

Zhongalish: Think and Feel Globally

Li Zhimin



an expanded version in 2021

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Li Zhimin

Chinese American Association of Poetry and Poetics
Philadelphia

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Contact: washingtonlzm@yahoo.com (washingtonlzm@sina.com)

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For my mother and father
Who do not read poetry
Whose love leads me to poetry

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P.S. New Year's Letter of 2017

Foreword: A few stories and a little thinking

1. When I was taking a walk with my friend at Swarthmore College yesterday evening, we saw a few teenagers were taking a walk too, in the opposite direction. We saw they saw us. When we were meeting up, two guys raised their left hands and said something like /hai fai/. I did not understand and was confused. But the first idea flashing into my mind is a Nazi salute. I asked, “Sorry?” The guy in the front repeated /hai fai/. My friend saved me! She smiled and said, “Yes! /hai fai/!” And she high fived with the first guy. I suddenly understood and high fived with the second guy. We kept on walking. But I started to feel shameful of myself. In a few seconds, I realized I must have embarrassed the first guy. I looked back at them, and saw a guy looking back at us too. I meant to catch up with them and to say sorry to the first guy. But we were already pretty far away, and it might cause even more embarrassment. I had to swallow up my shame!

I am an English professor. But there is so much that I do not know.

2. I was jogging at Swarthmore College one evening. Suddenly I saw a credit card on the ground. I picked it up, and wandered where to find its owner. It might be too trivial a business to call the police. It should be best to give it to a security guard of Swarthmore College. At this moment, I saw a girl and a boy, probably students, coming over. The boy was pushing a cart. Maybe they could find a security guard for me. I said hello to them and explained what happened. The girl looked at the card and shouted, "Oh! It is mine." And she looked at the boy who was obviously embarrassed. I was relieved, and happy. I said, "You are lucky!" They did not say anything, and I went on jogging. But gradually I felt it might be inappropriate for me to make that remark. I just meant to congratulate them to have got the lost card back. However, my remark seemed to be mocking at them, and it seemed that I was implying I brought them luck which made me seem to be a little bit self-important. I did something good, and I should feel happy. But my silly remark made me feel bad for quite a long time.

I am an English professor. But there is so much for me to learn.

3. I made a few close friends when I was at Cambridge University in 2001. But I lost two of them just because I made some cultural mistakes that I did not realize until many years later.

I felt awkward. But I had to be content with life.

It is certain that I must have lost many opportunities due to the fact that I do not understand so many cultural rules in English.

But I could only do what I know how to do.

I am happy I am still keeping some friends. I am worrying I might get them lost someday just because some silly cultural mistakes I might make.

I am an English professor. But I am always making mistakes in English.

4. Am I speaking British English, or American English?

My son started to correct my pronunciation of Putonghua when he got six years old, and he has been doing so until now, proudly. In order to defend myself, I argue that I am always making myself well understood, and I am expressing myself most accurately. Therefore, I do not mind having an accent. In fact, I start to feel proud of my accent, which, no matter how hard I

work, I could never get rid of. It is inborn. Language is for communication, anyway. So long as I could make myself well understood, it is fine. I sometime even go pretty far to boast that the so-call standard of any language is just something that is to be broken by literary talents. Linguistic rules follow talents. Not the opposite.

But I would still listen to my son and correct myself whenever it is possible.

Am I speaking British English, or American English? So long as I could make myself clear, I do not care what kind of English I am speaking. I do not mind having an accent at all. In fact, I should be proud of it. There is no linguistic authority to judge who is more correct when American English and British English use the same words, such as “football”, to refer to completely different things. The only reason is that they will it that way. Their wills count. My will counts too.

Perhaps I shall name my English Zhongalish. By this act of naming, I get my own authority.

In fact, Zhongalish is a new territory where many people reside. Just think of the fact that all students in China have to learn English for six years in the primary school, and another six

years in the junior and senior middle schools. We shall build up our own home to make us more independent and feel more comfortable.

5. I would surely learn to make myself well-understood. I would surely learn all the rules governing British English and American English. I would surely pay attention to all the accurate ways, the humorous ways and the beautiful ways of speaking and writing. But I shall not stop here. I shall go even further. In Zhongalish, I could go further. At least, I could take a different road in many cases.

In fact, Zhongalish is not that unfamiliar to a British or an American ear.

When people say “long time, no see,” they are speaking Zhongalish, or something originated in Zhongalish.

When Ezra Pound wrote some “ungrammatical” English, judged by the rules of British or American English, in his literary works, he was writing Zhongalishly.

One could hardly see China if one does not recognize Zhongalish. One has to get a little out of the boundary of one own language and culture if one wants to truly “see” and “feel”

another culture.

I shall not pretend that I am speaking either British English or American English, though I am always happy to learn from both of them. They are my foundations. Yet I have one more foundation, i.e., the Chinese. I shall frankly admit that I am speaking Zhongalish, though I might not be speaking good Zhongalish that shall be no less accurate, no less humorous and no less beautiful than either British or American English. Or it will get no respect.

Even if I could not write or speak good Zhongalish, by informing people I am Zhongalish, it could save me a lot of embarrassment and troubles, leaving much space for me to revise and improve myself.

Zhongalish is different. And it should be independent.

I shall build up a home for myself, which could be shared by so many of my people. We will be happier when we are not homeless anymore.

2016/08/10

I. Prologue

Who am I

I was born Chinese

I have been learning British and American literatures and cultures
all my life

And Chinese civilization had fused with Buddhism, Islam,
Christianity, Judaism

and many other cultures in the past

And China has been learning western cultures in the modern age

Chinese culture is the outcome of integration of many cultures

I am not a pure Chinese

Nobody is

I am Chinese, as well as American and English

I am a Zhongguo (中国) -American-English person

I am Zhong-a-lish

I live above Zhongguo, America and England

I live under them

Are you born American?

However, if you have learnt the Chinese language and culture, or
if you have ever used anything on basis of the Chinese invention

of printing, gunpowder and the magnet

or if you have used chopsticks

or if you have had any contact with Chinese

or have ever heard some stories of them

Your mentality is somehow changed

no matter how slightly

Thus, in a certain sense, you are Chinese

You are an American Chinese, namely, Americanese

No one is an island

Neither is any people or any race

If one wants to become pure

one has to get rid of all the alien elements of oneself

and, like peeling an onion

nothing is left in the end

It is the intent to communicate with each other
the desire to learn and to be learnt
that makes one great

Like it or not

If one wants to live a decent life
not to become a bigot and to lag far behind

One has to keep open
and to be willing to accept new ideas
and to be ready to change

I am proud of being a Zhongalish

I speak Zhongalish

I think Zhongalishly

And I feel Zhongalishly

I live and die

A Zhongalish

2016/07/05

II. Feel Words: One Way to Approach Language

1

We have a character for Love

It is AI /ai/ 爱

I know my mother *ais* me the most

But she never says the word *ai*

Never

However

I feel *ai* in her eyes

I feel *ai* in her smiles

I feel *ai* in every word she says to me

I feel *ai* in her voice, her tones and her breath

I feel *ai* in the way she walks

I feel *ai* in the way she stands

I feel *ai* whenever I think of her

...

She does not say it
Never
Yet it is in everything
 everywhere

2

I met Marjorie Perloff
I do not remember where or when
Yet we started to communicate

She is always very kind to me
She is always ready to give me assistance.

And one day, she ended her email with
“with love”!

I instantly started to feel the word
a once empty word I learnt
from my Chinese-English dictionary

I got involved with a Fulbright program in 2008
and went to visit her at her home

She cooked a delicious dinner for me
She invited a couple of her friends from Princeton University
to keep me company
and to drive me to her home
and back to my hotel

She was in her seventies
Yet she cooked for me
giving me wonderful experience of a warm dinner

Marjorie Perloff entered into the English word of LOVE
in my vocabulary.

3

Once we came across a word “Chink” at college
We did not know it and checked it up
in an English-Chinese dictionary

We got the meaning there
And a couple of diligent guys
in order to practice their oral English
(*practice makes perfect*, said our beloved English teacher)
started to throw the word all around
at each other
just to practice
and make fun

We did not feel feelings
It is just an empty word to us

And a naughty boy told our English teacher:
we have something equal in Chinese for you too
it is Yangguizi /janquizi/ 洋鬼子
Our English teacher laughed and practiced his Chinese
woshi yige Yangguizi
We all burst into laughter

We discussed on how those words
were coined, or from what kind of

ignorant, fearful and dark minds

We understood them more
but we never felt it
their masters have died out
and their days have passed
perhaps.

4

It is most difficult to learn the dirty words
of English in China
our teachers never taught them to us
we had to figure them out ourselves
by practicing

We came across the English word “Fuck” one day
We went to our silent teacher, the dictionary
It says “Fuck” literally means
“to make love” or to “have intercourse”
which seems to be very positive
pretty charming and attractive to us

One guy said to another guy

“Fuck you”

The other guy replied

“Sorry! Thank you!

But I only make love with my girlfriend.”

We all burst into laughter

No boy dared to try this word on a girl

Neither a girl on a boy

In public

2016/05/12

III. A Go for Mutual Understanding

1

a new baby is born
in the stable

one car come

one car go

two car *pengpeng*

people die

whew--

this was harder than I thought!

2

long time, no see

One, two, three

or none?

I think it is best
if I begin with only one

I will be happy to do three
over the next year.

3

hesitate: he sit & ate
legislate: leg is late
campus: camp us

barren equals to
bar + ren (人)
so that people in the bar are all barren

...

...

I do not want to be
involved with this!

4

it is sort of naive
in writing?

I'll need to rewrite
most of these!

I am not convinced
it is the best use of my time!

one pound for
one error or slip.

5

native or non-native
you me you me

monolingual or bilingual
we two who and who

I give you face
you don't want face
you lose your face

6

are you comforting me?
die away

I will give you some color
to see see

un-ding-able
thank you

know is know
noknow is noknow

7

I hope
I didn't upset him /her?

well, well, well ...
a sacred well is a well
that connects to the sea.

communication
starts

8

no wind
no waves

waves in the cup
I shall sit here, serving tea to friends

Chairman Mao said
good good study
day day up

brothers
together up

I will be happy to do this.

August 15, 2011

Note: This poem is the “Editorial Memoir” for the first issue of the journal of *EPSIANS*, published in September of 2011.

IV. Meeting Emily Dickinson

1

I was introduced to Emily Dickinson

by Dr. Rathmell at Christ College of Cambridge Univ.

The first poet he read with me.

Thus Emily Dickinson becomes the first poet

in the book I translated and edited

and published in China.

Thus I start with Emily Dickinson every year

when I teach poetry in English to my students

At first I did not feel anything much special

while reading Emily Dickinson

But the more I read

The closer we got

On one morning in 2011

when I was reading Emily Dickinson to my students

The door opened -- abruptly--

I saw Emily Dickinson --

-- Shining --

-- Just in front of me!

What a long journey

For me to reach you!

2

She is white

I am yellow

(as they say)

Should I love her?

What is the color of Love?

She is Christian

I am nothing

(as they say)

Am I allowed to love her?

Love can go without Christianity
Could Christianity go without love?

She is in America
I am in Asia
(as all can see)
May I love her?

Every drop of water in the Pacific
shall be turned into love
with love!

She is in the nineteenth century
I am in the twenty-first century
(as all can see)
Could I love her?

Time, time, time
Could it stop love?

3

I had been a slave
of the terror of Death, yet
Emily came up and waved it away
with your shining right hand

I felt your power of peace

The Power of Peace

I breathed it in

Oh

I breathed it in and in

I grew humble

and humbler

I became content with myself

with life itself

I cast no eyes at wealth, or fame, or pride

or anything

anymore

I became myself!

I became myself,

myself with

you --

2016/04/30

V. Color Politics

Is white a kind of color

It is. It is just common sense.

But why is the society

putting white and color against each other?

God creates all different colors to make the world

a colorful, therefore, beautiful place to live in

How boring it is if the world is just of one color!

Each color is precious, either white, yellow, red

black, brown, blue, or any other

All colors are equally precious

I do not know why people are classified

according to their color of skin

Skin is only skin deep

I could never tell who is white

who is black, who is brown

not even who is yellow

I was told I am yellow
Yet I have never believed it

When I was a kid
My mother often said I was black in summer
 when the sun is shining hot
and my mother often said I was white in winter
 when the sun is dim and snow is heavy

My mother said I was yellow
 only when I was pretty sick

When she said it
I knew it was time to see the doctor

In a Pennsylvania transportation department
I was asked the color of my eyes
Dark, I replied. I was suspicious why this question was asked.
No, Brown. The guy said while looking straight at my eyes
His strong interest in making it correct somehow
 made me feel a little scared. Something flashed
 into my mind, a scene of Nazi troops

examining people's color of eyes I saw in a movie.

Dark, I said.

But he wrote brown.

I do not know why people are so interested in

classifying people according to their color

I myself am pretty color blind

And I have never seen anyone who is truly white

or black, or brown, or yellow

I see each individual for their individual unique color

There are no two leaves that are exactly the same

There are no two people who are of exactly the same color

This is why the world is so beautiful.

How stupid it is to judge one

in light of one's color

yet not of one's inner beauty

How stupid to make a friend

according to the skin color

yet not of their minds and hearts

Color politics is a stupid game

played by people who are only skin deep
for their own stupid political interest

It is a boring game

How boring if people play and
are made to play it again and again

I see color as Nature sees it

All colors are equal children of Nature

Each color of each individual is an indispensable part of
the great painting that God paints the world.

2016/07/16

VI. A Love of Shining Night

1

The happiest
man & woman
young & old
am I to be

I have in my hand all my ancestors'
beautiful dreams except my own
modest one

6

They were happy for
they could die &
died
they were happy for
they could
pursue
me

They
hammer boundless vigour
and surging sweat
into a whip
driving hot summers and cold winters
like riding wild horses
flying in clicks and clicks and clicks

I cannot pursue
for I am the summit of summits
the happiest of the happiest
as they wished & worked out
day and night

16

Why they produced so many
beautiful & intelligent instruments
for killing the others and
themselves
as a whole as soon as
they had enough to eat

I see
their shadows growing
evil turns into beauty
it lures sharp edges drink blood dry
it transforms lives into rain bows

I see
heavy dark clouds
piling up in a blue sky
violent thundering & lightening
tearing apart all into
broken guns & rusted bombs
as rain
striking downwards
piercing through all roofs
smashing all cells
in a second
a thick layer of worthless iron & bronze
heaping up on the ground
all is drowned

only a few smoky shadows
escaped into the trembling sky
the earth, out of terror,
was suffocated

17

None of them survived
the radiation dosage is one hundred times
stronger than to kill any organism
they must know
death is the most beautiful
why they created
me suffering lonely in the
world by set-
ting a Clone Pro-
gramme left in a deep
cave that produced
(programme keeps on lying to me
that to rule over the whole world
is the most most most beautiful

shit

shiit

shiii-----

t)

I, truly, am not

grateful to them

Note: The original poem was composed in April of 2001 for being presented in the Cambridge Conference of Contemporary Poetry, and was published in 2002. [ISBN: 0-9539986-6-5]

VII. Non-Presence

2

Huge lawns are everywhere
growing on a same spot for centuries

The same spring comes
every year
the same winter departs
every year

with the same beauty
and unchangeable freshness

Lawns can be walked on
by college fellows
Lawns can be viewed
when a college is not closed to visitors

All around are signs

With their owners' titles

Huge trees are occupying huge spaces

leaving no chance for any new beings

A blackbird, who perches on the back chimney of Caius

College,

is claiming its territory at dusk

It sings beautifully

A moving mouse breaks his neighbour's privacy

while digging a humble hole

Too small a world!

'apologize'

'no'

Dark crows are waiting in the shade of trees
patiently

Murphy proves that one day
a bad mood of a single person
turns the whole earth
dozens of times
into heaven

Some people think war makes money

‘All things in the World are begot from Somethingness
And somethingness comes from Nothingness’
Laozi says, 2,500 years ago

Churches still serve bread and water
But fewer comers

People go travelling a lot nowadays
Hiroshima is a good place to take pictures

A pigeon is drinking in Cam

People like pigeons

6

Macdonald's sprung rapidly all over the nation

Yet it is hard to find a good native American speaker to learn
from

Students can communicate in English among themselves

But not with a native English speaker

Chinglish

'Professor,

Train your child

At the very beginning!'

'Why'

'To enter into USA Mainstream'

Ah, ah!

'I spent all my life deposit
but my son has an unchangeable accent----'

A man in two boats
No one is his

'English-learning should begin from baby-hood'
Chairman Mao says, 'Piepie Tide.'

8

'I will come back'
I tell my parents

A beautiful cloud is wandering
Lonely in the sky.
A leaf falls to its root.

Zhuangzi wakes up without knowing
Whether he is a butterfly

Dreaming to be a man

Or a man having dreamed to be a butterfly

Note: This poem is produced by the method of deletion of the poem of the same title published by PennSound in 2009. See: <http://writing.upenn.edu/pennsound/x/Li.php>.

VIII. Light of America

1

I did not understand why
so many successful officials and businessmen in China
had sent their children to America
or had bought a house here for their retirement life
though some of them were and are blaming
or even cursing America all the time

Are they stupid or crazy?
They are for sure the smartest people
They are so successful
and they are the only people who could afford to do that
maybe they are just dishonest
or too smart to be understood
by such ignorant people like me.

But I am always learning
to understand more of the world
both externally and internally

2

America was once a barbaric place

So many people were mercilessly murdered

just because their land was coveted

So many people were brutally enslaved (like animals)

just because of their color or race difference

So many people were unfairly excluded

just because of their foreign religious or cultural practice

So many people were violently dispatched

just because of their gender or sex-orientation difference

...

...

Yet the light of God gradually

woke up more and more Americans

and called on them to fight

for their own conscience

for their faith in God

in liberty, equality, fraternity

as well as for their brothers and sisters

And they prevailed

And the light of America started to shine

And has been shining till today

This is why so many people are coming over

And more are admiring all around the world

Is there any way to prevent them from coming over

Sure, the best way is to put out the light of America

People have many ways to do that

and racism that has never really died out

is certainly the closest way

to break America down

and put out the light of America

altogether.

How sad it would be

if it does happen someday.

3

I am just a poet and a teacher

I could hardly make enough money

to feed myself and my family

and to rent a small apartment to stay

I am not qualified to move to America

And I am content

It might be more desirable for me

to help build up my own homeland into

a place that shines too

Prometheus stole fire from the heaven

And brought it to light the earth

And even if the fire in Heaven might one day be put out

There will always be light in the universe

China was one of the most civilized nations

in the traditional age

However, it is just a teenager in the modern age

easy to be fooled, easy to get excited or to feel hurt

easy to get offended and annoyed,
and easy to rise up and break down

America as a nation is of only more than two hundred years

However its people are from all over the world

They are in no lack of civilized heritages

America is the big brother in the modern time

so far, it is dishonest not to admit it

And it does only good to learn the good from a good example

I am just a poet and a teacher

who loves his homeland as well as

the light of America

What I could do is limited, is humble

I will read some poems in a foreign language I like

to my students and explain

why I like them

Would they see the light

and be lit up?

2016/07/15

IX. Charles, my friend of lollypops

1

I met Charles
when I was in the kindergarten
We sat next to each other
We always sat next to each other

Sometimes I brought two lollypops to the kindergarten
and shared them with Charles
I enjoyed it much more when we had lollypops together
I smiled at him and he smiled back at me

Sometimes Charles brought two lollypops to the kindergarten
and shared them with me
We enjoyed it much more when we had lollypops together
He smiled at me and I smiled back at him

Charles stayed with me only for one year
and he moved to somewhere with his parents
more than forty years ago

And we have never met again

I never know why he came

or why he left

I do not know his family background

I do not know his family name

I even could not remember his face

Yet his name has deeply cut into my mind and my heart

And what I remember is that he likes lollypops

And would share them with me

We are best friends.

2

When I grew up

I went to college

And I went abroad

I have seen many new faces

And I am always sensitive to the name Charles

But when I offered a lollypop

None of the Charleses I met would take it

It is for children, they said

I started to send emails to friends

I started to post ads in all chatting spots on websites

I am looking for a Charles who likes lollypops

who would share them with me

and smile at me.

And I did get responses

Oh, I did.

3

I have got a homeless Charles

we met in the street

and we had lollypops together

and we smiled at each other

I have got a prince Charles

we met on the internet

and we had lollypops together

and we smiled at each other

I have got a professor Charles

I have got a military Charles

I have got a businessman Charles

I have got a farmer Charles

I have got more Charleses

Charleses of the yellow, Charleses of the White

black Charleses, brown Charleses

and we had lollypops together

and we smiled at each other

My friendship makes no difference in color or race

no difference in wealth or class

no difference in gender or age

I select friends with lollypops

I would share them with my friends

and when we have lollypops together

I smile at my friend, and my friend smiles back at me

2016/07/16

X. 曾经

题记：在费城郊区的小镇斯沃斯莫尔（Swarthmore Ave）附近散步时，偶尔发现了两把椅子，忽然似乎想到了上辈子的经历，颇有触动，于是写成了这一组诗。



1、曾经

曾经

你我相对而坐

你坐在东边

我坐在西边

你的面前是整个西方

可你的眼里只有我

我的面前是整个东方

可我的眼里只有你

2、赠花

我说我最喜欢春天

最喜欢春天里的荷花

你安静地听

你浅浅地笑

你给我背诵《爱莲说》

我也笑了

我说我更喜欢夏天
喜欢夏天的莲蓬
荷花凋谢之后就会长出莲蓬
等到莲蓬越长越丰满
膨胀得像要爆炸了
我就会下水去采摘莲蓬
然后吃掉

你摘了一朵鲜红的花儿送给我
你说你好喜欢
我说我也喜欢

我说我可不是淘气啊
我是真饿啊
十个莲蓬也不够我吃
至少可以垫垫肚子呢

你又送给我一朵雪白的花儿
你让我闻闻
我闻了
好香好香

3、莲蓬

我说莲蓬也有香味呢

闻着莲蓬的香味

晚上我都能笑醒

我摘莲蓬很有经验呢

好几次我在岸上看到一个莲蓬

下水去摘，又在荷叶林里

发现了好几个在岸上看不见的莲蓬

有一次我下水后发现了好多好多

我往前游，发现左边一个

摘了前面的回来摘左边的

摘了左边的，发现左边的左边还有呢

……

4、迷失

我游啊游啊，天都黑了

我不知道岸在哪边了

向前游

向后游

向左游

向右游

怎么就是游不出去呢

你依然静静地听

你依然浅浅地笑

你说你最爱种花了

我说我也喜欢

我想起大人讲的鬼故事

他们说这就是被鬼下了罩子

我的心砰砰直跳

我想我还是束手就擒吧

我抓着几根粗壮的荷梗

在水面躺了下来

感觉湖水那么温柔

怎么没鬼来抓我呢

它们抓住我

往水里面按一按不就大功告成了吗
是谁在暗中保佑着我呢

我休息了好一会儿
然后我决定只朝着一个方向游

然后呢？你问
然后我就游出了荷叶林了
真聪明，你说
我也无不得意地笑了

……

5、出走

你知道我的理想吗
我的理想是让我的孩子们
不再因为挨饿去摘莲蓬
让所有的孩子们都不再挨饿

于是我出发了
带着你送的两朵花儿

遇到愚昧的人

我让他看

红色的花儿

遇到迷狂的人

我让他闻

白色花儿

其实，只要那些聪明人不要

那么愚昧，那么疯狂

什么问题也都会烟消云散了

……

6、重逢

世界真小

原来你还在种花呢!

原来我们坐过的那一对椅子还在那儿呢

一张望西，一张望东

我曾经多么希望留下来和你一起种花啊

藤蔓早已覆盖了椅子
一切似乎从未变化

忽然我明白了
原来我一直就留在那儿
和你一起
在花海之中
在人海之中

2016年3月11日

Once

While taking a walk at Swarthmore Ave. in Swarthmore on an evening in the spring of 2016, I accidentally saw two chairs, facing each other, covered with ivies. Suddenly it seemed some of my last life experience came back to me. Thus I composed this poem as a record.



1. Once

Once

You and I sat, facing each other

You in the east

I in the west

Before you, it was the whole west

yet you only saw me in your eyes

Before me, it was the whole east

yet I only saw you in my eyes

2. Flowers

I said I like spring

I said I like the lotus flowers in spring

You listened to me quietly

You smiled quietly

I recited to you the prose of “Love of Lotus Flowers”

I smiled too

I said I like summer even more
I said I could not like more of the lotus seeds
When the lotus flowers are gone
lotus seedpods can be seen, growing fast
like the breast of a beautiful girl, growing fast
finally it gets mature, ready to explode at any time
I knew it was time, and plunged into water
to pick up the lotus seeds
and ate them

You picked up a flower of red and gave it to me
You said you love it so much
I said I love it too

I was not naughty at all
I was truly hungry
Even a dozen of lotus seedpods are too little food for me
They could, anyway, relieve me of some hunger

You gave me another flower, a snow-white
You asked me to smell it

I did

It is so fragrant

I am drunk

3. Lotus seedpods

I said lotus seedpods are also fragrant

Thinking of the smell of lotus seedpods

I sometimes laughed to wake up at night

I am pretty experienced in picking up lotus seedpods

For many a time, I saw a lotus seedpod on land

after getting into water, I saw more of them

hiding in the densely scattered lotus leaves

Once I saw more and more of them while in the water

I swam forwards, and found one on the left

after picking up the one in the front

I came back for the one on the left

after picking up the one on the left

I saw more on the far left

...

...

4. Getting lost

I swam and swam.

It was getting dark

I did not know where the land was

I swam forwards

backwards

to the left

and to the right

I just could not get out of the cover of lotus leaves

You listened to me quietly

You smiled quietly

You said you like planting flowers the most

I said I like it too

I thought of the stories of ghosts told by adults

I thought I could have been trapped by ghosts

My heart started to beat heavily

I told myself it should be the best to surrender

I took hold of a few strong lotus trunks

lying on water

The lake water is so gentle and warm

Why weren't there any ghosts coming over to catch me

It was so easy for them to succeed

What they needed to do is to press my head into the water

and all would be finished

Was anybody protecting me, unseen

I took a good rest

and decided to swim just at one direction

What happened? You asked

I swam out of the cover of lotus leaves and saw land

How smart, you said

I smiled, with much pride

...

...

5. On the way

Do you know my dream

My dream is simple

I wish my children do not have to swim

to pick up lotus seedpods to relieve their hunger

I wish all children in the world starve no more

I set out for fulfilling my dream

with the two flowers you gave to me

I show the red flower

to the stupid

helping them to see it

I show the white flower

to the maniac

helping them to smell it

In the end, I found it is all because of the smart people

so long as they do not turn themselves

too stupid or too maniac
so long as they do not make too much trouble
Many of the problems will just vanish naturally
...
...

6. Reunion

The world is so small
And you are still planting flowers
And the two chairs are still there, facing each other
one to the west, one the east

Once I desired so much to stay
to plant flowers with you

The two chairs are covered with ivies
It seems nothing has changed

I start to understand
I have never left

I am in fact always with you
amid flowers
amid human beings.

The original poem was written on 2016/03/11
and was translated on 2016/07/18

XI. The most beautiful poem

----To each of us, there is one poem that is the most beautiful

/a:/

/a:/

/a:/

/b/

/b/

/b/

爸

爸爸

爸爸爸

香老爸

臭老爸

真是一个臭老爸

豆豆

老豆

这是我老豆

爸，你好！

爸，你好！

爸，你好！

Hello father

Hello father

Hello father

亲爱的老爸

爸爸

爸

/b/

/b/

/b/

/a:/

/a:/

/a:/

April 20, 2016

Note: This poem is one that shall be called as TP-poetry, i.e., transparent performance poetry. Most of it is in Chinese. Yet by performing it, a person who does not know the Chinese language could get the feeling and sense. Thus it is transparent in a certain sense.

XII. Epilogue

A Tianist

I am a Tianist

Reason and Emotion are my two angels

1

Am I religious?

That really depends upon how you define religion.

I have my faith, my morals and my ethics.

I like religions that unite people

I do not like religions that separate them

Am I religious?

I am sure I am cultural

I have firm faith in modern cultural values

such as liberty, equality, democracy, and rule of law

My culture harbors all religions

that do not go against such modern values

I respect all existing religions in the world
and admire many of them

I went to many modernized religious places
that kept their doors to the public
and prayed there

I could not trust it if someone shows me a book
and says it records the deeds or will of God
or says it is of all truth and shall never
be reinterpreted or revised in the modern age

I could not trust it
because it is against Reason

I believe all books were written by human beings
I believe there is an angel and a devil in any human
I believe human beings see only what their eyes could reach
and know only what their age lets them know
I believe human beings make mistakes
I believe there is no book that is divine

I believe in God

I believe God would never speak to any human being

I believe human beings could never truly understand God

In fact, I prefer the term of *Tian* to the name of God

We could see Tian [天]

in every successful religion

and in God or gods of them

Yet none of them is Tian itself

Tian has the most beauty

Yet Tian never speaks

Tian has all the truth

Yet Tian never reveals it to anybody

Nevertheless

Tian has kindly bestowed us with

Reason and Emotion

2

I believe human beings are all created by Tian

all human beings are from the same origin

it is obvious to me because they are of the same bio-structure
though I am not sure how and why Tian create us

I believe all human beings are of one family
it is obvious to me because they could marry each other
and produce offspring

Thus they have natural right
to marry among them

And I believe anybody should marry
according to one's free individual will

I do not know why human beings had been so much
scattered and separated in the world in ancient times
Yet since they started to get to know each other in the modern age
and are able to communicate and meet each other
in person so easily nowadays
they shall be allowed and encouraged to freely love each other
and make the family of human beings
an even more unified, more lovely and more perfect one
People, no matter how separated they are,
could always be made into a family

by their children via marriage

I do not believe human beings should destroy each other
though I know they have to compete with each other
abiding by civilized modern laws
with their beautiful minds and hearts
with their honest work
to win their milk and bread
to win their sweethearts
to win respect in the society
and to win a life in honor of Tian

3

I believe every human being should love their family
either in the tradition or in the modern
and should take due responsibilities

I believe every human being should be honest
and do one's work well to serve the society

I believe, in the modern age, modern values
serve the society and each of us the best

and shall be respected and closely observed
I would be happy to pray together with people
who would follow modern cultural values

I believe every human is created with a divine purpose
though I am not sure what it is

However, I believe we could find our purposes
if we open our hearts for emotions to feel
and concentrate on our minds of reason to meditate
and work diligently in our daily lives to try hard

I will trust my two angels, Reason and Emotion
and treat them well
and work with them well

And live a life of a Tianist.

2016/07/15

Afterword

Zhongalish is born when East and West meet up.

Zhongalish is not British English, not American English.

Zhongalish is Zhongalish.

Zhongalish is naturally de-skilled and skillful at the same time.

Zhongalish is a territory that connects East and West, where many people make it their home.

This small poems collection attempts to explore into this virgin territory both linguistically and culturally.

My thanks go to Prof. Charles Bernstein, Mr. James Sherry, Prof. Liu Zhaohui, Dr. Ni Xiuhua and Dr. Zheng Jie for their kind editing or proof-reading work.

P.S. New Year's Letter of 2017

Note: This letter is added in 2021 as it serves as a very good background of the poetry book Zhongalish: Think and Feel Globally that published in 2016.

In January of 2016, I came to the US for a one-year program funded by CSC (China Scholarship Council), as a visiting professor at the Kelly Writers House at the University of Pennsylvania, with Professor Charles Bernstein as my sponsor. My focus was to do research on Modern American Poetry.

With the completion of 2016, my stay at UPenn is concluding itself, and it is a good time to take a look back to see what I have done, to thank people who have kindly offered me assistance, as well as to wish all of my friends a happy new year, moving into 2017.

1. Settling Down

I had done some preparation before travelling to the US, such as renting my apartment in Swarthmore just outside Philadelphia, paying a security deposit of one month's rent plus the rent for my first month, buying medical care for my family who was accompanying me to the US (covering the period, from the very moment that we would be landing on American soil), ordering some necessary furniture, and so on. My friend, Professor Liu Zhaohui, who had come to Penn a few months before me, gave me a lot of assistance for all this preparation.

My plane was due to leave for New York City at 1:20 am on January 24, 2016. However, there was a huge snow storm in NY and my plane was seriously delayed. Considering the further travel problems that we might encounter upon arrival, I postponed my flight to the 28th of January. All went on well that day. At my arrival, I saw heavy snow piled on both sides of the road or covering the land thickly. But the remaining travel to my apartment in Swarthmore was smooth.

As soon as we arrived to the apartment, a truck arrived to deliver some most necessary second-hand furniture for our empty department, that I had arranged and ordered for delivery from a visiting scholar from China who was returning to China. With the simple additional furniture, our home became functioning. Our neighbour Dr. Yao Na came upstairs to visit us, offering help and inviting us for lunch, and Dr. Hou Jia came over to help carry our luggage, inviting us for dinner. Those were the two most delicious meals we had ever had: after being in the air for more than 17 hours, on the whole journey for more than 25 hours, and being tired, without any proper meal.

Since I had been at Cambridge University for one year from 2001 to 2002 (while completing my doctorate thesis under the kind supervision of Mr. J. H. Prynne), I had thought I could settle down pretty fast. But it was not really true, as I was completely blind in the new situation in Philadelphia.

For the first couple of days, I concentrated on going through the procedure for sending my son, Henry, to Strath Haven Middle

School, a pretty good one in Pennsylvania, that I had checked up on the Internet before renting my apartment. The interest of my son often takes priority in my family. I had done some necessary preparation at home, so that no issue occurred, and Henry was very soon accepted. Although I had to fill in a lot of forms that tired me a little bit, I was pleased to see Henry was placed on the right track. Hard work with a good result is sweet.

I was curious of my neighbourhood and wanted to learn more, so I consulted Professor Charles Bernstein, who introduced many friends to me. One of his students, Davy Knittle, introduced to me Professor Laynie Browne, who lived very close in neighboring Swarthmore. Both Davy and Laynie are poets as well as poetry scholars, of my own kind, so that I was most delighted to know them. In due course, Laynie introduced to me Professor Andrea Liu, a local at Swarthmore, who offered to pick up my son to take him to the early morning orchestra rehearsals at his school every three days. All my family were indeed extremely grateful for this offer. Without it, what we could have possibly otherwise done is to go through all the trouble to call an Uber on early mornings for the whole spring semester.

I also sought talks with Miss Gwen Muren, a local poet in Philadelphia, introduced to me by my long-time friend Professor Keston Sutherland. I got a lot of valuable information from Miss Gwen Muren on Philadelphia.

I had been resistant to driving in Guangzhou. However, before coming over to the US, I anticipated that I might have to drive. Thus, I had taken a couple of driving lessons. At Swarthmore, it was confirmed that I must learn driving as soon as possible, so I took more driving lessons, and bought a second-hand car. I passed my road test the first time I took it, and got my driving license on the 20th of May. It was so easy that I felt the US was a paradise, considering how awkward the procedure is to get a driving license in my home city of Guangzhou.

After getting a car and a driver's license, I finally felt completely settled down. I had known, in theory, that the US was a nation on wheels. And now I understood more what it really meant: many facilities are designed with the assumption that all people are drivers. For example, most big supermarkets are not located in

towns, as they are in China. Instead, they are often located in open spaces with vast surrounding parking lots. Within walking distance, we do not have many choices to go shopping. However, with a car, we have a great variety of choices, mostly within 15 minutes of driving.

2. MocPoc and MEEP

I have been serving as the general-secretary for some NGOs in China, such as *EPSAC* (the English–Poetry [Poetry in English] Studies Association in China) and *PRIPF* (the Pearl-River International Poetry Festival). Additionally, I have been serving as directors of two research centers at Guangzhou University. Utilizing the organizational skills I obtained, I organized a small community named MocPoc (Modern Culture and Poetry Club), for visiting scholars from China, whose academic interests focus on poetry in English, as well as whoever would like to participate. It took some efforts to put MocPoc together, with Professor Bernstein’s assistance, and I organized two events which were pretty successful. Now, the problem is who should take it over

when I will have left. Maybe somebody will volunteer. I am not sure.

While having dinner at Professor Bob Perelman's house one evening (taken there by Professor Bernstein), I heard some students were looking for part-time jobs. My mind sparkled. I had been enjoying all the free services and facilities provided by Penn, and by the US at large, so I thought it would be a good opportunity for me to do something in return. I knew exactly how to create some good part-time jobs for university students. Thus, I initiated MocPoc EEP (English Education Program). The idea of MocPoc EEP (MEEP for short) was pretty simple: to match somebody in the US (as the tutor) with somebody in China (as the student) to create a pair, so that the former could tutor the latter in reading literary works in English to help the latter to learn English. The student should pay the tutor, while the program provides free organizational service. It is a non-profit program.

It required quite some skills in organizing everything. Fortunately, I understood exactly what kind of help students in China need to improve their English, so I designed the program accordingly. It

was so well designed that I was boasting that it was the best EEP in China. And I was very optimistic about its success.

After some experimentation of about eight months so far, the program has turned out to be extremely successful for some students who have gotten involved. Almost all students like this program. We have a membership of more than ten people, which is growing steadily. I tell myself not to let it expand too fast, as its quality shall be of the primary concern. I am also thinking that when there are more than 30 people eventually, I might need to hire somebody to help. The potential market is huge, as all students in China are required to learn English from primary school to college. I have not been sure how many of them I could help with this program, but I am sure that I could carry on with this program wherever I am located, so long as it runs well. It is a non-profit program that brings me great satisfaction while I see that both tutors and students are enjoying it.

3. Essays and poems

I have written four academic essays this year. One on *Pitch of Poetry*, a book recently published by Professor Bernstein. The essay has been accepted by *FLS (Foreign Literature Studies)*, the only A&HCI journal in China, and will be published soon. It was a great experience to closely read *Pitch of Poetry* and writing my essay. I had read Charles's essays before and, in fact, had translated one into Chinese. While I was reading his essays, I felt constantly inspired! Many of them are not in the European academic style. But they have their own characters and charm. Charles does not intend to establish an authority. Instead, he intends to provoke the readers into thinking to find their own poetics. His essays are of an open form that invite readers to participate.

The second essay was on Pound, Imagist, *Yijing* and *Duizhang*, which is ready to be submitted. In this essay, I propose that *Yijing* might help broaden the thinking and imagining ways in poetry in English. I sent it to Professor Marjorie Perloff, who said it was

pretty convincing, which I was so grateful to hear. The third essay is on the influences of Confucius and Plato on poetics in China and in the West, respectively. The essay probes the causes of their different cultural images of poets and poetry. I am thinking of writing an essay on “Critique of Impersonality” soon, maybe in 2017, which could not go well without the clarification of the foreground by my second and the third essays.

The above three essays are in English, while the fourth one is in Chinese that is a critical review of Professor Lu Jiande’s criticism on Chinese and Western poetries and poetics. This essay is a pretty long one, of about thirty-five thousand characters. It is long because the issues involved take some time and space to clarify. I had to propose a few totally new theories in explaining the dynamics of traditional Chinese poetry and culture. I disagree with Professor Lu’s views that belittle certain traditional Chinese poems, although I do agree with him that it is good to introduce Western poetics—such as stylistics of impersonality, objectivism, and others—into modern Chinese poetics. Professor Lu is a leading scholar in China whose essays I have enjoyed reading. Maybe due to the fact that I had read them too closely, I had

found some issues to argue against him. I have sent my essay for him to review, and I have been waiting for him to defend himself. I am wondering how he might respond? I know it is a little bit risky, but I do hate the fact that many academic people in China would always stay within their comfort zone, avoiding any challenge or controversy. They would never say a word against someone in a high academic position, who often has a decisive voice in allotting academic funds and other resources, so that all are in kind terms with each other, decaying and rotting together.

I have also written dozens of short essays—from 1,000 characters to 5,000 characters—on various modern cultural issues. I had realized that I had to address some fundamental modern cultural issues while doing my doctoral thesis, and I have been paying close attention to this area in the past couple of years. For my colleagues in the West, they might not need to do this in such a systematic way as I have been doing, because there might not be as many unsettled issues of this kind in their societies. As China is undergoing a fundamental cultural transformation, there has been lot of confusion about cultural values, which are seriously clouding people's minds. I have to find my own way out by

studying modern cultural values myself to understand how I should behave myself properly in the modern world.

I have published all short essays in an electronic journal that I am running myself, on the platform of WeChat. It is called *Modern Culture School* that has been subscribed to by a few thousands of readers. I have found that some essays are read for more than five thousand times, while others are read only around one hundred. I am writing really for cultivating my own thoughts, though I am happy the essays could benefit some readers as well. My definition of modern culture is very much like others' definitions of modern ethics, which include values such as: openness, understanding, friendliness, kindness, honesty, faithfulness, eagerness to help, liberty, equality, fair play in competition, rule of law, democracy, not to be wasteful, generosity, organization, innovation, courage, willingness to face challenges, and so on. I need these values to guide my life, and I call them my "God of Life." I also believe there is God of Creation who would never show up, and whom we could never fully understand. Fortunately, He did install us with humanity, with reasoning power, and emotional capability as the means for us to interpret his wills and

to find our God of Life. With this guide of my God of Life, I could always reinterpret, or reform, whenever necessary, those cultural values proposed by Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism, or any other cultural or religious idea that might cause confusion for me in the modern world. I would not really mind if people would interpret their Gods in medieval ways, calling upon religious freedom to justify it, so long as I could be allowed to carry on my own life with the guide of modern cultural values.

I have also composed dozens of poems, either in Chinese or in English, all of which are published in *Modern Culture School*. I could publish them at any moment I want to. With the kind assistance of Professor Bernstein, the Kelly Writers House, Segue Foundation, and Mr. James Sherry, I had collected and published some of them as a small poetry book with a title *Zhongalish: Think and Feel Globally*. My deep gratitude goes to Professor Marjorie Perloff, Professor Susan Stewart, and Professor Charles Bernstein who had kindly commented on it. Charles sponsored a reading of this book for me at the Kelly Writers House on the 20th of October, which was pretty enjoyable.

Zhongalish is a term I invented to clarify my own cultural identity as well as many other people in my field. We were born in *Zhongguo*, and have been learning different literature or other cultural aspects in America and/or England (and/or in other English-speaking communities) all our lives, which eventually makes us *Zhongalish*. I have found that *Zhongalish*, in fact, goes far beyond, and had long been existing and very successful, though we had not clarified its identity. For example, Pound's *Cathay* is *Zhongalish* and the whole *Pinyin* system in China is *Zhongalish*. Indeed, *Zhongalish* has served as an indispensable world that connects China and the West. *Zhongalish* learns from both China and the West and often inherits both of their strengths. It might not be too risky to say that *Zhongalish* people could often find themselves more American or English than some American or English citizens, in cultural terms, after they have learned and inherited more of the defining cultural values innovated by those great people in America and England, and that are marvels for all human beings—than some of their citizens who just want to be rich and have a comfortable life while not caring much about the rich cultural heritage their ancestors have left behind. I often feel surprised to meet English people who have read very little of

Shakespeare, or Americans who do not know either Walt Whitman or Emily Dickinson. Well, maybe I should not be surprised, as there are many people in China who do not read or think much either.

I have been editing a textbook of modern poetry in English for college students in China recently. This book was published in 2005 and sold out for more than twenty thousand copies. Although the payment I was offered could not even cover the cost of the camera I bought for this project, I have been feeling happy to have served so many readers. Since it had been out of print, I decided to revise and republish it in a new edition. Hopefully, I could finish it before leaving Philadelphia to return to China at the end of January 2017.

Despite the fact that I have been learning English for more than thirty years, I have to ask for help from some good native speakers of English to edit my essays in English before I have them submitted. It is almost impossible for a non-native, who has not been offered adequate time or opportunities to become more natively fluent, to figure out most idiomatic ways of writing in

English. Languages are very lively, and they change constantly. This is in fact another reason why I have been so enthusiastic in organizing the MEEP, as I am often thinking I might have done a much better job with my English if I had had such a good opportunity, when I was learning English as a kid. Fortunately, I could always get help from my friends to edit my essays in English. My special gratitude goes to Dr. Jenny Greenshields, introduced to me by Professor Keston Sutherland, who would spend hours in editing a single academic essay of mine. For non-academic writings, such as this one, I just keep them in the way that they come out of my mind.

4. The US Presidential Election in 2016

I had never expected to experience such a heated and hated presidential election in the US. It was a pretty depressing experience for me, though it was intellectually good for me, because it had opened my eyes to many aspects of the US that I had not known. I had read much of people like George Washington and Abraham Lincoln and had been preoccupied with the understanding that the American political system is led by

honesty and justice. However, to my great disappointment, it was once and again confirmed that both presidential candidates in 2016 lied a lot, which seemed to have turned the presidential election into a match for telling well or ill-conceived lies. It turned out that the politicians were just as crazy as my kind of people, the poets, as the former tells lies recklessly while the latter tells truth recklessly.

Most of my friends in Philadelphia were for Hilary Clinton, and I was for my friends. But Clinton was so careless as to make herself vulnerable to many wicked lies, and so ill-organized in her campaign strategy, that she finally lost the election although many people had predicted the opposite with confidence. She and her team even could not have found a better campaign slogan than that of Trump (as I have analyzed in a short essay). One of my esteemed friends told me that she did vote for Hillary, but she did not feel sorry for her at all when hearing of her loss. I followed her comment and stance, though I could not help feeling depressed for some time.

It is an election that allows me to see the best people and the worst people in the US, as well as the majority in between. I admire those people who would never reconcile with Trump's ill views on race, women, and many other issues. They will surely struggle on, unless Trump openly corrects himself of all the ill views that are in direct confrontation with modern cultural values. I admire those people also because they have helped me understand that a free and happy life is not given by anyone, not even by God. Instead, it is the outcome of hard and consistent fighting.

I had not realized that there are so many bigots in the US, who have deep hatred to anyone who is not of their kind. They have very deep-rooted deformed stereotypes in understanding any people they do not like. I am imagining, in their eyes, a "Chinese" person might always be an uneducated coolie with a huge pigtail behind for them to pull around. They might not understand that the pigtail is in nowhere but in their own minds. Well, there are many bigots in China, too, who have offered me opportunities to learn how to identify and avoid them, or how to fight them when necessary.

There were so many lies or biased views in the media, including the so-called respected mainstream ones. Those lies or biased views indeed polluted people's eyes and minds. I am happy that various media often contradicted each other, so that I could be reminded to rethink before believing in any of them. Maybe this is why students should be taught to think critically right at the start of primary school. Maybe I shall not complain at all as it might just be a universal phenomenon. Maybe I shall take full responsibility if I was misled or cheated by any story. The media tell a lot of lies, but the media tell all the truth, too. I shall not complain too much.

I had been pretty cautious of ill-intentioned tricks. But it was just too difficult to escape from all of them. Once I was pretty much convinced that President Obama's birth certificate was a fake after viewing the presentation given by Mr. Sheriff Arpaio, and I subsequently felt shocked about Obama's stupidity. I waited for some sort of clarification from the White House, but nothing happened. I had to consult my friends, helping me out of the worries inside me that were being built up, and I was told that

there was zero creditability to Mr. Sheriff Arpaio. I was offered the background unknown to me. Well, another shock struck me hard, this time, not for “Obama’s stupidity,” but for my own. I realized I was just an outsider to politics, and it would be wise for me to keep some cautious distance from politics here and there, as I had been practicing back at home in China. Maybe I am just credulous in nature, one who could easily be trapped, if getting too close to governmental politics where people ruthlessly fight for grabbing the biggest share of interest. Maybe I am just a guy who is suitable to work in the field of modern poetry, modern education, and modern culture studies, where people are much more honest and friendly, and where people could only get a bare salary to feed themselves and their families, so that there is not so much of a temptation to tell wicked lies.

I have shared the bitterness with my friends, and, fortunately in the end, I have also worked myself out of the situation by piecing myself back together.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, I had greatly enjoyed the year of 2016 in the US! I had met and made some new friends, and I have learned more about the American society. I have also understood myself better. I appreciate all the kind help from my friends and also acquaintances and strangers. I hope that I could be given an opportunity in the future to do something in return. I enjoyed living in Swarthmore, as the town was peaceful and people were pretty friendly to newcomers. Besides, there was a great well-organized community library that I like very much!

Many of my friends from China had travelled extensively during their visit to the US, while I had only travelled to Los Angeles for the fifth CAAP convention, to New York to visit Professor Bernstein's family, and to Washington, D.C. to stay with a friend's family. There are two reasons that I limited my travel within the US: the first reason is that I had travelled quite extensively when I was in the US for a Fulbright program of multi-cultural studies at UCSB in 2008. The second is that I am more interested in communicating with human beings rather than

with the beauties of nature. I do love natural beauties, but I would enjoy exploring them more while travelling and chatting with a few friends.

I am grateful to Strath Haven Middle School that had taught my son, Henry, who had reported no bullying at all. In fact, Henry had fallen deeply in love with his teachers and classmates, though I am pretty sure he might not have made it known to any of them. I appreciated the great help from our dear neighbours, Katherine and Eric, two most brilliant and sweet young people, who have offered me a lot of kind advice, and had kept their doors open to Henry whenever he wanted to visit them. It is getting pretty obvious that my son enjoys reading more with them than with his parents. Well, maybe all kids will get bored with their parents at a certain point, as it is a sign of becoming more independent. I am so grateful he could always be allowed to go to the best place for his own good.

As a professor of English in China, my defined responsibility is to promote mutual understanding and peace to this world, and whatever disturbs me most is the hatred that is polluting this

world, as well as the war of killing that is the most devastating to humanity. I understand there are always disputes between different interest groups, but I also firmly believe that all issues could and should be settled by talks, negotiations, and compromises, no matter how hard it might be. If there shall be fights, let them be verbal fights—not fights of the bloody killing of innocent people! It is always the case that wicked people wage wars, while innocent people get killed. I am very much encouraged to see that good communications and mutual understandings have been well established and are becoming more and more strengthened among the people in China, the US, and other English-speaking nations. It is no surprise if we just keep in mind how many people in China have received, or are receiving, education in English—either in China or in the US or in other English-speaking nations. I myself take it as a great honour to be in this profession.

In order to do a job well, one must have full faith in whatever one is doing. I do believe my job is the most valuable in the world. I would not trade it even for Mr. Trump's hard-earned presidency. If he did offer me the presidency and I had to accept it, the first

thing I would want to do is to reduce the number of nuclear weapons in the whole world to zero (a noble cause also shared by President Obama), because human beings should never be allowed to employ such evil weapons upon their own species. Human beings are created by God, and nobody should be allowed to have the power to demolish His divine plan.

I might have imagined a little too wildly and gone a little too far. I shall just do my job, and do it well, in my modest social position and with my limited capability. Again, my thanks to all my friends who have generously planted the seeds of all different acts of kindness in my mind and in my heart. Please be assured that the seeds you have planted will sprout and bloom and send more acts of kindness around.

I often ask me the question of who I am. In a certain sense, I am just a social being, with my mind and my heart made up of all the influences they have received, reordered with the reasoning power and emotional capacity endowed by the God of Creation. With my version of modern cultural values, built upon the intelligence and wisdom of my friends in the past (who wrote to

me and whom I read), as well as my contemporary friends (who talked and whom I listened to), I could always well guard the acts of kindness from my friends and ensure that they take root and prosper inside of me. Meanwhile, I could always cure the wounds in my mind and in my heart caused by the harshness received and not let them bring me down. In fact, the process of suffering and recovering could often help me grow wiser, more determined, and tougher. In this sense, sufferings, paradoxically, are good, even necessary, for a person to grow stronger, so long as they are not too devastating, and so long as there are friends who would give a hand when needed. Thanks to the goodness of humanity, my God of Life, who has guided my mind and my heart, so that we could inherit, produce, and shed some unswerving light to whomever wants it.

Life is complicated, as it is designed that way or I have picked it up that way. I could have lived a much simpler and happier life, playing *Majiang* and having banquets all the time. But I have somehow been led to the more complicated version of a lifestyle that requires constant cultivation of reasoning power and emotional capacity, in which I have made many mistakes that

often put me into awkward situations. But I could often find assistance from friends, in the past and at present, who are living the same lifestyle and are really my extended life. I live in the lives of other people, and other people are in mine. This is how the world of humanity is made up.

It is sunny today in Swarthmore, with some clouds scattering in the blue sky, and leafless trees and leafless vines on the earth below ----

Lifeless in appearance, sluggish
dazed spring approaches ----

They enter the new world naked,
cold, uncertain of all

save that they enter. All about them
the cold, familiar wind ----

Now the grass, tomorrow
the stiff curl of wild carrot leaf

One by one objects are defined ----

It quickens: clarity, outline of leaf

But now the stark dignity of

entrance ---- Still, the profound change

has come upon them: rooted they

grip down and begin to awaken

Well, I might just have been too talkative! I shall just shut up, and say goodbye to 2016!

And let me wish a most happy year of 2017 to you all!

2016/12/28

"I am proud of being a Zhongalish," declares Li Zhimin in the "Prologue" to his delightful, candid and witty new book of poems—his first in English. *Zhong* means middle or center and indeed Li Zhimin, a frequent visitor to the U.S., has come to regard himself as decidedly "in-between." Incorporating the word *ai* (love) into his lyrics, he reaches out to his new world only to find himself enmeshed in verbal quandaries:

hesitate: he sit & ate

legislate: leg is late

campus : camp us

What does it all mean? To watch Li Zhimin negotiate his changing relationships, whether with the poetry of Emily Dickinson or with the *Tian* (heaven) of his childhood is a continuous pleasure. Read Zhongalish and you will find yourself smiling from beginning to end.

Marjorie Perloff, Stanford University

Li Zhimin is a visionary writer: he crosses deftly from the present to the future, and awakens the deep past as well--and always with a searching moral sense. He teaches us that "A sacred well is a well/ that connects to the sea."

Susan Stewart, Princeton University

Li Zhimin, a stellar poet and scholar from Guangzhou (China), has written a book of English language poems, bringing to this new language a fresh style and perspective, both delightful and edifying, poems that have a wary (and savvy) ingenuousness. Rather than write poems in the idiom of "the American," Li takes delight in foreignizing the familiar and making familiar the foreign. These are poems at the intersection of East and West, or perhaps better to say poems where the one melts into the other, creating a new kind of syncretism (what Li calls "Zhongalish").

Charles Bernstein, University of Pennsylvania

\$12.00 US

