

An Eastern Wing Story

Now, let Her tell the story: what would Ying-Ying write about the fated love, parental censorship, illness, longings, attempted kidnap, politics, friendships, military strategies, betrayals, and farewells? The world will never know. Thanks to *How2*, we have a sample of poems written by contemporary Chinese female poets born in the 60s and 70s, telling us about themselves and their lives. In this age of an increasingly crowded global village, their lives share remarkable similarities with our lives in the West.

Yet, despite the contemporary scenes and refreshingly self-assured female voice in this work, the poetics of these poets reach deep into the long tradition of Chinese poetry. The poetics represented here fundamentally embrace the system of understanding underlined by the Chinese metaphysical concept of “Heaven and Human are one” — which denies separation of the subject and the object. True knowledge, in this respect, can’t be determined, given that mind and matter are the same, and observer and observed are one. Such knowledge is fluid and multi-directional in time and space. The human is not the only active participant in the game of knowledge. “Heaven” is more powerful, more knowing and more ubiquitous. Yet “Heaven” does not equal “God/gods” in the Western sense. “Heaven” entails the universe and the reasoning that embraces us all — and is part of things.

The apparent lack of syntactical structure and the non-directional collages of image and action often found in Chinese poetry, including the work collected here, derive from the requirement of such metaphysical understanding. Ezra Pound instinctively picked up on this feature of classical Chinese poetry, and brought it to the West as a new technique to enrich its poetic artillery without realizing the philosophical significance or the distinct difference of the Chinese definition of “things.” He was ingenious in attributing this feature to the Chinese writing system and its pictographic aspect — which lead him to invent imagism. Yet he still missed the metaphysical point at the bottom of it

all... “No ideas but in things” demonstrates just how narrowly William Carlos Williams and some imagists construed, and missed, the essence of Eastern thinking.

The difficulty of translation created by such writing is significant. Translators, who are often poets not unfamiliar with imagism or other post-Poundian multi-perspective writing strategies, are nevertheless perplexed by the seemingly arbitrary usage of personal pronouns in many Chinese poets’ work — as well as the fluid shifting of perspectives, the animation of things without any warning, and the tenseless transition of events defying a linear timeline, even when the poem is telling a story or following an obvious plot. If nature and human are one, the subjective and objective are one, mind is matter, and the conception of the world is not a human-centered activity, then the lack of “I” in many Chinese poets’ work becomes perfectly understandable. The absence of “I” is the manifestation of a presence everywhere, by every thing. Things have mind, or rather things ARE mind — or in Williams’ term, ideas are things. Animation is therefore unnecessary.

These writers’ poems sometimes have the quality of dialogues between interchangeable partners. Everything in a poem, I mean everything, is fluid: there is no fixed reference frame. Everything is open to everything else. “I” turns into you, he, she, it, we, they, etc. Time and space are “things” as well as other abstract thoughts and concepts. Things tend to know themselves better than humans, who are simply other “things.” The prepositional words used to position them, to pin them down, in turn become meaningless or even misleading. Is pan-perspectival the best word to convey this lack of a human-centered epistemological view?

On the other hand, like other Indo-European languages, English is a phonetic language (i.e. it records the human voice to name things), and therefore it assumes a human perspective and human-centered knowledge. The foundation for such knowledge is the philosophical separation of mind and matter, of subjective and objective. Readers need to keep in mind that the translators have to make some brave adjustments in

English, in order to re-create the energetic fluidity of the internal and external world where these Chinese poets dwell.

Incidentally, *Wings* is a poetry journal in Beijing devoted to the work of female poets. Many poets selected for this issue of *How2* had been published in *Wings* before. Notice the plural in the translated name, which is added to satisfy the logically conditioned mind. Of course it has to be a pair, male and female, Eastern and Western, for the take-off of an adventure. More works of these poets and of their male counterparts will be collected in the *Talisman Anthology of Contemporary Chinese Poetry* (ed. by Zhang Er and Chen Dongdong, Talisman House Publishers, New Jersey), which is forthcoming later this fall.

Zhang Er
Olympia, WA
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Biographical Information: Poets & Translators

Poets:

Cao Shuying was born in Nov. 1979 in Ha'erbin of Heilongjiang Province. She is a postgraduate student of Peking University and her major is comparative literature and world literature. Her poems were collected in many Poetry Collections and was published in periodicals such as *Writers, People's Literature, Star, Poetry*, etc. and in many non-official poetry journals like *Wings, Deviation, Selected Poems of 70's Poets, Battlefield, Provinces*, etc. She also writes prose and fairy tales besides poems.

Lan Lan was born Hu Lan Lan in 1967 in Yantai city, Shandong Province, China. She graduated from Zhengzhou University in Henan Province in 1988. She began to publish poems when she was fourteen years old, and had worked as a factory worker and a literary editor. A winner of Anne Kao Poetry Prize in 1996, Lan Lan has published several books of poetry, prose and children's stories. She currently works at the Literary Academy of Henan Province.

Ma Lan is a member of the Hui minority and was born in Meishan County, Sichuan in the 1960s. In 1982 she began working in a bank, where she served as an accountant for ten years. In 1993 she immigrated to the United States, first living in New York, and is currently living at Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut. One of the originators of the major online Chinese literary website "Olive Tree" (Ganlan shu), Ma Lan is currently editor in chief. Her fiction, poetry and essays have appeared in magazines and newspapers around the world, including *Huacheng* (Flower city), *Da jia* (The author), *Zhongshan* (Bell mountain), *Shanghai wenxue* (Shanghai literature), *Shiyue* (October), *Jintian* (Today), *Lianhe wenxue* (Unitas Literature), *Qingxiang* (The tendency), *Renmin wenxue* (People's literature), *Chuang shiji* (Epoch), and *Wanxiang* (Panorama). A German translation of her short story "Shi cong" (Hearing loss) appeared in 2003 in the collection *Das Leben ist jetzt: Neue Erzählungen aus China*. She is the author of the poetry collection *Zuo zai nali* (*Where shall I sit?*) and the short story collection *Hua fei hua* (*Flowers are not flowers*).

Tang Danhong was born in Cheng Du, Sichuan, a poet, documentary film maker, and bookstore proprietor. Her work of poetry started to gain notice in the 90s by its wild vocabularies and unusual associations.

Zhang Er was born in Beijing, China and moved to New York city in 1986. The collections of her poetry *Seen, Unseen* was published by QingHai Publishing House in 1999 and *Water Words* was published by New World Poetry Press in 2002. Her poems have also appeared in English translation in many poetry journals. Her chapbooks in translation, *Winter Garden, Verses on Bird* and *The Autumn of Gu Yao, Cross River, Pick Lotus, Carved Water* were published in recent years. *Verses on Bird*, Zhang Er's selected poems in Chinese and English bilingual edition was published from Zephyr Press in 2004. She has read and lectured at international festivals, conferences, reading series and

universities in China, France, Portugal, Russia, Peru, Canada, Singapore and Hong Kong, and in US. She teaches at The Evergreen State College in Washington.

Zhang Zhen started publishing poems in Chinese literary magazines as well as underground venues in China since the early 1980s. While moving between Sween, China, Japan and United States in the last two decades, she continued to write, publish and take part in public readings. Her book of poetry *Mengzhong louge (Dream Mansion)* was published by the Chunfeng Wenyi Publishing House in 1997. Zhang Zhen is also a film scholar, currently teaching Cinema Studies at New York University. She is the author of *An Amorous History of the Silver Screen: Shanghai Cinema, 1897-1937* (University of Chicago, 2005).

Zhao Xia was born in September 1976 in Shanghai, freelancing as a poetry editor for Internet poetry journals. She is the author of two volumes of poetry collection, *Seven Lilies in Barbarism* and *Paper-Back Spring*. She lives in Germany and Nanjing.

Zhou Zan was born in 1968 in Ru Dong, Jiang Su province. She graduated from the Chinese Department of Yang Zhou University in 1989 and obtained her Ph.D. in Literature from Beijing University. She started writing poetry in university and is the author of multiple publications including *Dreaming or Self Questioning* in 1999. She is the editor of poetry journal Wings, which exclusively dedicated to women's writing.

Translators:

Martine Bellen is the author of five collections of poetry including *The Vulnerability of Order*, Copper Canyon Press; *Tales of Murasaki and Other Poems*, Sun & Moon Press, which won the National Poetry Series Award; and *Places People Dare Not Enter*, Potes & Poets Press. She's a recipient of the New York Foundation for the Arts, the Fund for Poetry, and the American Academy of Poets Award. Ms. Bellen teaches at Rutgers University.

Chen, Xiangyang, PhD candidate in the Department of Cinema Studies, New York University. Her research interests include Chinese Cinema, Hong Kong Cinema, Film History/Historiography, and Film Genres. She is currently writing her dissertation on Cantonese cinema.

Caroline Crumpacker lives with her partner Tom O'Malley and their daughter Colette in Upstate New York. She is an editor for *Fence Magazine*, a contributing editor for *Circumference* and *Double Change* (an online magazine of French and American poetries) and curator for the Bilingual Poetry Reading Series at the Bowery Poetry Club in Manhattan. She received a fellowship from the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, MA in 2001/02. Her translations, essays, poems have appeared in the books *American Poets in the 21st Century: Who we are Now* (Wesleyan University Press, 2005); *Talisman Anthology of Contemporary French Poetry* (Talisman, 2004); and *Love Poems by Younger American Poets* (Verse Press, 2004), and in magazines including

American Letters and Commentary, Boston Review, The Brooklyn Rail, Can I Have My Ball Back?, Chicago Review, Denver Quarterly, DoubleChange, Fence, The Germ, Gulf Coast, Hors Bord (in French), jubilat, L'Oeil de Bouef (in French), Logopoeia, Lungfull!, mem, No, Ploughshares, Provincetown Arts, Poetry Project Newsletter, Seneca Review, Shankpainter, Third Coast, and Volt.

Jennifer Feeley is a doctoral candidate in modern Chinese literature in the department of East Asian Languages and Literatures at Yale University. Her research focuses on Chinese women poets' negotiations with gender-oriented stereotypes throughout the twentieth century. Her translations have appeared in *FIELD: Contemporary Poetry and Poetics*.

Huang, Canran was born in 1963 in the ancient city of Quanzhou, Fujian Province, mainland China. He immigrated to Hong Kong in 1978 when he was 15 years old, but returned years later to China and graduated from Jinan University, Guangzhou in 1988 with a degree in journalism. Since 1990, he has worked with Ta Kung Pao daily in Hong Kong as an international news translator. He has published three books of poetry, a book of essays on poetry and translation, and is currently editing an anthology of Hong Kong poetry. He is also an acclaimed Chinese translator of many Western poets and writers.

Bob Holman's eighth and ninth books are *A Couple of Ways of Doing Something*, a collaboration with Chuck Close (Art of this Century/Pace Editions), and *Carved Water* (Tinfish), his translations of the poetry of Zhang Er. He is Visiting Professor of Writing at Columbia University and Proprietor of the Bowery Poetry Club. He is Artistic Director of Study Abroad on the Bowery, an applied poetics program launched in 2005, and publisher of Bowery Poetry Press.

Charles A. Laughlin was born in Minneapolis. He received his B.A. in Chinese Language and Literature from the University of Minnesota in 1988, and went on to complete a Ph.D. in Chinese Literature at Columbia University in 1996. Since then, he has taught at Yale University, where he is currently Associate Professor of Chinese Literature. His first book, *Chinese Reportage: The Aesthetics of Historical Experience*, was published by Duke University Press in 2002, with a Chinese translation forthcoming. He is currently completing a book on the modern Chinese essay entitled *The Literature of Leisure and Chinese Modernity*.

Rachel Levitsky's first full length volume of poetry, *Under the Sun*, was published by Futurepoem books in 2003. She is the author of five chapbooks of poetry, *Dearly*, (a+bend, 1999), *Cartographies of Error* (Leroy, 1999), *The Adventures of Yaya and Grace* (PotesPoets, 1999), *2 (1x1)Portraits* (Baksun, 1998) and *Dearly, 3,4,6* (Duration Press, 2005). She is one of Zhang Er's poet translators.

Bill Ransom's poetry was nominated for both the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award. He's published six novels and numerous short stories, most recently in *Carve* magazine. A CD of his recent poetry collection, *War Baby*, is available from Wordman

Production Company. He teaches at The Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington.

Judith Roche, poet, arts educator, editor, arts programmer, is the author of two poetry collections, *Myrrh/ My Life as a Screamer* and *Ghosts*. She received an American Book Award for co-editing *First Fish First People, Salmon Tales of the North Pacific Rim*. She has taught poetry workshops and residencies extensively to adults, students, prisoners and others and is Literary Arts Director for One Reel, an arts events organization.

Eleni Sikelianos's two new books are *The California Poem* (Coffee House), and *The Book of Jon* (Nonfiction; City Lights). Previous books include *The Monster Lives of Boys & Girls* (Green Integer, National Poetry Series), *Earliest Worlds* (Coffee House), and *The Book of Tendons* (Post-Apollo). She has been conferred numerous awards for her poetry, nonfiction and translations.

Susan M. Schultz is Professor of English at the University of Hawai`i in Honolulu. She is author of three volumes of poetry, most recently *And then something happened* (Salt, 2004), and *A Poetics of Impasse in Modern and Contemporary American Poetry* (Alabama, 2005). She edited *The Tribe of John: Ashbery and Contemporary Poetry* (Alabama, 1995). In 1995 she founded Tinfish Press, which specializes in experimental poetry from the Pacific.