



The past may always seem a better time than the present, as the “good old days” of the younger days that will never return. However, during my “good old days” in the “Cultural Revolution”, people were deprived of dreams and hopes, even their lives in some cases. Those who suffered have all the reasons to resent and to curse that period for their suffering, as well as the reasons to cherish and to remember their youth. And, in my case, this period has also been associated with art and poetry, where East meets West.

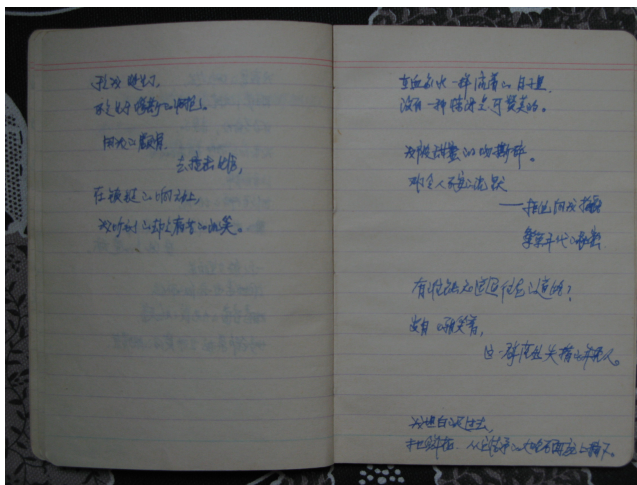
MY POETICAL YEARS DURING THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION

The Cultural Revolution broke out in 1966 when I just graduated from elementary school, the whole country entered into a period of ten years of chaos, which completely changed my fate as well as my peers’. The parents of most of my friends were expelled to the labor camps or kept in prisons while the kids were sent to the countryside or remote farms. Family members were all far apart from each other. Many lost their homes in Beijing. Later when the revolution turned into low tide in 1971-1972 and was questioned by the people participated in the first place with great passion; the kids went back to Beijing and gathered at some homes fortunate enough to be kept but without parents—my home was one of them. Having experienced the earliest days of the C.R. with terror and disappointment, we were so hungry for friendship and consolation. We sang foreign folk songs and listened to classic music records. We looked for “Voice of America” and “Moscow Broadcasting Station” on the radio behind closed curtains. We also read, painted and wrote poetry, all such activities were considered as the forbidden games then. These small groups of literary youth were later referred to by the historians as “underground salon” during the C.R.

At that time we had no school to go to and no job to work on. We had nothing but endless time and sudden freedom. I remember in the winter of 1971 my brother and I went to the Beijing Library which was reopened to public after a long break. We read every book on the shelf, from the biography of Napoleon to the western cooking and recipes. That is the symbol of a different world we were so eager to know. Some reference books (with yellow cover) only available to the party high-ranking officials began to go around among a group of friends. These books included western literatures and theories such as “The Catcher in the Rye”, “On the Road”, “Upper Class”, “La Nausee (Disgust and other)” and “New Class”, etc.. The reading of such books opened a new world to us. We read, exchanged books, discussed and argued the contents enthusiastically. Sometimes I had to read a book within only a few hours at midnight while next person sitting beside waiting for me to finish. Many books fell to pieces before being rebound—One read the first half while another read the second half. Some of my friends would steal books in (internal) bookstore. They hid the books inside the overcoat so no body could find what they were doing. Just like a

hungry man longing for food, the literature and poetry were unusually significant to us during those years when people were short of everything spiritually as well as physically. That time was a disaster for most Chinese but it also provided to us a chance and freedom to see the world with our own eyes and seek the truth by ourselves after the breakdown of our original belief in communism—which used to be the lifetime pursuit of my father’s generation.

Inspired, we started writing poetry in strange and obscure language to express resentment, delusion, and passion. We exchanged the poems on paper, which was later referred to as “Misty poetry” because the language and images were from Western literatures difficult to understand. When I read Duo Duo and Genzi’s poetry first time I was greatly shocked. As I no longer believed in what I was told in my childhood and felt tired for those false and empty words prevalent during the C.R. we started simultaneously looking for the languages that could express our true feelings. After reading an album of French poet Baudelaire I tried to write poetry in my dairy. All my poems were written during the year of 1973-1974 when I was 20. They were never read by anybody until recent years. Even myself din't know what these words had meant. It was only the need for expression—a pain from youth and a lust for life. The American young man who translated my poems into English commented that he was feeling “a warmth from darkness”.— possibly poets write to lighten to the darkness they live in.



My diary in 1973. 我 1973 年的日记. Perhaps during that time not many personal words left to record what we experienced, these poems to some extent became the underground voice of the lost youth, We were named by the people digging and studying this period of history as “pre-misty poets”. It seems to prove there existed a cultural undercurrent during the C.R., signifying some kind of continuation of the unbreakable

tradition and therefore nurturing the subsequent Chinese contemporary poetry. These poets born in ruins and turbulence later became known by the world along with the modern China with their works. The most stubborn poet DuoDuo won the Neustadt International Prize for Literature (“American Nobel”) in 2010 due to his consistent efforts. I was deeply impressed by his words at awarding ceremony:

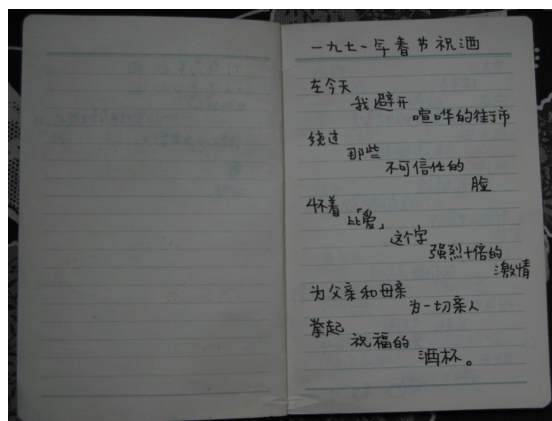
When first heard the syllables of Baudelaire, Lorca, Цветаева (Marina Tsvetaeva) and Ehrenburg, a generation of Chinese poets have shown their gratitude to the creative transition in those critical days. The words, already became the direct fate of receiver...yet the word of suffering contains all the secrets of human being. Perhaps inquiring the words is inquiring justice. If

soliloquy brings chorus, a poet can be the spokesman. The poetry, self-contained by its uselessness, contemns the power.



Reunion on the painting exhibition by poets after 37 years. Duo Duo already white haired. At the same time during 1973-1974 my brother and I with several other friends began to learn painting. Grant Peng was the leading member of this small artist group. He was a real genius who “shocked the salon in his wild creative power”. Whenever people recall the origin of Chinese contemporary art he is mentioned and remembered.

I want to mention here another buried Chinese poet Zhang Liaoliao, my ex-husband. This is his poetry written in 1971 in a toast to his broken family (Most of his poems are missing). When he wrote this poetry his father was kept in labor camp and his old brother was in death house as a condemned prisoner. He never joined any poet group but being with alcohol. His experience and others' will complete the whole picture of this history. Whenever I see his paintings and poems in childish way and recall those “beautiful words lost forever” I can not stop feeling pain in heart.



That was an unique time about which few original works are left. Due to the severe political pressure, people lived in fear. The whole system was running by this fear. In 1972 we hold a painting exhibition at a friend Tan Xiaochun's home near the Beijing First Prison. We could even see the prison wall from the balcony. Participants included my brother Lu Yansheng, Peng Gang, Tan

Xiaochun and Dong Shabei whose father was the author of famous oil painting “Founding Ceremony of PRC”. Fortunately he still keeps the awarded work “Apples”. This is a piece of history that has long been faded away. Why is it mentioned again today? I think it has to do with our fate and our choices. It is actually still influencing our lives to this date and it constantly reminds us of how art and literature have become our life-long pursuit.

I Shudder To Recall The Past

I shudder to recall the past
Hands over the light
Do not blame me, my dear
My first clumsy verses
No rhyme
No magical metaphor
That is the burnt out struggle with life
In ruins on paper.

Lying in darkness alone
No one comes to disturb his solitude.
Cigarette's stingy red light is slowly extinguishing
Every bit of the world gathers together in that injured eye

So -
I was born
Not born in the embrace of the Muse.

Use my skull
To ram life
In the ringing of chains
What I hear is the jeer of suffering.