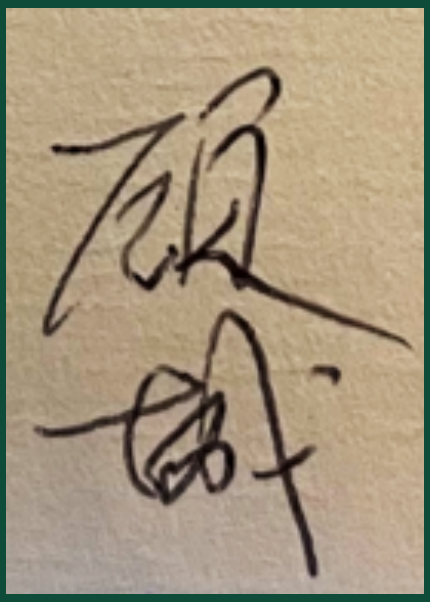
China's *Poète Maudit:*
Memories of Gu Cheng



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GU CHENG: China's *poète maudit*

John Minford

I first met Gu Cheng in December 1987 at a conference held at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, where I had worked from 1982 to 1986. He had been invited as a distinguished guest speaker, having recently returned with his wife Xie Ye from an extended European tour that included Stockholm. The Swedish sinologist Göran Malmqvist, who had translated some of his poetry into Swedish, had written to me in Hong Kong earlier in the 1980s seeking my endorsement of a joint Nobel nomination for the two young poets Bei Dao and Gu Cheng. As the editor of the journal *Renditions*, I had published some of the earliest translations of Gu Cheng's poems. However I declined to endorse Malmqvist's nomination at the time, influenced by the sceptical judgement of my friend Stephen Soong, who found it difficult to imagine anything readable coming out of the People's Republic, but even more so by the negative critique of his friend, the Taiwan poet Yu Kwang-chung, who one day dropped by our editorial office with a copy of their recent joint publication, having graded most of their poems B-minus or C.

In late 1987 I was back in Hong Kong, visiting from New Zealand. I vividly remember some of my old Chinese University friends at the conference describing Gu Cheng's rhapsodic speech (I did not hear it myself), his visionary utterances about the various birds, flowers and insects he had glimpsed by the roadside on his walk to the conference chamber. They couldn't make out whether he was a Chinese William Blake, an idiot-savant or just a plain idiot.

That evening he and I somehow found ourselves walking together down the hill to the university railway station, along a winding road among dense sub-tropical trees. We were chatting animatedly about our favourite works of Chinese literature, and I discovered to my delight that we shared very much the same tastes. We were both fans of Pu Songling's *Strange Tales,* and were both obsessed with the great novel *The Story of the Stone.* (Years later he gave me his own battered copy of a precious old reprint of *Stone*.) This created an immediate bond. From the very first, I was struck by his unusual, Jia Baoyu-like personality, which combined a strange intensity with an almost childlike naivety. Then all of a sudden our conversation took an unexpected turn. He stopped walking abruptly, turned to me and said quite simply: 'Could you help me? *Please*?' He then confessed to being deeply apprehensive about having to return to Mainland China, where earlier in the 1980s he and other 'Misty' poets had been targeted as prime examples of 'bourgeois individualism', guilty of spreading so-called 'spiritual pollution'. Their work, while it had been enormously popular with younger readers, had been furiously denounced by older orthodox critics as a 'lone, funereal voice, bewitching readers with its morose,

despairing tone.' He and his wife Xie Ye were desperate not to have to return to China, and they seemed to have run out of possible alternative destinations. Gu Cheng was clearly frightened. He dreaded renewed hostility and persecution. Could I possibly help him find a place of refuge?

I understood his plight only too well. I had spent the previous five years working with my friends Stephen Soong and Geremie Barmé on two anthologies of 'new Chinese writing', *Trees on the Mountain* and *Seeds of Fire*. Both books contained translations of poetry by Gu Cheng and his fellow Misty Poets. I knew the kind of torment such free spirits were being subjected to in the mainland. I admired his work, and had already commissioned a book of selected translations by the young up-and-coming scholar Zhu Zhiyu, whom I had taught in Tientsin in 1980-2, and the poet-translator and Joyce-scholar Sean Golden, an old friend from Tientsin days.

Our anthology *Seeds of Fire* was one of the first books to chronicle the heavy-handed party critique of dissent and creative freedom in mid-1980s China. We had included in the book Gu Cheng's powerful manifesto, his 'Misty Mondo', in which he bravely declared: 'Beauty will no longer be prisoner or slave, it will shine with as much light as the sun and the moon. It will rise high in the heavens to drive away the shadow of evil. Through the windows of art and poetry it will cast light on the hearts of both the waking and the sleeping.' These were not words that chimed with the official line, that literature should 'serve the people'. His most famous poem, 'My Generation', written in April 1979, consisted of two memorable lines:

The black night gave me black eyes,
But I use them to seek the light.

Ten years later these words were inscribed on placards and carried around Tiananmen Square.

It so happened that on the mountain road that evening in December 1987 I was able to help. Was this a question of destiny? I don't know. I had recently been put in charge of Chinese Studies at Auckland University in New Zealand, and had been given discretionary funds to start up new initiatives by the university vice-chancellor, Colin Maiden. I had also been offered generous funding by the country's Minister of Internal Affairs and Culture, the historian Michael Bassett, to support academic exchange with China. A visit to my university by such a well-known poet would fit in very well with these objectives. But, of more immediate importance, I was friendly with the New Zealand Consul-General in Hong Kong at the time, Nick Bridge, and his wife Diana, herself a fine poet and translator from Chinese. I had taken an instant liking to this talented and highly sensitive young man and could see at once how his presence in my department might be stimulating for staff and students alike. It was just what we needed to inject a bit of life into a stagnant academic environment. Anyway, I telephoned my friend the Consul-

General, and in a matter of days Gu Cheng and his wife had their visas and were on their way to Auckland and a new life.

Those early months of theirs in Auckland were idyllic. It was summer, and we took them camping. They happily scoured the beaches for free food, and delighted in cooking their favourite Peking dumplings and fried pancakes for their new friends. They struck us from the first as natural food-gatherers, like a couple of wild children from the countryside who had somehow strayed into the city. They were both vulnerable and lovable. They spent hours scavenging on the seashore. We found them temporary accommodation in a ground-floor apartment at the base of an old tower-like building. (Gu Cheng at once made the connection with Yeats.) Outside the building was a large avocado tree, and they gorged themselves throughout the late summer on the ripe fruits. Despite their almost non-existent English they spotted on the back page of the local paper (which they were burning in their fireplace) an advertisement for a seaside 'bach' (a humble seaside cottage) on the island of Waiheke – a short ferry ride from downtown Auckland. We christened the place *jiliudao* , 'island of rushing waters', from the meaning of the Maori name. They asked me whether it might be at all possible to buy the place. It was certainly cheap, but it was still a lot of money for them. They only had a few dollars saved from their European trip. Where were they ever to find the modest sum required for this 'bach'? It was such a poignant situation: they were desperately seeking to create a new home, a refuge from the hostile environment of the purges they had endured in China. My wife and I liked both of them greatly from the very start. Xie Ye was such a warm and beautiful person, and the two of them led a strangely symbiotic (almost unreal) existence, with Xie Ye participating closely in the transcription of his poems (often dictated straight out of his dreams). She believed totally in his genius, and Gu Cheng worshipped her as a sort of mother-goddess figure. My wife and I had grown up in the hippy era, and were complete misfits in mainstream urban society. We felt they were kindred spirits, and welcomed them into our lives.

That weekend we accompanied them to the island, where they inspected the old house and fell in love with it. The very next day I took Gu Cheng to meet the manager of my university branch of the Bank of New Zealand, and asked straight out if he could provide a mortgage for them to buy the property. The manager, whom I knew quite well, protested in a friendly enough way: 'But this young man has hardly any savings, very little income, no security of any kind… Can you tell me one good reason why I should do this?' I replied quite simply, and without any hesitation: 'Because he is my friend, and China's leading poet.' To my utter astonishment the manager (New Zealanders are sometimes spontaneously generous) immediately agreed to offer him a 90% mortgage on the house, and in a matter of weeks Gu Cheng and Xie Ye took

possession of their (rather ramshackle) island home, only a few yards from the beach. 'Thank you, John!' Gu Cheng later wrote for me in the front of one of his books of poetry. 'For bringing us home!' From that moment we became fast friends.

Shortly after his arrival he gave a series of fascinating impromptu seminars on the contemporary Chinese literary scene to a small group of graduate students in my department. They were inspiring occasions. He spoke in his quiet, inimitable, mesmerizing voice. He had no written notes, it was pure stream of consciousness. I did my inadequate best to interpret. It was exactly the kind of thing I had been hoping might happen in our Chinese programme, injecting some real life into the study of Chinese Literature. It brought the great Chinese poetic tradition alive into the classroom. I think for those of us lucky enough to be there it was a startling and unforgettable experience, to hear this unaffected Chinese *enfant terrible* speak so naturally of subjects such as the influence of surrealism on the new generation of writers and artists. For so long we'd been reluctantly making do with the drab products of social realism. Here was the real thing.

Afterwards I set him to teach regular classes in spoken Chinese to our third-year undergraduates. He turned out to be a born teacher. He would wander into the classroom, write a poem on the white-board, one of his own, or a classical poem by Tao Yuanming, and then talk about it slowly in his soft Peking brogue, gently drawing the students into the world, and the words, of the poem. He had no formal university education. But the students loved his classes. Several of them told me that those were the best Chinese classes they ever had.

A lot has been written about the primitive conditions in which they lived on Waiheke Island. This stems in part from a misunderstanding of the New Zealand holiday house or 'bach'. Several of my friends owned such places, usually near the sea, simple structures suitable for a rural holiday existence. They were part of the New Zealand way of life. We stayed with Gu Cheng and Xie Ye several times out on Waiheke, and found the place homely and comfortable, if somewhat primitive in its facilities. But then we had ourselves spent the 1970s living in various quite basic communities in England. It was beautifully situated, on a wooded hillside, with the beach (popular with local horse-riders) a short distance away. The outdoor toilet was a shed with a hole in the ground, but there again the 'long drop' was quite common in rural New Zealand. Gu Cheng and Xie Ye were at first blissfully happy in their new home.

Their son was born not long after their arrival. My wife and I were beside them in the hospital. They wanted to call the boy *Mu-er*, Wood Ears, and Gu Cheng asked me to come up with an English name. I suggested Samuel, since *mu-er* sounded rather like 'mu-el'. He became known as Sam.

During 1988 and 1989 we saw a great deal of the three of them. Gu Cheng wanted to show off his skills as a carpenter, and built a 'playhouse' in our Auckland garden, using old window frames and scrap timber. It was not well built, and in fact turned out to be a thoroughly hazardous structure, almost collapsing on one of our children. On one occasion they looked after the house and our eldest son Luke while the rest of us were away, feeding him slices of petfood and dandelion-leaf salad from the garden. He never forgot. My family all became accustomed to answering phone calls from Gu Cheng, whose one word of English was 'delicious!'. Learning English might interfere with his natural poetic access to the flow of his native tongue, he feared.

One memorable weekend we took my father-in-law the scholar David Hawkes over to Waiheke Island to meet Gu Cheng. They hit it off immediately, and sat across the table writing poems to each other in the time-honoured Chinese fashion. There is a wonderful relic of that encounter, a single piece of paper with the exchange of poems written by each of them in their own hand, and a simple sketch by Gu Cheng of two men sitting across a table with a lighted candle between them. This extraordinary record of a meeting of one of the great translators of Chinese literature with a brilliant young poet less than half his age is preserved in the Hawkes Archive at the library of the Chinese University of Hong Kong. Hawkes recognised at once in Gu Cheng the free voice of China's lyrical tradition, one that stretching back to the old shamanistic poems of the Songs of the South.

At first their life on Waiheke was filled with simple domestic happiness. They raised chickens (far too many for their environment!), and sold spring rolls at the island market. Eventually that idyll broke down. The tragic events of June 1989 had a hugely unsettling impact

on their lives, as they did on us all, and on the whole Chinese student community in New Zealand. Gu Cheng himself was reduced to helpless tears by the television images of PLA tanks mowing down innocent students. 'They're killing people!' '*Tamen zai sha ren!'* he cried in the rain as he knocked helplessly on our door late that night, having taken the last ferry across from the island. In the days that followed he gave a moving address at the memorial service held for the dead in the university chapel. The Auckland Schola Cantorum sang the section 'In Paradisum' from Fauré's Requiem. Gu Cheng and his friend and fellow poet Yang Lian, who was also visiting Auckland, jointly wrote a poem grieving for the wanton loss of human life, which was read aloud both in Auckland and in Canberra at a similar memorial service attended by the Australian Prime Minister Bob Hawke.

One hundred days after June 4th, we held a public reading in memory of the massacre, at which Gu Cheng read a number of his poems. One of them was the extraordinary poem 'Diddledy-Dee', which he recited in a shamanistic howl. It was a wild lament for the dead. It was very hard to follow his recitation with my rather inadequate English version. I was familiar with the poem, but had never imagined it could be read in that way. Ever since, I try to remind myself when reading Gu Cheng's poems, that beneath their often baffling surface there lies that potentially volcanic psychic force.

It was afterwards that things started to go badly wrong for them. Gu Cheng began to show serious signs of mental instability. Around this time he started knocking at my office door on his visits to town from the island, bringing parcels of home-cooked food, repeatedly asking me if I would send a formal letter of invitation to a 'talented young poet' he knew in Beijing, a young woman by the name of Li Ying. He was very persistent. He persuaded me (he pestered me), against my better judgment, to issue a letter of invitation to this Li Ying, on the understanding that he and Xie Ye would be entirely responsible for arranging and paying for everything. He subsequently had an affair with her that began the distressing unravelling of his marriage and family life. Both on Waiheke Island, and during his subsequent extended visit to Germany with Xie Ye, there were repeated episodes of serous domestic violence. It was a tragic cycle.

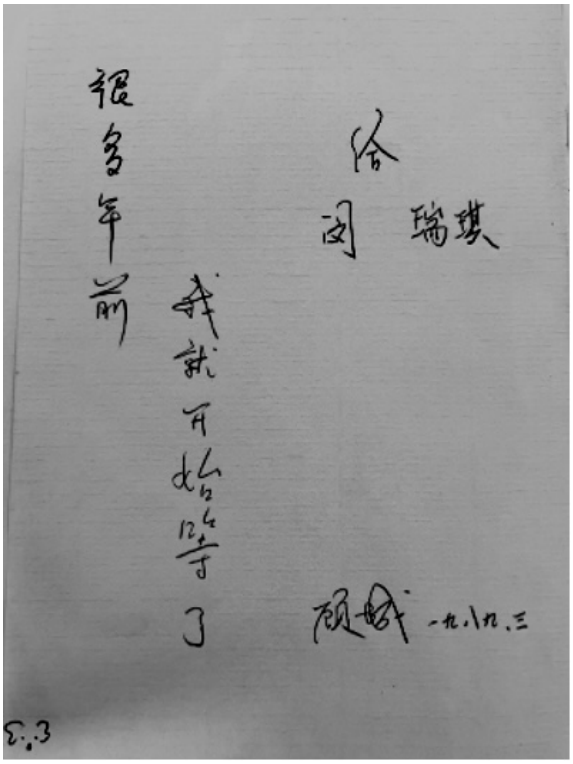
Although I met Li Ying, I had had no inkling at the time of the nature of their relationship on Waiheke, and was taken completely by surprise when I subsequently learned of their *ménage-à-trois*. I later read the detailed account of it of in the autobiographical novella *Ying-er*.

I myself suffered a severe mental breakdown in the last months of 1989. Gu Cheng came to see me in hospital. He was quiet, almost silent, but when he did speak, his few words were

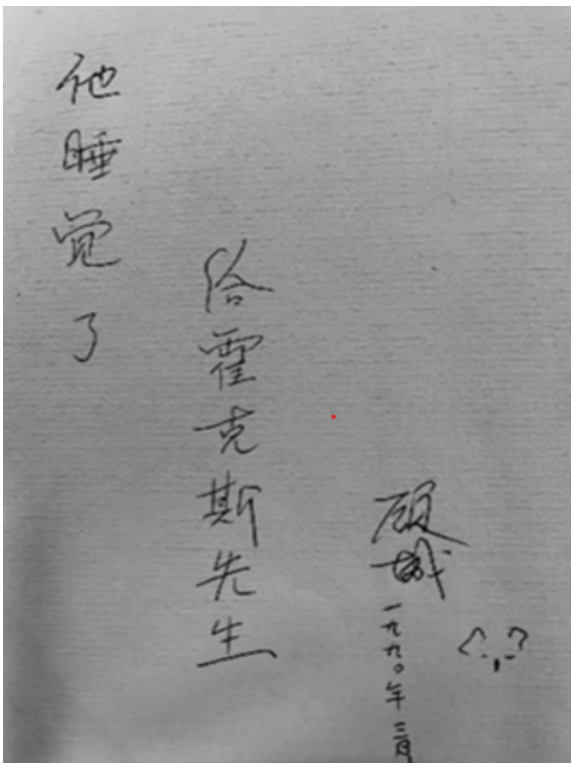
perfectly in tune with my own thoughts, his acute sensitivity enabling him to understand exactly my own disturbed state of mind at the time. I grew to love him all the more.

We saw virtually nothing of them after 1990, and in 1991 we moved from New Zealand to southern France, where I began to work on my translation of Pu Songling's *Strange Tales*. A couple of years later they were visiting Spain at the invitation of my old friend Sean Golden. From Barcelona Gu Cheng telephoned me in our new home in the small village of Tuchan, on the French side of the Pyrenees. That was the last time we spoke. I deeply regret not having been able to travel down to Barcelona on that occasion. I never saw them again. It came as a shattering blow in 1993 to learn of the tragic end of their lives.

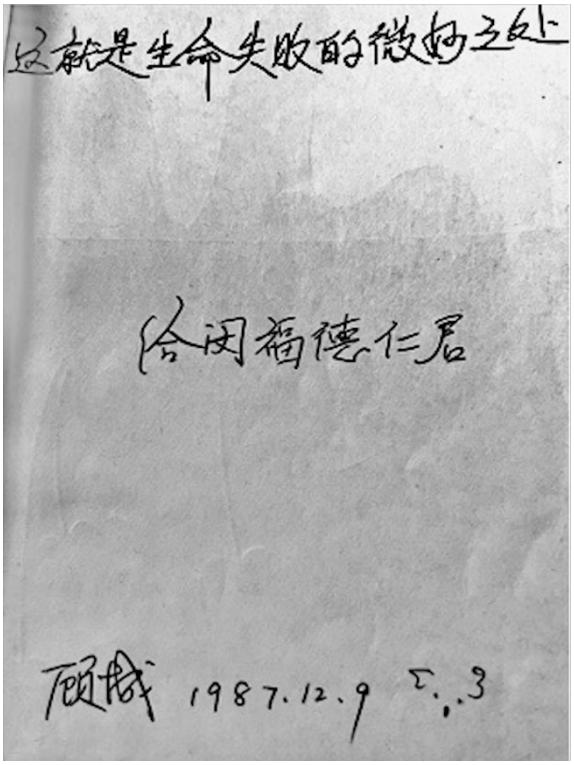
No amount of sadness and anger can take away from the fact that he was a most remarkably inspired poet. The devastating events of October 1993 left a deep wound in the hearts of all their friends across the world. It has taken me over thirty years to find the words to pay this short tribute to my dear friends, and to one of the finest Chinese poets of the twentieth century. In my opinion, more than any other poet of that 'Misty' generation, his was a pure poetic voice, his was a genuinely poetic inspiration. He and Xie Ye were our true friends. I miss them both. His work will continue to speak for them. May their spirits rest in peace.



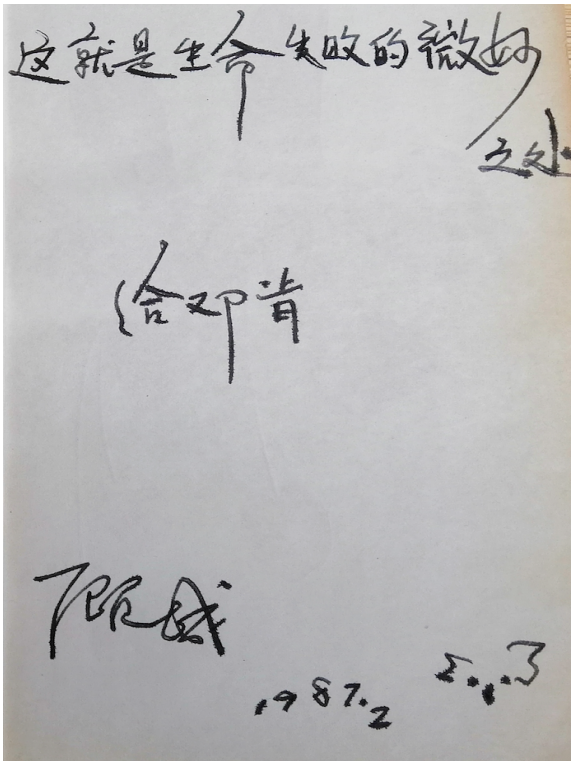
Ill. 1 Inscribed in March 1989 to my wife Rachel and myself, in the front of the 1988 Taiwan selection of his poems. 'I've waited so many years…'



Ill. 2 Inscribed for David Hawkes, in the front of the same 1988 Taiwan edition. 'For David Hawkes: asleep.' March 1990.



Ill. 3 'This is one of life's precious failures…' For my esteemed friend Mr Minford. Inscribed shortly after their arrival in New Zealand, on the 9th of December 1987, in the front of the 1986 People's Literature Press edition of the selection of Gu Cheng's poems, *Black Eyes* 黑眼睛.



Ill. 4 *Black Eyes* inscription: Here is the subtle spot of life's defeat | for Duncan | Gu Cheng | February 1987

A Poem and a Memory: Gu Cheng in Auckland

Duncan M. Campbell

Te Herenga Waka | Victoria University of Wellington

This passion would with time ripen into memory –

but, even when I lived it, it was as a trance to me.

此情可待成追憶

只是當時已惘然

Li Shangyin 李商隱 (812?-858), "The Flowered Zither" ("Jin se" 錦瑟)[1]

Some years ago, a friend sent me a copy of the poem transcribed below, accompanied on this occasion by a translation of it that I drafted soon thereafter. Before my friend had done so, I had had no inkling of the existence of this poem. In recent years I have only infrequently read contemporary Chinese literature, and have consciously sought to avoid the painful memories of the massacre of protesting students and others that took place on and around Tiananmen Square in Beijing (and elsewhere) on 4th June, 1989, and its various aftermaths, again, elsewhere.[2] Reading the poem, however, immediately occasioned a powerful recall of a conversation once snatched with the poet more than thirty years earlier, in the downstairs staff room of the then Department of Asian Languages and Literatures of the University of Auckland, on the corner of Symonds and Alfred streets.[3] In what follows, I venture no evaluative critique of the poem, nor am I keen to enter into the fraught and frequently sensationalist discourse about the poet Gu Cheng 顧城 (1956-1993) in any speculative detail. He was a friend. As was his wife and fellow poet, Xie Ye 謝燁 (1957-1993). We did not see the portents of what was to come.

From around the Northern Song dynasty (960-1127) onwards in China, in the domain of poetic criticism or *shihua* 詩話 (talks on poems), a particular subgenre developed. As captured in the title of the first extant example of the genre we now have available to us, Ji Yougong's 計有功

[1] As translated by Diana Bridge. I thank her for letting me use this translation here, and am grateful to Diana and a number of others for remaining encouraging despite having read an earlier version of this essay. Unless otherwise noted, all translations in this essay are mine.

[2] For a contemporary English-language account of the massacre, see Andrew Higgins and Michael Fathers, *Tiananmen: The Rape of Peking* (London: The Independent/Doubleday, 1989). For an insightful discussion of aspects the post-massacre intellectual climate, see Geremie Barmé, "Traveling Heavy: The Intellectual Baggage of the Chinese Diaspora," *Problems of Communism* (Jan-April, 1991): 94-112.

[3] Established in 1966, the department, Aotearoa | New Zealand's first and largest such programme, taught Chinese (modern and classical), Indonesian, and Japanese, and was housed in a lovely old two-storied wooden building that has since been dismantled. At the time, word was that, in earlier days, the building had served as both a police station and one of Auckland's earliest bordellos, although nobody seems clear about the sequence of such prior habitation. On the history of this department, see Nicholas Tarling, *Imparting Asia: Five Decades of Asian Studies at the University of Auckland* (Auckland: New Zealand Asia Institute, 2010).

(fl. 1126) "Record of Events Associated with Poems of the Tang Dynasty" (*Tang shi jishi* 唐詩紀事) dated 1224, this form of literary criticism sought to provide as complete an account as possible of the physical or social context of the poems discussed.[4] In an effort in this vein, I offer this modest commentary on this minor poem. Gu Cheng's poem, written several years before, on 8th October, 1993, he hanged himself, having first murdered Xie Ye with an axe,[5] reads:

《鄧肯》

考試是中國發明的 他說
然而世界通行　　人可以透過篩子
（有很多方法）　變成麵粉和餅乾

法律是希臘完成的 他說
人可以變成安全的灰土　看罪犯　　夢
在壁爐裡燃燒　　不會濺出一點火星

世界是上帝造的　　他說
把那些天國漏下去的人　繼續粉碎
並且發酵　給地獄裝上紗門

煙斗是哪來的　　我沒問

[4] In the words of Kurata Junnosuke (as translated by Y. Onuma and D. Holzman) in his entry on the work in Etienne Balazs and Yves Hervouet, eds., *A Sung Bibliography (Bibliographie des Sung)* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1978): "He collected critical and biographical remarks on the poet's official ranks and native places, and the events in their lives and even miscellaneous affairs of a superstitious nature. In other words, he collected all" (p. 447). Writing in 1981, Gu Cheng argues that: "As to having to explain my own poems, this is something that I have never enjoyed. This is because I have the view that reading a poem is certainly not an exercise in archaeology. As long as a reader might find something of their own past or future in a poem, or discover beauty therein, this, it seems, is enough for me" (對於解釋自己的詩，我是不喜歡的。因為我有個想法，認為讀詩並不是考古。讀者只要能從詩中，找到一些自己的過去，或未來，或者感到美，似乎就夠了), for which, see "A Letter About 'Six Small Poems'" ("Guanyu 'xiaoshi liu shou' de yifeng xin" 關於小詩六首的一封信), in *Gu Cheng wenxuan* 顧城文選 [Selected Prose of Gu Cheng] (Beijing: Zhongguo wenhua chubanshe, 2007), Vol. 1, p. 246.

[5] For a moving account of this dreadful event, see that by a friend of the couple, Anne-Marie Brady, "Dead in Exile: The Life and Death of Gu Cheng and Xie Ye," *China Information*, Vol. XI, No. 4 (1997), pp. 126-148. Brady is appropriately critical of the hagiographical tendency of much of the voluminous Chinese-language treatment of the life and death of the poet and his wife. See also Hilary Chung, 'Ghosts in the City: The Auckland Exile of Yang Lian and Gu Cheng,' in *ka mate ka ora: a new zealand journal of poetry and poetics*, Issue 11 (March 2012).

我看煙霧上升　　徐徐蒙蒙靠近窗子
輕輕一繞　離開了我們的課堂

1991 年 8 月[6]

"Duncan"

China invented examinations　　he said.
And once the practice became universal　　as through a sieve
(and in a hundred different ways)　　men were turned to flour, made into biscuits.

Greece perfected the law　　he said.
And mankind was reduced to the dust of safety　　watching criminals　　in a dream
as they were incinerated in the fireplace　　emitting never once a single spark.

And God created the world　　he said.
But those who have fallen from the Heavenly Kingdom　　continue to shatter
and to ferment lending Hell its Gate of Gauze.

Where did you get that pipe?　　I forgot to ask,
watching the smoke rise　　and seep towards the window, ever so slowly,
before, with a graceful twirl,　　it departed our classroom.

August, 1991

[6] *Gu Cheng haiwai yiji* 顧城海外遺集 [A Posthumous Collection of Gu Cheng's Overseas Writings] (Beijing: Jincheng chubanshe, 1995), Vol. 2, p. 108. There are, I believe, throughout this poem echoes of "Dead Water" ("Sishui" 死水) by Wen Yiduo 聞一多 (1899-1946). The use of the word "ferment" (*jiao* 酵) in the third stanza, for instance, appears to respond to the lines from Wen's poem that go: 「讓死水酵成一溝綠酒/縹滿了珍珠似的白沫」, translated by Tao Tao Sanders as: "Let the dead water ferment into a gully of green wine,/ Floating pearl-like crowds of white foam," for which, see her *Red Candle: Selected Poems by Wen I-to* (London: Cape Editions, 1972). In Gu Cheng's poem, it is the corpses of those who have fled the Kingdom of Heaven that ferment, "Lending Hell its Gate of Gauze," rather than the "patterned muslin" of Wen Yiduo's poem. The "world" (世界) conjured up in both poems seem equally hopeless, Wen's poem ends (again in Tao Tao Sanders' translation): "Better let ugliness cultivate it,/ And see what kind of world comes of it." And is the pipe here influenced by another Wen Yiduo poem, I wonder? The last stanza of his poem "Mr Wen's Desk" ("Wen Yiduo xiansheng de shuzhuo" 聞一多先生的書桌) goes: "The master biting his pipe smiled,/ 'All creatures should stay in their place,/ It is not my intention to ill-treat you,/ Orderliness is not within my competence.,'" for which see *Red Candle: Selected Poems by Wen I-to*, p. 53.

It would have been towards the end of the first half of the academic year, hence the topic of examinations. I was on my way to class, then held down along Wynyard Street, with the scripts of a final examination for Stage One Chinese in hand, along with a bundle of blank examination booklets, awaiting the handwritten simplified Chinese characters that students had learned over the course of their study of Book One of the then prescribed text, *Practical Chinese Reader* and which they were now required to try to remember and reproduce in response to the questions asked in the examination scripts.

By the time of our conversation, Gu Cheng and Xie Ye, who had come to Aotearoa | New Zealand during the summer of 1987, were living in the ramshackle house that they had bought in Rocky Bay on Waiheke Island, in the Hauraki Gulf. Gu Cheng, with his distinctive headgear made from trouser bottoms, would take the short half-hour ferry trip once a week in order that he take the conversational Chinese classes that helped the couple supplement the income Xie Ye earned by selling spring rolls and pots (made by Xie Ye, decorated by Gu Cheng) at the local Saturday market and thus eke out a living.[7]

We would meet up, if only in passing, on many of the occasions that Gu Cheng came to the department. As it happened, I had been in Hong Kong at a conference on translation in 1987 when Gu Cheng, also attending a conference on contemporary Chinese literature and on his way back to the Mainland after time spent in Europe, approached John Minford, then the Professor of Chinese at Auckland and the Head of Department, with the request that he and Xie Ye be invited to come to New Zealand for some time, as visiting scholar.[8] The dismissal of Hu Yaobang 胡耀邦 (1915-1989), the General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party in January of that year, and the expulsion from the party of the astrophysicist Fang Lizhi 方勵之 (1936-2012) and the writers Liu Binyan 劉賓雁 (1925-2005) and Wang Ruowang 王若望 (1918-2001)

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[7] For a while, the couple also raised chickens and sold the eggs they laid, until the local authorities determined that 200 chickens were far more than was permitted. In his (illustrated) "Our Chicken Raising Days: A True Record" ("Yangji suiyue (Jishi)" 養雞歲月（記實）), Gu Cheng offers a humorous account of their lives on the island, for which, see *Gu Cheng wenxuan*, Vol. 4, pp. 365-398. Stopped by a policeman one evening as they set off to deliver the eggs, an unlicensed Xie Ye driving an unregistered car, a misunderstanding on the part of the policeman when Gu Cheng tried to speak English saw them let off the various fines that he had been enumerating. Back home, Gu Cheng recounts: "We laughed and laughed. We may well have lost several dozen eggs [when they smashed as Xie Ye tried to flee the pursuing policeman], but it proved the happiest day we had experienced since coming to New Zealand" (我們笑了又笑，少了兩打雞蛋，卻是我們來紐西蘭最快樂的一天), *Gu Cheng wenxuan*, Vol. 4, p. 390. When asked in 1992 about life and writing in New Zealand in an interview in Berlin, Gu Cheng replied: "In general terms, you could say that my life is a rather complicated one, broadly divided into two parts. One part of my life sees me on campus, at work, or, one could say, in the midst of society. The other part of my life finds me in a bleak and desolate place, that is, amongst nature" (我的生活整個來說比較複雜，大概可以分成兩個部分。一部分是在學校，工作或者說是在社會中；一部分是在荒涼的地方，也就是在自然中間), for which, see "Building a Small Wall—Interviewed by Lizi" ("Zhu yige xiao cheng—Lizi caifang" 筑一個小城——栗子採訪), in *Gu Cheng wenxuan*, Vol. 1, p. 227.

[8] John Minford's engagement with contemporary Chinese literature began when he was editor of the Hong Kong based translation journal *Renditions* between 1982-1986, concurrently serving as Director of the Research Centre for Translation at the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

heralded a sharp reversal of the relative liberalisation that had been witnessed during the mid-1980s and which the important literary critic Liu Zaifu 劉再復 (1941-) had labelled a "great turnabout" (大轉機) for contemporary Chinese literature and art.[9] Understandably, then, Gu Cheng, who had earlier been a target during the "Anti Spiritual Pollution" (清除精神污染) campaign, was reluctant to return to a situation in Beijing that was both uncertain and threatening of the creative freedom that he and his fellow poets and artists wished for and which a period overseas had offered him.[10] The moment was a propitious one. John Minford had recently been granted some funding by the Department of Internal Affairs in order to host workshops with contemporary Chinese writers. Visas for the couple were quickly arranged. As it happened also, the night that they arrived in Auckland, John Minford and his family being out of town at the time, I had picked them up at the airport and taken them to the house of a colleague where they were to stay for a week. Sometime later, once they had acquired their house on Waiheke (Jiliudao 激流島 or Island of Fast-flowing Waters, as the couple styled it), I had been asked to hire a van to help them shift from Clifton, the Gothic castle on the slopes of Mount Eden that had been built in the 1870s for the concrete baron Josiah Clifton Firth where they had been renting a downstairs flat. Meeting the deadline for the one early morning vehicular ferry that crossed to the island proved somewhat more nerve-wracking than anticipated as, in the gloomy pre-dawn light, every now and then Gu Cheng would insist that we stop to pick up the various bits of timber, corrugated iron, and wire that we came across on the side of the street, all of which was later deployed in the endless repairs he made to his Rocky Bay house.[11] And later on, again, in the aftermath of the 4th June Massacre, it had fallen to me to assist with the process

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[9] For an excellent overview of the literary and political circumstances of these years, see He Yuhuai, "The 'New Period:' Cycles of Repression and Relaxation and the Demand for Liberalisation—A Study of Politico-literary Events in China, 1976-1989," in Dov Bing, S. Lim, and M. Lin, eds., *Asia 2000: Modern China in Transition* (Hamilton: Outrigger Publishers, 1993), pp. 131-182.

[10] The best introduction to the intellectual and literary ferment of the years preceding the 1989 massacre remains Geremie Barmé and John Minford, eds., *Seeds of Fire: Chinese Voices of Conscience* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1988). Writing in 1987 whilst touring Europe, Gu Cheng characterises the age in this way: "Once the Cultural Revolution came to an end, China experienced dramatic change, and when that tin can burst, Western culture and traditional Eastern culture flooded in, creating an unprecedented landscape, as Western fever and Seeking Roots fever raged at the same time, T.S. Eliot and Wang Guowei, Cosmology and *Daodejing* were à la mode at the same time, and just as if Ali Baba had declared 'Open Sesame,' contemporary Chinese poetics underwent a sudden transformation, blinding one's eyes, and whether it was spring, summer, autumn or winter, to the far south or the distant north, native or transplanted, imitative or duplicated, authentic or false, ten thousand flowers bloomed. It can be said to be a wonder in the history of poetry" (文化革命結束，中國發生戲劇性的變化，那個鐵罐子破了的時候，西方文化和東方傳統一湧而入，造成了前所未有的景觀，西方熱和尋根熱同時爆發，艾略特和王國維，宇宙論一起時尚，就像阿里巴巴打開了魔術門，中國當代詩歌驟然劇變，令人目眩，不論春夏秋冬，天南地北，原生，移植，模擬，複製，真假萬花齊放，可謂詩歌史上的奇觀), for which, see "Two Items on the Poetic Wonder—Collected Notes on Poetry" ("Shi qiguan erze—shihua ji" 詩奇觀二則——詩話集), in *Gu Cheng wenxuan*, Vol. 4, p. 70.

[11] For a copy of Gu Cheng's sketch of this house, and a brief discussion of the couple's life on the island, see John Minford, "The Chinese Garden: Death of a Symbol," *Studies in the History of Gardens & Designed Landscapes*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (1998): 257-268. Speaking of the role of Prospect Garden as a spiritual place within the novel, Minford writes: "The garden is a hallway house on their pilgrimage. It is the setting for their dreams. It is also the site of ruin and desolation" (p. 260).

of applying for the visa that would allow the young poet Li Ying 李英 (1963-2014) to join them on the island, on the understanding that she was in danger of imprisonment were she to remain in Beijing. It was only after the death of the couple that I became aware of the ménage à trois that was then formed and which features in the posthumously-published autobiographical novel *Ying'er* 英兒 [Ying] that the couple were to write whilst Gu Cheng was in Berlin on a Deutscher Akademischer Austausch Dienst (DAAD) visiting fellowship.[12]

Whenever we did happen to encounter each other, our first topic of conversation would often be the classes that he was responsible for. Although he had delivered a remarkable series of talks on aspects of classical Chinese philosophy and poetry to a seminar of staff and postgraduate students soon after he had arrived in Auckland,[13] opinions on Gu Cheng's effectiveness as a language teacher differ somewhat. Some suggest that the oral Chinese language levels of the students involved would not have allowed for easy conversation with an inexperienced teacher who would, in any case often have his mind elsewhere, with classes tending to fall silent. John Minford, who attended a number of his lessons, gives a different view of classes of engaged students as Gu Cheng wrote poems on the blackboard, either of his own composition or from the Tang dynasty. "They were a lucky group," he avers. Such obligations over and after pleasantries about Xie Ye (and later on, their son Samuel Muer 杉木耳) had been exchanged, whenever time permitted, we would fall to speaking about late Ming dynasty literature and Chinese traditions of dream culture. Gu Cheng knew of my interest in the late Ming essayist and historian Zhang Dai 張岱 (1597-?1684) and that I was engaged in translating sections from both his "Two Dreams," *Dream Memories* (*Taoan mengyi* 陶庵夢憶) and *Dream Quest*

[12] Gu Cheng and Lei Mi 雷米, *Ying'er* (Beijing: Zuojia chubanshe, 1993). The novel is attributed to both Gu Cheng and Xie Ye, under the name she was referred to by her husband, although the extent of the latter's involvement in the writing of the text (as opposed to the typing up of it) has occasioned some debate. Given the "fragmentary, incomplete, and partly incoherent tale" told in the novel, there exists a serviceable translation of it: Li Xia, trans., *Ying'er: The Kingdom of Daughters* (Dortmund: Projekt Verlag, 1995). See also Li Xia's article "Gu Cheng's *Ying'er*: A Journey to the West," *Modern Chinese Literature*, Vol. 10 (1998): 135-148, for a discussion of the differences between the two published versions of the novel, one of which sold at auction in Shengzhen for RMB33, 000, the day after the death of the couple. The castle that the couple had lived in is mentioned in the novel: "The castle we were living in was cold and desolate...The crater of the volcano behind the castle was deep and a bronze plaque placed there listed the directions and distances from Auckland to all the capitals of the world. We were ten thousand four hundred and seven kilometres away from Beijing" (我們住的古堡冷冷清清……古堡後邊是一個火山，火山口陷得深深的，有一個銅盤，上邊寫著從奧克蘭到世界各國首都的方向和距離。我們離北京一萬零四百零七公里), *Ying'er*, p. 296. "Finally, I found the house in a tiny, classified advertisement. Taking it to show to the professor, he determined it to be, truly, a very strange place" *Ying'er* (我終於在一條小廣告上，發現了房子。拿去給教授看，經過他的鑒定認為真是一個奇怪的房子), p. 297. I, too, find a passing mention in the novel, inconsequentially: "She is our best interpreter. Really excellent. Duncan introduced us" (她是我們最好的翻譯，棒極了，鄧肯介紹了), *Ying'er*, p. 197.

[13] It was after the last of this series of lectures that Gu Cheng turned to me to intone the lines of the Li Shangyin poem that serve as an epigraph to this essay.

for West Lake (*Xihu mengxun* 西湖夢尋).[14] Lynn Struve speaks of the extent to which, in the long history of Chinese engagement with the world of dreams, "...a span of time from about the mid-sixteenth century through the end of the seventeenth century (i.e., the late Ming and very early Qing period) has been *the* most generative of dream-related writings and visual materials in Chinese history."[15] The apogee of the obsession that she evinces during this age is of course, as would be universally recognised, Cao Xueqin's 曹雪芹 (?1715-?1763) great eighteenth century novel, the *Dream of the Red Chamber* (*Hongloumeng* 紅樓夢). Marián Gálik (b. 1933), the Slovak sinologist, in a postscript to Li Xia's 李俠 translation of *Ying'er*, argues that "...both Gu Cheng and Xie Ye were inspired by Cao Xueqin's vision," even going as far as suggesting the Gu Cheng compile a *The Dream of Gu Cheng Chamber* (*Chengloumeng* 城樓夢).[16] It was indeed a book that he, at least, lived his life by.[17] And, of course, the department at the time had something of a Redological (*Hongxue* 紅樓夢) flavour to it; a year or so before he took up his post with the University of Auckland, John Minford had published the fifth and final volume of the novel that he had undertaken with his father-in-law, David Hawkes (1923-2009), under its original title *The*

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[14] In a letter he wrote when he was in Berlin (dated 10 April, 1992), Gu Cheng likens the poetic sequence he was then working on, entitled "Walls" ("Cheng" 城) and in which he attempts capture the Beijing of his youth and to which he always returned to in his dreams, to a "new" *Dream Quest for West Lake*, for which, see "Two Letters About 'Walls'" ("Guanyu 'Cheng' de liang feng xin" 關於城的兩封信), in *Gu Cheng wenxuan*, Vol. 1, p. 320. For a translation of this poetic sequence, along with various other things that Gu Cheng wrote whilst living on the island, see Joseph R. Allen, trans., *Sea of Dreams: The Selected Writings of Gu Cheng* (New York: New Directions, 2005), pp. 151-175. Asked in an interview whether he ever felt homesick, Gu Cheng replied: "I very seldom have dreams that find me overseas. Almost every day, as soon as I close my eyes I'm back in China. In my dreams I frequently return to Beijing, return to the place where I lived when I was small" (我很少做外國的夢，差不多每天一閉眼就回中國去了。我常常在夢中回到北京，回到我小時候住過的地方), "Building a Small Wall—Interviewed by Lizi," in *Gu Cheng wenxuan*, Vol. 1, p. 230. Gu Cheng goes on to acknowledge that the Beijing of his dreams was "slowly disappearing" (慢慢消失). In another interview, when asked what he found most important in life, Gu Cheng replied: "A quiet room, a place where I can dream my dreams without being disturbed" (一座安靜的房子——一個不受打擾能夠做夢的地方), for which see "Aimless 'I'—In conversation with Zhang Suizi" ("Wu mudi de 'wo'—Zhang Suizi fangtan" 無目的的我——張穗子訪談), in *Gu Cheng wenxuan*, Vol. 1, p. 236.

[15] Lynn A. Struve, *The Dreaming Mind and the End of the Ming World* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2020), p. 4. More generally, on the dream culture of China, see Liu Wenying 李文英, *Meng de mixin yu meng de tansuo* 夢的迷信與夢的探索 [Dream Superstitions and Dream Explorations] (Beijing: Shehui kexue chubanshe, 1989).

[16] "Postscript: Reflections of a Reader and Friend," in Gu Cheng and Lei Mi, Li Xia trans., *Ying'er: The Kingdom of Daughters*, p. 277. Towards the end of his postscript, Gálik argues that *Ying'er* was not at all what he had had in mind when he made this suggestion. Speaking of the novel, Gálik writes: "What he has written is nothing more than *Qing "seng" lu* (*Records of a Passionate "Monk"*) complemented by a short history of the decline of his mind and personality and of his half-madness," p. 297.

[17] "The Chinese have only created two ideals, one being [Tao Qian's] Peach Blossom Source amidst the hills, the other, behind walls, being Prospect Garden [in the *Dream of the Red Chamber*]" (中國人只創造了兩個理想，一個是山中的桃花源，一個是牆裡的大觀園), for which, see "Notes on Reading *Dream of the Red Chamber*" ("*Hongloumeng* fandu suibi 紅樓夢翻讀隨筆), in *Gu Cheng wenxuan*, Vol. 4, p. 63. Elsewhere in this set of notes (p. 65) Gu Cheng refers to these two literary visions as "Earthly Heavenly Kingdom" (人間天國). Apparently, according to the editors of this volume of *Gu Cheng wenxuan*, Gu Cheng's sister Gu Xiang 顧鄉 and Chen Eryou ,陳二幼, Gu Cheng never wrote his reading notes in the margins of the books he was reading, but rather, invariably, on separate sheets of paper. In a letter written from Berlin in May, 1993 in which Gu Cheng anticipates the couple's return to New Zealand in October, he writes: "It is no longer the *Dream of the Red Chamber* here, but rather it has changed into the *Water Margin*" (這已經不是《紅樓夢》，改《水滸傳》了), for which, see *Gu Cheng wenxuan*, Vol. 1, p. 118.

Story of the Stone (*Shitou ji* 石頭記).[18] Further, when the 1989 massacre took place in Beijing and elsewhere, John was in the throes of teaching a course on traditional Chinese culture that made use of the novel as a framework for making sense as a whole of the various disparate aspects of Chinese civilization that he covered in this remarkable undergraduate course.[19] As a student at the time recalled recently: "...rather suddenly that year the traditional past was dramatically displaced one day in June by the scale of political events unfolding rapidly in Tiananmen Square. Professor Minford arrived for class to deliver the most memorable impromptu exposé of the perilous state of contemporary Chinese culture."[20] The great Australian National University-based scholar Liu Ts'un-yan 柳存仁 (1917-2009; the last man who was able to recite the *Analects* of Confucius backwards, it was said, and John's PhD supervisor) was a frequent visitor,[21] and a few years before 1989, the department had hosted the important Redologist (紅學家) Hu Xiaowei 胡小偉 (1945-2014), from the China Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing.

Other visitors, too, graced the department during these years. David and Jean Hawkes, of course, came to holiday with their daughter Rachel and their grandchildren.[22] The great art historian Michael Sullivan (1916-2013) spent a few days in Auckland with his wife Khoan, lecturing and meeting up with staff and students. Geremie Barmé (b. 1954) came several times, on one occasion to speak about his work on the Chinese artist Feng Zikai 豐子愷 (1898-1975),[23] on another, after the massacre, to start work with Linda Jaivin on their *New Ghosts, Old Dreams: Chinese Rebel Voices* (1992), an anthology that takes up from the anthology that he had earlier edited with John Minford, *Seeds of Fire: Chinese Voices of Conscience* (1988). In the wake of the massacre, W.J.F. Jenner delivered the 1989 Sir Douglas Robb Lectures; entitled "The Power of

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[18] On this remarkable translation, see, recently, Fan Shengyu, *The Translator's Mirror for the Romantic: Cao Xueqin's Dream and David Hawkes' Stone* (London and New York: Routledge, 2022).

[19] It is testament to the level of Sinological endeavour that John Minford brought to the department during these years that in subsequent years a similar design of a course was developed in various universities elsewhere, later again resulting in a book to which John contributed a fine discussion of how he and his father-in-law David Hawkes embarked upon their translation of the novel: Andrew Schonebaum and Tina Lu, eds., *Approaches to Teaching The Story of the Stone (Dream of the Red Chamber)* (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2012).

[20] Peter Holmes, "Song Dynasty Dragon Kiln Revival," in Duncan Campbell and Brian Moloughney, eds., *Encountering China: New Zealanders and the People's Republic* (Auckland: Massey University Press, 2022), p. 180. As Nicholas Tarling notes, after the massacre, appropriately and with the Vice-Chancellor's sanction, John Minford ensured that the department became "an information and counselling centre for distressed Chinese students," for which, see *Imparting Asia: Five Decades of Asian Studies at the University of Auckland*, p. 63.

[21] For John Minford's tribute to this remarkable scholar, spoken at his memorial service in University House at the Australian National University, see:
http://www.chinaheritagequarterly.org/features.php?searchterm=019_vale_liu_minford.inc&issue=019

[22] Gu Cheng records an amusing conversation he had with David Hawkes when he visited the couple at their home on the island. As the two mused about dreams, Hawkes warned him that: "Dreams can't fill the stomach" (夢裡吃飯不飽), for which, see "Remain Forever with Those Who Follow the Light" ("Yu guang tongwang zhe yongzhu" 與光同往者永駐), in *Gu Cheng wenxuan*, Vol. 1, p. 204.

[23] The book that Barmé subsequently published on this remarkable artist, *An Artistic Exile: A Life of Feng Zikai (1898-1975)* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2002) won the won the 2004 Joseph Levenson Book Prize for Modern China.

China's Pasts;" these four lectures were to form the core of his *The Tyranny of History: The Roots of China's Crisis* (1992). Pierre Ryckmans (Simon Leys) had earlier agreed to sail himself across from Sydney to deliver this series but needed to withdraw his offer in light of events in Beijing. Despite the circumstances, these comings and goings and the energy generated in the department, these years must be considered the golden age of Aotearoa | New Zealand Sinology. Remarkably, almost a dozen of those involved with the department at the time went on to complete PhDs in various fields of Chinese Studies, either at Auckland (Gong Hong-Yu,[24] Stuart Vogel,[25] Henry He Yuhuai,[26] Gong Shifen[27]), the Australian National University (Diana Bridge,[28] Anne-Marie Brady,[29] Lewis Mayo,[30] Miriam Lang,[31] Jonathan Hutt[32]), Melbourne (Robyn Hamilton; 1949-2015),[33] or Harvard (Michael Radich).[34]

At the time, I was working on a study of the biography that Yuan Hongdao 袁宏道(1568-1610) had written of the eccentric mid-Ming poet, painter, calligrapher, and dramatist Xu Wei 徐渭 (1521-1593), and this too, we would discuss occasionally, as Gu Cheng was obviously familiar

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[24] In what follows, I make no attempt to offer a definitive bibliography of this fine group of scholars, listing simply recent publications or ones that are in some way representative. Gong Hong-yu 宮宏宇, *Haishang yueshi—Shanghai kaibu hou xiyang yueren, yueshi kao, 1843-1910* 海上樂事—上海開埠后西洋樂人、樂事考, 1843–1910 [Shanghai Soundscape: An Investigation of the Western Musicians and Musical Events of Treaty Port Shanghai] (Shanghai: Shanghai yinyue xueyuan chubanshe, 2019); *Laihua xiren yu zhongxi yinyue jiaoliu* 來華西人與中西音樂交流 [Westerners in China and East-West Musical Exchange] (Hangzhou: Zhejiang daxue chubanshe, 2017).

[25] *Rich Treasure in Alien Soil—Chinese Churches, and Poll Tax in Aotearoa-New Zealand* (2024).

[26] Apart from the article mentioned earlier in this essay, and a similarly entitled subsequent publication of the thesis that he undertook under the supervision of John Minford during the year covered by this essay, Henry He Yuhuai's *Dictionary of the Political Thought of the People's Republic of China* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2001) provides an invaluable companion to anyone seeking to understand the period.

[27] *A Fine Pen: The Chinese View of Katherine Mansfield* (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 2001).

[28] A noted and prize-winning poet and essayist, Diana Bridge has published eight collections of her poetry. Her latest, *Deep Colour* (Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2023), includes her translation of fifteen "poems on things" (*yongwushi* 詠物詩) by the poet Xie Tiao 謝朓 (464-499). See also her *An Unexpected Legacy: Xie Tiao's 'Poems on Things'* (Wellington: Asian Studies Institute and New Zealand Centre for Literary Translation, 2008), and *At the Eastern Window: Three Essays* (2020).

[29] *Friend of China—The Myth of Rewi Alley* (Routledge, 2003); *Marketing Dictatorship: Propaganda and Thought Work in Contemporary China* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2008); *China's Thought Management* (Routledge, 2012); and *Small States and the Changing Global Order: New Zealand Faces the Future* (Springer, 2019).

[30] "The Order of Birds in Guiyi Jun, Dunhuang," *East Asian History*, No. 20 (2000): 1-59.

[31] "Swan Songs: Traditional Musicians in Contemporary China," *East Asian History*, No. 5 (1993): 149-182; "San Mao Goes Shopping: Travel and Consumption in a Post-Colonial World," *East Asian History*, No. 10 (1995): 127-164; and "San Mao Makes History," *East Asian History*, No. 19 (2000): 145-180. Shortly before Miriam died, she and her partner Lewis Mayo, along with Du Liping 杜立平, published *The Precepts of the Du Clan: An Investigation* (Changsha: Hunan Normal University Press, 2017).

[32] "*La Maison d'Or*—the Sumptuous World of Shao Xunmei," *East Asian History*, No. 21 (2001): 111-142.

[33] "The Pursuit of Fame: Luo Qilan (1775-1813?) and the Debates about Women and Talent in Eighteenth-Century Jiangnan," *Late Imperial China*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (1997): 39-71.

[34] *How Ajātaśatru Was Reformed: The Domestication of 'Ajase' and Stories in Buddhist History* (Tokyo, 2011); and *The Mahāparinirvāṇa-mahāsūtra and the Emergence of Tathāgatagarbha Doctrine* (Hamburg, 2015). It was during these years, too that, through the good offices of John Minford, the university library acquired a remarkable collection of some 230 old and rare Chinese books, dating from the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties, many of which had been in the collection of the playwright Hsiung Shih-I 熊式一 (1902-1992), on which, see Duncan M. Campbell, "Petrofilia and Bibliophilia: A Bibliographical Note on the University of Auckland's Collection of Rare Chinese Books," *New Zealand Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (2023): 135-156.

with the biography and was fascinated by the man.[35] To my mind, Gu Cheng's own calligraphy shows clear signs of the influence of Xu Wei's hand, described by Yuan in his biography as embodying "...a gentle charm that belies the boldness and vigour of its execution, a quality captured precisely by Ouyang Xiu's lines that go: 'Like a once bewitching young beauty,/ who in age has lost none of her charm'" (蒼勁中姿媚躍出歐陽公所謂妖韶女老自有餘態).[36] And of course, tragically, there are certain parallels between the biographies of these two writers. Yuan Hongdao's biography reads:

> In the end, he was imprisoned and sentenced to death for having killed his second wife on the suspicion that she had been acting improperly. He was released on after the strenuous efforts of the Grand Historian Zhang Yuanbian. On his release, he proved as intractable as ever...Once he attacked his own skull with an axe and blood covered his head, his skull having been so badly cracked that the bones gave off a grating sound whenever they rubbed together. On another occasion, he poked a sharp awl into both his ears, sinking it in more than an inch in each. But he did not succeed in dying...I, Master Stone, conclude: "The Master forever experienced ill-fortune and became insane. His insanity persisted, and he was cast into prison. Of all the literary figures who have suffered from ill-luck and anxiety over the ages, none have suffered as did the Master...The Master's prose and poetry was overwhelmingly avant-garde and at a stroke it swept away the decadent practices of this modern age. The final word on him will surely only be written after the passing of a hundred generations. How can we say that he was not successful?"
>
> 卒以疑殺其繼室下獄論死張太史元汴力解乃得出【既出倔強如初】……或自持斧擊破其頭血流被面頭骨皆折揉之有聲或以利錐錐其兩耳深入寸餘竟不得死……石公曰先生數奇不已遂為狂疾狂疾不已遂為囹

[35] Somewhat oddly, the biography was included, as the penultimate item, in the standard late imperial anthology, *Guwen guanzhi* 古文觀止 [The Finest of Ancient Prose], complied by Wu Chucai 吳楚材 and Wu Diaohou 吳調侯 and published in 1695, and this may have been where Gu Cheng had first read it. But, there again, one was constantly being surprised by how remarkably widely read Gu Cheng proved, in both classical Chinese literature and philosophy, and, in translation, in many of the classics of Western literature.

[36] "Xu Wenchang zhuan" 徐文長傳 [Biography of Xu Wei], in Qian Bocheng 錢伯城 ed., *Yuan Hongdao ji jianjiao* 袁宏道集箋校 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1981), Vol. 2, p. 716.The lines come from Ouyang Xiu's 歐陽修 (1007-1072) poem "Shuigu yexing ji Zimei Shengyu" 水谷夜行寄子美聖俞 [Travelling Through River Valley at Night: Sent to Su Shunqin and Mei Yaochen] and were Ouyang's comment on the tone of the poetry of his friend Mei Yaochen 梅堯臣 (1002-1060).

圖古今文人牢騷困苦未有若先生者也……先生詩文崛起一掃近代蕪穢之習百世而下自有定論胡為不遇哉[37]

Wang Meng (in white suit) arriving at Waipapa Marae, accompanied by Professor John Minford, April 1989.

Other memories of Gu Cheng's life in Auckland come back to me. When, in April 1989, the novelist Wang Meng 王蒙 (b. 1934), then serving as the Minister of Culture of the People's Republic of China, visited Aotearoa | New Zealand at the invitation of Michael Bassett, at the time New Zealand's Minister of Internal Affairs and who had toured the People's Republic of

[37] *Yuan Hongdao ji jianjiao*, Vol. 2, pp. 716-717. The sentence between square brackets is only found in the version of this biography in, for instance, *Xu Wei ji* 徐渭集 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju chubanshe, 1983), Vol. 4, p. 1343. The connections between Xu Wei and the Zhang family are intergenerational. The Zhang Yuanbian (1538-1588; note that the last character of his name should read 忭) mentioned here as having been instrumental in having Xu released from jail, like Xu from Shanyin (present-day Shaoxing), was Zhang Dai's great-grandfather; he once took his son, Zhang Rulin 張汝霖 (b. 1625), Zhang Dai's grandfather, to visit Xu Wei in jail. Zhang Dai, himself, suffered something of an anxiety of influence with respect to Xu Wei's poetry ("When I became aware of the extent of his influence on me, I regretted it; picking out all the poems I had written that resembled Xu Wei's style, I proceeded to incinerate them" 予乃始知自悔舉向所為似文長者悉燒之). His earliest literary enterprise (dated 1615) was the compilation of a collection of Xu Wei's hitherto unpublished writings, entitled *Xu Wenchang yigao* 徐文長逸稿 [Lost Manuscripts of Xu Wei]. Much later, Zhang Dai notes that his old friend Wu Xi 吳系 had once dreamed that Xu Wei had appeared to him in a dream to say that Zhang Dai was his reincarnation (向年余老友吳系曾夢文長說余是其後生), for which, see his "Langhuan shiji xu" 琅嬛詩集序 [Preface to the Paradise Poetry Collection], *Langhuan wenji* (Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 1985), p. 63. My study of aspects of Xu Wei's biography and his posthumous reputation, "Madman or Genius: Yuan Hongdao's 'Biography of Xu Wei,'" was published in Dov Bing, S. Lim, and M. Lin, eds., *Asia 2000: Modern China in Transition*, pp. 196-220.

China the previous year, I remember standing next to Gu Cheng during the pōwhiri as he was welcomed on to Waipapa Marae at the University of Auckland. As Wang Meng hongied his way down the line of tangata whenua, Gu Cheng was not the only Today (Jintian 今天) or Misty (Menglong 朦朧) poet that he encountered, for Yang Lian 楊煉 (b. 1955) and his wife, the novelist, Liu Youhong 劉友紅 (better known as Yo Yo; b. 1955), too, had taken refuge in Auckland.[38] The minister also came across the young man who had served as his interpreter during Bassett's visit to China and who had gone awol and had also fetched up in Auckland, studying philosophy. In responding to the greetings he had received, Wang Meng, a man who himself, of course, knew something about exile, having been banished to Xinjiang as a "Rightist" (右派份子) in 1963 after having published his short story "A Young Man Joins the Organisational Department" ("Zuzhibu laile ge nianqingren" 組織部來了個年輕人) and only returning to the capital in 1979, commented on the oddity of the circumstances and proceeded to sing, in Uyghur, a song that he had learnt whilst undertaking "Labour Reform" (勞動改造).

Once inside the wharenui, the great Māori academic and author Ranganui Walker (1932-2016) addressed Wang Meng on the evils of colonialism, illustrating his argument with reference to the extent to which, during the nineteenth-century, the amo that were such an important feature of the marae often had their carved penises removed by pākehā authorities. When Pang Bingjun 龐秉鈞, the noted translator of the poetry of, for instance, Mu Dan 穆旦 (Zha Liangzheng 查良錚; 1918-1977), then on the staff of the Chinese programme and charged with

[38] For a brief discussion of the extent to which the epithet "Misty" was initially employed pejoratively by an older generation of Chinese poet, see John Minford, "Into the Mist," *Mists: New Poets from China* (Hong Kong: Renditions, n.d.), pp. 182-186. Issues 19 and 20 of *Renditions* published in 1983, upon which this publication is based, marked the first appearance in English translation of a many contemporary Chinese poets, including both Gu Cheng and Yang Lian. Sadly, this year the journal published its 100th and valedictory issue. Stephen C. Soong and John Minford, eds., *Trees on the Mountain: An Anthology of New Chinese Writing* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1984) offered a wider selection of contemporary Chinese writing, prose and poetry, including translations of Sinophone poets from Hong Kong and Taiwan. For a glimpse into the life of Yang Lian and Yo Yo in Auckland, see *Unreal City: A Chinese Poet in Auckland*, eds. and trans., Hilary Chung and Jacob Edmond (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2006). This book includes a reproduction of a painting by Yo Yo of the house (since demolished) at 137 Grafton Road where the couple lived and were married. This book also contains a photograph (taken by Trevor Hardy, Hilary Chung's partner) of the stone erected in the grounds of St Andrew's Presbyterian Church on Alten Road in memory of all the victims of the 1989 massacre. The stone, which as needed to be restored several times over the years after desecration, bears an inscription drafted by Yang Lian: "This stone stands as witness for those who can no longer speak" (你們已無言，而石頭有了呼聲). Yang Lian's collection *Yellow* (*Huang* 黃) was published in 1989, by the same press (People's Literature Press 人民文學出版社), the same press that in 1986 had published Gu Cheng's collection *Black Eyes* (*Hei yanjing* 黑眼睛). In the case of *Yellow*, the edition was immediately impounded and destroyed. A few copies were smuggled out (minus several early pages) and I treasure my signed copy. John Minford first met Yang Lian whilst he was teaching in Tianjin in the early 1980s, introduced to him by Yang Lian's father, Yang Qinghua 楊清華, the interpreter and diplomat, then teaching English at the Tianjin Foreign Languages Institute. In an essay entitled "Poets on Yellow Mountain," the poet Murray Edmond recalls a trip to the mountain that he made with Yang Lian in October 2007 to attend the Chinese English Poetry Festival, for which, see Duncan Campbell and Brian Moloughney, eds., *Encountering China: New Zealanders and the People's Republic*, pp. 267-274. In his essay in this volume (pp. 96-103), "A Haunted Taste," Jacob Edmond recalls Gu Cheng conversing intensely with his father over dinner at their home whilst he was in the last year of his primary schooling.

the task of providing simultaneous interpretation, hesitated as he rendered this sentence into Mandarin for the benefit of the minister, John Minford interposed: "A full interpretation, Pang!"[39] In conversation after the event, Pang insisted that his momentary hesitation was not so much a sign of his reluctance to be explicit but rather came about as he tasked his mind for a polite way to put it, eventually coming up with the word "male member" (*yangju* 陽具).

In February that year, the National Art Museum of China in Beijing had hosted the important China/Avant-Garde Exhibition, bringing together the work of almost 200 of China's most innovative artists. When the performance artist Xiao Lu 肖魯 (b. 1962) fired at her instillation Dialogue with a handgun, the exhibition had been shut down, some two hours after it had opened.[40] In a Question-and-Answer session with Wang Meng after the formalities had taken place, John Minford questioned the minister on his understanding of the political and cultural circumstances then prevailing in Beijing, given that student protests had been taking place on Tiananmen Square since the middle of April. Tragically, the minister's apparent confidence that the issues the protestors would be addressed non-violently proved misplaced. When on 9 June, some days after the massacre, Deng Xiaoping 鄧小平 (1904-1997), as Chairman of the Central Military Commission, went to congratulate the People's Liberation Army troops for their violent suppression of the protests, telling them that "This storm was bound to happen sooner or later," Wang Meng was the only minister in the government who refused to accompany him, pleading ill health. He was dismissed from his post in September of that year.[41]

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[39] Pang Bingjun and Mu Dan had been colleagues in the Foreign Languages Department of Nankai University in Tianjin. During the Cultural Revolution, the two had been sent to countryside together to undertake manual labour and re-education. In conversations about their plight over the course of their removal to the countryside, Pang would often reminisce about sitting up late at night with Mu Dan, conversing under the stars about Shakespeare, some of the poets that Mu Dan had translated, including Keats, Auden, Byron, and Shelley. He had had his hair shaved off by Red Guards at the start of the Cultural Revolution. When later asked to name those involved, he refused, arguing that those ultimately responsible for the chaos and violence of the early years of the Cultural Revolution were the people in leadership roles within the Chinese Communist Party. Pang's *100 Modern Chinese Poems* (Hong Kong: Commercial Press, 1987), edited and translated with John Minford and Seán Golden, offers a fine selection, in fine translation, of some of the best poems written in Chinese between the 1920s-1980s. Pang Bingjun, in those days commonly addressed as Lord Pang (龐公) in the department, was again to provide simultaneous interpretation when, after the massacre, a group from Auckland (including Gu Cheng and Yang Lian) travelled to Wellington, met up with the then Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Russell Marshall, and then marched in protest to the embassy of the People's Republic of China on Glenmore Street.

[40] After the massacre of June Fourth, her action was often labelled the "first shots of Tiananmen."

[41] On Wang Meng, see Zha Jianying, "Letter from Beijing: Servant of the State," *The New Yorker*, Vol. 86, No. 35 (8 November 2010): 60-69. My translation of his *Win the Hearts of the People and All-Under-Heaven Is Yours: Wang Meng Reads the Mencius* (*De minxin de tianxia: Wang Meng shuo Mengzi* 得民心得天下：王蒙說孟子), commissioned by a Chinese press many years later, in 2019, remains unpublished. Sadly, despite the possibilities it offers for veiled contemporary critique, the text proves a remarkably anodyne one. At the time of the 1989 massacre, a number of our students were in the People's Republic on scholarships, some of whom were evacuated. Our colleague Margaret South (1926-2016), a scholar of the poetry of the Tang dynasty, was in Xi'an on her sabbatical. For a selection of some of the poems that Margaret South wrote during her stay in the city that had once been the capital of the Tang dynasty, "The Temples of Xi'an," see Duncan Campbell and Brian Moloughney, eds., *Encountering China: New Zealanders and the People's Republic*, pp. 160-164.

Two further memories from those Auckland days with Gu Cheng are occasioned by my reading of the poem. On the evening after the massacre in 1989, Gu Cheng and Yang Lian sat together at John Minford's dining table in Mt Albert. Despite the milling chaos all around them, the two composed a joint poem, their only collaborative poetic effort; immediately this was finished, the noted translator and collector of, amongst many other things, Chinese embroidery, Don Cohn, then also in Auckland and working in the department, and I sat together working on a translation. The poem was published in the pages of the *Sunday Star* some days afterwards. Later that year, on 17 September, John Minford, working with Murray Edmond (supported by Yang Lian and Gu Cheng), organized a *China: Festival of the Survivors* (中國：幸存者) on the campus of the University of Auckland. Throughout the day, Gu Cheng wandered around in a long cape with a placard the announced the arrival of the end-times. At a concert in the evening in the Maidment Theatre, at which poets and authors such as Albert Wendt and Murray Edmond spoke and recited their poetry, Gu Cheng gave an unforgettable reading of his poem "Deedledeedee" ("Didelidi" 滴的里滴), with John Minford providing a remarkable simultaneous translation.[42]

In those days, I smoked a pipe, although by the 1980s the days of being able to do so whilst teaching, as suggested by Gu Cheng, were long gone. And so, Gu Cheng's poem both begins and ends with things that I can identify with. His second and third stanzas, however, conjure up no memories whatsoever. I do not remember ever speaking with Gu Cheng about ancient Greek law, and having never been a Christian, I find it very unlikely that I ever suggested to him that the world had been created by God. The poet's mind must have taken him from our discussion of the imperial examination system developed in China, to the laws of ancient Greece, and then on to the creation of the world, associations that must have occurred to him as we were speaking or later, once he had sat down to compose the poem.

By September 1993, when the couple returned to Rocky Bay from Germany, I had left Auckland to take up a post with Te Herenga Waka | Victoria University of Wellington. I'd received a letter from Gu Cheng from Berlin, but don't think that I had been aware of when they were expected back in the country and had had no news about or from them otherwise. That is,

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[42] From Gu Cheng's 1985-1987 collection *Quicksilver* (*Shuiyin* 水銀). For an English translation of this poem, see Seán Golden and Chu Chiyu, eds., *Selected Poems* (Hong Kong: Renditions, 1990), pp. 164-167. "What was it that first caused me to be aware of the nature of poetry," Gu Cheng once asked himself: "it was rain drops" (最早使我感到詩的是什麼？是雨滴). He continues: "Inside every drop of water that I see is to be found a quivering rainbow, an exquisite blue emptiness, both me and the world...a world that is both purer and more beautiful than the world upon which we rely upon for survival" (我看見每粒水滴中，都有彩虹游動。都有一個精美的藍空，都有我和世界……比我們賴以生存的世界，更純，更美), for which, see "Notes on Studying How to Write Poetry: One" ("Xueshi biji [yi]" 學詩筆記（一）), in *Gu Cheng wenxuan*, Vol. 1, p. 244.

until the dreadful morning of 9 October when I heard about the events of the day before on the island.

Since their deaths, I have had two particular engagements with the afterlives of Gu Cheng and Xie Ye. In the early 2000s, the Sichuanese composer Shen Nalin 沈納蘭, now a professor with the Zhejiang Conservatory of Music 浙江音樂學院, undertook PhD research with the School of Music with Te Herenga Waka | Victoria University of Wellington, under the supervision of the New Zealand composer and ethnomusicologist Jack Body (1944-2015). His thesis, entitled "The Integration of China Opera Traditions into New Musical Compositions," completed in 2010 and, with the permission of Gu Xiang, Gu Cheng's sister, making use of a number of Gu Cheng's poems, includes a Poetic Opera in Seven Scenes entitle "Fatal Desire" ("Zhiming de yuwang" 致命的慾望) that focuses on the story of his life on the island with Xie Ye and Li Ying. For the purposes of both his thesis and the performance of one scene from the opera, Shen Nalin invited me to translate the opening section of Scene Three, "The First Night" ("Chuye" 初夜). As part of the Asia Pacific Festival, this section of the opera was performed twice, on 12 and 14 February, 2007, at Te Whaea National School of Dance and Drama. Produced by Lawrence Walls, it was directed by Sara Brodie, conducted by Gao Ping 高平, and starred Linden Loader (mezzo-soprano), Wang Xingxing 王荇荇 (soprano), James Meng (tenor), and Daniel Shen (boy soprano). More recently, in 2015, Benny Li 李本洲, the Executive Producer of the Dark Eyes Under White Cloud documentary crew and the friend who had sent me the poem that occasioned this essay, interviewed a number of those who had known the couple during their days in Auckland. One hopes that this documentary, when completed, will also serve to help document this sad chapter in the cultural life of Auckland.

About the Centre

The New Zealand Contemporary China Research Centre promotes knowledge and understanding of contemporary China in New Zealand through research, collaboration, and engagement. Based at Te Herenga Waka—Victoria University of Wellington, the China Centre partners with eight New Zealand universities to support research and courses on the political, economic, and social life of China today.

About the Authors

Professor John Minford is a world-renowned sinologist and literary translator. He was educated at Winchester College and Balliol College, Oxford, where he graduated in 1968 with a First Class Honours degree in Chinese Studies. Over the subsequent 15 years he worked closely with David Hawkes on the Penguin Classics version of the 18th-century novel *The Story of the Stone* 紅樓夢, translating the last forty chapters. He went to Canberra in 1977 and studied for his PhD under the late Liu Ts'unyan 柳存仁. He went on to translate for Penguin a selection from Pu Songling's *Strange Tales* 聊齋志異 and Sunzi's *The Art of War* 孫子兵法. His most recent work, a translation of the famous Chinese divination text, the *I Ching* 易經, was published in October 2014 by Penguin Books.

Duncan M. Campbell has taught (Chinese language, modern and classical; Chinese literature, modern and classical; and aspects of Chinese history and civilisation) at the University of Auckland, Victoria University of Wellington, and the Australian National University in Canberra. Between 2015-16, he was the June & Simon K.C. Li Director of the Center for East Asian Garden Studies and Curator of the Chinese Garden with The Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens in San Marino, USA. The bulk of his research concentrates on the literary and material culture of late imperial China, with particular reference to the late Ming-early Qing period (1550s-1660s).

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