

The Poetry of Zheng Min 郑敏

Selections: 1947 – 1995

Zheng Min was born in 1920 in Minhou, Fujian province. Zheng began writing poetry during the War of Resistance against the Japanese while at university in Chongqing during the early 1940s. At the time, she was one of a small number of poets (recently termed the Nine Leaves 九叶 poets) experimenting with contemporary western modernist trends in poetry. In 1943, she travelled to the US to study, and, after completing a masters degree at Brown University in 1953, returned to live in China. Political repression and the conservative aesthetic tastes of the CCP regime meant that what little poetry Zheng wrote before the death of Mao and the fall of the Gang of Four in 1976 was not officially published at the time. During much of this period and since, she has been a professor of western literature at Beijing Normal University. Since 1976, Zheng has written much poetry and criticism, and to this day remains as active as her health allows.

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Golden Sheaves of Rice [金黄的稻束] 1947

Golden sheaves of rice stand
in the mown fields of autumn
I think of innumerable weary mothers
I saw at dusk on the road: the pretty wrinkled face,
the day's harvest moon full
above towering treetops,
in the twilight, distant mountains
encircle the borders to our hearts,
no statue could be quieter than this.
Shouldering that great weariness, here
you stretch toward a far-off place
in the autumn fields heads are lowered in thought,
hushed. History is merely
a stream flowing away from under your feet,
and you, standing there,
have grown into an idea of mankind.

Washing Feet – A Painting) [濯足——一幅画] 1947

A deep forest scoops a trail through her chest
the trail leads to -- ancient tree, hey, circling a pond here
the pond reflects the image of a face, a smile flows from the image
like a still flower sending forth a life of myriad motions

Look over there, the color green floods out from tender leaves
and melts into dull green sunlight, soaking your feet
you dissolve into the forest's cold, dark tranquility, in the dim light
Hey, girl, you wait happily for that other half of yourself.

It's come, a squirrel skipping over a fallen leaf,
it whistles, two birds are whispering,
finally weariness scatters the light mist off the woods.

In dreams you see him grown into a squirrel, a tall tree
then grass, then a pool of water,
your pale white feet sleep in the water.

The Times and Death [时代与死亡] 1947

Throw a wooden boat
into a boundless turbulence,
raise a flag
into the strong wind's sky;
with a rough gait,
mankind wades into life's rapid flow.

In the long, long ranks
“life” and “death” cannot be cut asunder;
each one looks back on the hardship of those behind
spreads their limbs,
extends an extraditing bridge,
every one, so as to let some light through to those behind,
shuts his own eyes forever.

No more talk of destruction, terror,
and the sorrow passed down from ancient times,
only a noble heart
changed into a stream of light in the black night,
illuminating the footsteps of nighttime travellers.
When the troops move forward again,
each ray of vanished light
is dissolved already, deep in the blood of the living,
carried toward the day mankind is waiting for.

If hatred grows truly out of love,
then humiliation is the reason behind honor,
“death” “life's” greatest climax
and this lovely splendor like a
rare sudden bloom of flower, even though in an instant
it may wither and fall, yet leave behind
a budding life.

Poverty [贫穷] 1947

Still the something we have will continue to increase,
seemingly our having nothing will never happen,
just as the small greenness of spring settles into a dense shadow in the end,
sandstone in the desert cannot cast a green shoot.

Throw away the arguments of philosophers,
the fast pace of revolutionaries and the pressing calls;
this state of being silently accepts
the autonomous lands of “have” and “have not.”
If poverty is a piece of property,
how many inherit, accede to it,
put up with the devastation of wind, snow, hunger, cold.

One day you understand what this war is,
see how the tattered clothes, the suffering lips
speak its lack of glory, its never-end to you.

The Beauty of Life: Suffering * Struggle * Endurance [生的美：痛苦*斗争*忍受] 1947

Peck, peck, peck,
you are the woodpecker at that ancient tree,
incessantly spinning through my silent heart,
you know a timid bug hides here,
please see how I so obediently spread my limbs.

Attack, attack, attack,
in a flash the howling sea makes the waves to roll in,
race at the foot of a tall cliff,
and each detached refusal
stirs the sea's blood even more.

Silent, silent, silent,
as if trees abandon the lush green speechlessly,
suffer on in the darkness and pressure under the earth's crust,
only when pain seeps deep into your body,
can the soul blaze, spitting out a powerful light.

When You're by Me -- O Poetry, I've Found You Again [如有你在我身边—诗呵，我又找到了你] 1979, Beijing

Bist Du bei mir, Geh' Ich mit Freuden.....
Green, green, the willow tendrils tremble,
the thin transparent wings of early spring, sweep over the branches.
Why can't people see her,
this limber sprite, where are you? where?
“Here, right here in your heart.” Her soft response.

Ahh, did I bury not you?! Poetry, while the autumn wind rustled,
the grass withered, the leaves fallen, my pen broken,
I bore you out into the wilderness, up a mountain side,
there I buried my lover.
Looking back, wiping away tears, I only saw a wild dog hunger.

They piled garbage on your burial mound, stinking, rotting,
sun shone rain fell, but earth embraced you, digesting, absorbing.
A wild gust of wind scatters winter clouds, spring rain on and on,
green, green, willow tendrils tremble,
thin transparent wings of early spring sweep over the branches.

My limbs soaked by spring chill, stepping on fine misty rain,
pass through fields, come to her grave,
suddenly a soft sigh, so gentle,
Hey, where are you? where? I look everywhere,
“Right here, dear, in your heart.”

From the garbage pile, from the ruins, from the black earth,
Revive, wake from deep sleep, the spring calls you out,
my lover, softly sighing, stretches lazily, yawns,
the sorrow left behind by the funeral, like traces of glaciers,
the ice and snow melted, the skylark joyfully sings, and sinks into the memory of men.

Ahh, I've found you again, my lover, my face pearled in tears,
when I race forward, embrace you, I only see thin smoke,
one wisp, curling up, in an instant vanishes into the clear sky.
What?! What?! You..... I can see you no more,
your eyes so wise, in a moment the joy,

transforms into grief, can it be we cannot reunite?
Sad music, play again, people come and weep.
But the grass on the earth softly asks:
Isn't she right here? in the green of spring?
the pale green of willow tendrils, the jade green of pines.....

Full of joy, I kiss the dirt of your burial mound.
Let my heart grow green, I've found you again,
wherever springs are green,
you are there,
right inside my heart, forever in my heart here.

Whenever I Walk this Path [每当我走过这条小径]

Whenever I walk this path
ghosts curl around my feet
my whole body trembles, not because of cold
but because I see the burning gaze
The stars of youth shouldn't cool this quickly
your lush black hair
can it already be ash
those bright red lips
can all the blood have bled away
your limbs full of spring
today already scattered on the wind
no bone ash, no spirit tablet
Ahh! The life providence granted
in the end becomes a hideous grinning misunderstanding
though the conscience of a few twitches
who can return to the branch the apple
made to fall by the wind and rain, return to us
the tender cheeks of green spring, return to mothers
the foetus which once wriggled in the belly?
Again this year the green leaves here have grown into shade
hedge-roses climb wild over fences
rosy reds, jasmine whites
the bright yellows and deep purples of wild blossoms
all arrive as usual
only the sound of your footsteps
rise in the deep black night
in dreams of you

I fear walking this path
but cannot withstand your summons
from here I once walked toward the unharnessed you
and so my chest swells in pain
now blood ceases to flow, leaving behind
only the pallid white waiting of corpses
just the waiting, the waiting
will quietly grow
like a mushroom in the dark.

From **Images of the Heart** [心像组诗], a sequence of 13 poems (1986)

#2 The Gate [门]

This gate does not exist in the human world
only for the fate of a few
those wanting to walk through are blocked
by those wanting to walk out.
Ten years can leave not one trace behind
yet one look could spell eternity;
no beg-your-pardon
is more wistfully said than this

That gate is still there
but no longer exists
only when people
turn heads and look back
can it be clearly seen
that it is
the gate through into the divine comedy

It exists amidst the nothingness
and could be anywhere

#3 Yearning: A Male Lion [渴望：一只雄狮]

In my body a mouth is opened wide, wide
like a roaring male lion
it charges down to a bridgehead on a great river
watches the swift current below
the ferry silently passing through an arch
hears the roar of the times
as the symbol roars in a forest
it turns its head and looks at me
then returns to the cage of my body
the lion's gold fur like sunlight
the roar of the image like a drum roll
like a flower returns to me blooming vitality
the lion takes me there To the bridgehead
I go to meet my appointment

#4 It [它]

Can't forget it
though the sun's already gone behind the mountain
the range's long, long limbs
unfolding lying down

Passing through impassable armour of iron
it returns to my awareness
and yields there
a light I alone can see

#13 The Whale that can not be Seen [看不见的鲸鱼]

She cannot see
that strongest concentration of life
cannot touch
that densest mass, gathered together the bulk
of bright blue sea gathered
around the swimmer's pale white body
the deep dark forest
covers the black bear tracks
painfully she
 hunts, imagines, waits
despair
and again despair
discovering herself one day
already inside it
 surrounded
 in a caress
 digested
 swallowed up

She finally finds the burning point of life
when the unseeable whale
has eaten her up, digested

From **My Oriental Soul** [我的东方灵魂] (a sequence of 7 poems) 1987

#4 Snow, It can't be White [雪，它不能是白色的]

Snow
I don't know
if it's white or not
a black roof-topped sixth floor, New York's 122nd Street
stains the pure white of the snow

An old church bell sounds
stirring the bitter taste of solitude
touching the snow, kissing it
together with the wind
it lifts its top off
the roof line irregular
force and male uneasiness
invade
the holy mother's calm face

Beyond the windows in the building
snow is
red, blue, brown
perhaps it is black pain and
grey loneliness
snow dripping
from the sound of the bell
cannot be
white

The Ghost of a Spring Cocoon [春茧的幽灵] 1987

The ghost of a cocooned spring
strokes the pitch-black earth
with her silk white sleeves
her white damask dancing shoes
spin like awls
her raised face
cannot see the light of moon and stars
this is not the night
but the sun is picked up
by Chinese-chess players for a game.
From outside the picture a noise passes in
like a stack of china bowls smashed
its glad and ruthless laughter
a venting of hostility

On a tender green mulberry leaf
spring's cocoon pierced by transparency
undergoing the pains of a hard birth

Turning vainly the spinning-wheel
waits ten, a hundred, a thousand years
sleep in peace
the dark of the night seems sweet
immortality rots continuously soaked in honey
cocooned once more in its ancient corpse
the transparency of liquid silk stiffens

A moth flies from the coffin
flutters in the limitless dark
scattering its grey eggs.

A Small Room [斗室] 1987

The small room is so quiet
past views come here often
the fetal movement in a mother's body

Thrown outside, your thick, thick walls
some people jeer at you
the frivolous laughter, also the worship of slaves
here that's only hard thought
the cold stiffening after excited seething
the deep night after the day

The small room has solid walls
my thoughts repeatedly strike them
cast out and bounced back
the sound of an empty valley
lacking your honesty too
Tell me, what am I.

A False Image [假象] 1987

A grey wind shivers the window
dumping the resentment of thousands of years before it
like a mother, I howl and weep enduring it
if howling could bite right through the heart's restraints
let it continue
How old the open grave
so heavy the grudge
The wind is 'able'
to push wildly at the windmill

This morning the sun comes to say
yesterday was all wrong, see
the sky is so blue, pay no heed
From today on, we have only clear skies
and I stare oddly at it
the gust from the heart blows me over

An Appointment [一次约会] 1987

I thought we were all old
but time and again you
fly up over the horizon
reaching out your long arm of foam
following my feet that stand on a beach
you present pale white lips to me
until I must soak my feet in your
icy green jade
silently you
roll away the fine sand under my feet
carried back to your dark deep
the more I sink the deeper I go down
feel for a brief instant life close over me
until in time you are compelled by the receding tide
slowly to leave
and I spy my feet once more

She goes far away
leaves behind a long wet mark
as long as the shore
equally convoluted, equally hard to understand.

From **Existence that no longer Exists** [不再存在的存在] (a series of 4 poems)1988

#1 Van Gogh's Pleasure Boat is Gone [凡高的画船不在了]

Staggering along the North Sea's shore
in the sky an ink-black cloud bank rolls
cleaning away the white caps
the enormous wind blows away all tourists
Looking out from an empty sidewalk cafe:
only
violent, dark grey sea
van Gogh's colorful boat is gone
the vivid reds and greens
that make it hard to sleep
gone.

Luckily the rain storm
drives off the illusions and disappointments of a clear sky
van Gogh's pleasure boat is long gone actually, ever since
folk blundered along the shore of the North Sea
no longer harboring belief in 'the other side.'
Perhaps cataracts have developed
people cannot see that being
which no longer is
but the poet Strunt says
"No matter where, I always am
that lost part"

From **Naked Exposure** [裸露] (a sequence of 11 poems) 1987-1988

#9 The Wings of Swans [天鹅的翅膀]

Between freedom and unfreedom
swans swim in the park lake
herons pass through come and go
their wings uncut
The swans gracefully live in
the park's middling state
nobody knows
if they are happy or not

#10 Glass Windows [玻璃窗]

The world does not welcome a transparent window
it exposes a proper noun
like a person without any clothes
awkward, shameful

Sometimes the world welcomes a transparent window
when it puts its Xmas garden on parade
when
it exhibits in a display window a kindly, jolly old gent

People do not always welcome a bright window
thick curtains keep out the black night
light comes from a candlestick, a fireplace
Love knows no black night? or all is night?

The world welcomes a semitransparent window
all things are more beautiful than shadows
unfeeling reality screened by
eyelashes, protecting feeble sight

Only an artless child
pressing his nose against the glass world
I am longing for you
He still has no 'I' to perplex him

From **Heavy Lyrics** [沉重的抒情诗] (a sequence of 7 poems) 1988

#1 Heavy Lyricism [沉重的抒情]

As if
coming out of wood
coming out of stone
the heart is carved into
the planes and curves of an abstract painting
an appeal from earth to sky
history is heavy
you need a foundation of black cast iron
to bolster the heart that still bleeds

#2 The Rec' Room [游艺室]

In the rec' room
hangs every type of mask
children come in
play every kind of role
some cut their heads off
some barter their hearts

Curses, wild laughter, an uproar
demons for every form of desire dance
only the hero's mask cannot be found
it's left on the wall

The silly sainted one sobbing under the table
drips his tears that cannot spread
on the absorbent concrete floor
they won't bring forth flowers, won't melt the river ice

#3 Roots [根]

A root stretches out of the distance
passed through thousands of years a passageway underground
when I go to rip it up
so as to plant brilliant flowers
I track it down, unearth it
until, suddenly looking up
I see a beautiful big tree
With my bloody fingers
I carve a symbol in it to ward off evil
I know I can't dig it up
It is the mother of our graves

#4 Looking into the Distance [瞧向远方]

The air becomes the heaviest substance
the sacred gold pedestal dissolves without a trace or shadow
yet children's feet grow wings
they gaze into the distance, fly into the distance
the garbage beside them doesn't disturb them
the far-off thunder and fire of lightning is
the truth closest to home
all drank their fill of the wine of forgetfulness
and stare at the dense, distant fog
like Icarus, the fearless wings could melt

Bodies begin to fall like rain

From **Death of a Poet** [诗人之死] (a sequence of 19 poems) 1989

#1

Who is it, who
whose powerful fingers
break this winter day's narcissus
make the white juice ooze out

of green jade and scallion-white stems?
who is it, who
whose mighty fist
shatters this elegant ancient vase

makes the juice of life
gush out of his chest
The narcissus withers

the destruction of the new bride's illusions
is the hand that makes a life
taking back again a song not entirely sung.

#2

Unsung songs
unfinished dreams
peer down at me from the edge of a cloud
like migrant birds flying into the haze

Here the primordial age is just beginning
but without the mettle of dinosaurs
history goes astray in the confusion
spring will not easily arrive

Take it away you unsung notes
Take it away you incompletely painted dreamscape
the sky on that side, the earth on that

Already long long lines
carrying real feeling washed clean long ago
compose the sequel of our story.

#4

That pair of doubting eyes
watch the evening sun behind a cloud bank
full of illusions and innocence
unwillingly covered over by death

That pair of doubting eyes
ever unwilling to accept the darkness
even though they once passed through the shadow of death
accompanying the corpses of fellow sufferers in her chest

Don't know why she's always unwilling
to come down from the cloud's edge
acknowledge life's cruelty

Don't know why she's ever unwilling
to acknowledge the empty lies of illusion
life's inability to forgive

#7

The right hand lightly strokes the left
an odd feeling, called loneliness
a poet struggles to keep watch
over his spirit garden at the end of spring's book

Time rolls away step by step paintings press close
leaving only a right hand gently stroking a left
suddenly everything disappears, dead silence
the retreating tide doesn't heed your plea to stay

Like the wind whirling to sweep fallen leaves
but taunted ridiculed by winter
the curses chasing after you

Today still pressed tight on corpses
they say it's not hatred, there's no howl
A beautiful reply: Merely too busy with work.

#9

Gushing up from under our feet is not yellow earth
but a hundred thousand acres of billowing bluish-green
seawater industriously washes the coral clean
its snow-white skeleton is worry-free

Your sixty-ninth winter already past
you patiently wait for a bolt of lightning's fire
to arrive and inscribe the final line of a lifetime's
thought on your pure white bones

No matter what further boiling black clouds appear on the horizon
they can not hurt you
you've already carried off all the weakness of flesh

The dance of the flame in full bloom will absorb you
and so all pretty china
is left with odd curious flowers that never fall

#10

We are all fiery islands
all our lives we tread red flames
passed through hell, burnt through overpasses
without emitting a sigh that injures our status

But we envy islands of flame
that find pure sweet water in a clump of grass
an unbounded far-off sky above
abruptly they will fly up, thin bright red feet hanging behind

In a dream the lazy bear of wild thought also once
flew up
turned over

But like an inferior hero-acrobat
fell to death
without a sound

#11

Winter is past, is happiness really not far away
Your death ends your sixty-ninth winter
a desperate Shelley once vainly imagined the west wind
driving away cruel reality, blowing it far-off.

After winter there's still winter, still
it's winter, unending winter
this morning your ways make me believe, tied up
an unclear debtor, everyday in front of my door

We buried your remains
but that is still not enough by far
A debt of thousands of years

Ruins a family fortune, perhaps
we must burn your sheaves of poems too
stuff the greedy crematory

#17

The eye is a frozen lotus pond
the stream already dry, my sixty-ninth winter
stands at death's frontier checkpoint sending death on its way
on the horizon a camel train moves toward a state nobody knows

The happy grapes will not anxiously ask about their fate
the savory red wine also forgets its roots
only note after note connects into song
perhaps it is anger, perhaps it is soft

A whole is just a composition of fragments
pieces reorganized, birth a new whole
the shortsighted craftsman thinks it's the end

Rest your eyes, let your limbs lie across the earth
the replacement of silkworm by chrysalis, of caterpillar by butterfly
scattered on hills and lakes, what is like rain is this 'me'

#18

With the laser knife of time they
cut at our bodies
white brain waves are videotapes
that cannot be erased, boxes of our voice tapes

Smashed, harsh songs escape
a desperate poet holds out a heart of pent-up blood
goes to see god or the devil
Anyway they are all football stars

Kick a heart over to the center
shoot on goal with it
a good record of that fatal point

Joyful shouts like wind in the fields
passes through drops of blood and flies off
a poet's heart goes into the net, that is the grave.

#19

When the old is dressed up as new life
blocking out the sky above you
layer after layer of old skin reluctant to part with the ugly
fears the pain of new life

Today, a deflated balloon
the old skin clings tight to my body
its former life already quietly escaped
the immortal life of it is the death of my pain

Cast my, as yet unclosed, eyes
off into the distance
the magnificent Northern Lights are there

Poet, your final silence
like a voiceless polar light
plays more freely than we.

From **The Gift of Life** [生命之賜] (a sequence of 14 poems) Nov. - Dec. 1994

Preface: I Say [序言：我说]

I say:

Poetry, I pursue
Philosophy, I seek
but poetry and philosophy
and not bear paws and fish
possibly it's a fish boiling a bear paw
perhaps it's a bear paw braising a fish
in one there is the rich flavor of the other

People eating no longer closely question
which is the fish, which is the bear paw
only believing the tongue
receptor of ten thousand flavors in its one
forgetting that picky, biased, self-styled intelligence
of the brain

Long ago the fish and the bear paw forgot themselves
stewed above a fiery pool of red briquettes
in that invisible, black, burning,
unfathomable abyss.

#1

What is hard to accept is love's eternal transformations
hatred's stubborn persistence and the unwillingness of bitterness to vanish
the distant undulating cloud once experienced cruelty too
the scorching white sun also finds it hard to shirk the bath of nocturnal rain

Yesterday's wild wind only broke the arms of willows
observing, head raised is the unmoved old pine
the excited seething of millennia only condenses its dark green
its motley body is carved into an old dragon lying prone

Let go when the green spring gives you an elastic grace
the whirl of the instant makes even the universe dizzy
the planet is just a stage on which you unfold your power

What waits for you is not a muddled old age
changed into a distant undulating cloud a suspended twilight
gradually turning into orange, a pale blue, delivered by the universe

#5

The joy of autumn is in death
the rich colors of the wings of death
from gosling orange to deep brown to orangutan red
but the autumn does not sigh, doesn't weep

When a breeze sweeps over the crown of a big broad aspen
it knocks down a brown cascade
waiting on the earth is the wild joy of reunion
after a long, distant journey a whispering outpour

The wine of autumn rain intoxicates them all
pressed tight together, cheeks dark red
leaf on leaf, heap on heap, shower after shower

Arriving one after another still slowly drifting down
until the final leaf, the soft peel of a bell
ends the summer's showy wind and clouds

#6

Outcrops in silence. We must wait.
Like the fruit of peach trees, amid the damage of rainstorms and
pests, endure life's whips
Fruit filling a tree, outcroppings filling a gully

How many can still be stained dark red? On dinner tables
receive people's praise? Chance
has its choice, stretches out a hand
mysterious like drifting clouds passing over a border

Whose footsteps are so leisurely?
Whose arms so lazy
a hesitant look, can it ever pass through?

An outcrop hasn't an easily rotted body
can bear eons of indifference and forgetfulness
it is sound asleep in a deep place, pillowed by stone.

#10

Half a century we only blinked
the planet never stopped spinning revolving
when we woke the northern hemisphere in the liveness of spring
already become the cold harsh asthma of the southern

A flock of geese rushes to catch the season
even in the vortex of the air's stream it doesn't lose direction
the eyes of you and me are not the stars in the sky
at night it's hard to recover childish dreams

Dawn comes from the east
the setting sun goes home to the west
a weary traveller gazes up at the limitless sky beyond the sky

Too bad, only in the cabin of a supersonic jet
can you, at the final moment, say good-bye to the timidity of the evening sun
and immediately greet the downy grey of dawn

#12

Those words that were never spoken
we don't know what thicket they slipped into
we are forever digging deep
hoping to find their hidden loot

We look up at each other angry at being duped
you never really entered the pupil of my eye
I am only in a place far, far away from you too
but we strive, endeavor to come close

The distance is already impossible to remove
unless we can possess transparent bodies
limitless a blue sky without a cloud bank

You will become my hair skin
I the earth under your feet
no more the divergence of two lives you me

From **If Curses aren't Accompanied by Deep Thought** [如果咒骂没有带来沉思]
(a sequence of 9 poems) 1995

#1 Untitled [无题]

Writing a line of poetry is like taking a sip of alcohol
my soul sinks toward sleep
quietly talks of the world with a valley of dreams
that which is lost, please never return

After waking, we are like two free white colts
on unbounded green grass chasing playing
until the murky evening mist finds the halters again
no longer do we raise our heads to whinny, nor do hooves fly

Now our manes droop, we silently stand side by side
return to the pen built by people for horses

#4 If..... Then [假如。 然而。]

If I rush to the forest
tell the birds to sing somewhat softer
gently, gently
don't wake the baby sound asleep in the shade

If I rush to the open fields
tell the sheep not to eat the wild flowers
carefully, carefully
leave them for the oldster haltingly coming that way

Then birds sing more wildly
then sheep eat more savagely
when will they finally be able to understand
why creation made them gifts of voice and green grass?

#8 A Century's Waiting [世纪的等待]

The winter's waiting
winter's grey clouds toss and turn
waiting for snow

The sparse willow branches are brittle
loneliness hangs in the swaying of branch-tips
waiting makes the weak and small live
waiting makes the imperious tremble

Amid the tossing and turning the grey clouds finally spill down
white snow goose down scattering winnowing
in a blink the soundless white wilderness
transforms all that is impetuous into forgetfulness

A temporary forgetting is a bird flying
passing on the waiting of a century nearing its end

**#9 The Forgotten Yesterday (A dirge of an ancient culture) [被遗忘的昨天
(一首古文化的哀歌)]**

A flock of ancient animals
their hurried footsteps race between
perilous peaks of glass and steel
they have thousands of years of yesterday
they once had written words to be proud of
but today
the library at Alexandria is sealed
today they
pant amid the press of glass and steel.

Several times the invasions of foreign nations
has been digested by these volumes
absorbed, reborn, multiplied.
But a hand reaches out from inside
pinching off the words of each classic, extracting
a nerve of the old culture
from the spine of the ancient animal
now he's forgotten the form of the words
lost the ear to listen to the old zither
the eye to see mountains and rivers of splashed ink
after they walk through the palace of knowledge
its roof dark blue like the seaside
they are stunned, blinded, bewildered like people of another land

The sun of the twenty-first century shines on Beijing, Shanghai
Shenzhen, Hainan Island
The twenty-first century's sea wind blows their long hair
ancient animals light in years
sturdy bodies
long-distance runners record-breakers
their faces in the dark
facing the future
behind them
a long-forgotten path
on the far-off silk Road
long shadows and the sound of bells of the final camel train
moving toward death at Lou-lan¹

The long-running giraffe
the ocean-crossing dolphin

¹ Loulan: A warlike state during the Han dynasty (206 B.C.E. - 220 C.E.) located in what is now the western Chinese territory of Xinjiang.

possession of the great wealth of a capitalist
already lost
the cliff paintings of ancestors, the writings on bamboo slips
in a stretch of forgetfulness a blank yesterday
extends out from the desert's tomorrow

Desert links desert
footprints vanish in the wind
the lake of the crescent moon dries out in corrosion
Who will suddenly recover his senses?
Abruptly look back, shocked to see:
Death walking out of graves
like terracotta warriors just waking
on both sides smashing
the steel bones and glass clamping in the sky
the tall peaks pressing at their chests
the entire troop returns to the vast prairie
the harnessing of sand begins at Loulan
the flock of old animals finds its way back to the source of water

This isn't the recurrence of a dream
cock your ears and hear the sound of wind beyond the pass
yesterday calls to tomorrow
please don't be so insensitive
so frivolous
as to forget the pretty embroidered gowns
and let the calculators of the bourse
steal the old soul away.