

# A DAY WITHIN DAYS

By Liu Hongbin

China, you are my sodden nightmare.  
How I yearn to escape from the mouth of your swamp

China, I shall leave you for now  
You possess me  
I am encircled by the shadow that is cast down by myself

I have finally left you  
You have sneaked up to the dream cave of my night

How I long to go on writing poetry  
To make my imagination thaw,  
Let me feel my cells swimming as fish again

China, you are my nightmare  
You lull the children with gunshots and caterpillars of tanks

History is bleeding as we pray  
The executioner's time has not grown leaner  
In the dark, tree fingers stretch to the night sky to be snapped by bullets  
Tonight, salt crystals of the moon have not surfaced to fall into hollow wounds  
They could have prevented the flesh from decay

Those valleys of the throat are crammed with different shaped words  
Pushing upwards tenaciously with the strength of breathing  
Strings of lies have become zippers of the shrouded dead

China, you could not cleanse these wounds  
With the river of your tears

Alive, you force man to fight man, man to trample man  
Dead, you command one to press down on another, one to pile up upon another  
Why have you produced so much hatred?

The leaves of light are drifting down in putrid wind  
The sun is a drop of blood splashed on gray paper

I can never leave you  
I make love to you in my dream

I saw you giving birth to me  
In turn, I gave birth to a vagabond  
Who could never leave China

China, I want to sing  
I do not need to mark my name on the song  
You will recognize, it is I who am singing, China

China, I want to make love to you  
But I learnt that you are ruthless, a woman without sex

You forbade me to ever fall in love (you said that was the privilege of the bourgeois)  
You only allow me to love those leaders whom I get bored with at first sight  
(It is a pity that so far I have not had a homosexual inclination)

My testicles swell up, and that makes me suffer  
My sperm blows up like rock and roll

Those maternal things hoping to become pregnant are still waiting

The panting of the wind is blowing out the lamps  
Dreams settle  
The island of white bones looms

I would go to the execution ground where my father was killed twenty years ago  
He was sending his ideals wrapped in those transparent gunshots –  
Three bullets pelted through his head  
And I inherited his suffering

On this day, I lean against the head of the wind  
White bones beneath my feet are turned to pebbles  
My sparse hair is flocked by crows

The past like a puddle of water lies in my wound  
The wound where I seek my image  
The mirror reflects the bruised sky over Tiananmen Square

From dusk of the twentieth century, I go back to dawn of two thousand years ago  
From the dawn of two thousands years ago, I return to the dusk of the twentieth century

Lao Zi realizes that his theory of “a small warless country of inhabitants”  
“To make emptiness in each heart, to weaken ambition, to keep the people from  
knowledge and desire” has been plagiarized and distorted

He recites the scripture of “The way that can be named is not the permanent way,  
The name that can be called is not the permanent name”  
Files a charge in the People’s Court against Mao Zedong  
As a result, he is condemned to death for libel

Zhuang Zi waking up from his dream of the butterfly is accused of “escaping reality”  
He is obliged to price his imagination and take it to the free market for sale  
Poets and philosophers who have abandoned writing for business  
Don’t even bother to look at his offering

Confucius without a diploma, unworthy of promotion, has to enroll at  
the Open University  
However, he is expelled by the school Party Committee  
For promoting the idea that one must “establish others as well as oneself  
Wish them success as much as one’s own”

Qu Yuan is denounced in a correspondence, his collection of orange grain seeds  
Stolen by plain clothes police  
Is sold as far as Siberia by speculating government officials  
And as he sanely sings a song of tribulation  
throws himself into the troubled memories of the Miluo River to feed the fish

Li Po, the loner, is floating in the air  
Refusing to be present at the banquet hosted by the United Front Ministry  
Is put in a strait-jacket  
Drinks Maotai with the color of clouds  
And plunging into his own cup of wine  
Drowns, embracing the moon

Tu Fu leaning against the smoke of the great battle-fires of the real estate developers  
Sings in his wall-less thatched cottage to warm the poor  
Here he lies dead of cold in his hovel  
A promise from the office to be rehoused still hidden in his pocket

Wang Wei becomes a monk  
In the midst of the silence he lights incense in the remote, densely forested mountains  
And becomes a matchmaker for sound and color  
He suddenly gives up his monastic robes  
And goes to Beijing to open an international marriage agency

Mao Zedong invites a private tutor to study the Book of Changes  
But he makes up sentences like, “The more one knows the more reactionary one becomes”  
Overnight idiots become professors

Mao Zedong lies down in his transparent prison, serving his sentence ad infinitum  
Visitors look at him like a monkey  
To see how he continues to invent hate and strife

He calls Stalin, Rocha, Ceausescu, Honecker and Castro  
To an enlarged meeting of the politburo  
Deciding to expel Gorbachev from the Party

Deng Xiaoping is lucky  
Qi Gong Masters have kept him half alive, dozing he plays bridge  
God decides not to bestow peace upon him  
Letting him neither rise to Heaven nor fall to Hell

Jiang Zemin who is copying Mao erects a "Mao Zedong circus" on Tiananmen Square  
He appoints himself as the head, singing, playing wind, string and percussion instruments  
An outstanding clown  
Chaplin insists that he isn't material for the role

Sartre and Beauvoir decline the invitation to attend the reviewing ceremony of the  
Second Cultural Revolution parade  
Instead they decide to get married at last on Tiananmen Square and invite all the Chinese  
students to attend their wedding party  
The Ministry of security tries to persuade them to leave  
as soon as possible for Hong Kong for their honeymoon or risk being kidnapped

Li Peng's brain has had another break down  
Top Party secrets have been leaked again  
Here again he has declared martial law on the whole country  
Very soon he is infected by a sexless being with AIDS  
Whose tongue like a penis had to be transplanted  
Exhausted by the chase, just another anonymous victim on the wanted list

China, how did I ever cut the umbilical cord, to impose exile on myself  
China, how did I become a rebel, to be banished by you ?  
China, how could I become a dissident, and not be tolerated by you?

From dusk of twentieth century, I go back to the dawn of two thousand years ago  
From the dawn two thousand years ago, I go back to the dusk of the twentieth century

I remain puzzled by a question  
Those in power in China today, are they really Chinese?  
I turn this in my mind over and over again

Leafing through the history of China  
I can find no sovereign, of any dynasty  
Who imprisoned his subjects, made them his hostages  
To trade with other states to his advantage

The innate right to live  
Those in power sell it dear to their own people  
And would like them even to shed tears of thanks for their bestowal

They say that human rights are not applicable to China  
Does this mean that the Chinese nation is inferior to other human races?  
Why do those in power discriminate against their own Chinese people  
and create such inequality?

They say that the world standard weights and measures will not be allowed  
to apply in China  
So they may sell the people short

I remain puzzled by the question  
Those in power in China today, are they really Chinese?  
I turn this in my mind over and over again

Who reigns over China?!

When the world has turned into one village  
I hope the avenues and lanes of China can lead to any corner of the world  
Freedom is no longer a luxury good, which the people have to fight over to purchase  
People no longer live simply in order to survive

Who reigns over China?!

My China

My

China

Translated by Liu Hongbin and Peter Porter

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