

Transpacific Poetic Imaginary: Ai Qing Encounters Pablo Neruda

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Abstract

As a cultural celebrity and a diplomat, Pablo Neruda visited China twice during the 1950s. Among his welcoming party in China, Ai Qing, the acclaimed poet of the common people, became fast friend with Neruda. Centered around their encounters in the 1950s, this thesis takes Neruda's and Ai Qing's identities of artist and politician as a point of departure and argues that Ai Qing's encounter with Neruda sheds light on the heterogeneity of the former's poetic creation during a time of national crisis and social upheaval. Investigating the historical conditions that made possible their friendship, such as China-Latin America diplomatic relation in the Cold War and the internationalist milieu in the socialist world, this thesis also explores how, against the backdrop of an epic time, the oceanic landscape in the two poets' works is imagined as a sphere of cultural transmission and a space to contest their public and private selves. A close reading of Ai Qing's poems anchored in theory of the lyric, furthermore, broadens the image of Ai Qing as an archetypical communist party poet and points to different directions to reading modern Chinese poetry in socialist China.

Abrégé

Célébrité culturelle et diplomate, Pablo Neruda a visité la Chine deux fois dans les années 1950. Parmi les personnes qu'il a accueillies en Chine, Ai Qing, le poète acclamé du peuple, est rapidement devenu un ami avec Neruda. Centrée sur leurs rencontres dans les années 50, cette thèse prend comme point de départ les identités d'artiste et de politicien de Neruda et d'Ai Qing, et soutient que la rencontre d'Ai Qing avec Neruda éclaire l'hétérogénéité de la création poétique d'Ai pendant une époque de crise nationale et de bouleversement sociaux. Enquêtant sur les conditions historiques qui ont rendu possible leur amitié, par exemple, la relation diplomatique entre la Chine et l'Amérique Latine pendant la guerre froide et le milieu internationaliste dans le monde socialiste, cette thèse explore également comment, dans le contexte d'une époque épique, le paysage océanique dans les œuvres des deux poètes est imaginé comme une sphère de transmission culturelle et un espace pour contester leur moi public et privé. En outre, une lecture attentive ancrée dans la théorie de la lyrique élargit l'image d'Ai Qing comme un poète archétypique du parti communiste et indique directions différentes en ce qui concerne les interprétations de la poésie chinoise moderne en la Chine socialiste.

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Introduction

On March 16, 2013, a massive painting by Chinese artist and activist Ai Weiwei was unveiled in Valparaíso, Chile. It was part of an artistic installation named “Of Bridges and Borders”, which had drawn over 20 artists from Europe, the Americas and Asia to contemplate and imagine a world of arts that cultivates connections and proximity alongside contradiction and distance.¹ Ai Weiwei’s work is a 900-square-meter painting on the walls of a cultural center that was once a prison, depicting the aerial image of Diaoyu / Sensaku Islands. Instigating widespread protests and animosity from both China and Japan, the territorial disputes over the islands were still at their zenith. Ai Weiwei, a long-standing dissident and a vociferous activist, while not explicitly opinionating on the legitimate sovereignty of the islands, claimed that irrational behaviors such as damaging Japanese cars were “prepared” by Chinese officials and that the governments’ maneuvers to swing public opinions were naïve acts.² His first art project in Latin America, thus, was a statement that draws attention to a much-speculated international dispute where bridges were burned and sovereign borders were erected.

The significance of this painting is rendered more multilayered and nuanced by a combined reading of the title of the project and the inscription on the walls. The painting, “A Pablo” (“To Pablo”), was dedicated to Chilean poet and Nobel laureate, Pablo Neruda, a friend of Ai Weiwei’s father, Ai Qing. The inscription superimposed on the images of the islands came

¹ Kùlture Büro, Buenos Aires, “Of Bridges & Borders / Adquisición Edición Especial.” Accessed March 24, 2020. <https://www.kbb.org.es/ai-weiwei-of-bridges-borders-adquisicion-edicion-especial/>.

² Agence France-Presse in Beijing, “Ai Weiwei Calls Anti-Japanese Protests Prepared by Officials,” *South China Morning Post*, September 20, 2012. Accessed March 24, 2020. <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/article/1041389/ai-weiwei-calls-anti-japan-protests-prepared-officials>. All translations from Spanish and Chinese are mine, except Neruda’s memoir.

from Ai Qing's poem, "On the Promontory of Chile" (在智利的海岬上), written during his visit in 1954 to Chile and dedicated to Neruda: "A man stands up / with a magnifying glass / he looks at the map / and searches for places unexplored."³ The poem by Ai Qing is a paean to Neruda as a worldly poet and a steadfast communist party member. However, juxtaposed with the images of the disputed islands, the four lines extracted from the long poem read suspiciously like a description of a conquistador or a charterer of new waters. Whether the underlying image of the man searching for new destinations implies adventurous explorers and peregrinators, like Ai Weiwei's father and Pablo Neruda, or avaricious conqueror, or perhaps staunch nationalist, is made much more complicated by the politically charged images of the uninhabited islands that multiple parties wish to laid claim to, as well as the more intimate histories of a border-crossing friendship that Ai Weiwei claimed to commemorate.

Ai Weiwei was born after Ai Qing and Neruda met for the last time in 1957, when the anti-right movement against Ding Ling and the intellectual circle surrounding her started. This means that Ai Weiwei's knowledge of Neruda would only be fragments of memories or anecdotes told by his parents. Supplies of such memories, however, are not lacking in any way, as Neruda's visits in China and his friendship with Ai Qing left lasting marks on the Ai family, which can be found in Ai Qing's own writings and his wife, Gao Ying's memoir of their life together. For instance, in *Ai Qing and I* (2012), a memoir consisted of fragments of stand-alone stories narrating the poet's life of persecution and exile, Gao dedicates one brief chapter titled "Neruda" that provides precious sources on how Ai and Neruda communicated through a combination of French and body language along with details of their last meeting. With a bitter

³ "有人站起来 / 用放大镜 / 在地图上寻找 / 没有到过的地方." Ai Qing, "On the Promontory of Chile", *Ai Qing QuANJI 2* [*The Complete Works of Ai Qing 2*] (石家庄: 花山文艺出版社, 1991), 192-193. Hereafter *QuANJI*.

undertone about the circumstances under which the two friends parted, Gao asserts that theirs is a friendship “built on common beliefs” and that the reasons that they became fast friends are not only because of state-mandated companionship when Neruda visited China, but because they gained “profound understanding” of each other through their respective oeuvres. ⁴

Gao succinctly points out the two levels of interpretations of Neruda and Ai Qing’s encounter in the 1950s: while theirs is a friendship and comradeship ingrained in institutionalized context, enabled by cultural diplomatic policies and events that brought politicians and intellectuals alike together in the early 1950s, their appreciation of each other was built on something more intimate, linked by their beliefs and common artistic trajectories. While previous scholarships have highlighted the extremely politicized process of translating Latin American authors before 1970s and the striking similarities between both Neruda’s and Ai Qing’s political lives and artistic inspirations ⁵, a close reading that situates both Neruda’s and Ai Qing’s poems written in response to their encounter in the historical context of the Cold War and their involvements in peace movements not only helps us better interpret both the institutional and the more personal aspects of their friendship, but such an endeavor also broadens our understanding on the entanglement of arts and politics in the decolonization project and construction of the nascent Third World in the 1950s.

This project, furthermore, emerges from a broader interest in the literary connections between China and Latin America. While the conspicuous connections between “Magical

⁴ Gao Ying. *我和艾青* [*Ai Qing and I*], (人民文学出版社, 2012), 40.

⁵ See Teng Wei 滕威 (2012; 2018) and He Xixiang. 贺锡翔. ““我们永远航行在海上”——艾青与聂鲁达的文学关系.”[“We Will Forever Sail the Sea”---Ai Qing and Neruda’s Literary Relation] *浙江师大学报* 1 (1991): 3.

Realism” and Chinese writers from the 80s who read writers like Gabriel García Márquez and who were motivated by the success of Latin American novels are explored in a few scholarships⁶, there are even fewer research with regard to the Cold War era. During my research, I have been asked, and likewise, asking myself the question: why China and Latin America? Why now? How can a study of literary connections between China and Latin America contribute to current scholarships in literary and cultural studies?

To answer these questions, I situate my initial studies in the intersection of two broader fields of enquiry: the studies of world literature and contemporary scholars’ interest in the Global South. As Franco Moretti asserts in his seminal paper “Conjecture on World Literature”, literary transmission from “one periphery to another (without passing through the center) is almost unheard of”.⁷ Moreover, especially pertaining to the formulation of modern literature, scholars have cautioned us about the pitfall in theorizing on modernity of non-West countries in the academia, namely, the inevitability of the “West” as the reference point. Dipesh Chakrabarty, for instance, admonishes us to take notice of the conception of modern homogeneous time and how the Third World would always be condemned to the category of “not yet” by Eurocentric view of temporality.⁸ In this research, one often finds it hard to emit the influence of Baudelaire, Rimbaud, or Whitman in Ai Qing’s and Neruda’s early poetry. Perhaps instead of skirting the “West” as a reference point, one should follow Chakrabarty’s vein of inquiry and ask: if the

⁶ See Gao Yan 高岩, “‘魔幻现实主义’与中国‘寻根文学’的流变反思”[Reflections on the Evolution of “Magical Realism” and Chinese “Root-Seeking” Literature], 渤海大学学报(哲学社会科学版) (2017, 39(02):90-93; Wang Jinwei 王晋炜, “马尔克斯与中国”高端研讨会纪要”[Conference on “Márquez and China”], 外国文学, 2014(04):84-94.; Patricia Schiaffini-Vedani, “The ‘Condor’ Flies over Tibet: Zhaxi Dawa and the Significance of Tibetan Magical Realism,” *Modern Tibetan Literature and Social Change* (2008): 202-224.

⁷ Franco Moretti, “Conjectures on world literature.” *New left review* (2000): 54-68.

⁸ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial thought and historical difference* (Princeton University Press, 2008), 8.

“West” should provide theoretical frameworks and points of reference, how can they be “renewed from and for the margins?”⁹

A more recent article by Junyoung Verónica Kim explores such possibilities of rejuvenation from the “peripheries”. In her “Asia-Latin America as Method: The Global South Project and the Dislocation of the West,” Kim considers the possibility of an “epistemic outside” by proposing “Asia-Latin America” as a research method that explores the limit of our knowledge.¹⁰ Kim explicates the necessity of such a method by exposing epistemological limitations in area studies and ethnic studies in North American institutions. Kim emphasizes that, even though theories of area studies have been renewing themselves from within, Europe or the West “provides the universal mode of knowing or the status quo through which the *area* can be defined, bounded and studied”.¹¹ Furthermore, ethnic studies have focused mainly on studies of immigrants from the Third World to the First World while in reality migration within the Third World countries constitutes most of the world’s migrating movement. Asia-Latin America as a method, then, aims to explore the politics of such knowledge formation and the politics of *our lack of knowledge* about Asia and Latin America.¹²

However, as Kim makes clear, simply pairing Asia with Latin America does not magically dissolve the “West” as trope and reference point. Using the examples of Latin American authors who are widely read in Asia or K-pop dramas that gained popularity in Latin America, Kim singles out the force of the West as medium and sites of universality where such communications take place. Reading her discussion of popular Latin American authors in Asia,

⁹ Ibid, 16.

¹⁰ Junyoung Verónica Kim, "Asia–Latin America as Method: The Global South Project and the Dislocation of the West." *Verge: Studies in Global Asias* 3.2 (2017): 100.

¹¹ Ibid, 102.

¹² Ibid, 100-102. Italics mine.

one finds it particularly pertinent to the event of introducing Latin American authors associated with magical realism in China during the 80s. Literary critic Li Tuo claims that the introduction of Latin American authors was perhaps the more significant event in contemporary Chinese literary scene¹³, but there does not seem to be any discussion of how Cold War politics underwrote the canon of Latin American authors in the Chinese-language academia.

Although Latin American writers associated with magical realism provided a unique mode of writing for Chinese writers in the 80s, few Chinese scholar working in these areas have explored the phenomenon that the canon of magical realism was constructed during the cultural Cold War between Latin American and the US.¹⁴ Many of the treaties and canonical works of magical realism were written in the US and taught in North American institutions. Writers like Gabriel García Márquez were paradoxically both leftists and literary genius of singular talent supported by literary magazines associated with Congress for Cultural Freedom, a front organization of the CIA. ¹⁵ While Chinese writers in the 80s might feel a direct affinity with Latin American magical realist genre, this affinity, as Kim might caution, should be taken with a grain of salt, considering that the interference of the US partially opens up the possibility of communication between Asia and Latin America. Another reason that the West does not dissolve by simply juxtaposing Asia with Latin America, as Kim cites Naoki Sakai, is that “the West-and-the-Rest opposition has been duplicated in many regions and sites in the world involving a

¹³ Teng Wei 滕威. “边境”之南 拉丁美洲文学汉译与中国当代文学（1949-1999）[South of the “Border”: Latin American Literature in China and Chinese Contemporary Literature (1949-1999)] (Peking University Press, 2011), 44.

¹⁴ Jean Franco, *The decline and fall of the lettered city: Latin America in the cold war* (Harvard University Press, 2009). See Chapters “The Black Angel of Lost Time” and “The Magic of Alterity.”

¹⁵ Ibid.

different set of people each time”.¹⁶ Sakai’s schema of co-figuration not only aim to expose the hubris of the West in representing the East, but also to detect “the *hidden alliance* of the narcissisms of the West”.¹⁷ The word “alliance” points to a broader spectrum of misrepresentation beyond the East-West paradigm.

As Kim contends, studies of such transpacific connection will tell us more about the experience of Cold War from the perspectives of peoples in Asia and Latin America, and even help re-conceptualize the world map consisting of these contact zones. Some recent studies have explored Latin American intellectuals’ travels in China and how China is perceived in Latin American literature, ¹⁸ indicating that the vibrant exchange between the two distant regions is galvanizing attention in cultural and literary studies. While aiming to contribute to the growing body of scholarships, this thesis also approaches Chinese-Latin American relationship through a more microscopic angle, focusing on the relationship between two poets whose images are often shrouded in myths. Although both Ai Qing and Neruda are globally celebrated poets, neither has left a lot of truly disclosing personal writings. While Neruda left us with his memoir *Confieso que he vivido* (*I confess that I have lived*), it is, as Jean Franco points out, a book that “disclose[s] very little” and repeats “those mythic moments which went into the construction of the poet’s

¹⁶ Kim, "Asia–Latin America as Method: The Global South Project and the Dislocation of the West," 107.

¹⁷ Naoki Sakai, "The Problem of ‘Japanese Thought’: The Formation of ‘Japan’ and the Schema of Cofiguration," *Translation and Subjectivity: On “Japan” and Cultural Nationalism* Vol. 3 (U of Minnesota Press, 1997), 70.

¹⁸ See Andrea Bachner, "Violent Media, Chinese Fantasies: Salvador Elizondo's “Execution by Shooting in China”." *Verge: Studies in Global Asias* 3.2 (2017): 17-33; Rosario Hubert, "Geographical distance and cultural knowledge: writing about China in nineteenth-century Latin America." *452°F: revista de teoría de la literatura y literatura comparada* 13 (2015): 35-49; Maria Montt Strabucchi “Imagining China in Contemporary Latin American Literature”. PhD thesis (University of Manchester, 2017).

persona”¹⁹ Ai Qing, according to Ye Jin who compiled Ai’s *nianpu* (chronology), did not even want to write about his life.²⁰ Both poets were staunch in upholding their public images and resistant to the idea of exposing their private life.

In addition to the mythical images that the two poets constructed for themselves, this thesis also hopes to shed light on an imbalance found in their friendship. While Ai Qing directly references and features Neruda in multiple of his writings, Neruda’s focus, after his visits, was on China itself as a cipher of sentimental nostalgia and revolutionary ardor. Ai Qing’s deep engagement with Neruda’s works and identities in his poems and traveling diaries in contrast with a relative lack of personal engagement on Neruda’s part could be a result of a power imbalance: Neruda was already an internationally renowned poet whose works had been translated into Chinese, whereas Ai Qing was still constructing his image domestically, and his works were not accessible to Neruda in the latter’s native language. While Neruda was translated worldwide and remains the most translated Latin American author in China, Ai Qing, on the other hand, did not get translated later into French in the 80s and 90s. When Neruda referenced Ai Qing in his speech delivered to Chilean Socialist Party, Ai Qing was depicted as a token martyr who suffered in a stifled and tyrannical regime, under which he was taken prisoner.²¹

¹⁹ Jean Franco, “Review: *Memoirs* by Pablo Neruda.” *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol. 59, No. 3 (Aug. 1979), 557-559.

²⁰ Ye Jin 叶锦, 艾青年谱长编. [Ai Qing’s *Nianpu*] (人民文学出版社, 2010), prologue, iv.

²¹ Pablo Neruda, *Obras Completas IV* (*Publicações Europa-América*, 2002), 1167. “Y al poeta Al Chin, aquel que todos los chilenos conocieron, el mejor poeta de China, viejo comunista, que visitó Chile con ocasión de mis 50 años, dónde está? Acusado de derechista porque conoce el idioma francés, y por otras acusaciones ridículas, ha sido desterrado al desierto de Gobí, a una altura inhumana, y ha sido obligado a firmar sus poemas con otro nombre. Es decir, se le ha fusilado moralmente.” (And the poet Ai Qing, whom all the Chileans know to be the best poet in China, old communist, who visited Chile when it was my 50th birthday, where is he now? Accused of being right-wing because he speaks French, and for other ridiculous reasons. He was exiled to the Gebi Desert, to an inhuman altitude and forced to sign his poems under other names. That is to say, he has been morally executed.)

However, as this thesis hopes to make clear, Ai Qing's earnestness, in contrast with Neruda's reticence, offers an intriguing angle to the interpretations of the two poets' public and private selves.

Taken into consideration this power imbalance, the explorations in this thesis are multi-layered. Firstly, offering readings of the poems that the two poets produced in relation to their involvement in peace movements such as their affiliation with World Peace Council that enabled their encounters, this paper argues that, in their poetry and public discourse, the oceanic landscape in the two poets' works is imagined as a sphere of cultural transmission and a space to contest their public and private selves. China and Chile are imagined as two regions connected through the Pacific Ocean, or in Neruda's words, "a single sea" that shortens the distance between the two disparate countries.²² The Pacific Ocean emerges not only as a poetic imaginary, but also a manifestation of the new strategic territorialization of the Asia-Pacific that appeared on the political agenda of the People's Republic of China (PRC). Secondly, reading Ai Qing's traveling diaries and poems written during his journey to Chile, this paper explores the lyricism in Ai Qing's oeuvre during a time when he emerged as a political poet. This paper argues that, while Ai Qing is canonized as a patriotic poet, the encounters with Neruda gave rise to a great moment of introspection and lyricism in Ai's artistic career. While Neruda seems to remain shrouded in mysteries during their encounters, Ai Qing's poetic production offers a glimpse into his moments of doubt, withdrawal, and deep ruminations on selves.

The artistic and the political are inseparable in both Ai's and Neruda's lives. This paper takes the inseparableness of their identities of both artists and politicians as a point of departure

²² Pablo Neruda, "Oda a un Solo Mar." *Obras Completas II(Publicações Europa-América*, 2002), 829.

and explores how their poetry might offer new conceptualization of geographical imaginary that visualizes the Pacific Ocean and the Asia-Pacific as new emerging worlds, exemplary of an ideal, decolonized Third World. Paying attention to these intricacies in Chinese-Latin American relation, the following chapters delve into the works of Ai Qing and Pablo Neruda. The first chapter “Portraits of Young Artists: Lyric Poetry and Society” lays out some of the recurrent theoretical concerns of this thesis, namely, artists’ responsibility towards their worlds and lyric poetry with relation to society. The emphasis will be placed on Ai Qing, whose poems and poetic treaty offer a glimpse into lyricism in modern Chinese poetry both during and after a time of national crisis. The chapter first provides an overview of the early formation and the later “conversion” of the two young poets, who were invigorated by the most urgent national or humanitarian crisis of their times and channeled that urgency through their poetry. In conversation with David Wang’s writings on modern Chinese poetry, as well as Jonathan Culler’s theorizations of lyric poetry, chapter one analyzes one of Ai Qing’s early poems and his own theoretical view on writing poetry as an engaged intellectual. It further explores the potentials in Ai Qing’s early poems as sites of conversations and negotiations between Western lyric tradition and Chinese lyricism by juxtaposing one of Neruda’s early poems in the analysis.

Chapter two “The Poetics of Peace: Voice of the Masses in Revolution” argues for the primacy of voice and orality in Ai Qing’s and Neruda’s oeuvres following their first meeting in China. It first aims to answer the following questions: on the institutional level, what kind of historical conditions and political factors enabled the two poets’ encounters? What ideological climate facilitated their meeting? Chapter two thus provides a brief history of internationalism and diplomatic outreach in the early 1950s China, especially pertaining to China-Latin America relation. It then outlines the unfolding of the peace movements in which Ai Qing and Neruda

participated, namely the signature movement that asks the masses to sign on the appeal to peace and Asia-Pacific Peace Conference in 1952. While not directly referencing each other in their works during their first meeting, both poets contemplated the primacy of the voice of the masses in their works which aim to connect the ordinary people of the world in solidarity against the threat of imperialism.

Chapter three “Of Waves and Selves: On Ai Qing’s Journey to Chile” follows Ai Qing’s journey to Chile and analyzes a productive stint of his artistic career during which he produced a series of poems and a travel diary. Oceanic landscape figures heavily in Ai Qing’s poems written during this trip, which are inspired by his surroundings and Neruda’s own fascination with the ocean. In “On the Promontory of Chile”, in particular, Ai Qing, using oceanic motifs and incorporating a wave-like structure in the poem, creates a dialogic of Neruda’s mythologized images and the different selves unraveled by a friend. Similar to “On the Promontory of Chile”, is Neruda’s “Ode to a Single Sea”, a poem in which the ambiguity of addressee creates intriguing interpretations of the poet’s conflicting aspirations.

The final chapter, while juxtaposing Ai Qing’s and Neruda’s two poems, also focuses on Ai’s other poems inspired by oceanic objects during his journey. In this series of poems, Ai Qing not only draws inspiration from the oceanic landscape, he also contemplates on question of poetic forms, in particular, the tension between classical Chinese poetic form and free verse in modern Chinese poetry. The thesis will conclude on Ai Qing and Neruda’s last meeting and Ai’s persecution in the Anti-Rightist Movement. Besides summarizing the findings in the three chapters, the final conclusion will also reflect on the question of what Ai Qing’s poetry and his poetic career can say about the development of modern Chinese poetry in socialist China.

Chapter one. Portraits of Young Artists: Lyric Poets in Moments of Crisis

The period that follows from 1949 into the mid-1950s, during which time the friendship between Ai Qing and Neruda unfolded, was also one of the most critical junctures in modern Chinese history. As David Wang notes in his book *The Lyrical in Epic Time*, the year 1949 not only witnessed a mass exodus of millions of Chinese, but the following decade that leads up to the Cultural Revolution was also marked with constant political movements and campaigns, in nearly all of which Ai Qing himself either participated or was condemned. It is, indeed as Wang contends, an “epic” time that seldom left room for lyrical expressions ²³ The tension between the force of the epoch and artists’ lyrical tendency is evident in one of the commentaries from Ai Qing’s contemporary Du Heng 杜衡, an editor, critic and a poet himself. He commented on Ai’s poem “Dayuanhe, My Wet Nurse” (大堰河，我的保姆), a poem that made the latter famous in the Chinese literary scene as a young poet of twenty-three:

“[There are] two Ai Qings; one is a rebellious revolutionary, the other is an artist indulgent in aesthetics. They used to be a pair of friends who walked hand-in-hand, because they came from the same place, which is hatred and denigration for the world. However, these two friends eventually failed to understand each other... Therefore, understanding Ai Qing, the poet, is perhaps not an easy thing, at least for the ordinary people. I fear that he wouldn’t be forgiven on either side. Precisely because of this, Ai Qing could be called a poet.” ²⁴

²³ David Der-wei Wang, *The Lyrical in Epic Time: Modern Chinese Intellectuals and Artists Through the 1949 Crisis* (Columbia University Press, 2015), 2.

²⁴ Du Heng. Cited in Cheng Guangwei. 程光炜. 艾青评传 [*A Commentated Biography of Ai Qing*]. (南京: 南京大学出版社, 2015), 123. “.....两个艾青，一个是暴乱的革命者，一个是耽美的艺术家，他们原先是一对携手同行的朋友，因为他们是从同一个地方出发的，那就

In retrospect, although Ai Qing admonished this piece of criticism himself ²⁵, Du Heng's words ring true and prophetic in multiple ways regarding Ai Qing's life. Published in 1936, Du Heng's criticism appeared on the onset of one of the most turbulent times in 20th century China. With the imminent Sino-Japanese War in sight, Du Heng's piece hints at the two forces of the epoch that underwrote so many artists' lives: the revolutionary vanguard and the artistic avant-garde. Ai Qing was pitted against both forces and was paradoxically made the proponent and the enemy of the two during his career. Du's concern that Ai Qing would not be forgiven at neither side, retrospectively, was a well-justified one: being "an artist indulgent in beauty" brought doubt upon the revolutionary commitment of the poet in the stifling environment of socialist art world, foreshadowing his persecution in the Anti-Rightist Movement; being "a rebellious revolutionary", however, means that his poems are oftentimes filled with political slogans and the Chinese Communist Party's official rhetoric.

However, a closer look at Ai Qing's earlier works and the poems that he wrote during his trip to Chile proves that even the claim of "two Ai Qings" is a facile and inadequate impression. In this chapter, I will follow up on David Wang's vein of thought that, in order to capture what 1949 and the early 1950s meant for modern Chinese poetry, one often needs to look beyond the dichotomy of aesthetic indulgence and revolutionary commitment. The landscape of modern Chinese poetics after 1949 is not a monolithic order, but rather, "a configuration of soundings that reverberate with one another" to adjust to and to render the ethos of the time.²⁶ Of the two

是对世界的仇恨和轻蔑；但是，这一对朋友却到底要成为互相不能谅解.....因此，要了解诗人艾青，至少在一般人，也许并不是一件容易的事，我害怕他在两方面都会得不到原谅。然而正因此，艾青才是诗人。”

²⁵ Du was reprimanded vituperatively in Ai Qing's "On Du Heng" as a traitor to his country and a coward. (Ai Qing, *Quanji* 5, 18).

²⁶ Wang, 3.

poets under consideration here, Neruda is considered a great lyricist by critics such as Roland Greene and Jonathan Culler ²⁷ whereas the epithet “rebellious revolutionary” endowed by Du Heng seems to have followed Ai Qing throughout his life and afterlife, overshadowing his lyrical creativity.

While not endeavoring to excavate Ai Qing as the great lyricist of modern Chinese poetry, this chapter suggests laying out some theoretical angles and looking at Ai Qing’s poems through the perspective of lyricism. It argues that some of Ai Qing’s early poems and poetic treaty engender productive sites of conversations and negotiations between Western lyric tradition and Chinese lyricism. While Neruda’s life and works will be discussed in conjuncture with Ai Qing’s artistic trajectory, emphasis will be placed on the latter. The chapter provides brief descriptions of the two poets’ early formation and “conversion” before moving on to an overview of lyric poetry, especially with relation to Ai Qing’s own poetic treaty. It then analyzes one of Ai Qing’s earlier poems, juxtaposing with one of Neruda’s poems. While the approach is not strictly comparative, this chapter wishes to explore some of the preconditions that make possible the friendship between two poets who communicate in a language that is neither’s native tongue.

Early formation and “conversion” of the two poets

In 1929, 19-year-old Ai Qing left home under the auspices of his arts teacher Lin Fengmian and went to Paris to study painting. Of Ai’s time in Paris, we know very little from the

²⁷ See Roland Greene, *Post-Petrarchism: Origins and innovations of the Western lyric sequence*. Vol. 1163 (Princeton University Press, 2014); Jonathan Culler, *Theory of the Lyric*, (Harvard University Press, 2015).

few articles that he penned later in life and the scanty biographical information compiled by others.²⁸ Unlike some of his contemporaries²⁹, Ai Qing did not write about his journey abroad or his life in a foreign country in diaries or letters. Instead, what stands out from his recollections is an impressionistic list of all the influences from Ai Qing's early adult life. In line with his rebellious spirit, Ai Qing claims his passions about modernist painters like Monet, Renoir and Picasso, while the "academic" style did not hold any appeal to him because he associated it with feudalism and conservatism.³⁰ To learn French, he also started reading translations of Mayakowski, Yesenin as well as Rimbaud in the original language, claiming later in his poetic treaty that he is drawn to a certain "innocence" in the latter's works.³¹

Thus, the early formations of Ai Qing's poetic world were rooted in a combination of Francophone and Russian modernism; the same can be said about Neruda, who read French poetry avidly as a young man and whose teacher, another Nobel Laureate, Gabriel Mistral, lent him books by Russian authors like Maksim Gorky.³² Both had expressed their indebtedness to Rimbaud and Mayakowski, whose portraits adorned the walls of Neruda's house and whose works inspired Ai Qing as a poor Chinese student studying fine arts in Paris. Furthermore, French would become the language through which the two poets understood each other in their encounters.

²⁸ See Ai Qing, "母鸡为什么要下蛋"["Why Do Hens Lay Eggs"]; Ye Jin, 艾青年谱[Ai Qing's *Nianpu*]; Cheng Guangwei, 艾青评传 [A Commentated Biography of Ai Qing].

²⁹ Xiao Qian 萧乾 and Qian Zongshu 钱钟书 who were born in the same year as Ai Qing, for instance, wrote extensively about their travels or experience abroad either in travelogues or fictions. See Xiao's *Traveler Without a Map* (1990).

³⁰ Ai Qing, *Quanji* 5, 693.

³¹ Ai Qing, *Quanji* 3, 130-132.

³² Mark Eisner, *Neruda: El Llamado del Poeta* (HarperCollins Español, 2018), 60.

Gravitating to Francophone poets and French modernist poet such as Beaudelaire, Rimbaud and Verhaeren, Ai Qing and Neruda both created somewhat romantic images of themselves. Neruda, for instance, confesses that he was “besotted” with his “requisite black suit of the poet”³³, an archetypical image of a melancholic poet dressed in black. When Ai published “Flute” (芦笛) dedicated to French poet Apollinaire in *Xiandai*(现代) magazine in 1933, he was given the epithet of “poet playing the flute” (吹芦笛的诗人).³⁴ These “foundational myths”, however, subsequently made place for images of the poets as devoted revolutionaries and politicians. Neruda highlights his transition in his autobiography after witnessing the atrocities in Spanish Civil War and the assassination of his friend, Spanish poet, Federico García Lorca:

The bitterness in my poetry had to end. The brooding subjectivity of my *Veinte Poemas de Amor*, the painful moodiness of my *Residencia en la Tierra*, were coming to a close. In them, I now believed, I had struck a vein, not in rocks underground, but in the pages of books. Can poetry serve our fellow men? Can it find a place in man’s struggle? I had already done enough tramping over the irrational and the negative. I had to pause and find the road to humanism, outlawed from contemporary literature but deeply rooted in the aspirations of mankind. ³⁵

This self-reflection is an affirmation of the role of writer, artist, and poet in relation to the world. The 20th century witnessed a surge of discussions about the “intellectual responsibility” of artists in society and how they might help accelerate political transformations.³⁶ Spanish Civil

³³ Pablo Neruda, *Memoir* (UK: Penguin Books, 1978), 29.

³⁴ Qian Liqun. 钱理群, *中国现代文学三十年*[*Thirty Years of Modern Chinese Literature*], (Peking University Press, 2016). 614.

³⁵ Neruda, *Memoir*, 139.

³⁶ Rafael Pedemonte Lavis, "Pablo Neruda, his time and the" sense of History": Ideological position and poetic creation during the Cold War." *AYER* 98 (2015): 159-185.

War was certainly a point of “conversion” for the young poet, as was the Sino-Japanese War for Ai Qing. Almost at the exact same time in 1937, Ai Qing wrote on the eve of Sino-Japanese War: “You sad poets, dust off the melancholia of yesteryears.”³⁷ Although Ai Qing had always been vocal about his political stance since the very beginning of his writing career, the imminent war prompted one of the most productive stint of his poetic creation, its ramifications constantly haunting the poet’s mind.

Although there seems to be a definitive moment of “conversion” for the two poets, like any kind of conversion, the transformation is hardly definite and irreversible. To understand the heterogeneity of their works and to avoid repeating the dichotomy of aesthetic pursuit versus revolutionary commitment, I suggest reading Ai Qing’s view on poetic creation along with conceptions of lyric poetry in the next section.

Ai Qing’s *Shilun* and theory of the lyric

During the Second Sino-Japanese War, Ai Qing started to formulate his own theories on poetry. His first poetic treaty, *On Poetry (Shilun, 诗论)*, consists of pithy one-liners and touches upon a variety of theses that were some of the central concerns in the debate of modernizing Chinese poetry in the first half of the 20th century. One of Ai’s most important legacies from his theoretical writings is his advocacy of “prosifying poetry” (诗的散文化)³⁸ which aims to rid poetry from the rein of rhyme and meter. Although hardly the first to promote free verse in China, Ai Qing articulated his poetic treaty in conversation with many of the debates in the literary scene, personally experimenting with some of its principles he learned during his time in

³⁷ “你悲哀的诗人呀，也应该拂去往日的忧郁。” Ai Qing, *Quanji* 3, 649.

³⁸ Ai Qing, *Quanji* 3, 64.

Yan'an. His "On Poetry", "The Beauty of Prose in Poetry", "Poetry and its Time", "Poetry and Propaganda" etc. were written during the onset of the Sino-Japanese War and during his wartime stint in Yan'an. Although they were filled with nationalism and militant patriotism, they also present intriguing views, often in negotiation with the intellectual debates of his time. For instance, Ai Qing resumed some of the discourses from May Fourth Movement by underscoring the importance of "truth, goodness, and beauty" (真善美) in creating poetry. Influenced by his education in Yan'an, Ai Qing saw artistic creation as a kind of labor (劳动). Using words like "bitter labor" (苦役), "training" (训练), and "conscription" (服役), Ai Qing believes that writing poetry is akin to physical exertion.³⁹

Ai's theoretical writings on poetry from 1930s to 1950s focus predominantly on poetry as a revolutionary tool which has the potential to saturate common people's life and galvanize them to a higher cause. However, Ai Qing offers his views on the role of "emotion" and the lyrical in poetic creation in one of his earliest writings:

"No matter what happens, human beings have not come to a place where they can live without emotions; it follows that, the 'lyrical' (*shuqing*) exists in poetry just like 'emotion' (*qinggan*) exists among human beings --- it is a permanent thing.

Some people misunderstand 'lyrical' as 'sentimental', thus conflating 'sentimentalism' as a synonym for 'lyricism'. This is a result of the universal waning of old intellectuals' mind after this century's arduous suppression."⁴⁰

³⁹ Ibid, 39.

⁴⁰ "人类无论如何都不至于临到了一个可以背弃情感而生活的日子；既然如此，'抒情'在诗里存在，讲有如'情感'之在人类中存在，——是永久的。

有人误解'抒情的'即是'感伤的'，所有有了'感伤主义'的同义词'抒情主义'的称呼。这是由于在世纪的苦闷压抑下，旧知识分子普遍地感到心理衰惫的结果。" Ai Qing, *Quanjia* 3, 14.

Although the word “lyric” (*shuqing*) seems to fade out in his wartime theoretical writings, the lyrical, for Ai Qing, is inseparable from poetic creation itself. This is confirmed in a piece of his much later writing in 1980s, in which he talks about his views on lyric poetry and narrative poetry. Claiming that lyric poems cannot exist without “emotion” (*qing*) which is a poet’s “inner activities”, Ai Qing again situates emotions at the center of poetic creation.⁴¹ He then moves on to talk about narrative poetry, which he equates with epic poems. Using his own poems as examples, Ai Qing candidly admits some of his narrative poems as failures --- nothing more than “rhyming reportage.”⁴² He further concludes that these failures mean that narrative poems need lyrical “ingredient”.⁴³ From here, one can glimpse into the fact that, although Ai Qing distinguishes between the categories of lyric and epic poems, these categories are more or less malleable, sometimes permeating each other. The lyric, thus, is less of an established genre for Ai Qing, but a secret “ingredient”, an essential expressive mean for a poet.

Ai Qing’s view on the lyric, malleable as it might be, falls partially in line with view of the lyric as revolutionary romanticism from the May Fourth generation, oftentimes conflated with Western lyricism.⁴⁴ The latter, moreover, is almost ubiquitously associated with Romanticist view of selfhood and self-expression centered on poets’ interiority. However, in both Western and Chinese literary history, lyric poetry has a wide range of connotations beyond the pervasive Romantic model. Providing a critical etymology of the word *shuqing*, David Wang shows that Chinese lyricism has always pointed toward a relationship between “the self and the world and beyond.”⁴⁵ Reading works of Chinese literati from the premodern times, Wang sums

⁴¹ Ibid, 644.

⁴² Ibid, 645.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Wang, 2.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

up the discourse of *shuqing* as not only associated with selfhood, but also pedagogy, social discourses and sometimes therapeutic treatment. This, in fact, resonates with the lyric tradition in Ancient Greek, where, as Jonathan Culler points out, the lyric is regarded as an epideictic discourse, a “rhetoric of praise or blame, focused on what is to be valued.”⁴⁶ Moreover, standing at the center of Culler’s theory of the lyric, regardless of era or national convention, is what he calls “triangulated apostrophe”, a lyric address “to the reader by means of addressing to something or someone else.”⁴⁷ Therefore, lyric poetry, a genre that is commonly linked with selfhood, interiority and introspection, in fact, prefigures a kind of outwardness and an intricate nebulae of the poet, the readers, the addressee, and the world.

In his widely discussed lecture “Lyric Poetry and Society”, Adorno proposes the striking argument that “precisely that which is not social in a poem should become its social aspect.”⁴⁸ Discussing Eduard Mörike’s and Stephen George’s works, Adorno regards their seeming disengagement as having the potential of generating utopian discourse and thus criticism of the society. Bringing sociality to the discussion of lyric poetry adds much-needed nuances to the common representation of lyric speakers as “musing in solitude,”⁴⁹ but at the same time, precisely because the definition of lyric poetry has been broadened in recent years, one might begin to wonder not “what is lyric poetry”, but “what is not lyric poetry”. Following Ai Qing’s own musing on the lyric being an “ingredient”, this thesis suggests regarding lyric poetry not merely as a genre, but a mode of expression and articulation, capable of producing affective effects.

⁴⁶ Jonathan Culler, *Theory of the Lyric* (Harvard University Press, 2015), 3.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 186.

⁴⁸ Adorno, *The Adorno Reader* (Blackwell, 2000), 217.

⁴⁹ M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (Cengage Learning, 2015), 202.

It is, nonetheless, important to set out some parameters for the mode of the lyric which will aid with analysis of Ai Qing's and Neruda's poems. Following Culler's wonderfully written *Theory of the Lyric*, we can define lyric poetry in at least four dimensions. The first is the aforementioned "triangulated apostrophe", which involves the lyric speaker, the addressee, and the readers. It follows that voice is a vital precondition for the lyric mode. However, "voice" does not simply refer to the voice of the lyric speaker, but, as Culler argues, lyrics "create effects of voicing, of aurality,"⁵⁰ which are manifested in some of the analytical dimensions such as rhyme, rhythm, assonance and alliteration. Secondly, Culler emphasizes that lyric poetry is itself an event, not a mimetic representation of one. As we will see in the second chapter, Ai Qing's poems did present characters or even actions, but as Culler makes clear, actions and characters are "enlisted in nonmimetic enterprises" in lyric poetry.⁵¹ Actions or even narrations are essentially embedded in a nonmimetic frame in lyric poetry. Following the claim that lyric poetry is an event in itself is the third parameter, the ritualistic dimension of the lyric. By using refrains, repetition or parallelism, lyric poems often invite the readers or the listeners to be part of the discourse. Culler enlists a fourth dimension, hyperbole, which originates from Baudelaire's remark that "hyperbole and apostrophe are the two forms of language which are not only most necessary but most pleasing in lyric."⁵² This can manifest in the most blatant way, such as Neruda's famous line "I can write the saddest verses tonight" or Ai Qing's vatic invocation of the goddess in "On the Promontory of Chile", which will be discussed in chapter three; or sometimes it can be a mundane observation elevated to the status of divine epiphany, like in William Carlos Williams' "so much depends / upon / a red wheel / barrow".

⁵⁰ Culler, *Theory of the Lyric*, 35. Italics mine.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid, 38.

With these parameters in mind, the next section analyzes Neruda's and Ai Qing's earlier poems, "Dead Gallop" and "The Sick Watch". These two poems were chosen in part because of their representativeness of the two young poets' earlier works, in part because of their common influence from French modernist poetry. To connect the two poets with their common influence of Arthur Rimbaud seems a facile observation, but the lasting marks of French modernist poetry left on the two poets' early works and common themes of death and regeneration add intriguing layers to their works.

"Dead Gallop" and "The Sick Watch"

"Dead Gallop" ("Galope Muerto") is one of the most celebrated poem in Neruda's *Residencia en la Tierra* (*Residence on Earth*), a collection of poems that he wrote during his stint as a diplomat in Ceylon and Malay, where he felt estranged and isolated as a foreigner. It is, thus, a poem that at first glance seems to be the production of an archetypical lonely lyric speaker:

Como cenizas, como mares poblándose,
en la sumergida lentitud, en lo informe,
o como se oyen desde el alto de los caminos
cruzar las campanadas en cruz,
teniendo ese sonido ya parte del metal,
confuso, pesando, haciéndose polvo
en el mismo molino de las formas demasiado
lejos,
o recordadas o no vistas,
y el perfume de las ciruelas que rodando a tierra
se pudren en el tiempo, infinitamente verdes.

Like ashes, like seas inhabiting themselves,
In the sunken slowness, in formlessness,
or like hearing, high on the road,
chimes of bell crossing in a cross.
Beholding that sound already free of metal,
Blurred, labored, turning to dust.
The same mill of forms so far away,
whether remembered or not seen.
And the fragrance of plums rolling to the earth
That rot in time, infinitely green

Aquello todo tan rápido, tan viviente,
inmóvil sin embargo, como la polea loca en sí
misma,
esas ruedas de los motores, en fin.
Existiendo como las puntadas secas en las
costuras del árbol,
callado, por alrededor, de tal modo,
mezclando todos los limbos sus colas.
Es que de dónde, por dónde, en qué orilla?
El rodeo constante, incierto, tan mudo,
como las lilas alrededor del convento,
o la llegada de la muerte a la lengua del buey
que cae a tumbos, guardabajo, y cuyos cuernos
quieren sonar.

Por eso, en lo inmóvil, deteniéndose, percibir,
entonces, como aleteo inmenso, encima,
como abejas muertas o números,
ay, lo que mi corazón pálido no puede abarcar,
en multitudes, en lágrimas saliendo apenas,
y esfuerzos humanos, tormentas,
acciones negras descubiertas de repente
como hielos, desorden vasto,
oceánico, para mí que entro cantando,
como con una espada entre indefensos.

All that is so swift, so lively,
not moving nonetheless, like a pulley spinning
madly by itself,
these wheels in motors, in short.
Existing like the dry stitches on the seams of a
tree,
quiet, all around, in such a way,
all the limbos mixing up their tails.
But from where, to where, on what shore?
The incessant, uncertain whirl, so silent.
Like the lilacs growing besides the convent,
or the arrival of death upon the tongue of the ox,
who stumbled down, unguarded, and whose
horns want to sound.

That's why, in the immobility, stopping oneself,
to perceive,
and then, like an immense fluttering of wings,
overhead,
like dead bees or numbers.
Oh, all this my drained heart cannot hold,
In multitudes, in half-shed tears
And human toiling, tormenting,
Black actions suddenly exposed
Like ice, boundless disorder,

Ahora bien, de qué está hecho ese surgir de
palomas
que hay entre la noche y el tiempo, como una
barranca húmeda?
Ese sonido ya tan largo
que cae listando de piedras los caminos,
más bien, cuando sólo una hora
crece de improviso, extendiéndose sin tregua.

Adentro del anillo del verano
una vez los grandes zapallos escuchan,
estirando sus plantas conmovedoras,
de eso, de lo que solicitándose mucho,
de lo lleno, oscuros de pesadas gotas.

Like ocean, for me who goes in singing,
Like a sword among the defenseless.

Well then, what is it that makes this rising of
doves,
That fly between night and time, like a damp
ravine?
This drawn-out sound
That falls lining the road with stones,
Better yet, when only one hour
Grows unexpectedly, extending endlessly.

Inside the ring of summer,
Once, the huge calabashes listen,
Stretching out their compassionate stems.
Out of that, out of which seeks so much from
itself,
Out of the fullness, darkened with their heavy
drops. ⁵³

Rallying up visual, aural and olfactory sensations, the first stanza, which lacks a clear voice of the poet or the object at hand, invokes imageries of death, birth and regeneration. Like the title “Dead Gallop”, the poem is full of contradictions and antithesis. The action of “gallop” is frozen in death; constant movement and cycle of life are pitted against lethargy and decadence.

⁵³ My translation, cross-referenced with John Felstiner’s translation (1978). Any mistake is on my part.

The many pairs of paradoxes in the poem have been noted in previous scholarships. John M. Bennett, for instance, points out the binaries between fire and water, emptiness and fullness, silence and sound in his “Estructuras antitéticas en ‘Galope muerto’ de Pablo Neruda”.⁵⁴ In my analysis, I focus specifically on the voice and voicing of the lyric speaker, concept of cyclical time and how they shed light on Neruda’s attitude toward life and responsibilities as a poet.

What makes “Dead Gallop” notoriously difficult to interpret and translate is its chaotic syntax and the lack of a clear voice. There does not seem to be a clear voice in the first stanza, but instead, as John Felstiner notes, the lines are given as a riddle that describes the characteristics of an object⁵⁵ --- what is formless but sounds like a bell? What possesses traits of both water and fire? On the level of voicing, moreover, the syntax and the rhythm also create a somewhat chaotic structure in the poem. Lacking a subject, the first stanza utilizes a lot of passive tense structure (“poblándose”, “se oyen”, “haciéndose”), which resonates with the references to self-enclosed, cyclical structures in later stanzas. The rapid movement from one image to another and from one state to another separated by “o” (or), moreover, creates a staccato-like rhythm that does not seem to comply to any conventional rhythmic pattern.

Even though the riddle-like object remains obscure in the next two stanzas, depictions of movements such as the spinning of the wheel or “lilac growing besides the convent” hints at a progression from chaos to growth, from voicelessness to sound. The images of the circle are vital in “Galope muerto”, especially with regard to conception of time in the poem. Images such as “pulley”, “wheel”, “whirl” and “ring” underscore the impression of a cyclical temporality.

⁵⁴ John M. Bennett, "Estructuras antitéticas en" Galope muerto" de Pablo Neruda." *Revista Hispánica Moderna* 38.3 (1974): 103-114.

⁵⁵ John Felstiner, "Translating Pablo Neruda's" Galope muerto"." *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* (1978): 185-195.

However, instead of seeing the cyclical temporality as a nightmarish construct of which the poet cannot rid himself, I would argue that the poet, in fact, hints at some degree of growth and resolution by emphasizing the function of poetic voice itself. In the final two lines of the second stanza, the tongue of the ox is visited by death --- a sign of muteness, while the ox's horn "wants to sound". Nonetheless, the inanimate horn itself is voiceless, unless sculpted and played by some other entities. Thus finally enter the poet's voice and perspective in the third stanza--- enters "I". The poet's heart cannot understand the chaos "like dead bees or numbers", the images of which invokes the dying of sound, the incrementation and the passing of time. Out of the "boundless disorder", however, comes the "singing" of the poet, like "a sword among the defenseless".

The contrast between the chaos, the aphasia of the vast ocean and a "singing" that aims to break the chaos is a recurrent theme, appearing later in Neruda's letter to the Asia-Pacific Peace Conference. Here in the poem, some degree of clarity finally emerges, with the poet's voice entering the chaos and the defenseless. In the final two stanzas, the poet's voice is obscured once again, but a sense of growth within the cyclical time ("inside the ring of the summer") and compassion stand in contrast with the initial chaos from the first stanza. As Bennett argues, disintegration / destruction and integration form as much a contradiction as a "complementary and unified reality" in this poem.⁵⁶

When "Galope muerto" was first published in 1925, critics from literary magazine point out similarity between Neruda and Rimbaud.⁵⁷ A few years later in 1929, Ai Qing, as a young fine arts student in Paris, started to engross himself in Russian modernist poetry and Francophone

⁵⁶ Ibid, "... una realidad complementaria y total", 103.

⁵⁷ Felstiner, 185.

poetry, such as the works of Belgium poet Émile Verhaeren. It was not until Ai was put in prison in 1933, however, that he started to read and immerse himself in the Rimbaudian universe. Six years Neruda's junior, Ai Qing started out as an aspiring painter and did not officially begin his career as a poet until he was arrested and imprisoned for participating in leftist movement in Shanghai. Some of Ai Qing's poems written in his prison cell speak to the Francophone poets that he admired, the freedom and the thrill of pursuing beauty that he felt in Paris. Suffering from pneumonia in his cell, Ai Qing wrote "The Sick Watch" (病监), a poem replete with religious connotations and imageries of permeating sweetness and degeneration:

我肺结核的暖花房呀。⁵⁸

My pneumonic greenhouse!

绷纱布为芙蓉花。

The bandages are hibiscus flowers.

而蕴有醉人的气息；

Saturated with redolent smells;

死神震翼的逡巡着你，

Death watches over you with its fluttering

蜜蜂般嗡嗡的是牧姆的弥撒。

wings,

清晨的露珠，

The priest's mass is the buzzing of bees.

遂充做亡人额上的圣水。

The morning dew,

would be the holy water on the forehead of

the dead man.

⁵⁸ “花房” has more than one meaning: the first refers to a type of red rose multiflora, which is highly resistant to diseases; the second and the more obvious one is a greenhouse, or literally a flower house. Judging from the use of “暖”(warm), I translated it as “greenhouse” here.

铁栅为乔木的林子般丛簇，
铁栅是我们和人世的界线。
人将说：“我们都是拥抱着
我们的痛苦的基督。”
我们伸着两片红唇，
吮吻我们心中流出的脓血。

脸上浮起 Pompei 的云彩了；
于是牧姆把寒热表，
插进了我的火山口。

黑猫无声地溜过时，
人们忙于收殓死者的卧榻了。

我肺结核的暖花房呀；
那里在 150° 的温度上，
从紫丁香般的肺叶，
我吐出了艳凄的红花。

Iron fences cluster together like trees in the
wood.
Iron fences are the boundary between us and the
world.
People will say: “We are all Christ
embracing our own pain.”
We offer up our two red lips,
kissing and sucking out blood from our hearts.

Ash clouds from Pompei rise up on my face;
So the priest sticks the thermometer
in my volcanic mouth.

When the black cat sneaks by without a sound,
People are busy tidying up the dead man's abode

My pneumonic greenhouse!
In temperature of 150 degree,
From my lilac lungs,
I cough out red desolate flowers.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Ai Qing, *Quanji* 1, 58.

The dying patient's bloodied gauze is compared with hibiscus flower, "saturated with redolent smells"; the morning dew that covers his forehead is the holy water meant for the dying men. From his "lilac lungs", the patient spits out "desolate red flowers". The prison cell is thus transformed into a space of sweet smells and pious sounds, the patient's bodily fluids into imageries of flowers. As if already envisioning his actual death, Ai Qing depicts his cell as a death bed surrounded by sounds of humming masses and smells of funeral bouquets. The religious association and the saturation of smells are reminiscent of Rimbaud's "First Communion" and Baudelaire's "A Martyr", the former of whom Ai Qing continued to read thanks to a friend smuggling books to him during prison visits. The first stanza, which is also a stand-alone verse, "my pneumonic greenhouse", at first glance seems to imply the location of the poet. However, upon closer reading, the "greenhouse" is not so much the cell that confines Ai Qing but his body, where flowers unnaturally blossom and morning dew appears because of the sickness.

Compared to "Galope muerto", the voice in "The Sick Watch" is clearer, but the switching of pronouns and the ambiguity of the addressee makes the poem equally intriguing. The pronoun changes from the first person to the second person in the second stanza --- Death surrounds "you", who hears the sound of the priest on the death bed. Instead of addressing the readers, however, the second person pronoun in this stanza creates the impression that the lyric speaker is looking at and talking to himself, almost like an out-of-the-body experience of a dying, delirious man. There is an anticipation for death in the second stanza, supposedly unrealized, yet paradoxically finalized in the image of "the dead man".

The switch to "we" in the third stanza is initiated to include the collective subjects that are separated from the world by the iron fences. However, exactly who are invoked blatantly

here as martyrs can have multiple interpretations: Ai's inmates, or perhaps more broadly, those who are just like him, who are wrongly jailed for fighting for their beliefs. Following the second addressee in the last stanza, moreover, the "we" here can be interpreted as a collective of the "split" poet(s), the lyric speaker and the "dead man" he is envisioning himself to be. If following the latter interpretation, this stanza is a statement of extreme solitude that separates the speaker from the outside world. Inside the cell, there is nothing and no one but the speaker and his dying self. This last interpretation seems counterintuitive, but one can take the intratextual elements into consideration by looking at another poem with a somewhat similar title 监房之夜 "The Night in the Cell", a quatrain following the rhyme pattern of aaba, which was published in literary journal 春光 (*Chunguang*) in 1934.⁶⁰ The two poems are the only ones from this period writing explicitly about the poet's experience of imprisonment and isolation, but "The Sick Watch", in comparison with "The Night in the Cell", seems more experimental and introspective. It does not follow a rhyme pattern, nor are the stanzas conventionally organized. Furthermore, the pronouns are also experimented with and being switched from the first person to "you", "we" and finally, back to "I" in the last stanza, which seem to imitate the delirium state of a sick and dying man.

What makes this poem stand out in Ai Qing's early poems are not only its stylistic innovations, but also the depictions of death as something holy and sweet, and the echoes of French modernist poetry that he was reading at the time. Like "Galope Muerto", "The Sick Watch" galvanizes several sensorial perceptions, such as the olfactory, aural and even tactile senses. By rallying up the sensorium, the poem also presents several contradictions and antitheses. Dying (i. e. "pneumonia") is described through growth ("greenhouse"); smells of

⁶⁰ Ai Qing, *Quanji* 5, 642.

blood and gore is described through smells of fragrant flowers; the sound of mass (the sacred) is compared with the mundane buzzing of bees (the sacrilegious). Further, although not directly referencing the poets writing in French that Ai Qing was reading at the time, the soundless “black cat”, more than anything, is akin to a Beaudelairean artefact, specifically, to the cat from his famous serial poems “Spleen”: “My cat upon the flagstones seeks to make its bed, / Shaking incessantly its body, gaunt and old, / And in the drains there roams a poet long since dead, / Whose melancholy accents tremble in the cold.”⁶¹ Much more sensuous and invoking imageries from French modernist poetry, “The Sick Watch”, compared with his later poems, showcases Ai Qing’s engagement with lyricism in his early poems.

As the above analysis of the two poems shows, both Ai Qing and Neruda engaged with lyric conventions, especially through their reading of French lyric poetry during their youthful moments of isolation or even imprisonment against the background of emerging societal crisis. The chapter, thus, hopes to provide an entry point to the two poets’ historical encounter by situating the two young artists’ early background in French poetry within a broader paradigm of how to approach lyrical-political poems in “epic” time. Having laid out some groundwork on the artists’ commitment to revolutionary causes and some parameters of lyric poetry, the next chapter will turn to the historical events that enabled the encounters and friendship between Ai Qing and Neruda, along with analysis of their poems and political discourse that emphasize the primacy of orality and its tension with literacy.

⁶¹ “Mon chat sur le carreau cherchant une litière / Agite sans repos son corps maigre et galeux; / L’âme d’un vieux poète erre dans la gouttière / Avec la triste voix d’un fantôme frileux.” (Translated by John Tidball) Charles Baudelaire, *Les Fleurs Du Mal* (Bishopston Editions, 2015), 163.

Chapter two The Poetics of Peace: Voice of the Masses in Revolutionary Times

Up until Neruda's first visit in 1951, China and Latin America have sat on two distant continents that barely seem to have any connection. While journeying between China and Latin American countries does seem too arduous prior to the era of air travel, not only were there records of travelers in the 19th century, ⁶² there are also multiple nodes of connections which deserve more attention in the discussion of China-Latin American relation: the coolie trade, the migration of Asian immigrants to Latin America, and more pervasive in scholarships than the former two, the orientalist discourse in Latin American literature. ⁶³ These connections, while quite substantial, do not alter the fact that China and Latin America exist largely as imaginary territories in each other's minds, salvaged from memories and unreliable second-hand accounts. It was not until in the Maoist era, with the backdrop of Cold War ideological battles raging on, that over a thousand Latin American diplomats, students, politicians and writers paid their visits to China. ⁶⁴ Among these travelers, Pablo Neruda was one of the first Latin American intellectuals to visit Beijing.

⁶² Columbian traveler Nicolás Tanco Armero, for instance, wrote *Viaje de Nueva Granada a China y de China a Francia* in 1860. See Rosario Hubert, "Geographical distance and cultural knowledge: writing about China in nineteenth-century Latin America." *452°F: revista de teoría de la literatura y literatura comparada* 13 (2015): 35-49; Kang Youwei visited Mexico in 1906, and upon seeing the indigenous people and their artwork, exclaimed that they seemed to descend from Chinese people ("遗民似是自华来"). Discussed in Huang Zhiliang, 新大陆的再发现[The Rediscovery of a New Continent] (世界知识出版社, 2003).

⁶³ See Rosario Hubert, "Sinology on the Edge: Borges's Reviews of Chinese Literature (1937-1942)." *Variaciones Borges* 39 (2015): 81-101; Amanda, Holmes, "China in Argentine Exotismo: Contemporary Inventions of the Orient." *Bulletin of Spanish Studies* 85.1 (2008): 71-83; Ignacio López-Calvo, ed. *Alternative Orientalisms in Latin America and Beyond* (Cambridge Scholars Pub., 2007).

⁶⁴ William E. Ratliff, "Chinese Communist Cultural Diplomacy toward Latin America, 1949-1960." *The Hispanic American Historical Review*. Vol. 49, No. 1, Feb., 1969, pp. 53-79. Duke University Press.

This chapter centers around the first encounter between Ai Qing and Neruda in 1951, the historical conditions that made possible their meeting, as well as their works produced during this period. It first offers an overview of the historical exchange and communication between China and Latin America, focusing specifically on the early 1950s, before moving on to further contextualize that institutions and events that mobilized artists like Neruda across national boundaries, namely, the peace campaign that asks for millions of signatures and Asia-Pacific Peace Conference in 1952. Turning to one of Ai Qing's poems and Neruda's political discourse, it argues for the primacy of orality and the voice of the common people in Ai Qing's poetic creation, which is echoed in Neruda's conceptualization of "singing" that reaches across the Pacific Ocean.

Overcoming the distance: China and Latin America in the 1950s

Spearheaded by Chinese premier Zhou Enlai, Chinese foreign diplomatic strategies during the early 1950s focused on "people-to-people" rather than "state-to-state" communication.⁶⁵ William Ratliff characterizes these strategies as "propaganda and invitation", denoting the two main ways in which China spread its ideologies and fostered a Third-World solidarity among Latin American countries. ⁶⁶ The first is what he calls "guided tourism", a tactic of the state through which visitors, such as prominent cultural figures like Neruda, Cuban writer Nicolás Guillén and Alejo Carpentier, were guided a by a welcoming party of some of the most

⁶⁵ Teng Wei. 滕威, "边境"之南 拉丁美洲文学汉译与中国当代文学 (1949-1999) [South of the "Border": Latin American Literature in China and Chinese Contemporary Literature (1949-1999)] (Peking University Press, 2011).

⁶⁶ Ratliff, "Chinese Communist Cultural Diplomacy toward Latin America, 1949-1960," 53.

important cultural figures in China and were shown “carefully selected and prepared parts” of the PRC.⁶⁷

The second strategy is the propagation of printing materials. The early years of the 1950s mainly witnessed a lot of political publications, such as the constitution of the PRC and Mao’s writings. After 1957, a communist publishing house based in Uruguay also started publishing literary works, including one of the most important texts of modern Chinese literature, Lu Xun’s *Diaries of a Madman*, as well as the works of many influential Chinese authors such as Ding Ling, Mao Dun and Guo Moruo.⁶⁸ Translations of Chinese fictions such as *The Sun Shines over the Sanggan River* (1948) were published as early as 1948 in Brazil⁶⁹, but in the case of Spanish-speaking countries, it seems that Chinese literatures were translated much later and much less systematically than in the case of Brazil. That is not to say, however, that the presence of China was significantly less in Spanish-speaking Latin American countries than in Portuguese-speaking part. Spanish editions of Chinese journals such as *China Reconstructs*, *Revista de Pekin* (*Beijing Review*), *Ciencia China* (*Chinese Science*), and *Mujer China* (*Chinese Woman*), as well as radio in Spanish about China were in circulation and broadcasted on air throughout the 50s.⁷⁰ Furthermore, Chinese delegations, such as the group of writers sent to Chile to celebrate Neruda’s birthday, or Latin American youth delegates that toured China are evidence of a mutual and vigorous sphere of cultural exchange.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 57.

⁶⁸ Ai Qing, when visiting Chile in 1954, wrote in his travelling diaries that there was a Uruguayan writer and a Brazilian writer who wanted to translate his poetry and publish them in Uruguay and Brazil (Ai Qing, *Lüxing Riji*, 249). However, the name of the publishing house remains obscure.

⁶⁹ Wang Siwei, “Transcontinental Revolutionary Imagination: Literary Translation between China and Brazil (1952-1964).” MA thesis (Columbia University, 2016).

⁷⁰ Victor Alba, “The Chinese in Latin America.” *The China Quarterly* 5 (1961): 53-61.

Going back to Ratliff's account, however, one sees that, informative as it is, his emphasis on "propaganda and invitation" seems to have been constructed from the viewpoint of what he calls the "students of the Latin American scene"⁷¹ and the strategic interest of the United States. Thus, a more holistic understanding of China's efforts at winning over Latin American nations and constructing the nascent Third World requires investigating first the involvement of the institutions from the early 1950s in organizing events that enabled meetings and communications between Chinese and Latin American agents, along with the reasons behind Zhou Enlai and other policy makers' interests in Latin America.

In the heydays of Sino-Soviet relation, conferences, literary prize ceremonies and cultural events were vigorously organized in the name of peace and communist internationalism. On a global scale, World Peace Council (WPC) was established in Warsaw in 1950 during the Second World Peace Congress. Although this massive scale world peace gatherings drew thousands of delegations from countries across Asia, Europe, the Americas and Africa, when put into the political climate of Cold War, WPC was regarded as a conduit of communist ideologies and sometimes the propaganda machines for the Soviet Union.⁷² Works written in Chinese that explore WPC's activities in China are sparse, and the reasons behind this lacuna could be due to Sino-Soviet fall-out in the 1960s which made WPC's branch committee in China a short-lived vision. However, the scope of peace movements and their interconnection with literatures can still be glimpsed from the existing sources. From the fledgling stage of WPC, prominent Chinese writers Guo Moruo and Xiao San were already active participants and committee members. Further, rhetoric of world peace was imbricated in slogans for national and international crisis

⁷¹ Ratliff, "Chinese Communist Cultural Diplomacy toward Latin America, 1949-1960." 53.

⁷² See a discussion of the history of WPC in Jean Franco (2009) and Patrick Iber (2015).

like the Korean War.⁷³ In order to draw readers to the “camp for the defense for world peace”, magazines such as *Defense for Peace* were translated and distributed in China by party writers such as Mao Dun, Ding Ling, and Xiao San.⁷⁴ Within this literary space, many leading writers in the communist camp such as Nazim Hikmet, Anna Seghers, Jorge Amado, and Neruda were introduced as writers advocating for peace to the Chinese readers.

Such circulation of texts and active translation of foreign authors are symptomatic of the milieu of which Nicolai Volland calls “socialist cosmopolitanism”, a force that, as Volland argues, liberates individuals from the “shackles of a narrow and narrow-minded nation state” while also aims to destabilize the hegemonic structure of the Cold War.⁷⁵ It was under this atmosphere of cosmopolitanism that the travelling of texts and the meetings of authors were made possible. The USSR served as a central hub of communication between China and other communist countries in Asia and Easter Europe. Meanwhile, Chinese authorities were actively engaging with socialist countries through a series of work plans that strategized the visits of writers, musicians, and scientists. Under these circumstances, encounters between writers were state-regulated, and private contacts were discouraged.⁷⁶ The PRC’s initial contact with Latin America could be said to have been mediated through the influence of the USSR in many ways. For instance, translations of Latin American author’s works were often dependent on Soviet

⁷³ See for instance, Ai Qing’s poem “I Signed on the Appeal to Peace” to be discussed later.

⁷⁴ Yang Lijun 杨丽君, “保卫世界和平运动: 东方阵营应对西方冷战的意识形态行为”[“In Defense of World Peace: the Eastern Bloc’s Ideological Actions Toward the West in Cold War”]. *Heilongjiang Social Sciences* 136.1(2013): 133-138.

⁷⁵ Nicolai Volland, *Socialist cosmopolitanism: the Chinese literary universe, 1945-1965* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 20.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 23.

literary magazines. Latin American authors' trips to China were often a gateway passage to the "Mecca" of their tour of the socialist world, Moscow.⁷⁷

However, although the USSR serves an important role in facilitating the initial meetings of Chinese and Latin American intellectuals, on a domestic level, interaction between China and Latin America seems to enjoy more autonomy and freedom. Zhou Enlai, who served as Chinese premier and the minister of foreign affair since the founding of the PRC, emphasized that in order to open up opportunities with Latin American countries, a "people-to-people" diplomatic strategy should be deployed first. This attitude was summarized into a 16-character "formula", of which Zhou often masterfully coined throughout his diplomatic career: Seek commonality, allow differences; trickling water lasts longer; don't cower nor disdain; foster friendships (求同存异, 细水长流, 不卑不亢, 发展友谊).⁷⁸ What is more surprising is the straightforward directions given by officials from the Waishi (foreign affairs) office claiming that "there is no restriction on who you can meet. Anyone who wishes to visit China can be invited without asking for permission".⁷⁹ This strangely relaxed attitude could be related to the ambiguous position at which Latin America lied in the PRC's diplomatic agenda. Although itself a battlefield of cultural Cold War, Latin America was not an urgent strategic area to win over nor did it pose immediate threats to the PRC as some of the Asian and East European socialist states might due to their affiliations with the USSR. Taken into consideration the combined factors such as distance, ideological ambivalence, or the fact that the communist parties within Latin America

⁷⁷ See for instance Neruda's third trip and Nicolás Guillén's visit. Guillén's biographer focuses almost exclusively on his trip to Moscow and glosses over Beijing. See Ángel Augier, *Nicolás Guillén: estudio biográfico-crítico* (Havana: Unión de Escritores y Artistas de Cuba, 1984).

⁷⁸ Huang, Zhiliang. 黄志良. 新大陆的再发现[The Rediscovery of a New Continent] (北京: 世界知识出版社, 2003), 52.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 61.

had not shown overt inclination to the “Soviet way” before Sino-Soviet split⁸⁰, a relatively moderate and relaxed attitude was adapted toward Latin America

As events in the 1950s unfolded, the regions of Latin America galvanized wider interests from the Chinese authorities who wished to establish more direct connections, gradually more independent of USSR and the constraints of Cold War polarity. For instance, conferences, political campaigns and cultural events served as grounds on which initial contacts and conversations came into form for the first time. The next section turns to the peace campaigns and movements in which Neruda and Ai Qing were involved as the setting of their first encounter.

Neruda’s visit in China and Asia-Pacific Peace Conference

Invited to the Stalin Peace Prize ceremony, Neruda arrived in Beijing on September 15, 1951 and was welcomed by politicians and writers like Song Qingling, Guo Moruo and Mao Dun.⁸¹ The peace prize was to be awarded to Song Qingling, “the most respected female personality of the day” in Neruda’s words. More importantly, Neruda met with Ai Qing, “the prince of Chinese poets”, with whom he quickly built rapport among other members of the welcoming party.⁸²

Prior to his visit in 1951, there had already been translations of Neruda’s works and various news articles in mainland China about his political dedications. Neruda’s first translated work was introduced to Chinese readers in 1950, by the name of “让那伐木者醒来吧,” or “Let

⁸⁰ Cecil Johnson, *Communist China & Latin America, 1959-1967* (Columbia University Press, 1970), 129-180.

⁸¹ Neruda, *Memoir*, 206.

⁸² *Ibid*, 208.

the Rail Splitter Awaken”. Neruda’s introduction to China marks an important moment in the translation of Latin American literatures as the start of a more systematic endeavor to “import” more works from this formerly unfamiliar continent. Prior to 1950s, the only introduction of Latin American literatures was initiated by Mao Dun, who published Rubén Darío’s “Queen Mab’s Veil” in *Fiction Monthly*. With the publication of “Let the Rail Splitter Awaken”, more and more Latin American authors were introduced in journals such as *Yiwen* (译文, later re-named *World Literature*). During the height of his popularity, Neruda was featured at least six times in *Yiwen*.⁸³

However, the principal role that Neruda undertook in his 1951 visit is not so much a visiting writer but a politician and a diplomat. Having received the International Peace Prize awarded by World Peace Council (WPC) together with Pablo Picasso and Paul Robeson in 1950, Neruda was active in events promoting international communism and was frequently invited to ceremonies such as the Stalin Peace Prize, most of which were organized by the USSR. Although Chinese cultural diplomacy span to a different direction after Sino-Soviet split in the late 1950s, the influence of the USSR in the facilitation of a multitude of cultural and diplomatic events during the early 50s was still preeminent. One of the most important institutions that determined the series of cultural events in the early 50s was the World Peace Council, a front organization of the USSR that promotes anti-capitalist ideologies through cultural and artistic events.⁸⁴ The WPC had a branch committee in China, “中国人民保卫世界和平大会委员会”(the Committee of China for the Defense of Peace). Following the guidance of the WPC, the branch committee in China was responsible for a series of events such as cultural conferences

⁸³ Volland, 178.

⁸⁴ See Jean Franco (2009).

that brought intellectuals together, ceremonies that commemorated “world celebrities” (世界文化名人) such as Victor Hugo and José Martí, and a series of literary and political prizes awarded to artists such as Paul Robeson, Picasso, and Qi Baishi.⁸⁵

Being a committee member of the WPC, Neruda attended the award ceremony celebrating the achievements of Song Qingling. Nonetheless, during his stay in China, Neruda was not all uncritical of what he saw. In his autobiography, Neruda claims that Chinese people are people who like to smile the most in the world⁸⁶, but there are two kinds of smiles: the smiles of farmers or ordinary people and the smiles of bureaucrats. He was also aware of the reality behind “propaganda and invitation”, knowing that resources must have been in dire demand after only the second year of the revolution, but this was meticulously masked during their visits in Beijing. Although he only stayed in China for no more than a few days during the titular first visit, Neruda’s political activities and influence extended to 1952, when the first Asia-Pacific Peace Conference was held in Beijing.



Figure 1. Neruda with Song
Qingling. Photo credit obscure.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Yang, 134.

⁸⁶ Neruda, *Obras Completas*, 628. “El pueblo chino es uno de los más sonrientes del mundo”

⁸⁷ Image found on Tencent Culture, <https://cul.qq.com/a/20141111/025614.htm>. Accessed May 11, 2020.



Figure 2. Pictures of committee members from the APC bulletin. Neruda is the first on the third row. Author's photo. Guangzhou Library archive. ⁸⁸

Although he could not attend the conference in person as he was returning to Chile after a stint of exile, Neruda was nominated as one of the vice-presidents on the contacting committee, among Song Qingling, Guo Moruo and Turkish Poet Nazim Hikmet, etc. Although his involvement in the conference was not conspicuous, his prestige, together with the assistance of his painter friend, fellow Chilean, José Venturelli, helped draw over 150 representatives from 11 Latin American countries, including Chile, Colombia, Panama, and Guatemala. Among the 150 representatives from Latin America, Chilean diplomat, D'Amesti carried a letter from Neruda and hoped to meet with Zhou Enlai. As the personal representative of Chilean president Carlos Ibáñez del Campo, D'Amesti did not simply go to Beijing to attend the conference. The priority on his agenda was to strike a trade deal between China and Chile. With the foundation laid by Zhou Enlai in establishing the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade, the first trade deal between China and a Latin American country was struck with Chile during the meeting of Zhou and D'Amesti. ⁸⁹ While some might doubt the power of a letter from a poet, the publicity of Neruda's 1951 visit undeniably helped with smoothing the process of striking a deal between two formerly unfamiliar countries. Besides the trade deal, the first "Friendship

⁸⁸ Bulletin of the Peace Conference of the Asian and Pacific Region (Beijing, 1952)

⁸⁹ Matthew D. Rothwell, *Transpacific revolutionaries: the Chinese revolution in*

Latin America. Vol. 10 (Routledge, 2013), 20.

Association” between China and a Latin American country was also founded with the help of Neruda and his friend, Venturelli. These friendship associations mainly helped negotiate trade deals between China and Latin American countries, organize visits of diplomats and non-state actors across the Pacific Ocean.⁹⁰

More concretely, the Asia-Pacific Peace Conference that was held in the following year in 1952 drew over 150 delegates from Latin America. It was the first large-scale international conference held in new China, but, being overshadowed by the later Geneva and Bandung conferences, it has received little attention in both English and Chinese scholarship. Nonetheless, the conference is significant in that it drew over 150 delegates from Latin American countries, a curious outcome considering the day and age. As Rachel Leow argues in her recent research, the presence of these Latin American delegates that constituted over 20 percent of the total participants “defies conventional historical trajectories of Third World Internationalism”⁹¹, in which Latin America was only considered part of the Third World after Havana Tricontinental Conference in 1966.⁹²

While Neruda could not personally attend the conference, he sent his congratulatory speech which was read during the opening ceremony. Meanwhile, Ai Qing, being affiliated with Chinese Authors’ Association, welcomed Turkish poet Nazim Hikmet, who was also on the committee board of the APC. “To Hikmet”⁹³ is dedicated to the Turkish national poet who had

⁹⁰ Ibid, 19-20. For a discussion on José Venturelli, see Matthew Rothwell. "Secret agent for international Maoism: José Venturelli, Chinese informal diplomacy and Latin American Maoism." *Radical Americas* 1.1 (2016), 44-62.

⁹¹ Rachel Leow, "A missing peace: the Asia-Pacific Peace Conference in Beijing, 1952 and the emotional making of third world internationalism." *Journal of World History* (2019), 24.

⁹² For a discussion of the agenda and legacies of the Havana Tricontinental, see Manuel Barcia, “Locking Horns with the Northern Empire: Anti-American Imperialism at the Tricontinental Conference of 1966 in Havana”, *Journal of Transatlantic Studies* 7.3 (2009): 208-217.

⁹³ Ai Qing, *Quanji* 2, 94.

been imprisoned by his government for over 12 years, an experience that Ai Qing could easily relate to:

你坐在铁窗的旁边，
静听世界在疾步前进——
斯大林格勒的炮火，
中国士兵的脚步声……

You sit beside the iron-barred window,
Quietly listening to the world marching on--
Gunfires in Stalingrad,
Footsteps of Chinese soldiers....

在黑暗的十二年里，
燃烧着希望的烈火；
你的诗句像火焰，
照耀在土耳其的夜空……

In twelve years of darkness,
the fire of hope burns;
your verses, like flames,
shine in the night sky of Turkey...

A Soviet-trained poet, Nazim Hikmet continued to write poems in prison that were subsequently published in the USSR and in China. After only the second year of his release, Hikmet's appearance at Asia-Pacific Peace Conference was well-received in the Chinese press and he was among the eleven vice-presidents on the board of the APC alongside Neruda and other iconic figures such as Guo Moruo and James Gareth Endicott. ⁹⁴ The poem "To Hikmet" was written on October 3, the second day of the APC. More than 350 representatives from 37 countries attended the conference. ⁹⁵ Although a much smaller turnout than World Peace Congress held in Warsaw or Paris, the APC was the first large-scale international conference to be held in China since the founding of the PRC in 1949.

⁹⁴ Canadian missionary who was born in Sichuan. Sympathizer of the communist cause. He later headed the branch committee of WPC in Canada.

⁹⁵ Leow tallies the number at 400+ while the APC bulletin says +350. The discrepancy could be due to some of the participants' late arrivals.

Such initial attempts of an international conference with the Korean War as backdrop were not without concomitant difficulties. During the planning stage of the conference, many liaison members from Latin America could not arrive at China in time because of the distance and troubled journey.⁹⁶ Further, overlooked or glossed over in most historical accounts of the APC is the problem of translation. According to a first-hand witness account written by Lü Wanru, who worked as a translator during the conference, there was not a single person who could conduct simultaneous Spanish interpretation in Beijing, so the conference committee employed interpreters from the UK, many of whom worked for International Brigades during the Spanish Civil War.⁹⁷ Thus the communication between Chinese and Spanish speakers was achieved through the mediation of English. This in turn prompted Zhou Enlai to establish the first Spanish language department in a Chinese university, namely, Beijing Foreign Language University (北京外国语大学).⁹⁸

Although the language barrier remained, it did not stop Lü from resonating and empathizing with the guests from the other side of the Pacific Ocean. The speech given by the delegate from Panama, Carlos Francisco Chang Marín, who was of Chinese and Creole descent, was particularly impressive to her, as his especially “Chinese-like” face grasped her attention immediately. ⁹⁹ The country of which she had no previous knowledge somehow seemed closer to heart. Chang Marín opened his speech by saying: “We’re late. We’re only here because we

⁹⁶ 亚洲及太平洋区域和平会议筹备会议 [*The Preparatory meeting for the Planning of Asia-Pacific Peace Conference*] (北京: 世界知识出版社, 1952), 42.

⁹⁷ Lü Wanru, 吕宛如. 忆亚洲及太平洋区域和平会议. [*Remembering the Asia-Pacific Peace Conference*], *百年潮(Bainianchao)*: 2012(4): 34-39.

⁹⁸ Teng, 14.

⁹⁹ Lü, 34.

crossed several continents, overcoming the obstacles set by the intelligence agency of the United States and the threats of our own government.”¹⁰⁰ He went on to compare Panama as the “white-haired girl” of Latin America, invoking an image of the martyr whose hair turns white overnight under feudal oppression. While this could very likely have been the wittiness of the translator ¹⁰¹, the metaphor of “white-haired girl” is so effective that Lü still remembers it vividly after almost 60 years. Events like this, thus, provide an affective space, a sense of community, or as Rachel Leow contends, a cathartic function for their participants. ¹⁰² The next section zooms in on Ai Qing’s and Neruda’s works to further investigate such construction of community and its voices.

Re-enacting Voice: “I Signed on the Appeal to Peace” and Neruda’s letter

Starting from 1950, Ai was among the several cultural workers that went on a tour propagating “the defense for world peace” across the country, asking for signatures on proposal appealing for peace. ¹⁰³ Answering the call made by World Peace Council, this campaign turned into a massive nation-wide movement, with overweening ambitions like obtaining a million signatures within a single municipal district in Guangdong Province.¹⁰⁴ This emphasis on signatures can also be found during Asia-Pacific Peace Conference --- the sheet on which national representatives signed their names was copied, reproduced and distributed in a booklet

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 37. “我们迟到了。因为我们是横跨了几个大陆，克服了美国情报机关的阻挠和本国政府的胁迫才来到这里的”

¹⁰¹ *The White-haired Girl* was touring globally in other countries according to Volland (2017). It’s possible that these delegates had seen or were shown the opera during their stays in Beijing. However, no news of it appeared on *Renmin Ribao* during the time.

¹⁰² Leow, 49-50.

¹⁰³ Ai Qing, *Quanji* 5, 659.

¹⁰⁴ “各地强烈响应扩大和平签名运动号召” (“Different Regions React Enthusiastically to Expanding Peace Signature Movement”), *Renmin Ribao*, August 28, 1950.

published by World Knowledge Publishing House (世界知识出版社), which details the planning of the conference.



Figure 3. Signature of national representatives who attended the APC. Author's photograph. Guangzhou Library Archive. 105

To show his support of world peace movement, Ai wrote “I Signed on the Appeal to Peace” in 1950, which was subsequently published in *Renmin Wenxue* (People's Literature):

在白鸽飞翔的晴空下，
在绿树如海的北京城，
为了响应伟大的号召，
我在和平呼吁书上签名——

Under the clear sky where white doves fly,
In Beijing where verdant trees amass like the
sea,
To answer the great calling,
I signed on the appeal to peace.

¹⁰⁵ 亚洲及太平洋区域和平会议筹备会议 [The Preparatory meeting for the Planning of Asia-Pacific Peace Conference] (北京：世界知识出版社, 1952).

“反对侵略战争！”

“Say no to invasive wars!”

“拥护世界和平！”

“Defend world peace!”

“禁止原子弹！”

“Say no to atomic bomb!”

谁先使用，谁是战犯！”

“Whoever uses is first is a war criminal!”

呼吁书上写满了名字，

The appeal is filled with names,

密密层层像一片森林——

crowded and overflowing like a forest---

一个名字代表一颗心，

Each name represents a heart,

千万颗心都反对战争！¹⁰⁶

Tens of millions of hearts against wars!

...

Juxtaposed with images of a peaceful but enthused Beijing and its people, a world recovering from recent wars, and determined soldiers who signed on the letter using wounded hand, the stanza in quote that contains the popular political slogan of the day is repeated four times throughout the entire poem. Such repetition is far from common in Ai Qing's poems. Its use more than likely lies in the memorability of verses for people at rallies which Ai Qing and his colleagues attended during their nationwide tour. An instruction from the CCP explicitly demanded that, when organizing rallies (宣传活动), it should be emphasized that one is against “invasive war”, instead of simply “say no to war and yes to peace.”¹⁰⁷ The subtle difference here seems to imply that the state is against war of invasion, but not against war waged in the name of defense. Further, the instructions made it clear that such movement was not simply

¹⁰⁶ Ai Qing, *Quanji* 2, 95-97.

¹⁰⁷ “中国保卫世界和平宣传团工作简述” (“A Brief Description of the Propaganda

Committee for Chinese Defense for Peace Movement”, *Remin Ribao*, June 29, 1950.

pacifist in nature. While “wars can be avoided”, people of the world, claim the instructions, “are not afraid of wars” as imperialism will inevitably perish when the wars are waged.¹⁰⁸ The instructions, issued in June 1950, foreshadowed the determination with which Chinese People’s Volunteer Armies marched to the Korean Wars later in October.

However, such militant undertone does not necessarily override the emotional pull with which Ai Qing depicts the scene of people signing on the appeal:

坏了的桥梁刚修复，	Broken bridges have just been repaired,
填平的战壕刚长麦苗；	Wheat has just sprouted by the filled-up
久别的人民刚相会；	trenches;
新生的婴儿刚会微笑；	Long-separated people have just reunited,
	New-born babies have just learned how to smile;
“反对侵略战争！”	“Say no to invasive wars!”
“拥护世界和平！”	“Defend world peace!”
“禁止原子弹！”	“Say no to atomic bomb!
谁先使用，谁是战犯！”	Whoever uses is first is a war criminal!”
荣誉军人负伤的手，	The wounded hand of an honored soldier,
刚把签名的笔放下；	has just put down the signing pen;
一双稚嫩的手马上拿起，	Another pair of fledgling hands picks it up at
写上自己小小的名字……	once,
	Scribbling down their own tiny names……

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.



Figure 4. Ai Qing on his tour of “In defense of World Peace”. Guangzhou Library archive.

Such signature campaigns are often dismissed as mere propaganda while the emotive and cathartic purposes behind these events are overlooked.¹⁰⁹ Ai’s poem, though not a reportage of people’s reaction at the peace rallies, is nonetheless based on his observation touring the country and taking in the reactions of the surrounding crowd. Ai’s Beijing was a city of battered past and hopeful youth, a city recovering from the memories of wars and losses. The inexperienced hands following the hands of a war veteran is an indication of mobilized youth enthusiastic about a brighter future as well as a poignant forecast of young soldiers marching off to the battlefields of the Korean Wars. Ai Qing’s political poems of this era seem to be distinguishable by being more narrative-like, by their orality, and an appeal to the public. For instance, another poem written around this time, “The Tale of a Hidden Gun” (藏枪记) is a long narrative poem about a guerrilla soldier’s mother who hides the guns left by her sons and fights valiantly with Kuomintang agent. That the poem rhymes even in most of the characters’ conversations might indicate that it was meant to be performed or at least read out loud to the public.

¹⁰⁹ Leow, 48.

Upon first glance, Ai's poem "I Signed on the Appeal to Peace" and his poems from the same period are filled with high-spirited imageries of mobilized masses and parallelism of recurrent political slogans of the time that shun one away from analyzing the poem closely. It is a poem, in short, filled with exclamation marks from which the poet's interiority is eclipsed. In a psychological experiment during the Republican period, psychologist Zhang Yaoliang correlated exclamation marks with degree of emotive resonance or power in a comparative study of new Chinese poetry and "universally recognized good poetry", that is, Western poetry.¹¹⁰ Discovering that young Chinese poets used way too many exclamation marks, Zhang lamented the inefficacy of such a maneuver and claimed that it would "scare off" the readers.¹¹¹ Although his methods and results are not scientifically sound by modern standards, Zhang did point out an important layer in new Chinese poetry: the eminence of the sounding voice and its correlation with emotive power. Replete with exclamation marks and heady emotions, Ai's poem, indeed as Zhang describes it, might scare off readers who are attuned to high modernist poetry. But, as Crespi points out in his book *Voices in Revolution: Poetry and the Auditory Imagination in China*, recitational poems should be studied as events, where the sounding voice figures centrally in our analysis of the poems.

Voice, enacted in Chinese folk and commoners, is seen as the "origin of poetry", derived from a "national interiority" by many poets who were renovating Chinese poetry during the first half of the 20th century.¹¹² There still exists, however, the inevitable problematics that, even though poems like Ai Qing's "I Signed on the Appeal to Peace" were meant to be read and

¹¹⁰ John A. Crespi, *Voices in Revolution: poetry and the auditory imagination in modern China* (University of Hawaii Press, 2009), 51.

¹¹¹ Ibid. 52.

¹¹² Ibid, 41.

recited in groups, it is only through writing that they were preserved and read today. Haun Saussy points out that, the studies of oral literature are almost always ancillary to the studies of written records; orality is thus “an inferior, inconsistent shadow of writing”.¹¹³ However, if one sees instead the “authority of written records” as secondary and ancillary to orality, the studies of oral literature provide sites of resistance, or in Saussy’s words, they “perturb” the previous conceptions of the relationship between literacy and orality. Chinese poets and scholars were also aware of the tension between written record and oral performance of poetry. However, in times of national crisis and of needs to mobilize commoners, the sounding voice came to triumph the literary scene of prewar and wartime China. Writer and scholar Zhu Ziqing, for instance, was once dubious about the rising prominence of recitational poetry, but after hearing Ai Qing’s “Dayanhe, My Wet Nurse” read out loud in a poetry recitation, he discovered that “sometimes the same poem, though it may not look at all good, can sound very good”.¹¹⁴

In “I Signed on the Appeal to Peace”, moreover, the repetition of the four lines consisting of political slogans is positioned on an exhortational footing that encourages the participation of the gathering crowds, shouting, chanting and high-spirited denunciation of war crimes. The poem was not intended to inscribe poetic beauty or structure which is designed to give pleasure or generate new meanings during subsequent re-readings. Instead, it aims to engage actively with and construct a unique historical event. Although it captures a historical moment, “I Signed on the Appeal to Peace” is not strictly a narrative poem. In fact, it checks all of the parameters of a lyric poem. An event in itself, the poem or at least some version of it was likely read or chanted during the signature rally and later reproduced in newspaper and literary journals for potential

¹¹³ Haun Saussy, *The ethnography of rhythm: Orality and its technologies* (Fordham Univ Press, 2016), 15.

¹¹⁴ Cited in Crespi, 133.

future reenactments. The ritualistic aspect lies not only in its inscription of an actual historical event, but also in a performative act in the poem: giving “voice” to the voiceless signatures on the appeal to peace. Again, we see the tension between literacy and orality as pointed out by Saussy. The event asked for the consent, the “voice” of the people by asking them to sign their names. A vocally political act thus is paradoxically rendered voiceless by this display of literacy. With this paradox in mind, the exhortational footing consisted of political slogans in Ai Qing’s poem can be regarded as an attempt to recuperate and reenact the voices of the voiceless signatures.

A similar concern with the sounding voice is echoed in Neruda’s congratulatory letter to the Asia-Pacific Peace Conference, written in Spanish and subsequently translated into English at the conference. According to the account provided by one of the first student to study Spanish in the PRC who later became a diplomat, Huang Zhiliang, Neruda’s congratulatory letter in Spanish was passionate and poetic, but once translated into English, it “lost its original poetic flavor and literary appeal”.¹¹⁵ Unfortunately, the original Spanish letter was not included in the bulletin and it is possible that the only extant version is a Chinese translation of the insipid English translation of the original Spanish letter. Nonetheless, Neruda’s vision of a Pacific Ocean world formerly ruptured by the greediness of conquistadors, merchants, and economic exploitation, now united by a “singing” that reaches the souls of ordinary people is preserved in these several rounds of translations:

“For more than a century after the independence of American nations, American people have looked out to the sea and saluted the immense Pacific Ocean, but they saw nothing. They received no answer.

¹¹⁵ Huang, 18.

Nevertheless, like marvelous fruits, the great peoples and the struggling masses have blossomed and progressed, growing on the distant shores of the Pacific Ocean.

The ocean separated us. The ocean became an abyss, drowning and muting the voice of humankind.

It used to be conquistadors searching for blood and treasure who traversed this ocean, alongside the imperialists. They searched and found oil, tin, tea, nitrate, copper, sugar and pearl, but they failed to find the friendship and love of the people. Stentorian cries resounded throughout the seven seas. Cries morphed into words. Words morphed into songs. And the songs turned into weapons, into struggles and victories...”¹¹⁶

The letter opens with the image of the vast and silent Pacific Ocean, prohibitive of any transmission of sounds. “Cries” of the common people, however, concretize into “words” and “songs”. The voice of the common people, thus, itself constantly morphing and transforming, has the transformative power to shape reality. Moving on into a new era, the communication across the Pacific Ocean, according to Neruda, becomes more alive:

“At the old and rusty sea port of Iquique in Chile that exported nitrate, at Guayaquil in Ecuador, at the little sea port of Manzanillo, Mexico, the voice from the other side of the ocean is being listened to wholeheartedly. The words of Mao Zedong are eulogized and disseminated widely in North and South America. People everywhere listen to them with respect and passion.

For us American people, this voice is familiar. It is our own voice. Thus, the voice cannot be separated by the ocean. It traversed the deep vast sea.”¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ *APC Bulletin*, 8-9.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

“The voice from the other side” is seemingly listened to without any difficulty imposed by language barriers or mistranslations. Throughout the sea ports dotting the shores of the Pacific Ocean, the voice of the Other is heard with compassion and respect in Neruda’s imagination. Mao’s writings were indeed translated and circulated in Latin America at the time, especially among left-wing intellectuals. Cuban poet Guillén and Brazilian writer Jorge Amado, for instance, claimed that translations of Mao’s literary guidelines, *Talks at the Yanan Forum on Art and Literature*, were read and discussed in “progressive cultural circles”.¹¹⁸ However, perhaps more importantly, the voice is listened to not only because of its political appeal, but because “it is our own voice.” It seems like a chorus that does not depend on any individual language. It is made possible by imagining the Other as the Self through common experiences of invasion and exploitation. Emphasizing the shared destinies of the peoples from the shores of the Pacific Ocean, Neruda’s congratulatory speech ends with an optimistic note on Asia-Pacific solidarity and a peaceful future: “Let the sea unite us with its endless waves. Let it dissolve the distance and bring together cultures of humankind on the path of peace and creativity.”¹¹⁹ Although it is possible that the Chinese translation of his speech was rendered somewhat plain and trite through the mediation of English, the political and poetic vision in the speech is consistent with his political poems of this period such as those collected in *Canto General*, offering a more panoramic view of the poet’s political aspirations.

The two texts under consideration in this section were produced in the series of related historical events in the early years of 1950s, namely, campaigns and conferences that were held in the name of international peace. Orality and the sounding voice of the masses are given

¹¹⁸ Ratliff, 71.

¹¹⁹ *APC Bulletin*, 9.

primacy in these two texts. In Ai Qing's poem, for instance, he intends to vocalize the silent writing, that is, the signatures that he and his fellow cultural workers were collecting. In a sense, the poem is the archetypical lyrical poem in its attempt to capture a historical event and itself being a recitational event. At the core of Neruda's letter, there is also a paradox between orality and literacy: the letter was meant as a speech, but because Neruda could not personally attend the conference, the letter was likely "given voice" by someone else at the conference while the original voice was so far away. Sound and writing both seemed separated in these two events, but the two poets also try to bring them together in their works. Ai Qing, by inscribing the sound of the masses in "I Signed on the Appeal to Peace"; Neruda, by depicting the transformation of the "cries" of the common people across the Pacific Ocean.

The public, epideictic nature of these two texts, compared to the two poems analyzed in the first chapter, may lead to the question of whether lyricism is subsumed in an "epic" time of internationalism and revolutionary frenzy. While Neruda's *Canto General* (1950) envisions a Latin Americanism of an epic scale and Ai Qing's early 1950s poems are filled with paeans to socialism, I would argue that there still remains space for lyricism in their works, which is incorporated in new ways and negotiated with emerging historical contingencies. It is especially true regarding Ai Qing's journey to Chile and his writings on Neruda, to which I turn in the next chapter.

Chapter Three: Of Waves and Selves: On Ai Qing's journey to Chile

Ai Qing embarked on his journey to Chile on July 1954, three years after his first encounter with Neruda. His journey took him on a tortuous detour in Eastern Europe, Africa and finally South America. On his flight to Brazil, he wrote "It is a Sunny Morning", its tone liberating and anticipatory:

我写过无数痛苦的诗

一边写，一边悲伤

如今灾难总算过去了

我要为新的日子歌唱

I've written countless poems of agony

Writing, and aching

Now calamities are finally over

I will sing for the new beginning ¹²⁰

It is a new era and a new world that Ai was hoping to "sing" for in this poem, not the calamitous past from which he emerged. Indeed, Ai's poems written in his two-month journey allow him to return to some of the motifs in his earlier poems. Observing the changing world around him, Ai offers his perspectives on peregrination and mobility in the new era as well as social criticism of the injustice he witnessed in the various countries that he visited. Perhaps more importantly, the series of poems that he wrote on La Isla Negra where Neruda's house is located offers intriguing insight into Ai Qing's musing over Neruda's conflicting selves and his own identity.

This chapter first starts with an investigation of the Ai Qing's journey: under what circumstances was he invited? How did he perceive his experience in Latin America, as one of the first men from socialist China to tour Brazil and Chile? There is, admittedly, a considerable lacunae regarding research into the two poets' activities in the early 1950s. Neruda, for instance, writes in his autobiography that he would not record the events occurred from 1952 to 1957

¹²⁰ Ai Qing, *Quanji* 2, 163.

because “nothing interesting happened”.¹²¹ Ai Qing is even more elusive due to a lack of writings about his personal life. Luckily, Ai Qing’s travel diary was preserved and published almost half a century after Ai and Neruda’s meeting in Chile. This piece of document is precious not only because of its recording of what Ai Qing witnessed during his trip, but also for reenacting some of the conversations that Ai Qing had with Neruda. Providing a brief overview about Ai Qing’s trip abroad, the first section analyzes his diary and the conversations between the two poets before moving on to the poems that Ai Qing composed on La Isla Negra.

The second section focuses on two poems by Ai Qing and Neruda, “On the Promontory to Chile” and “Ode to a Single Sea”. The first one by Ai Qing was dedicated to Neruda, while in “Ode to a Single Sea”, as my analysis will show, the addressee is much more ambiguous. By juxtaposing these two poems, I do not wish to compare them on a textual level, but to elucidate the power dynamics of this friendship. It is clear that Ai Qing, instead of being eclipsed by such as megastar poet, emerged as a much more exploratory and intriguing figure in their encounters, who offers us a fascinating vignette into Neruda’s inner realm. The chapter finishes with analyses of other poems that Ai Qing composed on La Isla Negra, which is a series of poems inspired by objects from the sea. One of them, in particular, was written in the style of classical Chinese poetry. By combining the analysis of the poems and recent studies on alternative histories of modern Chinese poetry, I hope to end on an exploration of different modes of writing new poetry in socialist China in the final conclusion.

¹²¹ Neruda, *Memoir*, 285.

Ai Qing's journey abroad and his *Travel Diary (Lüxing Riji)*

Travelling with Xiao San 萧三 and Zhao Yimin 赵毅民, both of whom were closely associated with World Peace Council, Ai Qing was invited to Chile to celebrate Neruda's fiftieth birthday and participate in a series of events organized by WPC and its branch committees in Chile. This journey not only offered a perhaps much-needed escape from the taxing bureaucratic cultural scene back home, but it also proved to be one of the most productive stint in the 1950s for Ai Qing as a poet. Ai wrote more than 15 poems and a travel diary in the short period of two months, and on one of the pages of his diary, Ai writes with relief and pride that "It looks like I can still write".¹²² As the preface to his diary notes, it is not a diary in the conventional sense as it is too fragmented and often contains fleeting emotions and impressions, instead of full accounts of all the personal and political events that Ai participated in.¹²³ However, this posthumously published notebook proves to be valuable in puzzling out Ai Qing's often incomplete images due to later censorship and the loss of several his works during his later turbulent life.

Ai and his fellow travelers' journey started in Eastern Europe and proceeded to West Africa and Brazil. Ai Qing offered his observation of the French colony of Senegal and Rio Janeiro, where sights of inequality shocked and prompted him to write a series of poems such as "My Africa" and "Song of Sympathy". For Ai Qing, Rio Janeiro was akin to Shanghai before the socialist revolution, a "playground for adventurers".¹²⁴ The destitute living conditions of the people that he encountered were seemed as a result of capitalism, racial disparity and an importation of American values. The poor mulatto boy that he saw on the beach of Rio Janeiro,

¹²² Ai Qing 艾青, *旅行日记[Travel Diary]* (上海: 上海文艺出版社, 2004), 479. Hereafter *Lüxing*.

¹²³ Ibid, prologue.

¹²⁴ Ai Qing, *Lüxing*, 79

for instance, is a result of illegitimate “affair” between black and white parents, a result of Rio Janeiro being an obscene place where “old white men walk arm in arm with black girls”.¹²⁵

Ai’s impression of Chile, by contrast, is much more informed as he participated in a lot of talks and formal events organized by Chilean writers as soon as he landed in Santiago. More importantly, Ai’s travelling diaries recorded fragments of his conversation with Neruda, some of which made their way into Ai’s poem “On the Promontory in Chile”. Some of these conversations were recorded without clarifying who the addresser and addressee were. Most of the times it is not difficult to tell who said what. For instance, Ai Qing reduced what might have been a lengthy conversation among himself and a group of writers from Brazil, Chile and Argentina to pithy, poetic fragments consisting of sentences like “We walked from summer into winter” and “Let us hope you are swallows”.¹²⁶ Although the sentences were not attributed to either poet in the diary, it can be conjectured that the first was spoken by Ai Qing, who was among the group of travelers that journeyed from the summer of the Northern hemisphere to the austere winter in Chile, while the second was a witty repartee by Neruda.

Other conversations, by contrast, might not be so clear in terms of addressees. When Ai Qing showed Neruda the gifts he brought from China, there was a quick exchange about Qi Baishi’s painting *Eighty-seven Deities*: “---I hope there are eighty-seven great poets singing for peace in the world. ---Every poet has eighty-seven deities”.¹²⁷ While the editor of Ai’s travelling diaries deemed the first to be an utterance by Ai Qing and the second by Neruda, it is nonetheless an ambiguous dialogue. The first seems like a claim of hope that conforms to Ai’s purpose of this trip, whereas the second seems to be resisting to the political undertone of the first.

¹²⁵ Ai Qing, *Quanjì* 2, 175.

¹²⁶ Ai Qing, *Lǚxíng*, 123

¹²⁷ Ibid, 127.

Although, admittedly, there can be a plethora of interpretations of the second utterance, all of them seem to point to the fluid and capricious image of a poet who does not conform to a single “deity”, ideology, or identity. Such conversations abound in Ai’s diary. While some are not unexpected utterances coming from the two poets’ public personas, others, such as the ones above, furtively show the more casual musing and bantering between two friends.

Ai Qing spent the first half of his journey to Chile in Santiago, where he met with a lot of Latin American authors and Chilean politicians through the affiliation of World Peace Council. Going to Neruda’s house on La Isla Negra, however, diverted Ai Qing’s attention completely away from the political agendas to the oceanic sceneries and the novel objects from the sea that occupied every inch of Neruda’s dwelling. On La Isla Negra, Ai wrote a series of poems inspired by his excursions on the beach and his conversation with Neruda, including “Reef”, “Conch Pearl”, “Kelp”, “To Pablo Neruda”, and “On the Promontory of Chile”.

Situated on the coastal area of Valparaíso and directly facing the Pacific Ocean, Neruda’s villa on La Isla Negra is now converted to a museum celebrating his artistic and personal life. In 1954 when Ai paid his visit, however, it was already a museum of curiosity and a testament to Neruda’s self-crowned title: an amateur oceanographer. Remembering his trip to La Isla Negra decades after his visit, Ai Qing faithfully records details of Neruda’s dwelling and collection in his essay “My Friendship with Pablo Neruda”:

“His house in the city is located inside a little garden...There is a room upstairs that contains the tens of thousands of conches and seashells that he collected, each with its own label. He is a world traveler.

Passing by lots of wastelands and mountains covered with cacti, we went to his villa by the sea. His villa looks completely like a stranded shipwreck facing the ocean, and he is indeed like a man drifting in the world”¹²⁸

Neruda’s identity as a poet and an amateur oceanographer is further elaborated in Ai Qing’s poem “On the Promontory of Chile”, to which I turn in the next section.

“On the Promontory of Chile” and “Ode to a Single Sea”

Using fragmented verses and even sketches of the interior of Neruda’s home, Ai Qing’s travel diary provides even further details of all the objects and novelties in the villa. Ai Qing compiled a list of all of Neruda’s collections such as anchor, bust of goddesses, compasses, all of which were conserved and remain strikingly similar to what the villa looks like nowadays. All of these objects appear in the poem “On the Promontory of Chile”, which makes it quite unique in all of Ai Qing’s poems. The detailed descriptions and the relatively longer length of the poem are more reminiscent of the epic form, and the list of objects resembled “catalogue” in epic tradition.¹²⁹ Indeed, the image of Neruda that Ai Qing depicts is that of an errant navigator who went to search for new land and a home to call his own. The poem begins by invoking and supplicating to the goddess of whose bust Ai Qing saw in the house clustered with objects from the sea:¹³⁰

¹²⁸ Ai Qing, *Quanji* 5, 311. “他在城里的住宅是在一个小花园里……楼上有一间是他收藏的上万只海螺与贝壳的木柜子，每一个收藏品都有标签。他是跑遍全世界的人。我们到聂鲁达的海边别墅去，路上经过很多荒地，山上长满了仙人掌。他的别墅完全像搁浅的船的模样，面临大海，而他也真像个漂泊在世界上的人。”

¹²⁹ Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 110-111.

¹³⁰ Ai Qing, *Quanji* 2, 186.

让航海女神

守护你的家

她面临大海

仰望苍天

抚手胸前

祈求航行平安

Let the goddess of navigation

guide you home

She faces the ocean

looks up to the sky

Putting her hand on her chest

she prays for a safe passage.

(一)

你爱海，我也爱海

我们永远航行在海上

一天，一只船沉了

你捡回了救命圈

You love the sea, as do I

We will forever sail the sea

One day, a ship sank

You picked up a life buoy

好像捡回了希望

风浪把你送到海边

你好像海防战士

驻守着这些礁石

你抛下了锚

解下了缆索

回忆你所走过的路

每天了望海洋

as if picking up hope

The tempest washed you ashore

Like a coastal defense soldier

you guard these reefs.

You casted the anchor

Untied the ropes

Reminiscing the paths you took

You look out to the sea everyday

The inspiration of a “goddess of navigation” seems to come from the broken bust of a “Renaissance boat” that Ai Qing saw inside Neruda’s house.¹³¹ The invocation of a goddess of navigation that seems to be inspired and more attuned to Homeric epics sets the tone of the entire poem as mythical and epical. The first few verses, furthermore, are positioned as an epigraph that open the entire poem, in which the poet invites the goddess of navigation to produce a “safe passage.” While the addressee seems to be Neruda, the grand opening also resembles an invitation to the readers to join on this passage home. The epic elements of the opening of the poem seems pose questions on the form of the poem. “On the Promontory of Chile” has a subtitle “To Pablo Neruda”, which makes it clear that the addressee is Neruda himself. This direct declaration of the addressee makes the poem fall into the vein of odes, a branch of lyric poetry, rather than epic poetry. As I hope to make clear in the following analysis, “On the Promontory of Chile” is a lyrical poem in which the poet tries to incorporate epical elements.



Figure 5. Ai Qing's sketch. Goddess bust in Neruda's house. *Lyxing Riji*. 132

The rest of the poem is divided into six parts, each inspired by a variety of objects from the house and conversations between the two poets. The first part starts by evincing the two

131 Ai Qing, *Lüxing*, 202.

¹³² Ibid, 216.

poets' common love for sea and the image of Neruda as a shipwrecked sailor. This image is recurrent in Neruda's poems written around the same period in *Navegaciones y Regresos* (1957-1959). In "Oda al Ancla", Neruda depicts a "heavy fugitive fragment" discarded on the coast, an anchor waiting to sail the sea again.¹³³ The anchor is an ambiguous symbol, embodying conflicting desires to feel the tremor of a ship again and to rest in the garden away from the world ("En mi jardín reposa").¹³⁴ The Ai Qing in the next part of the poem, nonetheless, turns into an impassioned visitor who documented every object that constituted this house of a mariner:

(二)

“.....

我们走进了

We enter

航海者之家

the home of a navigator

地上铺满了海螺

Seashells pave the floor

也许昨晚有海潮

Maybe there was a tidal wave last night

已经残缺了的

A wooden statue of goddess

木雕的女神

Already broken

站在客厅的门口

Stands by the door of the salon

像女仆似的虔诚

Piously like a maid

¹³³ Neruda, *Obras Completas II*, 744.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

阁楼是甲板

栏杆用麻绳穿连

在扶梯的边上

有一个大转盘

这些是你的财产：

古代帆船的模型

褐色的大铁锚

中国的大罗盘

（最早的指南针）

大的地球仪

各式各样的烟斗

和各式各样的钢刀

意大利农民送的手杖

放在进门的地方

它陪伴一个天才

走过了整个世界”

The attic is a deck

The handrails are bound by hemp ropes

Next to the stairs

There is a big steering wheel

These are your treasures:

The models of ancient sailboats

A big brown iron anchor

A huge Chinese compass

(the earliest of its kind)

A big globe of the earth

tobacco pipes of all shapes and sizes

and steel knives of all shapes and sizes

a walking cane given by an Italian peasant

sits by the entrance

it accompanies a genius

to walk the entire earth

Reading this segment together with the Ai Qing's travel diary reveals that the list of objects presented in the final poem is almost exactly the replication of Ai's initial record in the diary. Neruda's seashell collection is described as washed ashore onto the floor of his house, as if

the house itself is a boat and the boundary between the coast and house is non-existent. Neruda's house was further depicted as a panorama of objects, each of which constitutes part of his personality. Walking into the poet's dwelling is like walking into his mind as a traveler, as a connoisseur of the ocean. Although perhaps this tendency towards collectomania goes against the poets' disavowal of material accumulation, Neruda's obsession with "things", especially mundane objects, is epitomized in his many odes (odes to onions, books, tomatoes, and cats), and the obsession is usually justified through Neruda's deep connection with the mundane world. He even has a poem simply called "Oda a las cosas" ("Ode to Things"), in which the poet exclaims that "I love / all things, / not only / the supreme / but also / the infinitely / small".¹³⁵ The dangerous peccadillo of being regarded as accumulating wealth is transformed, in Neruda's hundreds of odes, to a dedication and appreciation of small things connected to the world and the masses. In being an objective observer in these verses, Ai Qing depicts a poet that collects objects from the sea, some of which show his connection to China (the Chinese compass) and to the masses. In the next section, Ai Qing further ruminates on Neruda's identity by incorporating their conversation in the poem:

“房子在地球上

而地球在房子里

壁上挂了一顶白顶的

黑漆遮阳的海员帽子

好像这房子的主人

今天早上才回到家里

The house is on the Earth

and the Earth is inside the house

On the wall hangs an oily black

sailor's hat with a white top

The owner of this house seems

to have just returned home this morning

¹³⁵ Neruda, *Obras Completas II*, 769.

我问巴勃罗：

“是水手呢？

还是将军？”

他说：“是将军，

你也一样；

不过，我的船

已失踪了，

沉落了……”

I ask Pablo:

“Are you a sailor?

Or are you a general?”

He says: “A general,

So are you;

But, my ship

disappeared,

sank...”

The opening lines create a *mise-en-abyme* that reaffirms the image of the poet as a navigator of the world: the house is on the Earth and the Earth is inside the house on Earth... *ad infinitum*. This identity is refracted and reflected infinitely by the various panoramas and symbols of the world collected in his house (maps, globes...). The sailor's hat hung on the wall seems to bring a crispy sea air, left behind by a newly landed mariner. Ai Qing further questions Neruda whether he is a merely a sailor or a general. The question harkens back to Neruda's self-acclaimed title “the captain.” Although staunchly against personality cult of political figures such as Stalin in his autobiography, Neruda inevitably falls into one of his own self-aggrandizing myths by calling himself “the captain”. Ai Qing, on the other hand, poses the delicate question, asking whether the poet sees himself as a mere sailor or a general leading his people. Neruda's answer elevates both of the poets' status as generals without their ships, once glorious, now discredited. In the following verses in the fourth section, Ai Qing immediately contemplates further how to define the seemingly retreated, once powerful poet in a wave-like structure:

你是一个船长？	Are you a captain?
还是一个海员？	Or are you a sailor?
你是一个舰队长？	Are you a general of a fleet?
还是一个水兵？	Or are you a marine soldier?
你是胜利归来的人？	Are you a victorious returnee?
还是战败了逃亡的人？	Or are you a defeated fugitive?
你是平安的停憩？	Are you safely ashore?
还是危险的搁浅？	Or are you dangerously stranded?
你是迷失了方向？	Have you lost your ways?
还是遇见了暗礁？	Or have you bumped into hidden reefs?

The series of questions create an ebb-and-flow, forward-and-backward structure, vacillating and finding a balance between glory and defeat, greatness and ordinariness. Ai Qing was well aware of the image of Neruda being presented in China as a politically engaged poet. However, the deep rumination shown in these back-and-forth movements seems to suggest he questions the extent of that glorified image and desires to delve deeper into Neruda's inner realm. The vacillation between glory and pain in these questions reflects both poets' experience of being given encomium in their lifetime in contrast with the experiences of imprisonment, exile and ostracism. However, the following verses refute all of these images by offering Ai Qing's own interpretation of Neruda's identity at this moment:

都不是，都不是，	You are none of these, none of these
这房子的主人	The owner of this house
是被枪杀了的洛尔伽的朋友	is the friend of the assassinated Lorca
是受难的西班牙的见证人	a witness of the toiling Spain

是一个退休了的外交官

a retired diplomat

不是将军。

not a general

Overthrowing all the former conjectures, Ai Qing affirms that the Neruda who dwells in this house is a friend of Federico García Lorca, who was assassinated during the Spanish Civil War in 1936. Ai Qing chose to define Neruda through a moment of “conversion” in the latter’s life, who claims that the Spanish Civil War became personal with the death of Lorca in his memoir.¹³⁶ Neruda highlights this transformation in his autobiography: “I had already done enough tramping over the irrational and the negative. I had to pause and find the road to humanism, outlawed from contemporary literature but deeply rooted in the aspirations of mankind.”¹³⁷ The writing of Neruda’s opus magnum *Canto General* was initiated against the backdrop of his stint as a diplomat and a witness of the atrocities in the Spanish Civil War. While some critics might regard these moments as proofs that there are “two Nerudas”¹³⁸, others might caution instead that the heterogeneity of Neruda’s work should not be glossed over by a definitive dividing line.¹³⁹ That Ai Qing chose a moment of change to define his friend resonates with the remark that Neruda’s work is a heterogeneous mix of all his vacillating identities. However, following the wave-like structure of the last stanza, this stanza “recoils” from making grandiose claims about being a captain or an admiral. The last verse outright questions and refutes Neruda’s claim that they are both “generals”. Although not necessarily meaning that Ai Qing is questioning Neruda’s self-endowed title of “the captain”, this stanza demonstrates an effort at unravelling the layers of myths that artists builds around themselves and those that the

¹³⁶ Neruda, *Memoir*, see chapter five “Spain in my heart”.

¹³⁷ *Ibid*, 139.

¹³⁸ Jason Wilson, *A companion to Pablo Neruda: evaluating Neruda's poetry*. Vol. 259. Boydell & Brewer Ltd, 2014.

¹³⁹ Pedemonte, 162.

world builds for them. Furthermore, by using a wave-like structure and recoiling from grandiose titles, this stanza seems to depict a shipwrecked, defeated Neruda, retreated to his house which was isolated from the world. Indeed, the poet being depicted here is not a general or an admiral who charges headfirst into battles but an artist who was exiled by the sea:

日日夜夜望着海	Day and night you watch the sea
听海涛像在浩叹	Listening to the ocean tides as if they were
也像是嘲弄	sighing
也像是挑衅	As if they were mocking
	As if they were taunting

巴勃罗·聂鲁达	Pablo Neruda
面对着万顷波涛	faces millions of miles of roaring tides
用矿山里带来的语言	he uses words from the mines
向整个旧世界宣战	to declare wars on the entire Old World.

The ocean waves seem to have been personified as the poet's opponents or enemies who mock the defeated, self-exiled Neruda. Nonetheless, the ultimate image of the poet in the last stanza of this section is that of one that lost a battle but eager to assume the war. Ending on a positive note, this section of the poem incorporates both the symbolism of ocean tides and the structure of ocean waves to present a vacillating battleground of Neruda's identity: from a glorious general, or as Neruda himself claimed, a captain, to a retired diplomat and a poet consisted of a myriad of images, always on the point of breaking and converting into another.

It is likely that Neruda never read “On the Promontory of Chile”.¹⁴⁰ However, a similar sentiment of retreating or recoiling from public life is present in Neruda’s “Ode to a Single Sea” (1958). At first glance, the poem seems to present a political vision of the Pacific Ocean that connects China and Chile, but the ambiguity of the addressee and the mixture of childlike and romantic visions make the poem vacillate between the political and the personal. The poem opens with a disoriented view of the sky and the sea, depicting the poet himself as diver becoming one with the ocean. Although he enters the “the sea of China”, the sea surrounding him is close to the poet’s heart as the oceanic scene seems reminiscent of his own land. The ocean becomes an infinite ribbon that connects the two distant countries, China and Chile:

Es vertical el día,
como una lanza azul. Entro en el agua.

The day is vertical,
like a blue spear. I enter the water.

Es el agua del Asia,
el mar de China.

It is the water of Asia,
the sea of China.

No reconozco sierras ni horizontes,
Sin embargo, este mar, esta ola viene
de tierra americana: esta marea,
este abismo, esta sal,
son una cinta pura de infinito
que enlaza dos estrellas:
los volcanes lejanos

I do not recognize sierras nor horizons,
but this sea, this wave comes from
the American land: this tide,
this abyss, this salt,
are one pure ribbon of infinity
that links two stars:
the distant volcanos,

¹⁴⁰ A more formal poem called “To Pablo Neruda” was read during the celebration ceremony for Neruda’s birthday. Ai Qing, *Lüxing Riji*, 347.

de mi patria,

la agricultura diáfana de China.

of my country,

the diaphanous agriculture of China.

141

The “distant volcanoes” in the third stanza that constitute Neruda’s memory and imagination of the Chilean landscape find their way into the opening of his autobiography where the poet reminisces the inspirations and the sources of his poetic repertoire.¹⁴² Juxtaposed with “diaphanous agriculture”, they form a symmetry with the image of China. Both are presented as nostalgic or even imaginary territories. In the next stanza, the poet addresses a distant, obscure figure and hopes to navigate him/her to his house by the sea:

Qué sereno sería

si yo te navegara,

si mi cuerpo o mi nave

condujera

a través de las olas y la luna,

mar doblemente mío,

hasta llegar donde me está

esperando

mi casa junto al manantial marino.

How serene it would be

if I can navigate you,

if my body or my ship

guide

through the waves and the moon,

sea twice mine,

until arriving at where my

house

by the sea spring awaits me.

Following the juxtaposition of China and Chile in the last stanza, the “you” here could very likely be some friend from China, be it an actual friend or an imaginary one, whom the poet wants to invite across the “single sea”. “Sea twice mine”, furthermore, is a powerful phrase that

¹⁴¹ Neruda, *Obras Completas II*, 829-831.

¹⁴² Neruda, *Memoire*, 5-6.

evinces not only the excitement of seafaring but the poet's own musing over his identity. To claim the sea twice, even only metaphorically, necessitates seeing oneself not as one but as two. In this case, the poet seems to have become an integral part of the addressee, merging with him/her and claiming common "possession" of the seas of China and Chile. However, this interpretation of the addressee is made problematic considering the religious and romantic undertows of later stanzas:

Qué azul, qué transmigrante,
qué dorado sería
si caminara el mar con pies desnudos,
si el mar, mi propio mar, me transportara.

How blue, how transmigrating,
How gold it would be,
if I walk the ocean with naked feet,
if the sea, my own sea, would carry me.

Vería el vuelo
de las hambrientas aves oceánicas,
contaría tortugas,
resbalaría sobre los pescados,
y en el gran instituto
de la aurora
mi corazón mojado
como un marisco se deslizaría.

I would watch the flight
of these hungry oceanic birds,
I would count turtles,
I would slip over the fish,
and in the great institute
of the dawn,
my soaked heart
would glide like a shellfish.

Hasta que tú, sirena,
junto a mí, transparente
nadadora,

Until you, mermaid,
together with me, transparent
swimmer.

con sal del mar mezclaras

You would mix your amorous kisses

tus amorosos besos

With salt from the sea,

y saliéramos juntos del océano

And we would leave the ocean together

a comprar pan y despertar la leña.

to buy bread and wake up the firewood.

These three stanzas are a shift away from the political and the realm of national territories, transiting to a transcendental, semi-religious and romantic vision of the sea. The word “transmigrante” is rare in modern Spanish and omitted in many dictionaries, e. g. Cambridge and Collins.¹⁴³ While the verb “transmigrar” is almost equal to “migrate” in modern usage, the word “transmigrante” refer to a journey, or a feeling of wanderlust, more than likely a spiritual one in this context. In Buddhist learning, moreover, transmigration refers to reincarnation of the souls. Thus, the word choice, be it intentional or an unpremeditated epiphany, exudes a spiritual connotation that is absent in the first few stanzas. The allusion of Jesus walking on water further exemplifies the spirituality of traversing the “single sea” as a traveler whose identity seem to dissolve, its boundaries with the addressee “you” blurred in the water.

The second of these three stanzas shows yet another shift in the poem to childlike wonder. Witnessing the passing of the sea creatures and utilizing words such as “count” or “slip”, the poet regards the ocean as some kind of playground where his body roams free. To describe the dawn as a “great institute”, however, is thought-provoking when juxtaposing the phrase with the carefree tone of the rest of the stanza. In the face of an “instituted”, organized order of the coming day, the poet’s heart slips away like a shellfish, the collection of which

¹⁴³ In modern usage, moreover, “transmigrante” refers to immigrants within Latin America and / or to the United States. See, for instance, “Los transmigrantes centroamericanos en México” (Palacio 2015).

Neruda indulged himself in as a lifelong private hobby. Where does the heart “slip” away to? To the “great institute” of the future, or to its reclusive shell? The next stanza seems to point to the poet’s desire of a more hidden and quotidian life. The second-person addressee, contrary to the interpretation before, turns into the mythical creature mermaid. The revolutionary vision of connecting China and Chile through the “single sea” dissolves into a ballad of love and fairytale-like wonder. The figure of the mermaid seems to have solved the ambiguity of the addressee in the first half of the poem, but this interpretation does not seem to decipher well the enigmatic phrase “sea twice mine” in the stanza where the identity of the addressee remains elusive. The ending of the poem, furthermore, returns yet once again to the familiar motif of the ocean as a connective sphere that ties China and Chile in solidarity:

Ven a soñar, nadando,	Swimming, come to dream,
Y el mar de China y Chile,	the sea of China and Chile,
ven a nadar el sueño,	come to swim the dream,
ven a soñar el agua que nos une.	come to dream the water that unites us.
Amor o mar o sueño,	Love or sea or dream,
hicimos juntos esta travesía,	Together we traversed,
de tierra a tierra un solo mar soñando,	from land to land a single sea dreaming,
de mar a mar un solo sueño verde.	from sea to sea a single green dream.

How much of this dream is political and a continuation of Neruda’s vision for the Asia-Pacific Peace Conference, and how much of it is personal and intimate longing? This poem appears to be a mixture of both, but considering the period of de-stalinization and withdrawal in

the poet's life, it is possible that in various places of the poem, personal sentiments overtake political aspiration in "Ode to a Single Sea." As Teresa Fernández argues pointedly in her essay "El Imaginario Oriental de Alberti y Neruda", compared to the Spanish communist poet Rafael Alberti who wrote about China with a more carefree attitude of a "drunk sailor", Neruda was always more of an "ironic and ambiguous diplomat", enjoying his share of glory through "exact or impeccable toast"¹⁴⁴ The claim might be true regarding his earlier poems composed directly to the needs for formal situations, such as the award ceremony in honor of Song Qingling or the poems that were directly addressed to China, but as shown in "Ode to a Single Sea", the identity of Neruda as a diplomat wavers, crisscrossing with his identities as a friend and a lover.

"Ode to a Single Sea" was likely written between 1957 and 1959, several years after Ai Qing's composition "On the Promontory of Chile". Ai Qing astutely points out the vacillation that Neruda feels during this period of his life, a vacillation epitomized by the wave-like structure in Ai's poem. Oceanic landscape inspires both Neruda and Ai Qing, the latter of whom composed a series of poems related to objects from the sea during his trip to La Isla Negra. I turn to an analysis of these poems in the next section.

"Reef", Conch Pearl" and "Kelp"

While "On the Promontory of Chile" directly addresses Neruda, other poems that Ai Qing wrote on La Isla Negra seem more introspective, and oceanic imageries are used to contemplate the processing of composing a poem and the turbulent life of the poets. In "Reef" for instance, Ai Qing depicts the reef standing by the shore like a stalwart costal guard:

¹⁴⁴ María Teresa Hernández Fernández, "El imaginario oriental de Alberti y Neruda." *Epos: Revista de filología* 2 (1986), 144.

礁石

一个浪，一个浪，
无休止地扑过来
每一个浪都在它脚下
被打成碎沫，散开……

Reef

A wave, a wave,
coming ashore incessantly
every wave is battered into foam,
scattered beneath its feet...

它的脸上和身上

像刀砍过的一样

但它依然站在那里

含着微笑，看着海洋……

Its face and its body

seem to have been slashed by knife

but it still stands there

smiling, looking out at the sea...

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Although not directly addressing Neruda, the image of the battered reef resonates with that of Neruda who looks out at the sea every day in “On the Promontory of Chile”. While the poem could easily fall into a sentimental reading of the poet, be it Neruda or Ai Qing, as a martyr happily bracing his sufferings, this sentimentalism is countered by the concise or even, minimalist language of the poet. Standing in contrast with “Reef”, Ai Qing’s “Conch Shell” is a more refined poem and the process of writing the poem embodies the essence of poetic creation itself for the poet: it is a gradual self-improvement, or labor that produces the best intellectual fruit. “Conch Pearl” was originally written as non-rhyming free verses; in the final published edition, however, it was refined as a seven-syllabic regulated verse(七言律诗):

珠贝

145 Ai Qing, *Quanji* 2, 180.

在碧绿的海水里
吸取太阳的精华
你是虹彩的化身
璀璨如一片朝霞

Lying in the emerald sea water
you absorb the essence of the sun
You are the reincarnation of rainbow
Effulgent like a shade of the dawn

凝思花露的形状
喜爱水晶的素质
观念在心里孕育
结成了粒粒珍珠

Meditating on the shape of flowers' dew
You love the pure qualities of crystal
Thought are incubated in the heart
Together they form drops of pearl ¹⁴⁶

Describing the process of how pearls are formed in shells, the poem is an embodiment of how errant thoughts are combined, compressed, and refined into poetry. The imagery of a conch shell lying in the ocean is defined by changing colors: emerald green sea water, different reincarnations of light --- rainbow and shapes of the dawn. Reading the second stanza, further, we know that the process of forming a pearl actually embodies the process of composing a poem. The poet / the conch has to contemplate on the beauty in the things that surround him/her; not simply mundane objects, but a higher, refined essence like dewdrops or crystals. Poetic “thoughts” are thus born within the heart into precious pearls. Considering how Ai Qing was among the Chinese poets of the generation that advocated abandoning the classical form, utilizing a classical poetic form here seems like a curious choice. Ai Qing’s prescription to his generation’s rule, however, was more casual, as he argues in his poetic treaty that poetic forms should serve the contents, not vice versa.¹⁴⁷ The fact that the first draft of the poem “Conch Pearl” is significantly different from the compacted final version underlines Ai Qing’s emphasis

¹⁴⁶ Ai Qing, *Quanji* 2, 181.

¹⁴⁷ Ai Qing, *Quanji* 3, 327.

on classical poetic structure--- an intricate structure harkening back to a bygone age --- in the creation of this poem.

The metaphor of pearls as thoughts had appeared before in Ai Qing's poetic treaty, in which he describes the poet as someone "picking up conches on the beach of wisdom".¹⁴⁸ The parallel is especially revealing when juxtaposed with the original draft in the travel diary where the sea shell was personified as a martyr, who "shines" even though it is shattered to dust .¹⁴⁹ Thus, the fact that "Conch Pearl" abandoned the somewhat formulaic imagery of a revolutionary martyr, like that of the steadfast costal guard in "Reef", shows a temporary shift from the overtly political, to the more introspective musings found in his theoretical writings on poetry. More elusive compared to his poems of this period, the poem "Kelp" depicts strands of kelps discarded on the beach and given in to the hands of destiny:

海带	Kelp
寄生在大海	Drifting in the sea
随水流摇摆	it lets water direct its flows
怨海潮把它卷带	it blames the tides that dragged it
抛撇在沙滩上	and abandoned it on the beach
从此和水属分开	It has since been separated from the water
任风吹太阳晒	Blown by wind and burned by the sun
心里焦渴地期待	Its thirsty heart looks forward to
能象往日一样	Swimming without a care in the water
在水里自由自在	like in those bygone days

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, 76.

¹⁴⁹ Ai Qing, *Lüxing Riji*, 231.

但命运不给它

But destiny denied it

较好的安排

better arrangement

它就这样一天天

Day by day it

枯干，碎断慢慢化作尘埃

desiccates, breaks

slowly turns into dust¹⁵⁰

As can be gleaned from his diary, the destiny of being dried and shattered was originally meant for the conch pearl in the previous poem. In “Kelp”, however, there no longer exists the image of a martyr, “shattered” but still pure and intact at heart. The figure of kelp is that of a drifter who gives in to the forces of destiny. While I translated the word “寄生” in the first line as “drift” to denotes a sense of temporary residence, it literally means “parasitize”, as if the kelp is not endemic to the ocean but a parasitical being, an Other that takes up residence in the sea. However, this entity alien to the ocean is not compatible with the land neither. Abandoned on the beach, the kelp seems to invite neither pity nor indignation on its behalf. It is simply a product of destiny. While the other two poems about oceanic objects are quite sanguine and fits into the overall celebratory tone of the other poems Ai Qing wrote during his journey, “Kelp” is intentionally ambiguous and self-reflective. Further, it seems to foreshadow the turbulence of the poet’s life that culminates in the Anti-Rightist Movement in 1957, the year that Ai Qing and Neruda met for the last time.

In conclusion, this chapter focuses on Ai Qing’s journey to Chile, his travel diary, and the poems that he wrote during this trip. Reading the poems together with the information provided by Ai Qing’s diary gives us a better picture of how the poet creates and refines his works.

¹⁵⁰ Ai Qing, *Quanji* 2, 182.

Inspired by the oceanic landscape and the objects in Neruda's house, Ai Qing's series of poems written on La Isla Negra utilizes the structure of the ocean waves or of the conch shell, the personification of the reef and the kelp to contemplate on Neruda's vacillating identities and to reflect Ai Qing's own life and "destiny".

Although in the interim years between 1954 and 1957, Ai Qing was still engrossed in the national literary and political scene, by the beginning of 1956, following the prosecution of literary theorist Hu Feng, Ai Qing was criticized as not "politically enthusiastic" and out of sync with the "pulse of era."¹⁵¹ His abrupt falling in status and the eventual ostracism from the Chinese literary world can be glimpsed from the drastically different attitudes shown in the literary magazine *Poetry* (诗刊, *Shikan*). Ai Qing's "On the Promontory of Chile" and two of Neruda's poems were published in the first issue of *Poetry* in January 1957. Astoundingly, six issues later, *Poetry* dedicated a special edition to Anti-Rightist Movement, in which some of Ai Qing's former collaborators and acquaintances published poems like "Battle of Sugar-coated Bombs" ("糖衣炮弹之战") and "Big Sharks Will Come to the Surface Themselves" ("大鲨鱼自己浮上水面").¹⁵² In the subsequent issues, as well as in other publications like the *Literary Gazette* (文艺报), Ai Qing was directly accused by writers who posed the question "Can Ai Qing Sing for Socialism?"¹⁵³ The poet's last meeting with Neruda was among one of the testaments to how quickly the movement escalated and put Ai Qing at the center of vehement criticism. I will conclude my research on the circumstances of the two friends' last meeting and different modes of modern Chinese poetry, especially lyric poetry, in "epic" times.

¹⁵¹ Cited in Ye, 194.

¹⁵² 反右派斗争特辑[Special Edition of Anti-Rightist Movement], 诗刊/Shikan, Vol. 7, 1957.

¹⁵³ Ye, 153.

Conclusion

Neruda visited China again in July 1957, and the purpose of this visit was less politically oriented than his first visit in 1951. The group of invited writers mainly visited some of the most famous tourist sites and, to the limited capacity of their host, food and wine were served along the way. The first few moments of their sojourn together had not yet been tinted with political turmoil, as Neruda affectionately wrote of his friend Ai Qing three years after their meeting in 1954: “His broad dark features, his large eyes brimming with mischief and kindness, his quick intelligence, were once more a promise of pleasure during this long journey.”¹⁵⁴ However, this delightful start quickly escalated to a disturbing turn when Neruda asked his young translator to translate some news from a Chinese newspaper. It mentioned a political trial in which the members of his welcoming party, Ai Qing, Ding Ling, and Xiao San, were involved. Nobody mentioned anything about the trial to Neruda, but he could feel that “times had changed” and that “all the flowers were wilting.”¹⁵⁵

Ai Qing’s prosecution in the Anti-Rightist Movement was mainly a result of his association with Ding Ling, the latter of whom was among one of the many writers that accused Hu Feng as the enemy of the party. However, stating one’s political stance was far from making one immune to the political turmoil and the ceaseless finger-pointing in the accusatory meetings. All the condemnations to exonerate oneself and indict others came back to haunt many writers in their later years. As Ai Qing wrote in the 80s: “Throughout these years, things incomprehensible to our friends had happened in our country”.¹⁵⁶ In their last meeting, Ai Qing went to Neruda’s hotel room to say goodbye when a phone call claimed a ministry official was coming to see Ai

¹⁵⁴ Neruda, *Memoire*, 231.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 239.

¹⁵⁶ Ai Qing, *Quanjia* 5, 268.

Qing. Though Neruda protested as he has an inkling about what was to come, neither one could do much about the matter at hand. Although Ai Qing's attitude during his trials was described as impertinent and "not serious", the poet, according to his wife's memoir, had seriously considered committing suicide, but he decided against it in the end.

Ai Qing was expelled from the Chinese Communist Party and subsequently exiled to the farms in the Northern provinces and Xinjiang to be reeducated. Some of the lasting regrets during this time were the losses of his several long poems about Yang-Tze River and the experience at the frontier farmlands. The incompleteness of his poems in the 1950s notwithstanding, the period witnesses a mix of trial-and-error in Ai's poetry. While most of the poems were written in sync with the ethos of socialist poetry and some of them were admitted as failures in Ai's later writings, the period was also marked with experimenting with new forms such as narrative poems, engaging with folklores and attempting long poems. The series of poems written during his travels to Chile was definitely one of the highlights of Ai's career. To be able to distance himself from the bureaucratic literary life back home provided Ai Qing chances to absorb the oceanic inspiration from his friend Neruda and contest the poet's identities in these poems. What is more, Ai Qing's poetic creations that are discussed in this thesis reflect the multiple nodes of the development of modern Chinese poetry. By way of a conclusion, I will elucidate the possible divergences in the development of modern Chinese poetry by summarizing the findings in the three chapters.

Chapter one "Portraits of Young Artists: Lyric Poets in Moments of Crisis" offers an introduction to Pablo Neruda's and Ai Qing's early formation and "conversion" as young poets. "Conversion" was put into quotation marks because, as shown in the above chapters, conversion is never a clear-cut process; the line between the revolutionary vanguard and the artistic avant-

garde is porous for the two poets. Reading David Wang's research on the status of lyricism in times of national crisis in China, this chapter presents lyricism as one vital aspect in Ai Qing's poetic creation and in modern Chinese poetry at large.

Expanding on the pervasive Romantic model of lyric poetry, Jonathan Culler proposes four parameters for lyricism. This thesis has focused on at least three of them: the triangulated apostrophe (lyric speaker, addressee, and the reader), the eventfulness and the ritualistic aspect of lyric poetry. Analyzing Neruda's "Dead Gallop" and Ai Qing's "The Sick Watch", this chapter explores some of the early influences from French or Russian modernist poetry and how the two poets engage with lyric conventions to emphasize artists' responsibility toward the world that surrounds them. As David Wang contends, selfhood is a key theme that concerns a lot of Chinese intellectuals in times of national crisis, but whenever it is evoked, the concept of selfhood is often "overdetermined by both individual and collective motivations."¹⁵⁷ Lyricism, thus, provides an important mode of poetic production, the engagement of which also reflects a negotiation between one's selves and the society in modern China.

Chapter two "The Poetics of Peace: Voice of the Masses in Revolutionary Times" focuses on one important aspect of lyric poetry: the lyric poem itself as an event where the voice of poet takes the central stage. This chapter centers around Ai Qing and Neruda's first encounter, made possible by the socialist, internationalist milieu of the early 1950s. Their first meeting also initiated a transpacific network and exchange between China and Latin America, epitomized in Asia-Pacific Peace Conference in 1952. While pointing out the many unexplored threads in China-Latin America relation, this chapter emphasizes orality and the voice of the masses in Ai Qing's and Neruda's poetry. It argues that the two poets contest the tension between literacy and

¹⁵⁷ Wang, 4.

orality, between writing and sound in their poem and political discourse. Also emerging from this chapter is the question of writing poetry in socialist China, during a time when revolutionary orthodoxy was suffocating the literary world. However, instead of viewing modern Chinese poetry in the socialist regime as a monolithic enterprise of socialist realism, I wish to show that, by investigating individual artists' engagement and experimentation with themes such as orality in literary production, there exist, in modern Chinese poetry in socialist China, multiple modes of productions in which self-expression is actively embedded.

The final chapter also broaches on the idea of different ways of writing poetry in modern China, more specifically, Ai Qing's "Conch Shell", written in seven-character regulated verse. Producing poetry in the classical style in socialist China seems like an atavistic endeavor, or even a dangerous one that will generate criticism such as "out of sync with the time". However, as Xiaofei Tian shows in her article "Muffled Dialect Spoken by Green Fruit: An Alternative History of Modern Chinese Poetry", "old-style poetry", contrary to the traditional binary framework of new-style poetry replacing classical poetry after the New Culture Movement, is alive and prospering within modern Chinese poetry.¹⁵⁸ Analyzing Huang Zunxian's poem written during his journey across the Pacific Ocean, Tian points out the dilemmas that modern Chinese poets have to deal with in the face of a more mobilized and connected world: the dilemmas of using a new vernacular language, of encountering other poetic traditions, and the dilemma of translation.¹⁵⁹ Reading Ai Qing in conjunction with studies in alternative history of modern Chinese poetry, thus, will allow us to uncover another mode of modern Chinese poetic production: a lyricism that draws from both modern and premodern references.

¹⁵⁸ Tian Xiaofei, "Muffled Dialect Spoken by Green Fruit: An Alternative History of Modern Chinese Poetry." *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 21.1 (2009), 5-6.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid. 3-4.

In conclusion, this thesis investigates the friendship between Ai Qing and Neruda: what made possible their quick rapport? What artistic creations resulted from their encounters? And what do they mean for lyricism in modern Chinese poetry, especially during an “epic” time of crisis and unprecedented international cultural communication? By answering the above questions, this thesis also shows that, instead of being eclipsed by Neruda, this encounter sheds light on the heterogeneity of Ai Qing’s poems and his versatility as a modern Chinese poet. This project thus hopes to make the image of Ai Qing as the archetypical communist party poet more nuanced.

Another major objective of this project is to initiate conversation about China-Latin America relation through the perspective of literary production. The two poets under discussion here were not only crossing their respective national boundaries under the political conditions of the Cold War and absorbing literary conventions from other literary traditions, they themselves were also envisioning a “world” beyond what it means to be solely Chinese or Chilean --- a transpacific sphere of political solidarity and cultural transmission. Although far from attempting to provide a comprehensive literary history or the multitudinous nuances of intertextual echoes between China and Latin America, hopefully an investigation of the two actors in the cultural Cold War offers alternative ways of viewing the heady, bi-partisan, and bipolar world of the 1950s and new perspectives in the studies of world literature.

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