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### London

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Photo: Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin

#### PROJECT

## The Poetical Other in the New World

The latest developments in the Middle East and in China provided widely divergent contexts for our "New World". To me, the "new" here means "the deep"; every culture and even every person has to address some deeper questions: where will the fast-changing global politics and the economic landscape take us? What value and principles can we hold onto in this stormy situation? Actually, who am I?

China is not only a political and economic case, but also one of profound cultural transformation. As a poet, I experienced the nightmare of the Cultural Revolution; then, during the 1980s and layer by layer, introspections on Chinese history and tradition; the Tiananmen Massacre in 1989; and since then, being a Chinese poet and thinker in exile and turning "exile" positively into a grammar to share and understand other cultures with their thinkers. The question "What did we gain from exile?" is still the basis of the internal journey in my literary writings and helps me to observe the world.

In 2003, when I met the great Arabic poet Adonis at the Poetry International Jordan, it opened up a direct exchange between interdependent thinkers in the Chinese and Arabic worlds. I also began my series of projects of discussions with international poets, especially with Eastern European poets, since we shared some common historical experiences that could be understood as important references of our situation today but which, sadly, have been ignored by the world. My essay "The contemporary significance of Cold War experiences" expressed this thought.

During my stay at the Wissenschaftskolleg, I would like to continue the projects of my own writings, mainly poetry and essays, to draw a map of thinking of China, to show how China has been transformed from a Cold War version of a Communist state into a much more complex part of the global capitalist system, whose ideology (or even religion) is selfishness and cynicism. This theme will also become the meeting point to continue discussions with the poet-thinkers from Eastern Europe. We shall try to discover what the "New World" means to us as people and as poets and how to respond to it with the depth and creative quality of poetry. We will translate the poems ourselves, like other poets' translating projects I have been engaged in with poets from other languages (but not with German poets yet); the profound and rich discussion throughout all layers of poetry, from the very linguistic to literary concepts and realistic attitudes, will be documented as an ever-growing living book.

I shall also try to follow the model of the Jade Ladder, the anthology of contemporary Chinese poetry in English translation based on poets' translations and to organize a German-Chinese poets' translation project to create multi-voice translations between contemporary German and Chinese poetry.

Finally, I shall write a book titled Unique Mother Tongue, based on a wonderful sentence "Poetry is our unique mother tongue", to show how poets can respond to the challenge of the New World.

Yang, Lian. Aufzeichnungen eines glückseligen Dämons. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 2009.

- Where the Sea Stands Still. Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1999.

- Concentric Circles. Tarsset: Bloodaxe, 2005.

- Jade Ladder. Tarsset: Bloodaxe, 2012.

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COLLOQUIUM, 04.06.2013

## Watching Ourselves Set Sail

The latest developments in the Middle East and in China have provided widely divergent contexts for our "New World." They address those deeper questions pertaining to every culture and every person, namely how to understand our true situation with the fast-changing global and economic politics that are taking place. What values and principles can we hold onto in this stormy reality? How can contemporary Chinese poetry face these profound challenges or for that matter how can poetry anywhere face them?

Looking back on contemporary Chinese history, there were never any tranquil bays on our navigational charts but only tsunamis and maelstroms. Chinese poets experienced the nightmare of the Cultural Revolution and then during the 1980s, layer by layer, they rethought Chinese history and tradition, the Tiananmen Massacre in 1989 being the bitter yield of this process. Since then, being a Chinese poet in exile has turned "exile" into a positive, allowing us to deepen ourselves and share our views with other cultures. The question What did we gain from exile? informs the image conjured by the title "Watching Ourselves Set Sail" - one stands on a coastal cliff and sees oneself on a boat setting sail into the vastness of the ocean. This image turns all external journeys into internal ones. The depth of the thinking and creative writing that we have gained from our Chinese experiences continues now in compelling us to take stands with respect to the present worldwide spiritual crises.

Contemporary, Chinese, Poetry - three words that point to three juxtapositions, namely that between traditional and modern, between Chinese and other languages, and between poets and poetry. Every poem written in Chinese is both "conceptual" and "experimental," which means that because there is not some existing model that we can simply copy, an individual thinker must select and integrate elements from all manner of sources in order to develop his mind; therefore, every line of poetry is the start of a brand new culture. It is for this reason that the poetical passion is fundamentally different from collective emotions - it is based on nothing but one's own self. So every poem must be an unrepeatable "project of thinking and arts." In short, the real essence of the writing of poetry is not only "Why write" but "How to write". We are endlessly rewriting our own "past," plunging into the present, and confronting our common global future. All collective divisions - national, cultural, religious, linguistic, Oriental-Occidental, and even evolutionary diachronic time - are fake notions. They must be transcended and retrieved so as to become one of the many layers within our individuality. With poetry's relevance being increasingly questioned, creative thinking and actions of whatever type now form concentric circles in our understanding of life.

"New World" means a profounder and more challenging reality for all human beings. Outmoded economic and cultural structures have changed; the globe is now deeply shared, all of us sharing the same "reality" for the very first time. To be a "poet" today means to be a real individual who faces the ever more impoverished choices of political ideas allied with ever stronger commercial control - and this together with increasingly confused values and cynicism. How can we avoid mere plaintiff status and muster an active response as poets? Today the "poetical other" regains the original meaning of "poet" for all individuals. In this ocean-like world, "culture" is a boat and "poetry," in its wider meaning, is the ballast keeping the boat stable and balanced. And we sail on.

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A tower built downwards

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Erkundung des Bösen

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Zusammenstellung: Erkundung des Bösen

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