chains of thinking by exploring the possibilities of the old language beyond its accepted "logic, reason, and grammar."

On the Poetic Transformation

Though the traces of Western thinking in the Third Generation Poetry discussed earlier may not be sufficient to warrant a claim of representation of "the West," to the Chinese audiences and critics in the mid 1980s, these poets were invariably seen as having the authority to interpret what the West is. With the limited channels of perceiving the West at the time, critics have repeatedly referred to this poetry as an example of westernization of Chinese poetry. Taken at its face value, we may see, through this process of "westernization," a certain image of the West emerging in front of the Chinese audiences. How Western thinking and cultural forms are interpreted in Third Generation Poetry reveals a unique representation of "the West" in the contemporary Chinese context. As we have seen, this particular discourse shares many strategies with Said's model in terms of constructing a cultural Other, a reversal of the process of Orientalism, and indeed a Chinese Occidentalism in the making. In the name of advancing Chinese poetic writing, the poets seek to represent, reconstruct and identify the Western world according to their own perceptions of the Other. Like Orientalism, in this case, the West "was not a free subject of thought or action" (Said, 1978, 3), it is the object of an authoritative voice. It is up to the Chinese poets and critics to construe images of the silent Other from within Chinese culture. The very process of reading/misreading and theorizing of what is considered Western "domesticated" the Western Other for local Chinese use. The lack of direct correspondence between what

is projected in the poetry and the *real* or *actual* West signifies a process of orientation rather than objectification. The location where the West, in the form of existentialism, Structuralism and the postmodern critique of language is found, lies within the very steps of building up images of the Other. In the same way of what Vico calls man making history, the poets adopted a discursive practice in the space of poetic creation.

One of the major techniques employed by the poets is a certain "reductiveness" talked about by Harold Bloom. In his *The Anxiety of Influence*, Bloom explains, "by 'reductiveness' I mean a kind of misprison that is a radical misinterpretation" (Bloom, 1973:69). During the very process of poetic influence, it is impossible for poets seeking inspiration from their precursors to escape this "misprision."

> Poetic Influence—when it involves two strong, authentic poets,—always proceeds by a misreading of the prior poet, an act of creative correction that is actually and necessarily a misinterpretation. The history of fruitful poetic influence, which is to say the main tradition of Western poetry since the Renaissance, is a history of anxiety and self-saving caricature, of distortion, of perverse, willful revisionism without which modern poetry as such could not exist. (Bloom, 1973, 30)

Given the limited availability of Western works in Chinese translation and more importantly the cultural and historical locations within which these works were written, Western theories could not be digested without the creative involvement of a Chinese imagination. Certain "reductiveness" is inevitable in the process of transformation. In their representation of Western cultural forms the poets had to go through a highly selective and manipulative process, which, according to Bloom, is inevitable, even if it only involves two authentic poets. There is no doubt that the misinterpretations, distortions, inaccuracies and misreadings of Western works and translations of these works form an integral part of the construction of the cultural Other. Many Western concepts were adopted in a crude manner. The concept of absurdity is a case in point. In the poems of the Third Generation there seem to be no representation of the absurdity that determines human beings' relationship with

life. The sort of absurdity talked of by the Third Generation poets and critics has little to do with the absurdity of Albert Camus. For instance, the absurdity in Zhan Xiaolin's poem "Absurdity" suggests more the absurdity of reality[8]: "the advertisement board is walking in the wind/noodles are squeezed out of Bailang toothpaste/the new-born baby girl is pregnant"(Xu Jingya et al., 1988, 262–263). This kind of absurdity indeed bears little resemblance to that of the existentialists, for it questions the accepted concept of what is absurd and what is normal, whereas the absurdity of the existentialists resides in everyday living. This is the absurdity that concerns Albert Camus in his "The Fact of Absurdity":

> It happens that the stage sets collapse. Rising, streetcar, four hours in the office or the factory, meal, streetcar, four hours of work, sleep, and Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday and Saturday according to the same rhythm—this path is easily followed most of the time (Camus, 1965, 823).

To a certain degree, even the basic concepts of being, choice, time, and agony were construed in a similar manner. Though many of the Third Generation poets were university graduates, some students of Western philosophy, few could read existentialist writings in the original. Very often translations grant no more than a superficial understanding of philosophy. In this sense translation is no more than "the performative nature of cultural communication," and it is language in positionality (enunciation) (Bhabha, 1994, 228). The disorientation of time and place also contributed to the fact that distortions and reductiveness are unavoidable. As I mentioned earlier, while in the West the development of modernity into postmodernity might be said as representing a diachronic process of history, the exposure of post Marxist European thinking and its subsequent transformation is very much a synchronic practice in post-Mao China. What Bhabha called "cognitive reductionism" (Bhabha, 1994, 239) is a precondition in any significatory practice, and certainly in a systematic effort to reconstruct a cultural Other. With all their effort

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8.   See Lu Zhouju, "The Variations of Muse" [Miusi de bianzou], *Shandong shida xuebao* (Journal of Shandong Normal University, No. 12, 1989: 41).

to learn from Western works, the poets constructed an image of the West which at best could be termed Western-like.

Contrary to the purpose of Orientalist polarization, the new poets strived to identify with the otherness of the Other. In their seeming Occidental discourse, the poets did not set out to divide "them" (Westerners) from "us" (the new poets). Orientalist hostility and the division associated with it seem to have been eliminated from the process of constructing the West in the new poetry. In this sense the Occidentalist discourse developed by these poets serves more the orientation of the West in the Orient rather than dividing human reality. Instead, the polarization is consciously transplanted in the distinction between the Third Generation poets and their predecessors, namely the Obscure poets. Their conscious effort to learn from the postmodern West brought the Third Generation poets to disassociate themselves from the Obscure poets,

> I feel it is high time for us to say good-bye to you now, Shu Ting, Bei Dao. You have once been obscure, we followed suit. It didn't take long for us to realize—what do we have to be obscure about? You seemed to have doubted everything, and again you seemed to have believed something. You are obscure about the lost dandelion, about the contentions far and near. Your voices are strange yet courageous. Perhaps you do have a corner in a salon; perhaps you can still keep on being obscure among the middle school students who haven't seen the world. When it comes to real life, we find you are just too beautiful, too pure, and too romantic. We have to, no matter how reluctantly, part from you. Good-bye, Shu Ting, Bei Dao! We want to come out of your obscurity and go to the real world. (Cheng Weidong, 1987, 3)

By emphasizing the division between their predecessors and themselves, not only did the Third Generation poets identify more with the constructed Western Other, they also reconstructed a new image of themselves in the evolution of Chinese poetry. "It has become clear that every version of an 'other,' wherever found, is also the construction of a 'self'" (Clifford, 1986,23). The act of representing the West was the act of reconstructing a new identity for the poets themselves. The reconstruction of the otherness of the Western Other was instrumental in establishing the "Self" of the Third Generation in revolt against the Obscure group. The very process of what James

Clifford calls "cultural *poesis*," is "the constant reconstruction of selves and others through specific exclusions, conventions, and discourse practices" (Clifford, 1986, 24). By appropriating, transforming, and representing the West, not only did the Third Generation group develop an Occidentalist discourse which sets it apart from the Obscure group, it also acquired a new "self-recognition and self-identification," and "gained in strength and identity" (Said, 1978,3).

In a way, the act of self-recognition by these poets in their discursive practice can also be seen as the reversal process of self-orientalizing of the Orientalist talked about by Arif Dirlik when he says,

> ... in the very process of understanding an alien culture, the Orientalist needs in some measure to be 'Orientalized' if you like, which brings the Orientalist closer to the Other while distancing him/her from the society of the self. If only as specialist or expert, the Orientalist comes not just to speak about but also *for* the other. (Dirlik, 1997, 109).

Indeed, if we see the poetic practice of these poets as a discourse of Occidenatlism, we will be able to look at the very process of transforming the cultural Other as a process of Occidentalizing by the Occidentalist. The poets did not only attempt to speak about what they perceived as Western "isms" in their poetry, they also spoke for the "isms.""The contact zone" here "also implies a distance, a distance from the society of the Self, as well as of the Other" (Dirlik, 1997, 119). The poets "Occidentalized" themselves in the very process of entering the "Occident" intellectually and sentimentally. As a direct result of distancing from the society of the Self, the poets became an "object of suspicion": their poetic themes diverged from the established traditions of the immediate past, and what is more, the adoption of loanwords and concepts made their poetic diction appear "Europeanized."

As we have seen in the case of the poetic experiments of the 1980s, the interpretation/misinterpretation and transformation of cultural products between different cultures indicate more of a "relationship" than an act of colonization/post-colonization. In the very process of communication, cultural identities are becoming less dis-

tinctive, and the contact zones of cultural exchange become increasingly unavoidable as the world approaches the new millennium. As China continues on its path to progress in the global context, Chinese society will continue to get more exposed to the postmodern West, the adoption of loanwords and concepts will continue to contribute to the Europeanization of the Chinese language. The anxiety of being "culturally-colonized" or "post-colonized" will continue to haunt the academy. It is important to recognize that the uptake of modern and postmodern Western ideas in China forms an integral part of the importation of cultural products from Western countries such as science and technology. It is a mistake to think that these domains are separate. Technology and interpretative, critical discourse have always gone hand in hand throughout the history. Artificial separation of the two will only result in a higher degree of distortion of the cultural Other. It seems predictable that in the years to come this discrepancy will gradually shrink and is already shrieking as a result of accelerated globalization.

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Appendix A

黄相荣

四方盒子 （节选）

过去的门和过去的门都已关闭
未来的门和未来的门都已关闭
只有无牵无挂的太平门敞开
超脱的诱惑来自梦幻的死屋
我们在一个窒闷的四方盒子里
"现在"总是走投无路
每走一步都是门
每一扇门上都没有目的
没有目的就没有地址
没有地址惊慌失措

……………

我们虚幻不充实
我们因虚幻才活着
在闷闷的四方盒子里
在闷闷的四方盒子里

Appendix B

野村

接着就是腐烂

接着就是腐烂
没有疼痛
正象我们从无到有
接着我们从有到无
就好比在医院里
把眼皮翻给医生看
是一种手续
我们可以冷静地坐在一旁
看自己怎样不慌不忙的腐烂
怎样不慌不忙（有的是时间）
从诞生日向现代文化腐烂
从初恋向婚姻腐烂
从长满癣疾的脚趾
向大腿腐烂
向嘴唇腐烂
向一句没说完整的话腐烂
或许这是最诚实的艺术表演
骷髅骨更接近我们本来的模样
他空洞的眼窝里
没有多余的表情

Appendix C

蓝色

圣诞节

总觉得塞进邮筒的信
对方不会收到
放在街旁的自行车
会被别人偷掉
总觉得端在手上的高压锅
马上就会爆炸
转播足球赛的电视机
会出什么故障
如果撞上了什么东西
那一定得了脑震荡
如果这班车她还不到的话
我就要一个人被撇在世界上

一个成熟的男人
身上为什么会有
那么多的份量