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, Ceaucescu, 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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