DIVE-IN **2025, 5(1S)**: 123–152
https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.2785-3233/23647

A Time that Goes Nowhere: The Resemantization of Time as an All-Human Language in Zheng Xiaoqiong's Poetry and our Contemporaneity

Martina Renata Prosperi
University of Wrocław

Abstract Zheng Xiaoqiong (Sichuan 1980–) is a contemporary poet best known for her *dagong* (migrant workers') poetry, often interpreted through subaltern or ecocritical lenses. This article proposes a broader reading of Zheng's work, arguing that her poetry addresses the experience of time as a specifically human and embodied language. Departing from the linear, progress-oriented temporality underlying dominant modern narratives, Zheng's poems reveal time as both physical and cognitively constructed – a rhythm inscribed on bodies and environments that exposes both the interdependence of all beings and the linguistic nature of human lives. Through an intersectional and transcorporeal approach, indebted to thinkers such as Adriana Cavarero and Stacy Alaimo, the contribution investigates how Zheng's resemantization of time arises from her situated experience as a female migrant worker, yet ultimately speaks to the condition of human existence as a whole. Comparative readings with other Sinophone authors further highlight how her poetry transforms personal marginality into a wide-reaching meditation on the possibilities of being human in a world of supposed crises, and concrete, inevitable, transcorporeal – possibly transconscious – interconnection.

Keywords Zheng Xiaoqiong; *dagong* poetry; transcorporeality; time; crisis.

1. Introduction: Zheng Xiaoqiong and the Critical Reception of Her Poetry

Zheng Xiaoqiong 郑小琼 was born in 1980 in a village in Sichuan, which she left in 2001 in search of work in Dongguan. In Dongguan – a booming city in southern China, located roughly between Guangzhou and Shenzhen – she moved from one factory to another, from one identification number to the next. The only constants in this anonymous and mechanical existence were the inevitable corporeality of herself and things surrounding her, time as a human measure inscribed on bodies by the cycle of the seasons, and poetry, which Zheng began to publish in literary magazines, gradually earning her recognition.

Although Zheng worked in factories for seven years, her poetry was noticed early on, and especially with the rise of the internet she soon became part of networks of poets and writers, engaging in fruitful exchanges. As early as 2003 she received the *First China Folk Poetry Prize for a New Poet*, followed by several other awards – particularly after 2007, when the release of her poetry collection *Huangmaling* 黄麻岭 marked the beginning of her publishing career (to date, Zheng has published ten books). In addition to recognition from literary magazines and numerous local and national literary prizes, it is worth mentioning the prestigious *China Quyuan Poetry Gold Prize* and the national *Lu Xun Literary Prize*, both awarded to her in 2014 (Zhou 2016: 93–94).

Public attention, both national and international, academic and non-academic, subsequently followed. The CNKI database alone currently lists around 150 academic texts that, since 2007, have focused on – or made mention of – Zheng Xiaoqiong's poetry.[1] There is also a substantial body of scholarship in English, as well as scientific and journalistic articles in various other languages. In fact, Zheng's poetry has now been translated into many languages, including Japanese, Korean, Turkish, Vietnamese, and other Asian languages, as well as English, German, French, Spanish, Italian, Swedish, and more.

As far as academic attention is concerned, most scholarship situates Zheng Xiaoqiong's production within the tradition of *dagong shige* 打工诗歌 "migrant worker poetry," emphasizing her representation of factory labor, bodily suffering, and social marginality (e.g., Zou & Wu 2025; Shen 2025; Picerni 2020; Zhou 2016). Her identity as a female migrant worker has also given rise to a substantial body of feminist and gender-focused analysis, exploring how her work articulates the experiences of the *dagongmei* 打工妹 "young women laborers," constructing a distinct subjectivity that combines class and gender oppression while asserting new modes of female self-expression. As regards socio-political dimensions, Zheng's poetry has been studied for her ecological and ecofeminist concerns (e.g., Gong 2018; Feng 2017; Gong 2012), which have also gained her the attention of non-academic circles of environmental activism and ecopoetry.[2] Ultimately, there is no lack of studies interpreting her work through broader lenses, such as the philosophical approach of post-existentialism (Shao 2025), or connecting her writing to wider literary and

[1] Search for "郑小琼". *CNKI.net*, https://www.cnki.net/kns/defaultresult/index [last accessed 25 Sept 2025].

[2] E.g. Zheng, Xiaoqiong. n.a. "What are the ecological / social crises within your region / country?". *Ecopoetikon.org*, https://ecopoetikon.org/poets/portfolio/zheng-xiaoqiong [last accessed 25 Sept 2025].

ideological contexts, such as the legacy of left-wing literature (e.g., Feng 2018; Gong 2012), the rise of new popular culture (e.g., Dai & Zhang 2025; Li et al. 2025), or the production of writers such as Yu Xiuhua 余秀华 (1976–) and Fan Yusu 范雨素 (1973–), who similarly challenge literary norms from positions of social marginality (e.g., Wei 2021; Liu 2020).

A recurring motif in this criticism is the centrality of pain and the body. Zheng's depiction of physical exhaustion is read both as an autobiographical testimony and as a metaphor for systemic violence under globalized capitalism. Yet, researchers have also pointed to a perceivable evolution in her writing – from the early "migrant worker poetry" label to more personal, experimental, and intellectual modes, extending her focus from the factory and the city to questions of ecology and spirituality (e.g., Zhang 2016).

This article precisely situates itself within this strand of research which, by moving beyond the label of "migrant poet," seeks instead to explore the broader value of Zheng Xiaoqiong's work. More specifically, this contribution aims to examine the resemantization of time observable in a selection of Zheng's poems, situating this perspective of hers within a framework of transcorporeal dynamics and relations – hence, within a field of inquiry that does not concern Chinese migrant workers alone, but humanity as a whole. My methodological stance thus resonates with Van Crevel's (2025) invitation to an ontological approach to Zheng's poetry yet advances a distinct critical focus: I examine the resemantization of time in Zheng Xiaoqiong's poetry through an intersectional lens. Whereas Admussen (2025: 14, 15 and ff.), who also discusses the topic of time in relation to poetic expression and contemporaneity, interrogates the "dehomogenization of spacetime" in contemporary poetry – conceptualizing time as rhythm – and links its arrhythmic perceptions to the asymmetrical temporalities of climate change across localities, my analysis shifts the emphasis from ecological and (g)located temporality to humans' most intimate and embodied temporal experience.

Namely, I investigate how time is reinvented as a fundamental category of meaning-making – a framework through which human consciousness makes sense of, survives and navigates both internal and external changes. In an age that renders us both contingent and eternal – one that projects humans onto the increasingly "timeless" horizon of chronic consumerist time shortage (Kaufman-Scarborough & Lindquist 2003) while also confronting us with generative language models that are themselves "timeless," disembodied, and thus potentially eternal – reading Zheng's poetry through this lens may add a timely contribution to existing interpretive frameworks. Indeed, it offers an

occasion to revisit the "outmoded," as Miller lamented (2003: 86), question of time in literature, or more broadly in language, prompting a renewed reflection on the human as a temporal being, living physically and cognitively in the very time that language seeks to analogize and represent.

Central to my argument is the correlation between the resemantization of time observable in Zheng's work and her subject position as both a woman and a migrant worker – a figure hyper-exposed to environmental degradation yet also actively embedded within its unfolding realities. Thus, if Admussen foregrounds the desynchronization of time in relation to planetary crisis (Admussen 2025: 26, 37, etc.) – already identifying a positive implication in its opening up the possibility for new, locally grounded rhythms and "strange loops" (Admussen 2025: 25, 33–34) – my aim is to further illustrate how another kind of positive – and possibly redemptive – resignification of time may be traced in the work of my case-study author. As a conclusion to my analysis, I eventually argue that, considering this resemantization as emerging from the situated, intersectional subjectivity of a woman poet living and writing within that very crisis – that is, on those margins where issues such as environmental pollution, gender violence, and a sense of disorientation and identity loss are most acutely felt – its perspective holds all the more significant potential for enabling us to confront this so-called 'crisis' with engaged empathy and new constructive responses.

2. The (Human) Body of Time: Transcorporeality as a Theoretical Framework

The core argument of this article posits that, in this age of "great derangement" (Ghosh 2017) and of "death of transnational time" (Admussen 2025), Zheng Xiaoqiong's poetry conveys a return to a possibility of "human time." This concept of human time – one rooted in the environment and interpersonal relationships – emerges from her poetry as more authentic and fulfilling than the progressivist and eschatological notion of time prevailing in contemporary societies.

While progressivist time is aimed toward a phantomatic development being never fully attainable and thus having detrimental effects on the world and its inhabitants, acknowledging the "unfathomable enigma" of human temporality (Miller 2003: 89), poetry – and literature in general – have often

been representing senses of time which better resonate with our human experiences.

Thus, if it might be true that "each literary work has a different time sense – even those by the same author" (Miller 2003: 87), my attempt here is to detect a time-related discourse underlying Zheng's verses that – despite its different manifestations – might be indexical of a well-weaved and coherent resemantization of time. Subsequent to this analysis, time finally reveals itself to be a cognitive device, that is, a meaning-making process existing through human language, yet nonetheless indispensable to (return to) being human.

To introduce and understand the alternative sense of time proposed by Zheng Xiaoqiong, and the resulting extended value of her poetic activity – one that exceeds the label of "migrant poetry" to address our shared entanglement within the material, linguistic, and "temporal" contexts that shape our life experiences as humans – I will employ Stacy Alaimo's concept of transcorporeality. While this involves a degree of simplification that may not do full justice to the depth and wide-reaching implications of Alaimo's theorization, it remains functional to the scope of the present article. In this sense, the concept is understood here as the inseparability of human corporeality – "in all its material fleshiness" – from its embedding environment.

> Transcorporeality does the opposite of distancing or dividing the human from external nature. It implies that we're literally enmeshed in the physical material world […] there's no nature that we just act upon. Instead, it's also acting back upon us, as we are always already the very substance and the stuff of the word that we are changing (Kuznetski & Alaimo 2020: 139).

The term 'transcorporeality,' thus, might well describe the physical (and possibly social) position in which every human being is situated – and indeed every existing being, whether living or not, with a more or less visible physicality. Differently said, the notion of transcorporeality allows conceiving of the subject as "generated through and entangled with biological, technological, economic, social, political and other systems" (Alaimo 2018: 436). Thus, in the case of Zheng Xiaoqiong, this term might prove particularly appropriate for foregrounding the intersectionality of the forces and variables that act upon her body and person, and are in turn acted through them: not only the force of the chemical elements and metals with which she contaminates the environment and by which she herself is contaminated, but also the global economic dynamics in which she inevitably participates – as well as the unquestioned patriarchal regime that these dynamics indeed perpetuate:

> For example, in the poem "Age of Industry," Zheng employs the voice of a migrant worker to show that her life and workplace on the assembly line in a factory are inter-twined with the global market […] : "Japanese machines in American-invested factories carry iron / produced in Brazilian mines; / . . . / I am keeping busy every day / for the sake of peacefully arranging the world in a factory". […] [Additionally,] Zheng's emphasis on the intersections of patriarchy and market economy extends the critique of sexual exploitation of women beyond sexism in China to the intricacies of "patriarchal capital" in the age of urbanism and globalization (Zhou 2016: 89–91).

In this contribution, I will use the concept of 'transcorporeality,' both by applying it to this poetry's content (where reality is represented as a transcorporeal field of relationships between human beings and the environment), and for describing Zheng Xiaoqiong's poetic practice itself, thus conceiving writing poetry as a biological process, organically being part of that very same transcorporeal field. My thesis, ultimately, is that this poetic activity understood as a biological process is precisely what enables Zheng to resemantize time – a process grounded in her specific life experience yet culminating in a compelling (re)conceiving of human transcorporeality as a relational and linguistic condition, rather than one merely situated and entangled at the material level.

3. "They are me, I am them." Writing of a Multi-entity, Preserving Low Entropy.

The link between the resemantization of time and the rethinking of what it means – or rather, of what it *is* – to be human necessarily passes through an identitarian renunciation, which concerns both the term 'time' itself and Zheng as a person. Put differently, in order to resemantize what we conventionally call 'time' through poetic activity, Zheng operates on two parallel channels: on the one hand, she virtually deconstructs her own sense of individuality and singular identity; on the other, she refuses a univocal representation of time, whether as a linear or cyclical trajectory, or as a unique and objective coordinate of any given contingency. After all, one deconstruction cannot occur without the other: to continue being Zheng Xiaoqiong and to write a self-centered poetry would mean admitting to biographical coordinates inscribed in the human language of time (e.g., a birthdate preceding later life events, a village of

departure and a city of arrival, one job before and another after, a before and after in relation to an illness or accident, etc. – a temporalization which, as Miller suggests, is nothing but linguistic, that is, founded on the fact that human language does not merely *express* time, but rather *creates* it tout court); conversely, to reiterate the language of time without problematizing it would not allow the dismantling of individual identity from those very coordinates, and would thus return the poet to herself, without any real alternative.

To clarify these reflections, I will first discuss the poet's deconstruction and resemantization of her own identity, and subsequently the deconstruction and resemantization of 'time,' pausing on some concrete examples and, where useful, comparing them with the works of other Sinophone poets and writers.

As regards the deconstruction of the poet's identity, again, this is the very condition for accessing a different sense of time, yet the reversal is also true: based on the alternative sense of time conveyed by her poetry, Zheng experiences and suggests new ways for individuals to experience human life and identity.

To delve further, her search for an alternative identity rests on an in-depth exploration of connection with others, understood not only as fellow human beings (for instance, other female workers) but also as non-human elements of the environment. The theme of sisterhood is thus recurrent and programmatic in her poetry, yet the multi-entity consciousness she envisions also emerges through the representations of artificial objects and natural elements, especially plants and atmospheric agents, which – far from constituting external details or factors – do share with human beings the very same level of existence and the very same intense proximity or interrelation.

As a result, Zheng's work gestures toward an identity that transcends human, temporalized individualism, reaching toward a 'multi-entity' rather than an *individual* identity – a positive form of transcorporeality that ultimately opens onto a dimension of timeless trans-consciousness. And it is precisely this trans-consciousness what makes it possible to reconceive human time – and thus human existence on Earth – in an alternative, and potentially redemptive way.

Most interestingly, it is not so much Zheng's status as a migrant worker as her status as a woman – including her feminist awareness (Wu 2018) – what enables her to enact this identitarian transition. Her verses, in fact, both exemplify and perform what Cavarero & Guaraldo explain as follows:

> The individualist doctrine that characterizes modern political thought […] [is] centered on the abstract notion of a free and autonomous individual […], appearing in the legal sphere as the bearer of rights, and serving instead, in the sphere of the market, as the repository of incessant desires […], the ideal protagonist of a consumer economy. […] With [Descartes'] *cogito ergo sum*, we are confronted with the theorem of an individual existence that brings itself into the world through thought – that is, with the theoretical act of an autogeneration of the self as a "thinking substance." To which […] Descartes must, of course, add the presence of the body, which he defines as an "extended substance" that – one supposes, even if the philosopher pays no attention to such trifles – is generated by a mother. […] Feminist theory has devoted [constant effort] to overturning the framework of selfish individualism, by elaborating an alternative mode of thought that conceives subjectivity primarily in terms of relationality and interdependence. […] Far from being closed and self-sufficient subjects, […] we are all embodied singularities, vulnerable and exposed. […] The urgency of a response to climate catastrophe and to other planetary crises is clearly incompatible with the model of the selfish and competitive individual, the latest offspring of the Anthropocene lineage. More promising instead is a model of relational subjectivity, attentive to the vulnerability of the living – human and non-human alike – , […] a *feminine relational model* as an alternative to the *masculine individualist model* (Cavarero & Guaraldo 2024: 45–49).

To explore more closely how this transpecific sisterhood (or "feminine relational model"), and its accompanying multi-entity search, concretely emerge in Zheng's poetry, I propose considering the following poems, in which the poet respectively identifies with her colleague workers (*They*), and with some grass roots (*Grass Roots*), thus sheltering her monadic self for embracing a multi-entity ipseity:

> (1) They
>
> I remember iron, iron that rusted over time
> pale red or dark brown, tears in a furnace fire
> I remember the distracted, exhausted eyes above the workstations
> their gazes were small and trivial, small as a gradual furnace fire
> their depression and distress, and a tiny bit of hope
> are lit up by the flames, unfold, on white blueprints
> or between the red lines of a traditional painting, by the meager monthly wages
> and a gradually exhausted heart –

I remember their faces, their wild eyes and subtle trembling
their calloused fingers, their rough and simple lives
I say quietly: they are me, I am them
our grief and pain and hope are kept silent and forbearing
our confessions and hearts and loves are all in tears,
all is as silent and lonely as iron, or as pain

I say, in the vast crowds, we are all alike
we all love and hate, we all breathe, we all have noble spirits
we all have unyielding loneliness and compassion!
(Zheng 2015: 270; translation by Eleanor Goodman)

(2) Grass roots

Twilight spreads, a layer of ash-gray iron melts July
Returning to lychee woods, everything is empty and silent . . .
flying bugs of July
And a drop of blood pools at the tip of a grass blade, a slanting red
When short, grass stalks drop their heads
And see a drifter's heels
In Silver Lake Park, encountering a plume of grass with purple-blue flowers
Moonlight hears the sounds of flowers, blooming and fragrant

Pale flower of July cannot hold on to the moonlight over Silver Lake Park
By the lake at midnight I listen to a blade of grass weeping, it is a
Drifter on the road, briefly
Vanishing into the dark

A street lamp illuminates grass tips and my footprints
We share the same name, oh
– Grass roots

In the depth of green grass, under the lychee trees
My friends and family
In this homeless strange land, I grow like a blade of grass
At the twilight when the universe falls silent, a night wind blows
But cannot blow down our heads
(Zheng 2022b: 42; translation by Jonathan Stalling)

The examples reported above, and especially the lines highlighted in bold, clearly exemplify the abandonment – within the virtual space of the text – of an individual self-reducible to a single identity. In the first case (*They*), this ipseity

is rearticulated in the multi-entity of the coworkers with whom the poet does not merely associate – she does not employ the rhetorical device of comparison – but rather identifies through a powerful double metaphor, when she bluntly states: "they are me, I am them." In the second case (Grass roots), she even comes to merge herself with the plant species of grass and lychee trees, not only playing on the linguistic level ('grass roots,' or *caogen* 草根 in Chinese, is a metaphorical term commonly used to refer to 'ordinary people'), but also establishing with them a shared physical-biological lineage, to the point of calling herself part of the same family and claiming to grow in the same way they grow.

Pursuing this reflection a bit further, and returning to Cavarero & Guaraldo's discourse, I contend that the urgency of this quest for a multi-entity consciousness in Zheng's lines, is indeed not by chance. In fact, those unavoidable conditions of 'embodiment', 'vulnerability' and 'inter-dependence,' that as human beings we all share, are particularly suffered by migrant women laborers like her.

My argument, thus, is that this search for a multi-entity consciousness – undoubtedly boosted by a feminist stance – originally arises from Zheng's urgent need to fill the void left by the loss of an integral and healthy subjective dimension. In fact, for migrant workers like her, subjective dimension is affected on all fronts – physically (as they suffer physical impairments, chemical poisoning, irregular menstruation, etc.), psychologically (they are deprived of their personal names and not recognized any specialized skills: on the assembly line, they are all identical, interchangeable numbers), and socially (far from their hometowns, they are deprived of their family and community ties, thus, of that sense of subjective recognition and legitimization deriving from them).

Hence, to concretely observe this loss of an identity intended as individual, singular, referable to one name and one body, let's consider, for instance, this excerpt from *Life*:

(3) [from Life]

What you don't know is that my name has been hidden by an employee ID
my two hands have become part of the assembly line, my body was signed over
to a contract, my black hair is turning white, leaving noise and toil
overtime work and wages...I've passed through fixed fluorescent lights
and the exhausted shadows flung on the machine stations move slowly

> turning, bending down, silent as cast iron […]
> **I don't know how to protect a silent life**
> **this life of a lost name and gender**, this life of surviving off of contracts
> where and how do I start, with **the moon** on the metal cots in the eight-person dorm room
> what it **illuminates** is **homesickness**, the secret flirting and love in the thundering of the machines […]
> (Zheng 2015: 267–8; translation by Eleanor Goodman)

In this poem, the disorientation of the individual and her sense of identity is emphasized both rhetorically and thematically. On the rhetorical level, the enumerative style and paratactic accumulation immediately stand out, which, far from making the poem more fluid or intelligible, instead create an overwhelming, suffocating reading experience. It seems as if Zheng intended her poetic *text* to reproduce the monotonous roaring of the machinery, the alienating repetition of gestures, and the resulting sense of oppression that the factory (con)*text* originally exerts on her. Notice, for example, the repeated use of 'know' – always in the negative form –: "you don't know […] that my name has been hidden," "I don't know how to protect a silent life." On the thematic level, the poem features the poet-individual's unrecognizability – both in relation to herself (her hands and body no longer belong to her, and her inner life falls silent amid the deafening noise of the factory; she has become a "silent life") and in relation to others, for whom she no longer has a name. This reflects the loss of any center, or reference point, capable of defining her boundaries. The absence of home or family is particularly striking – "the moon […] illuminates […] homesickness" – and such dislocation eventually elicits a profound sense of disorientation: "I don't know how to protect a silent life […] of a lost name and gender."

Hence, to sum up, as these three poems testify, this woman laborer's sense of self is so disrupted that the contours of a subjective identity are no longer definable or preservable. In her poetry, thus, survival is eventually sought by shedding an individual self and rather embracing a multi-entity alliance – both among human bodies and between humans and the environment.

At first glance, this multi-entity shift might appear an overwhelmingly chaotic and psychologically demanding path, one that broken individuals would hardly consider a more livable dimension (par rapport to the "masculine individualist model"). Yet, in Zheng Xiaoqiong's practice, the chaotic charge of such a busy, multi-entity world–one of roaring machines, melting chemicals,

blowing winds, aging beauties, changing trees, shifting laborers, etc.–is well counterbalanced by her poetic activity itself as a low-entropy-preserving process.

Entropy is a term borrowed from thermodynamics, designating the quantity that measures the degree of disorder within a physical system–the greater the disorder, the higher its level of entropy. As the British neuroscientist Anil Seth explains,

> the second law of thermodynamics tells us that the entropy of any isolated physical system increases over time. […] But somehow […] living systems temporarily fend off the second law, persisting in a precarious condition of improbability. They exist out of equilibrium with their environment, and this is what it means to "exist" in the first place (Seth 2021: 223–4).

From a biological perspective, transcorporeality and the preservation of a low level of entropy are thus processes that remain constantly precarious yet constitute a necessary condition for survival (Seth 2021: 223). "For any living system," Seth continues, "the condition of 'being alive' means proactively seeking out a particular set of states that are visited repeatedly over time, whether these are body temperatures, heart rates […] or the organisation of protein complexes […] in a single-celled bacterium" (Seth 2021: 224). While the persistence of this equilibrium – both physical and transcorporeal (Seth notably emphasizes that "living systems are in continual open interaction" – Seth 2021: 224) – may suffice for the survival of most living organisms, the human being, as a social animal endowed with symbolic language, also contains a form of heightened entropy that manifests at social and psychological levels and is negotiated precisely through the epidermis of language.

Hence, by suggesting that the high entropy of a multi-entity existence appears to be counterbalanced by Zheng through and within her poetic practice, this essay proposes to locate human linguistic activity – of which poetry is, quite literally, the paradigmatic form (the term derives from the Greek poiesis, meaning "the act of creation") – within the transcorporeal dynamics, both physical and symbolic, that originally inform it. Accordingly, it hypothesizes – drawing on Zheng's poetic production – that this very same poetic activity may function as a mode of regulation or counterbalance to environmental and psychological chaos, emerging both from individual disorientation and from the multi-entity responses she engenders. In the very first line of *Gudu* 孤独 "Loneliness," Zheng puts it in these terms: "In order to escape loneliness/she writes poetry" (Zheng 2022b: 72). Yet, as a matter of fact, poetry saves her both from loneliness and from the multi-entity chaos that she

engages with just "in order to escape loneliness," because through the controllable ecology of this literary text she can enact this multi-entity survival while (linguistically) exerting control over it.

Differently said, her poetry systematically articulates a multi-entity everyday existence, becoming an integral component of her self's biological, low-entropy-preserving mechanisms of survival – akin to breathing, heartbeat, or digestion. Writing poetry – that is, spatializing human life within a timeless ecology – consequently becomes a biological survival strategy sustaining the organism – an organism that can be understood as Zheng Xiaoqiong herself, her colleague community, Chinese migrant workers, the broader Chinese population, or even the whole of humanity.

Taking a step back from poetic activity as a biological mechanism, it has been noted that the deconstruction of an individual subjectivity, and the resemantization of human subjectivity as relational and multi-entity existence, goes hand in hand, in Zheng's verses, with a deconstruction and resemantization of time. As already mentioned, this resemantization of time may be understood as the outcome of adopting the viewpoint of a multi-entity self, but also as its starting point. In this section, I will further examine the premises of such resemantization, how it is connected to the resemantization of human identity, and – most importantly – how it might be discerned in Zheng's poetry.

Regarding the premises and the connection between the resemantization of time and the resemantization of human identity, it might be worth specifying that what follows is purely based on my own reading of and reflection on the texts. In other words, I am not claiming any explicit authorial intent on Zheng's part but rather offering one interpretative proposal among many possible others. In my view, the representations of time, and the forms – both linguistic and corporeal – that time assumes in this poet's verses, appear to rest on the assumption that time is, to a certain extent, a functional illusion, or, borrowing again from neuroscience, a self-induced 'hallucination' (Seth 2021: 310), yet ultimately necessary for human existence. Conceiving of human time as a controlled hallucination – that is, as an illusion specifically functional to *human* life – would thus enable Zheng to recognize how the self itself, or the perception each person has of themselves as an individual consciousness, is likewise a functional yet relative perception. Differently said, if time is an illusion, then our ego – our internal narrative of a time-rooted individual identity – might be equally conceived of as a cognitive construction.

Another line of reflection, which also emerges quite evidently from Zheng's verses, is that language is precisely what allows time to be spatialized – thus figured, though never attaining a representation beyond abstraction (Miller 2003: 87); or conversely, that any human time that can be conceived of exists only insofar as it is abstracted through, or made of, words. What I have observed, thus, is that in Zheng's poetry, time is both embodied and linguistic: it consists simultaneously in *humans'* embodied perception of reality, and in their linguistic conceptualization trying to make sense of that perception.

In fact, Zheng features time primarily in relation to the human body (e.g., aging) and to environmental transformations (e.g., seasonal shifts, falling rain, flowing water, blowing wind, rusting iron, etc.), thus as a physical and tangible experience, yet also as a cognitive one. This latter aspect emerges, for instance, in one of the following poems (*She*), where human lifetime is compared to a film projected by memory: a fictional movement observed from a condition of stillness, that is, a mental abstraction – something that can be stopped and grasped in each tiny moment of its unfolding (e.g., through poetic writing or filmmaking), but never as a representable whole.

Among the poems in which I have observed this thematization of time, the following are some of the most significant examples:

[Time in relation to the human body:]

(4) Time

In the village where I've lived for six years, in the lychee grove
the mountain stream shines on my truncated youth
the hardware factory's drowsy dream
leaves Silver Lake Park, heading north
I polish a migrant's sighs
and my own closer Huangma Mountain dialect
in the shade of banyan trees, the blazing industrial zone
turns brighter and brighter in the minds of the workers
past events fall from memory, wet
with grief, and the lights show the wrinkles slowly forming at my eyes
a lonely bird hides itself in the darkness of the lychee grove
the darkness overwhelms the red of the lychees, and the dark branches
turn even darker, the birdcalls have faded, and here
the roar of the hardware factory continues its banging unabated
my worker's number is 231, and when I take the blueprints, there in the darkness
in the midst of forgotten time, I see my youth

wriggling away in a clean and public grief
withering in the vastness of my country
(Zheng 2015: 270–1; translation by Eleanor Goodman)

[Time in relation to environmental elements:]

(5) The Wind Blows I

Huangma Ling. The wind blows on the twilight
that slowly sinks into darkness
leaving behind a void and my wobbly heels

Along Phoenix Avenue the wind blows continuously from
the hair of the afternoon workers to the melancholy of
the birds that return to the lychee grove

They come from distant places, Sichuan, Hunan, Hubei
They speak in dialect, and the wind blows on their destinies of
breathless wanderers

The wind blows on the pedestrian bridge
on the hidden prostitutes who, blacker than the night, under
the shade of a tree, look into the distance

The wind continues to blow, time is silent,
the trees are mute… their faint rustling

Time and water that I cannot stop, flow,
vanish... like my native country, like a foreign land

The wind blows and I bend to adore this
poor yet pure, austere life
(Zheng 2022b: 76; draft translation by myself)

[Time as both physically embodied, and abstracted through human language:]

(6) She

She no longer lives in her pain, like wood
no longer lives in the forest. She made herself into a chair
without anyone sitting on it. In the quiet and bright reflection

Her body began to shrivel silently and fragilely

Soon it will fade away, she begins to grow attached to things like a wall
to the security she gets from it and the calm she relies on. Her wishes
are like running raindrops, mild but restless
The sun illuminates the illusion in the mirror, that fading face

She begins to accept that like a flower she will wither
On her face shriveled features of clouds have emerged
Maybe this heart won't stand waiting like a plant
But it's going to be a pair of shoes that go the distance

In the thunderous echo of drops that fall down like ashes,
sitting on the bed, she tilts her head and observes people and objects in the mirror
of this film neither tragic nor comic called Life that memory shoots
already tired of this gloomy and narrow path

Moonlight has such a bitter and harsh sound
Full of gratitude for the pain that punctually arrives every month
that feeds the heart with hopes and anxieties
sweet melancholy that now deprives anger of any use
(Zheng 2022b: 36; draft translation by myself)

By analyzing these poems, we can get a sense of what I mean by conceiving poetic activity as a biological process, or as a low-entropy-preserving practice. In these verses, in fact, we can observe how the poet, through the spatializations made possible by language, captures – or rather hunts for – her own sense of time, in order to make its physicality and (cognitive) reality into a harbor of calm and security ("she's attached to things like a wall, to the security she gets from it and the calm she relies on," *She*, ll. 5–6).

This reality of a time that is not static but still and calm, capable of becoming a chair for one who can never sit down (*She*, ll. 2–3), of returning a changing face from the stillness of a mirror (*She*, ll. 8–10), or of echoing birds falling silent at nightfall, indifferent to the factory's unceasing roar (*Time*, ll. 11–14), ultimately constitutes that human dimension – austere yet authentic (*The Wind Blows*, last line) and thus livable – that poetic activity allows Zheng to depict.

The dimension she opposes is that of the factory, whose experience is not perceived by migrant workers as a real space-time of life, but rather as a "drowsy dream" (*Time*, l. 3): a suspended, unreal existence born of incessant, alienating,

and dehumanizing labor, of an "unabated banging" (*Time*, l. 14) that follows the (non-)time of the machines and therefore denies the time of cycle, return, and rest – the very time that Zheng represents, for instance, through spatializations (e.g., the blowing of the wind or the return of birds to their nests after sunset, *The Wind Blows*, ll. 1–6), or through sound impressions (e.g., the trees in the darkness of the night are 'mute,' despite the blowing of the wind, because mute is the biological time of rest, *The Wind Blows*, ll. 13–14).

At night, the tree – like the human being – belongs to a silent darkness unknown to the world of the factory and its machines, which are constantly switched on, *flashing and roaring*. (See, in *Time*, ll. 7–8, the contrast between the shadowy banyans and the "blazing industrial zone" shining "brighter and brighter in the minds of the workers.") That darkness enveloping the lychee and banyan trees, the birds and the prostitutes at sunset, is ultimately the time of rest.

In other words, thus, that dark space represented through words – this spatialization of movements, lights, and sounds – is an abstraction through which time is portrayed: a time grasped and figured through language, and which, ultimately, we can consider intrinsic to human life – a paradigm through which human beings project and situate themselves within the rhythmic horizon of life. But does this time concretely exist? Does it also exist for the other – for the reader, for the migrant worker? Does it *ex-ist* – outside the poet, and outside the text? I hereby argue that the answer might be yes: through the poem itself.

In fact, if the act of writing poetry is the dimension in which Zheng re-figures this time, then the poem, as the product of her writing, becomes the point of conjunction between this time (i.e. the one figured through her words) and the transcorporeal reality within which she operates. Zheng does not evade Saint Augustine's question – *what is time?* – "If no one asks me, I know; if I wish to explain it to one that asketh, I know not" (Saint Augustine 1951: 224). On the contrary, her verses seem to seek it everywhere, collecting its sounds, its motions, its traces.

In Zheng's poetry, what time is, or what it once was before the alienating experience of life among machines – a language through which human life constantly, perpetually, precariously used to attune itself with the rest of existence – seems rather a given notion. Hence, Zheng does not aim at metaphysical speculation, nor at defining time or transforming it into a metaphor for something beyond material life. On the contrary, she seeks its evidence in matter itself: in the body (e.g., wrinkles, menstruation; *She*, ll. 10, 18), and in memory – which is like a muscle, changing and weakening with age

(*Time*, ll. 9–10) – and turns its related sufferings and frailties (physical weakness, pain, forgetfulness) into the very point of contact between the human being and the reality of which she is part.

In other words, the problematic and ineffable nature of this time – its resistance to verbalization, to being reduced to a system or an arrestable mechanism – yet the inevitable necessity of turning it into poesis, of creating it and continuing it –, resembles that regime of 'improbability' in which, as Seth observes, living beings fend off the second law of thermodynamics for the very sake of existing. It is an ineffability that, after all the wrinkles, clouds, and sunsets described, leaves the poet inevitably silent (*She*, l. 4), yet alive with a renewed sense of concrete existence – poor and yet authentic (*The Wind Blows*, last line).

Ultimately, it is interesting to note how this linguistic figuring of time – which in *The Wind Blows* materializes in the element of the wind and in the polyphony it gathers (the noise of the poet's heels, the birdsong fading at dusk, the varied dialects of the migrant workers, the silence of trees in the dark) – brings us back precisely to the multi-entity perspective discussed earlier. The starting point is the language of the individual poet – indeed, the first sound the wind encounters in the poem is that of her heels – but Zheng's poetry then acts upon that individual perspective like a kaleidoscope. The result is that the time she strives to depict, as illustrated in these examples, goes far beyond any banal melancholy for wrinkles or the sorrow of aging far from home: it transforms into a multi-entity experience and dimension, into a movement including stillness and, above all, including the other – the colleagues, the birds, the prostitutes, the trees, etc.

It is this time that takes form in the other, that resonates in the other, that literally *ex-ists*, what finally returns to the poet as a tangible anchorage, a flow she cannot stop (*The Wind Blows*, ll. 15–16) but to which she willingly surrenders ("I bend to adore this // poor yet pure, austere life," *The Wind Blows*, last lines), finding in this surrender a joyful – though painful – space of real existence. Significantly, she is "*full of gratitude for the pain that punctually arrives every month, // that feeds the heart with hopes and anxieties*" (*She*, ll. 18–19).

This reference to the menstrual cycle is also an opportunity to observe how the very dimension of gender is repositioned and resemantized in Zheng's discourse. Not only does the classic representation of romantic (and heterosexual) love give way to the portrayal of deep sororal empathy and affection (e.g., *They*) and even interspecific bonds (e.g., *Grassroots*), but the

menstrual cycle itself – commonly conceived as an undeniable marker of the female condition – appears here to be stripped of its (female) body of origin, rather representing a cadence of time, a rhythm that is not only personal but entangled with everything else.

Instead of emphasizing the exceptional nature of the female condition (in contrast to a presumed male universal), this cyclical 'pain' becomes, thus, its universalizing element: if the (menstrual, lunar, seasonal, emotional, vital, generational, etc.) cycle is the temporal form that allows the human heart – repeatedly and rhythmically – to replenish itself with 'hopes' and related 'anxieties,' then every person – whether man, woman, or identifying otherwise – who experiences the fatigue of living yet also the cyclical renewal of intentions, expectations, or simply vital energies, may be said to feel 'grateful' for this 'pain,' which indeed is intrinsic to (any) human life.

Hence, in other words, the resemantization of human temporality carried out by Zheng is also a resemantization of the female condition – shifting it from something exceptional (vis-à-vis the male universal) to something universally defining of human nature itself.

Zheng's depiction of time thus reconciles both the female and male, and the human and environmental dimensions, by transcorporeally situating human experience within a non-self-centered mode of life and poetic expression. It is a physical yet transcorporeal time, a stream that encompasses the poet, her language, and the environment they inhabit. Although the poems discussed above may have already shed considerable light on this point, to further grasp the relevance of this concept it is useful to compare Zheng's portrayals of time with other representations in contemporary Sinophone poetry.

For instance, Bei Dao 北岛 (1949–)'s *The Roses of Time* articulates a distinctly metaphysical view of time – a vision that certainly holds its own philosophical and aesthetic value yet does not permit the kind of resemantization discussed here. Interestingly, this male poet's preference for a metaphysical approach to time resonates with Cavarero & Guaraldo's observations on the male domain over spiritual and philosophical discourse, a domain traditionally considered alien to women, who are instead associated with their embodied role as life-generators (Cavarero & Guaraldo 2024: 19–20). Yet, leaving such reflections for another research, let us now consider the following lines:

(7) The Roses of Time

When the gate guard sinks into sleep
You turn back together with the storm
That which ages in the embrace is
The rose of time

When the birds' routes demarcate the sky
You look backward at the sunset
That which appears in the disappearance is
The rose of time

When the sword is bent in the water
You tread the flute melody across the bridge
That which cries aloud in the conspiracy is
The rose of time

When the pen draws a line of horizon
You're startled awake by the oriental gong
That which blooms in the reverberation is
The rose of time

It is always this moment in the mirror
This moment leads toward the gate of rebirth
And the gate opens toward seas
The roses of time
(Bei 2011: 263–4; translation by Tao Naikan and Simon Patton)

Comparing these lines with the preceding poems immediately highlight their different approaches to time. Although the spatial representations used by the two poets sometimes coincide – e.g., "the birds' routes" (*Roses of Time*, line 5; comparable to *The Wind Blows*, line 6), "the sunset" (*Roses of Time*, line 6; comparable to *The Wind Blows*, line 1), or the mirror's reflection (*Roses of Time*, line 17; comparable to *She*, line 8) – the formal structure in which Bei Dao inscribes such elements (a temporal clause beginning with "when," reinforced by its fourfold repetition and by the metaphorical device that rhythmically refrains – "that which ages […] is the rose of time," "that which appears […] is the rose of time," "that which cries aloud […] is the rose of time," "that which blooms […] is the rose of time") points to an aesthetic-philosophical quest that – as discussed in the previous paragraphs – has no place, nor reason to exist, in Zheng's poetry.

Bei Dao does not seek evidence of a time possessing its own physical or linguistic concreteness in order to anchor a renewed sense of real existence. On the contrary, he abstracts the spatial moments of time – its "roses" – into a rhythmic and captivating song, which ultimately aspires – in contrast to Zheng's more yielding approach (see *The Wind Blows*, last four lines) – to allude, through human language, to the totality of reality, investing his "roses" of time with an absolute, metaphysical significance. One might consider, in this respect, the final quatrain and its powerful allusive charge, which eventually constitutes a sort of open ending, pointing toward a meaning other than matter and other – or external – to the poem itself.

It goes without saying that this comparison does not aim to express any judgment or establish any hierarchy of value between the poems under examination. As previously stated, its purpose is rather to define more precisely – by contrast – the specific resemantization of time that characterizes Zheng's poetry. In light of this comparison, Zheng thus patently contrasts Bei Dao's metaphysical roses of time with a rather physical and linguistic concept of time; a time being much rooted in our all-human experience of life and never constituting an external entity.

Another contemporary poet worth mentioning is Han Dong 韩东 (1961–). In some of his writings, including the example presented below, Han Dong indeed depicts how the human body bears the marks of time. However, in his poetry, these physical changes lack transcorporeal potential; they do not situate the poet within a framework connecting the individual's experience to the other and to the environment. For Han Dong, the poet's body neither mirrors the time of other beings nor attunes him to the steppe (see In these years, ll. 19–20). By contrast, *In These Years* follows a linear temporal narrative, focused entirely on the poet, recounting his life as an individual, independent human being, simply aging with the passage of time (his solitude and isolation being further underscored by the recurring motif of the number one: in these years, he has read only one book and listened to only one CD; see ll. 21–22).

Following *In These Years*, I present a poem by Zheng Xiaoqiong, which will offer an opportunity to draw a compelling comparison.

(8) In these years (by Han Dong)

In these years, I haven't had a bad time
except for love, I haven't fallen in love anymore
except for sleeping, I haven't slept with a woman anymore
except for writing, no more poetry

I often send people to hell, but without anger
I'm often in Nanjing, it also happens
that I go elsewhere
I continue to live, but I don't aspire to a long life

In these years, I've lacked money, but I didn't want it
I've lacked sleep, but I didn't take tranquilizers
I've lacked meat, but I didn't eat chicken feet
I've gone bald, let me go bald
my teeth have fallen out, let them fall out
I'm satisfied with the ones that remain
my beard has turned white, even the lower beard
my eyebrow hair has grown, even the nose hair

In these years, I've been to Shanghai once
but it doesn't seem to me that things have changed much in Shanghai
I've been to the steppe once, but I haven't felt
communion with nature
I've read, just one book, but seven times
I've listened to music, just one CD, every day
words and ideograms no longer torment me
nor do I torment my language anymore

In these years, a friend has died,
but to me it feels as if he were still alive.
Another one is famous now
so bye-bye, let's leave it at that
I am still Han Dong, they call me Old Han.
Old Han is still well: he climbs the mountain every week,
not to gaze into the distance from above, nor to make love in the open air,
just like that, and halfway up he turns back.
(Han 2015: 195–6; draft translation by myself)

(9) Body (by Zheng Xiaoqiong)

The twilight extracted from my body
tender but passionate silence
grass bent until it falls into the darkness
time pierced, little by little
The forehead in the mirror begins to whiten with snow
that covers face, bones, hair
these somber and ancient white things
like sugar that melts on an ordinary day
The twilight that flows deep in the ribs

lingers for a moment making me glimpse a quiet
but meticulous life what remains is love that, like a
stain of water spreads
In the shade of birds that chirp on the lake Li
a curved branch whispers, calling to me
I turn and see it stretch out happily
while I, like a drop of rain from last year
fallen on a crowd of people
come across a faded night
(Zheng 2022b: 86; draft translation by myself)

In Han Dong's poem, the monad of the narrating self and its detached stance toward both his own body and the surrounding environment predominates (e.g., he shows no concern for the aging of his body, nor for attuning himself to the steppe). By contrast, in Zheng's poem – significantly titled "Body" – the pivotal focus is the intersection between the poet's body and the body of the encompassing environment, which both embraces and transforms her (e.g., the twilight extracting silence from her body, or a curved branch calling to her). Put differently, the body becomes a transcorporeal space-time in which the individual-poet experiences existence as part of an unstoppable, multi-entity continuum.

4. Final Reflections: Renouncing Being Timeless Gods, for (Timely) Being Humans

This conception of time, understood as a language deeply rooted in human experience – i.e. embedded in the way humans perceive and live existence – offers not only an alternative to the dominant narrative but also provokes a profound shift in perspective. In fact, by removing the human beings from a narrative that casts them as the protagonists of a directional, linear, and progressive timeline – thus, from a divine, eschatological, or anyway missionary view of human life on Earth – this shift detaches humanity from the constraints of individuality and the notion of the self as a singular, isolated monad. Instead, it repositions the human being among the "ten thousand beings," occupying an equal, integrated, and osmotic – or transcorporeal – relationship with the environment we inhabit. In this new perspective, human existence is non-linear, devoid of inherent meaning, and resists any explanation: no more a "cogito ergo sum," but "I (transcorporeally, relationally) participate in reality thus exist".

Differently said, abandoning a disembodied, eschatological conception of time means relinquishing the notion of human exceptionalism. Yet, it also offers the possibility of escaping the isolation and depressive states which increasingly affect our ("masculine individualist") contemporary societies (Shaer 2024). Thus, embracing this plural, integrated consciousness – or transconsciousness – may offer a viable path to preventing humanity from becoming the architect of its own extinction or unhappiness. As Zheng Xiaoqiong pointed out in an interview released in 2022, the worsening environmental crisis does not threaten the survival of planet Earth itself, but of humanity (Zheng 2022b: 106).

In conclusion, considering the above-proposed analysis, I suggest that Zheng Xiaoqiong's poetry ultimately enacts, demonstrates, and embraces the cognitive dimension of human time, which, like personal identity, is essentially a predictive projection – a functional self-hallucination necessary for existence (Seth 2021: 87).

By acknowledging (a) the cognitive dimension of time and – consequently or simultaneously –, (b) the fictionality of the individual self – that is, of identity as a monad – Zheng achieves what Recalcati calls "nostalgia-gratitude," describing it as the positive outcome of a still incessant work of mourning (Recalcati 2022: 87–88). The work of mourning carried out by Zheng is to be understood as the mourning for a self who could once – but can no longer – identify with their native place, family name, or community of belonging; a self – to sum up – who could once survive as a (distinctly male or female, human or non-human) individual identity – yet can now fully live as a relational, transcorporeal and even transpecific multi-entity. Indeed, I would further argue, this reflection which Zheng's poetry often elicits transcends the categorization of her work within the Chinese "migrant poetry" genre and speaks to global society about some of its most-discussed "crises:" the environmental crisis, but also the psychological and sociological crisis at once faced and caused by increasingly lonely individuals.

As Andersen and Aubry suggest (Andersen & Aubry 2025: 2 and ff.), the concept of crisis has become widely inflated, and often – paradoxically – its use is what justifies postponing concrete action on a 'critical' situation (Gaza humanitarian 'crisis' right now – 25th September 2025 – is indeed a telling example!). In other words, defining a problem as a 'crisis' often allows its exceptionalism to take precedence over its urgency. According to Andersen and Aubry, an effective approach to problematize the concept of 'crisis' is to examine the margins: what happens in border zones. The dynamics at the margins can help us investigate – from a detached and intrinsically hybrid

viewpoint – what we fundamentally mean by 'crisis' and the complexities hidden behind such a simplistic and far-from-innocent word.

We can safely affirm that the linguistic and conceptual dynamics in Zheng Xiaoqiong's poetry are indeed examples of dynamics occurring at the margins. Migrant workers live lives that are peripheral to the mainstream rhythms and lifestyles, and their poetry is also labeled as a specific thus marginal genre. Yet, precisely because of this marginality, borrowing Andersen's reflection, Zheng Xiaoqiong's poetry enables us to look at contemporary 'crises' from a different and much potential perspective.

Significantly, the Chinese term for crisis, *weiji* 危机 (literally, "danger" + "opportunity"), is not recurrent in Zheng's poetry – indeed, it is entirely absent in the poems analyzed here. Zheng addresses and represents many of the dichotomies that dominant narratives often label as "critical," but never referring to them in such terms. The dichotomies of individual and society, human and artifact (or human and machinery), nature and artifice, time as natural rhythm and "time" as an abstract concept, are fundamental themes in her work. Yet, the relationship between the two terms of these pairs is never judged by the poet. It is never labeled as "critical" but rather portrayed in all its lively, peculiar and shifting complexity. The dominant discourse would subsume these pairs under labels, urgently reducing their complexities – e.g., we talk about "identity crisis," "environmental crisis," "social crisis," etc., creating word-monsters that are easily targetable as escape goats of our sloth. But reducing these relationships to mere "crises" is actually a way to avoid addressing their complexity (assuming the impossibility of such an undertaking) or to marginalize their scope (by asserting their "exceptional" nature).

Therefore, Zheng's poetry, which investigates these dichotomies without framing them as critical, demonstrates how such relationships are an integral part of our existence and that the distinction between "crisis" and "normality" is ultimately meaningless. If, for me – as a researcher – losing a finger at work would be considered critical or exceptional, for a migrant worker, it might be an entirely normal eventuality – a "screw falling to the ground" (Xu 2015), that, in the roar of the machine, nobody does actually hear. If, in the Polish city where I live, the eventuality of pollution-related health issues would probably seem 'critical' and cause a big stir, for a migrant worker, they are often considered 'normal.' In the marginality of the lives and poetry of Chinese migrant workers and former migrant workers like Zheng, the concept of 'crisis' hence reveals its full inconsistency.

Labeling a situation as 'critical' is thus of little use; it is more useful to observe and represent its dynamics, recognizing them as transcorporeally integrated into our existence, and thus accepting partaking in and responsibility for them. After all, the English word 'crisis' comes from the Greek *krísis*. And *krísis* does not mean 'danger opportunity,' nor 'exceptional catastrophe;' it means 'crucial choice,' or 'decision.'

Hence, Zheng's poetry may not confront us with any 'crisis,' yet it presents numerous 'choices' that call for our thoughtful reflection. One choice – yet Van Crevel (2025) and others have exhaustively addressed this – might be whether to read her poetry as mere 'migrant poetry' or rather as 'poetry' *tout court*. Another choice might be whether to continue conceiving our society according to a 'masculine individualist model,' i.e. as a line of lonely individuals racing down a progressive time, or to question whether this Anthropocene rather invites us to re-explore the horizontality of existence from a 'feminine relational model,' multi-entity perspective, and a sense of time being an all-human language – a time that is essential for human life yet, in reality, neither ex-ists nor flows in any fixed direction: a time that goes nowhere.

(10) All beauty will not live forever

All beauty will not live forever, it will grow old
or die, stubborn words will burn
and disperse, frivolous objects will eventually burst in
and populate the world, the foam will flood us
In the void between one bubble and another, I write poems
I write about lost beauty and eternal love

(Zheng 2022b: 94; draft translation by myself)

References

Admussen, Nick. 2025. "The Death of Transnational Time: Locality, Reader Response, and the Strange Loop." In Justyna Jaguścik, Joanna Krenz & Andrea Riemenschnitter (eds.), *Lyrical Experiments in Sinophone Verse: Time, Space, Bodies, and Things*, 25–40. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Agostino (Sant'Agostino; Augustine, Saint). 1951. *The Confessions*. Translated by Edward B. Pusey. New York: Pocket Books.

Alaimo, Stacy. 2018. "Trans-corporeality." In Rosi Braidotti & Maria Hlavajova (eds.), *Posthuman glossary*, 435–438. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Andersen, Dorte Jagetic, & Lola Aubry. 2025. *Resituating Crisis: Silencing and Voicing Crisis in Everyday Life*. New York: Berghahn Books.

Bei, Dao. 2011. *Jieju huo kaishi* 结局或开始 (The End or the Beginning). Wuhan: Changjiang Wenyi Chubanshe.

Cavarero, Adriana & Olivia Guaraldo. 2024. *Donna si nasce* (One is Born a Woman). Milano: Edizioni Mondadori. (eBook).

Dai, Xueqing & Qianqian Zhang. 2025. *Dazao "xin dazhong wenyi" de Dongguan yangban* 打造"新大众文艺"的东莞样板 (Building the Dongguan Model of the 'New Popular Literature and Art'). *Nanfang Ribao*, A08.

Feng, Qinggui. 2018. *Lun zuoyi wenxue chuantong de fusu – – yi Wang Xuezhong, Zheng Xiaoqiong de shige wei zhongxin* 论左翼文学传统的复苏 – – 以王学忠、郑小琼的诗歌为中心 (The Revival of the Left-Wing Literary Tradition – – Centering on Poems by Wang Xuezhong and Zheng Xiaoqiong). *Hainan Shifan Daxue Xuebao* 31(4), 7–12. https://doi.org/10.16061/j.cnki.cn46-1076/c.2018.04.003

Feng, Ting. 2017. *Shengtai nüxing zhuyi shiye xia de "Nügong ji"* 生态女性主义视野下的《女工记》('Record of Women Workers' from an Ecofeminist Perspective). *Wenxue Jiaoyu (Shang)* 3, 114–116. https://doi.org/10.16692/j.cnki.wxjys.2017.03.051

Ghosh, Amitav. 2017. *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Gong, Haomin. 2012. "Toward a New Leftist Ecocriticism in Postsocialist China: Reading the 'Poetry of Migrant Workers' as Ecopoetry." In Ban Wang & Jie Lu (eds.), *China and New Left Visions: Political and Cultural Interventions*, 139–157. Lanham: Lexington Books.

Gong, Haomin. 2018. "Ecopoetics in the Dagong Poetry in Postsocialist China: Nature, Politics, and Gender in Zheng Xiaoqiong's Poems." *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 25(2), 257–279.

Han, Dong. 2015. *Ni Jianguo dahai* 你见过大海 (You've Seen the Sea). Beijing: Zuojia Chubanshe.

Kaufman-Scarborough, Carol & Jay D. Lindquist. 2003. "Understanding the Experience of Time Scarcity." *Time & Society* 12(2–3), 349–370. https://doi.org/10.1177/0961463x030122011

Kuznetski, Julia & Stacy Alaimo. 2020. "Transcorporeality: An Interview with Stacy Alaimo." *Ecozon@: European Journal of Literature, Culture and Environment* 11(2), 137–146. https://doi.org/10.37536/ecozona.2020.11.2.3478

Li, Mobai, Pengbo Liu, Chunhua Kang, Heran Jiao, Hongye Wang & Haoyue Zhang. 2025. *Tamen shi xin dazhong wenyi de chuangzaozhe* 他们是新大众文艺的创造者, (They Are the Creators of the New Popular Literature and Art). *Wenyi Bao*, 001.

Liu, Yingying. 2020. *Diceng shuxie zhong de nüxing yishi yanjiu* 底层书写中的女性意识研究 (A Study on Female Consciousness in Bottom Writing). *Sichuan sheng shehui kexueyuan*. (Doctoral dissertation). https://doi.org/10.27346/d.cnki.gssky.2020.000125

Miller, J. Hillis. 2003. "Time in Literature." *Daedalus* 132(2), 86–97.

Picerni, Federico. 2020. "Metamorfosi operaie. Corpo e alienazione in alcuni poeti operai cinesi" (Workers' Metamorphoses: Body and Alienation in Some Chinese Worker Poets). *Sinosfere*, 1 March 2020, https://sinosfere.com/2020/03/13/federico-picerni-metamorfosi-operaie-corpo-e-alienazione-in-alcuni-operai-cinesi/ [last accessed 25 Sept 2025].

Qin, Xiaoyu (ed.). 2017. *Iron Moon: An Anthology of Chinese Worker Poetry*. Translated by Eleanor Goodman. Buffalo, NY: White Pine Press.

Recalcati, Massimo. 2022. *La luce delle stelle morte: Saggio su lutto e nostalgia* (The Light of Dead Stars: An Essay on Mourning and Nostalgia). Milano: Feltrinelli Editore. (eBook).

Seth, Anil. 2021. *Being You: A New Science of Consciousness*. London: Faber & Faber. (eBook).

Shaer, Matthew. 2024. "Why Is the Loneliness Epidemic So Hard to Cure?". *The New York Times Magazine*, August 27, 2024. https://www.nytimes.com/2024/08/27/magazine/loneliness-epidemic-cure.htm [last accessed 25 Sept 2025].

Shao, Yifei. 2025. *Zheng Xiaoqiong shige de hou cunzaizhuyi xushi jiazhi* 郑小琼诗歌的后存在主义叙事价值 (The Post-Existential Narrative Value of Zheng Xiaoqiong's Poetry). *Yuegang Ao Da Wanqu Wenxue Pinglun* 3, 63–71.

Shen, Jianyang. 2025. *Zheng Xiaoqiong de "dagong shige" yu "jincheng" shuxie – – jianlun 90 niandai yilai de wenxue guannian* 郑小琼的"打工诗歌"与"进城"书写 – – 兼论 90 年代以来的文学观念 (Zheng Xiaoqiong's 'Migrant Worker Poetry' and the Writing of 'Entering the City': With a Discussion of Literary Concepts since the 1990s). *Dangdai Zuojia Pinglun* 2, 130–135. https://doi.org/10.16551/j.cnki.1002-1809.2025.02.020

Van Crevel, Maghiel, et al. 2025. "Poetry and Subalternity: What Are We Looking For?" In *Time, Space, Bodies, and Things*, 291–310. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Wei, Hongshan. 2021. *Diceng nüxing de ziwo yanshuo yu zhuti goujian – – yi Zheng Xiaoqiong, Yu Xiuhua, Fan Yusu wei yangben* 底层女性的自我言说与主体构建 – – 以郑小琼、余秀华、范雨素为样本, (Self-explanation and Subject Construction of Women at the Bottom of Society – – based on Zheng Xiaoqiong, Yu Xiuhua and Fan Yusu). *Chengdu Gongye Xueyuan Xuebao* 24(3), 110–116. https://doi.org/10.13542/j.cnki.51-1747/tn.2021.03.024

Wu, Chun. 2018. *Lun xingbie yishi zai Zheng Xiaoqiong shige zhong de biaoxian* 论性别意识在郑小琼诗歌中的表现 (On the Representation of Gender Consciousness in Zheng Xiaoqiong's Poetry). *Shandong Nüzi Xueyuan Xuebao* 2, 2018–04–02.

Xu, Lizhi. 2015. *Yi ke luosi diaozai dishang* 一颗螺丝掉在地上 (A Screw Fell to the Ground). In Qin Xiaoyu (ed.), *Xin de yi tian 新的一天* (*A new day*), 214. Beijing: Zuojia Chubanshe.

Zheng, Xiaoqiong. 2022a. *In the Roar of the Machine*. Translated by Eleanor Goodman. Sydney: Giramondo Publishing.

Zheng, Xiaoqiong. 2022b. *Versi di umana resistenza. Testo cinese a fronte* (*Verses of Human Resistance. Chinese Text with Italian Translation).* Edited and translated by Serena Zuccheri. Roma: Orientalia.

Zheng, Xiaoqiong. 2020. *Zheng Xiaoqiong de shi 郑小琼的诗* (The Poems of Zheng Xiaoqiong). Beijing: Yangguang Chubanshe.

Zheng, Xiaoqiong. 2019. *A Needle Hole through the Constellations*. Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press.

Zheng, Xiaoqiong. 2015. [Selected poems]. In Qin, Xiaoyu (ed.). *The Verse of Us: Poems of Contemporary Workers*, 267–85. Beijing: Zuojia Chubanshe.

Zheng, Xiaoqiong. 2006. *Huangmaling: Shiji* 黄麻岭诗集 (Huangmaling Poetry Collection). Beijing: Changzheng Chubanshe.

Zhang, Kaicheng. 2016. *Shiren xiezuo zhuanxing de fasheng ji jiaolv – – yi Zheng Xiaoqiong wei li* 诗人写作转型的发生及焦虑 – – 以郑小琼为例 (On the Occurrence and Anxiety of Poet's Writing Transformation: A Case Study of Zheng Xiao-qiong). *Guangxi Shifan Xueyuan Xuebao* 37 (3), 29–34. https://doi.org/10.16601/j.cnki.issn1002-5227.2016.03.005

Zhou, Xiaojing. 2016. "Zheng Xiaoqiong's Poems on the Global Connection to Urbanization and the Plight of Migrant Workers in China." *Verge: Studies in Global Asias* 2(1), 84–96.

Zou, Lin & Dan Wu. 2025. *Xin shiji chuqi dagong shige zhong de tonggan tiyan – – yi Zheng Xiaoqiong de dagong shige wei zhongxin* 新世纪初期打工诗歌中的痛感体验 – – 以郑小琼的打工诗歌为中心 (Painful Experience in New Century Migrant Worker Poetry – – Taking Zheng Xiaoqiong's Poetry as an Example). *Hanjiang Shifan Xueyuan Xuebao* 2, 47–53. https://doi.org/10.19575/j.cnki.cn42-1892/g4.2025.02.008