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# *The Banyan Tree, Untitled, To --, A Dried Flower--For Someone, Palace-Cave Mountain, and Nanmu Forest* by Cai Qijiao

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Edward Morin, Dennis Ding, and Fang Dai  
*The Banyan Tree*

Cai Qijiao  
榕树

I've come to believe that no plant more than he  
embodies so completely the spirit of my homeland.  
His tangled roots spread out in all directions  
like bronze that can split the hardest rock,  
while the benevolent long beard fluttering in the sky  
caresses and fondles the resplendent air;  
his branches generously give many kinds of life a dwelling—  
small parasitic weeds below, powerful eagles perched above.  
He towers by the roadside extending his hands to all sides  
as if ready to lift myriad things on earth to great heights.

1956

Edward Morin, Dennis Ding, and Fang Dai  
*Untitled*

Cai Qijiao  
无题

Whoever bare their teeth and brandish their claws  
are as rare as phoenix feathers and unicorns.  
Candor and loyalty are just as rare.  
For them deception is a common strategy;  
they put on a Buddhist kasaya  
or the kind of coat everyone else wears  
and go on hiding their hearts' hatred of mankind.  
Don't let calamity dissemble happiness,  
don't let an emperor pose as a teacher,  
don't let blindness replace an ideal,  
but observe calmly with vigilant eyes,  
and don't blithely trust the most beautiful words.  
Imperialism is your foe!  
Feudalism is your foe!  
Ignorance is yet another!

1963

Edward Morin, Dennis Ding, and Fang Dai

To —

Cai Qijiao

致 —

Because you love others more than yourself  
your heart bears a full load of gnawing pain  
and blossoms with intense feelings like a rose.

You wear sharp thorns only for self defense.  
Unfriendly to boors, you yourself are so gentle  
that moonlight forges music in your soul.

Before hope would fly out of your bosom  
raindrops have already soothed your feelings,  
and therefore sparks flash from your shining eyes.

To tell the truth, your heart is like a green seedling  
that dearly loves springtime's morning dew—  
moon and rain your only escort as you begin your journey.

1973

Edward Morin, Dennis Ding, and Fang Dai

*A Dried Flower—for Someone*

Meandering in from far away  
this flower whose color hasn't faded  
keeps bringing back roguish memories;

today it seems to still hold  
the air and sunlight of that day  
and shall never change  
even when snow falls and ice congeals.

1975

Cai Qijiao  
赠人以枯花

Edward Morin, Dennis Ding, and Fang Dai  
Palace-Cave Mountain

Cai Qijiao  
洞宫山

Dreams lean out from the intense green of this mountain plain  
You can almost hear waves crashing  
Tall cliffs are transformed into sails  
The valley vanishes into the horizon

A silver mirror reflects the spring landscape  
charged with flowing light, without the trace of one ripple  
How I wish this green tide  
would engulf and obliterate the desolate poverty

The original fountainhead of life is water  
My reverie on the last hundred years suddenly takes wing  
Unfinished laughter is calling  
the rose that steadily moves westward

O great land, how could all those hopes of yours  
have moved me this much and not broken my heart?

November 25, 1986

Edward Morin, Dennis Ding, and Fang Dai  
Nanmu Forest

Cai Qijiao  
楠木林

In the vast dense shade of overlapping limbs  
rising tier upon tier  
over this world of fragrant plants  
the wind fills a void and dances with elegant silhouettes

To oppose misdeeds everywhere  
a man craves to hear some birdsong  
sweet notes that lead  
every path toward tranquility

Everything is on the way to being destroyed  
Everything is striving toward completion  
The grassland with blue crystalline dewdrops  
and the stream's song rippling in a cool wind  
have brought about this everlasting green

November 26, 1986

Cai Qijiao stands out as a rare poet who extricated himself from the meshes of Socialist Realism under Mao Zedong, survived ostracism before and during the Cultural Revolution, and persisted in writing individually inspired, high-quality poetry. Over a period of four decades, he produced a large, masterful corpus whose literary merit ranks him as a major poet and among the most important living in China until his death in 2007.

Born in 1918 in Fujian Province, Cai Qijiao emigrated with his parents to Indonesia and returned to China by himself at age thirteen. After high school, he went home to Indonesia, returned to China again in 1938, and later walked with friends several hundred miles from Wuhan to Yan'an, where he joined the forces of Mao Zedong. As a cultural worker with the New Fourth Army, Cai began to write poetry in 1941. He married in 1943 and had several children. After the Communist Party came to power in 1949, he entered Lu Xun Arts Academy where he studied literature. When the novelist Ding Ling founded the Central Literature Training Institute in 1952, she picked Cai to head its teaching and research office of foreign literature.

Cai had the rank of military officer dating back to the years of the Sino-Japanese War, yet he associated very little with military people after 1950. Because of a liaison with a high ranking officer's wife, he was convicted in 1965 of "disrupting a military marriage," an offence sometimes arbitrarily and severely punished. After a year and a half in prison, he was released on parole and later sent to a "forest farm" for reform by labor. He lived under the cloud of being "politically irrelevant" and a "hooligan" until the conviction was overturned in 1985.

In the 1950s, Cai published three collections of poems focusing on rural life in a folk style encouraged by the Communist Party. Officials criticized Cai's poems for concentrating on scenery, people, and love, and for showing little regard for promoting political objectives. Chastised after the Hundred Flowers and Anti-Rightist traps of 1957–58 for expressing personal feelings in nature poems, Cai continued writing poems, but kept them out of sight and published no books of poetry for more than twenty years.

Cai has the rare distinction of having written personal poetry during the Cultural Revolution (1967–1976) and preserving it until it could be published afterwards. The Communist Party required all writers to produce only morale-building, "spears and dragons" poetry in support of government programs. Poems expressing personal feelings were considered seditious, so nearly all poets stopped writing personal poems. While China endured thought control whose severity has become legendary, Cai improved his art with the study of classical Chinese and foreign literature. Holding the work classification of "professional writer," Cai had leisure for study and the means to travel extensively throughout China. For years he made his home in Beijing and spent winters in the milder climate of his home province, Fujian.

In the late 1970s, when the “obscurist poetry” (*menglong shi*) of young writers attracted official criticism against their unauthorized magazine *Today* (*Jintian*), Cai Qijiao did not join other established poets in censuring them. He had been a teacher and mentor of the Fujian poet Shu Ting, an important member of the Obscurists. Cai became friends with the young poets and encouraged their work. While very popular with readers in China, his poetry has been less well received there by scholars and critics, who avoid putting him in any category with his peers. They do not know how to fit him into their existent poetic discourse.

Cai Qijiao’s prolific output since the Cultural Revolution includes poetry collections *The Double Rainbow* (1981), *Praying* (1981), *Fujian* (n.d.), *Songs of Life* (1982), *Facing into the Wind* (1984), and *The Drunken Stone* (1986). Compilations of his poetry include *Selected Works of Cai Qijiao* (Hong Kong: Wenxue yanjiushe, N.D., preface dated 1979); *Lyric Poems* (Hong Kong: Modern Press, 1993), which contains a sequence dedicated to student victims of the Tiananmen Square massacre; and *Selected Poems of Cai Qijiao* (*Cai qijiao shixuan*) (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1997). An edition of his collected works in eight volumes, titled *A Gallery of Poems* (*Cai Qijiao shi ge hui lang*) and edited by Liu Denghan, was published by Straits Press, Fuzhou, in 2002.