

## CHAPTER 2

# Environment

### 2.1 Embodied Activity and Intimating Environment: A Report from LanCheng, Taiwan

*Shaw-wu Jung*

In an interesting article, de Boeck (1998) explores how in building ecological space, local people make sense of their material, symbolic, and metaphoric worlds. To put his insights in a context in which a successful reconstruction of a community garden in LanCheng, a small village literally at the centre of Puli township, Nantou County in Taiwan, brings forth a sensitivity to its environment, I will examine how vegetables, as part of the environment seen every day by the residents, are the material world by which abstract cultural elements such as forward-looking environmental consciousness are localised. This case drives us to focus on the embodied activity that tethers grand and new ideas such as environmental justice to local sensibility.

From 2013 through to 2016, I joined a project at the National Chi Nan University in Taiwan. The project built on a community-based, participatory action research method, looking for ways to boost community action. As part of this, I led a team of research assistants and students to LanCheng. Not unlike the majority of rural villages in Taiwan that have experienced outbound migration, especially young people going to the cities looking for jobs, LanCheng has seen an ageing population and stagnant economic activities over the past decades.

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There is a community park, a 30m<sup>2</sup> piece of land, quite small, located just opposite the activity centre and the community kitchen, a government-sponsored welfare service providing lunch a few times a week for the elderly and those who cannot afford lunch.

However, there were no resources to maintain the park, to the effect that it had fallen into disuse. The pavement had become disused, and the premises were in poor condition. Gradually, trash had been discarded there, and weeds grew everywhere. Snake bites were also occasionally reported. No one regarded the park as safe and relaxing anymore.

After discussing with and getting permission from the secretary-general of the Community Development Association, a member-based civic organisation, our team decided to renovate the park as part of our collaborative efforts. But first of all, we asked the residents for their opinions about what the park should look like. Among them, the idea of a vegetable garden stood out, where they could both grow vegetables and do exercise. The initial and principal reason for this was that the community kitchen could use the yields from the garden and help reduce the financial responsibilities of the Association. Given the fact that since the 1990s, various branches of government have poured resources into the so-called Integrated Community Building policy with the aim of encouraging community involvement, communities have transformed themselves to something like funding competitors which must follow the guidelines of the funders, leaving little room to do what they liked. Financial self-sufficiency was certainly the first step for the community to gain flexibility and control over its own agenda. There was also consensus that the vegetables should be edible and organic, and not grown using industrial pesticides. A vision of this place: 'a vegetable garden-based park and a park-like vegetable garden' was brewing (e.g. Follmann and Viehoff 2015).

As soon as the Association and our team had reached an agreement on converting the park to a community farming garden, our team and residents jointly began digging soil, removing the bushes, and cutting down the trees behind the gazebo. Within a few days, several parallel beds had been cultivated, with seeds of different vegetables planted. Compared with just talking during the meetings without any real sense of outputs, the activities on the field were swift and efficient, mainly because of the fact that many of the participants had done some sort of farming at some point in their life.

Friendly farming was the approach we used to tend to the garden, even though there was no consensus on what it really meant in practice, let alone the term 'sustainability' that friendly farming aims for. Without the use of agrochemicals and synthetic fertilisers, we had to devote considerable labour and time to weeding, for one thing, and needed to do it on a daily basis. Students usually weeded particular sections in the morning, but weeds in other areas were removed by others in the afternoon. We had no idea who cleared them. Residents would come to the garden offering us suggestions on how to weed in a more efficient way, and more often than not, brought with them tools to weed. We once saw an elderly woman sitting on a stool removing the weeds



**Figure 2.1:** Images of the vegetable garden in the initial stages. Photograph courtesy of the author.

on the roadside by the garden. The weeds on the roadsides were so visible and were seen by residents as a mark of ‘negligence’ and ‘laziness’, or a sign of ‘waste land’, as the old lady put it. Traditional agricultural habits required workers to constantly attend to the land, as if it were an extension of the self. Now it seemed the garden had become something gathering attention in the community through weeds’ visible materiality, to use anthropologist Tim Ingold’s phrase (2006), so as to (re)build sociality.

The garden produced everything from ginger to pine, mushrooms, and many kinds of vegetation that I did not recognise. Then came diverse insects, and amphibian and reptilian species. Frogs and dragonflies were also spotted, which in turn attracted families with children to come close to the garden. We gradually learned that the routine activities passed down from the past generations, such as ploughing, planting, and weeding by manual labour, contributed to an ecosystem that supported many species. Old-fashioned farming practices in this tiny garden were perhaps the most ‘natural’ way to manage the land.

The garden started off from the belief that providing free meals for the elderly with the vegetables planted by the residents themselves was self-sustaining in a way. But vegetables were not passive, only waiting for humans’ care and intervention. They grew, they connected, with air, soil, and water, and in the end, they transformed from seeds to crops, but they also assembled humans as well as non-humans into a lively network. It is important to recognise, however, that the garden was a place where practices of physical exercise, aesthetic

judgements, cultural habits, and, of course, state governance intermingled. It began as a state-funded project and was a place of ideologies, to be sure, but it was a place of other practices too because planting vegetables always took growers outside the predictable world to continuously attune to the possibilities of human and non-human factors. This echoes recent concerns of anthropologists who have been interested in the ways a novel world of humans and plants support one another to solve many of the environmental problems humans have created under the logic of extracting profit from the exploitation of natural resources (e.g. Hartigan 2015; Ingold 2006; Marder 2013).

Other things happened as plants and people began to interlink. When the most mundane and deserted scenes were made buoyant again, a renewed sense of protecting and maintaining this ecology may have a direct impact upon villagers' identity. As the old lady said, 'I tend all of the species, and would pass them on to my children.' While the garden did not start off with the goal of initiating ecological consciousness among residents, in the end, it did show a promising way that ecological resuscitation in a neglected community can be linked with its agricultural past. Here, we saw clearly the importance of taking seriously local sensibilities and traditional agricultural nodes, and the bringing together of concrete objects, plants, engaged residents, and communal spirit in the implementation of grand and new environmental ideas.

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### 2.2 'Sometimes We Have Some Toxins': Eco-Anxiety in Chinese Female-Authored Writing and Cultural Activism

*Justyna Jagusciak*

In the 2010s, following the global virality of Chai Jing's 柴静 movie *Under the Dome* (穹顶之下 *Qiongdǐng zhi xia* (2015)), which addressed the impact of air

pollution on children's health from the perspective of a concerned mother, the independent documentary film became the artistic medium most associated with environmental citizen activism in the PRC. However, similar concerns have also long been voiced in other media forms less accessible to global audiences unfamiliar with the Chinese language, such as poetry.

When in 2007 I began my research on Chinese female-authored poetry, neither of the two authors I focused on, the acclaimed poet Zhai Yongming 翟永明 and the rising star of migrant workers' poetry Zheng Xiaoqiong 郑小琼, had yet to be discussed from an ecocritical perspective. In fact, their texts already displayed increasing eco-anxiety. For example, in her 1999 poem 'How to Take Care of a Baby?' (拿什么去关爱婴儿? *Na shenme qu guan'ai ying'er?*) Zhai Yongming questioned the impact of pollution on younger generations' health. In contrast to the deeply personal tone in Chai Jing's documentary, Zhai's text displays an affinity with the feminist ethics of caring, taking up notions of human vulnerability and dependence on human and non-human others. The poem comments on the unresolvable dilemma of mothers who have no alternative to feeding their babies contaminated food.<sup>1</sup> They are aware of the environmental drama they are witnessing when 'before [their] eyes milk turns into dioxin' and 'plastic turns into garbage' (Zhai 2011 [1999]: 314). However, years of intense industrialisation at the expense of the natural environment have deprived the lyrical 'we' of healthy ways to sustain and protect life on Earth:

Sometimes we have some toxins  
 We eat some rust  
 Some DDVP  
 (Zhai 2011 [1999]: 315)

They also realise that their minds have been contaminated by past toxic ideologies, such as an uncritical belief in progress, because sometimes their 'mouths ramble some industrial charms' (Zhai 2011 [1999]: 315). Nevertheless, these charms lack magical powers, nor do they grant preservation from destruction or failure. Zhai's poem lays bare the older generations' lack of agency in the face of the environmental crisis. The poet, who came of age in the Mao era, questions also her own responsibility for the condition in which they hand over the natural environment to the younger generations.

'How to Take Care of a Baby?' shows that roughly half a century after the last catastrophic famine in the PRC, and in a time of abundance of affordable food, the issue of malnutrition in children may, again, become acute. Indeed it happened in 2008, the year of the milk scandal, when contaminated infant formula led to cases of fatal kidney damage in babies. Zhai shared her grief over the incident in 'The Child's Dripping Song' (儿童的点滴之歌 *Ertong de diandi zhi ge*), which reads like a dark, disturbing lullaby. The first stanza of the poem describes a dying baby boy from the perspective of his mother, who sits next to him at the hospital bed: 'little Shi Jie has three tubes in his head' (Zhai 2013: 21).

His mother bemoans the calamity, and her pain amplifies with the realisation that she poisoned her baby with the infant formula.

The anonymous child from Zhai's 1999 poem becomes, in a ghostly manner, Shi Jie, the baby unintentionally fed to death by his mother. The 'Song' quotes from the morbid imagery of gothic tales when it compares the profit-driven managers of milk companies to bloodsucking vampires:

Some people drink the baby's blood some people share profits

...

2008's milk is vampires' saliva

2008's excess is the problem

(Zhai 2013 22)

2008 was not only the year of the milk scandal, but also the year of the devastating Sichuan earthquake and of the Beijing Summer Olympics. Thus, the word 'excess' in the quote may be referring to much more than the food safety incident alone.

The same year, Zheng Xiaoqiong wrote 'Pedestrian Overpass' (人行天桥 *Renxing tianqiao*), a long prose poem inspired by her work in factories in the manufacturing hub of the Pearl River Delta:

... plutonium replaces calcium in the production of saliva, soft silvery tin floats in the air, rushing into your lungs and blood vessels, arsenic eats up your sexual desire, mercury has killed the algae and fish in the rivers ...

Toxic petroleum shines on our diseased bodies, toxic fumes and waste have contaminated the semen of our men.

(Zheng 2008: 95, 99)

This is only one of many examples in Zhang's oeuvre that depict the transformation of matter by the chemical substances that penetrate it. Drawing upon her personal experience, the poet writes about the deleterious impact of industrial waste and pollution on workers' health. The daily contact with iron parts and tools in factories exposes them to the risk of accidents and injuries. Almost invisible, but no less dangerous, is the exposure to toxins that can lead to infertility.

Since 2007, environmental concerns have accompanied my research visits to the PRC. This was not only as a literary theme, but also due to the impact of pollution on my daily life. My academic friends based in Beijing have embraced vegetarianism because of worries over meat safety, and eating out has become increasingly challenging. When in 2019 I met the social scientist and labour activist Lü Tu 吕途, she told me that recurring incidents of food poisoning were a turning point in her career. Lü recalls the experience that changed her perception of the countryside:

In 2009 I began to organise the Workers' University in the village Pinggu ... When I had classes, I stayed overnight in Pinggu. One day, I bought tantalisingly fresh cucumbers from a vendor next door. That evening I suffered from severe food poisoning. When the pain became unbearable in the middle of the night, I had no other choice but to clean out my stomach. (Lü 2019)

Lü realised that the pastoral image of the countryside some of us cherish has long fallen out of sync with the reality of 'toxic insecticide and the smell of pesticide in the air when fruit is ripening' (Lü 2019).

Lü is mainly known for her new workers' trilogy (Lü 2012, 2014, 2017) and her work for the Picun-based NGO Migrant Workers' Home. In her texts she elaborates on the emotional homelessness and instability that endangers the existence of many migrant workers. Following the spike in eco-anxiety, Lü's attention shifted from a critique of urbanisation to rural reconstruction work. With her singer-songwriter husband, Sun Heng 孙恒, Lü began a new project that focuses on reviving the tradition of village songs. Since 2019 they have been organising workshops with villagers who write their own texts, such as those created by the inhabitants of the Stone City Village (石城之村 *Shicheng zhi cun*):

Stone wall, stone house, the small village made of stones  
One stone, four ounces oil, otherwise the grain won't grow

Walnut scent, chestnut taste, old trees count a hundred years  
Valleys filled with fresh air, and the stones smell sweet too  
(quoted in Lü 2019)

Lü and Sun hope that the fostering of villagers' emotional connections with the countryside may be the first step toward creating a healthier living environment for those, mainly older women and children, left behind by urbanisation.

These examples illustrate a growing ecological awareness on the part of engaged citizens and activists. The state's agenda has also changed, and currently the PRC is affirming its commitment to green development. Concurrently, other globally known phenomena, such as greenwashing, have appeared. My last example comes from the short play *Ocean Hotpot* (海水火锅 *Haishui huoguo*) by Chen Si'an 陈思安. Her work was commissioned by the 2019 Edinburgh International Festival, which asked five writers to share their views on the global climate crisis. Chen's absurdist piece invites the audience to the Committee for Global Ecological Balance and Environmental Promotion, where the protagonist applies for an environmental grant. He plans to turn the warming sea around the Yong Le Island into a seawater hotpot and successfully sells his costly environmental project as an ecological start-up. The play pokes fun at the superficiality of much of environmental politics. One could wonder

if the playwright was targeting the organisers of the festival too? Environmental art sells and wins grants for funds, in the PRC and elsewhere.

### Note

- <sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all translations from Chinese are by the author, J. Jagusick.

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## 2.3 Garbage Bins Are for Containing People Too

*Adam Liebman*

Four categories of post-consumer waste: dry, wet, recyclable, and hazardous. In 2019, news stories about Shanghai residents being forced to sort and deposit their household waste according to these categories rippled through the international news media (Kuo 2019). The rules included limited times for dropping off waste and confusing categorical requirements, leading to complaints of inconvenience, unfair penalties, and state overreach. This effort to improve waste separation in urban China was rolled out in 46 pilot cities in 2020, including Kunming (CCTV 2020), where I engaged in waste fieldwork on and off throughout the 2010s.



**Figure 2.3:** A newly installed waste station in an upscale residential area in Shanghai, 2019. Courtesy of Goeun Lee.

Garbage bins function as a crucial nexus that connects the state with two different social groupings. On one side are relatively well-off urbanites who generate and deposit most post-consumer waste (the main focus of media coverage); while on the other side are large populations of waste workers, both formal and informal, who make a living through handling this waste (mostly missing from media coverage). As such, looking at changing bin designs, aesthetics, and the politics of their placement provides a lens into shifting urban political ecologies in contemporary China. Below is a brief history of garbage containment efforts in Kunming that includes both social groupings to help contextualise the recent initiative.

1965. The frenetic scrap collection campaigns of the Great Leap Forward had passed, but an ethos of thrift and material reuse was still widely promoted for its potential to help the nation industrialise. In this context, the Kunming sanitation bureau set out to unify regulation of the city's system of collecting food waste and distributing it to villages outside of the city for use as pig feed or fertiliser. The bureau drafted a report for the city's leaders comparing three methods: either setting up a costly system of workers, facilities, and vehicles to collect and transport the waste; allowing peasants to continue entering the city to pick up waste collected by urban workers; or continuing to allow peasants to collect food waste directly from residential areas, cafeterias, and restaurants, while adding some new restrictions.

In the last method, the most economical, three 'drawbacks' listed are especially revealing:

1. Peasants going to people's courtyards to collect food waste is a fragmented process, which takes more time and wastes labour power.
2. The times when peasants enter and leave the city cannot be guaranteed, influencing urban aesthetics and appearance.
3. When peasants themselves go to courtyards to collect, usually they will not seriously clean the buckets and containers, influencing the environment and hygiene.

The cleanliness of 'buckets and containers' for collecting food waste (precursors of black-box garbage bins) thus appears to be a larger concern than are peasants who appear reduced to their only use: labour power. Peasants are seen to be as potentially polluting in the city as rotting food waste, and the report makes it clear that the state's efforts to systematise waste collection are often tied to projects of containing devalued people as well as matter.

1978. Deng Xiaoping had taken over leadership of the Communist Party in the wake of Mao's death, markets had emerged for selling surplus agricultural products, and many Kunmingers were enjoying a new abundance of fruits and vegetables. But with this small shift from scarcity to abundance came a proliferation of stinking garbage, straining Mao-era systems of collection and reuse. A report from this year hints how this process played out. To improve 'urban aesthetics and sanitation', the sanitation bureau constructed 216 new garbage repositories in which waste could be deposited and partially contained before being transferred to larger garbage dumps. However, twelve of these new repositories had been demolished by work units and neighbourhood associations that were seeking to expand their businesses. One repository was replaced with a business selling cold drinks, another with a restaurant selling rice noodles (a Yunnan speciality). Clearly, some work units had been quick to take advantage of new economic opportunities, and they were not allowing the city's new waste infrastructure to impede them.

Without these repositories, some city residents were left without a designated place for disposing of garbage and had to merely leave it nearby. This not only influenced the city's appearance. More seriously, it blocked roadways, prevented garbage trucks from getting through, generated a rotting stench, and 'raised the ire of the masses.' The sanitation bureau required offending work units to reconstruct the repositories. In this way, the responsibility of the local state can be seen shifting: from overseeing the conversion of waste to value and containing the dirt and stench of devalued things and people, to a fuller battle with merely attaining elusive containment.

1998. The city began to install in public spaces garbage bins containing two separate sides: one for 'recyclable waste' and the other for 'non-recyclable waste'. The new bins were part of the city's efforts to not only appear more modern and hygienic, but also more 'green' and 'ecological' as it prepared to host the World Horticulture Exposition the following year. Yet, both sides of the new bins soon came to be used for all waste, as urbanites noticed that both sides were dumped

back together into the same vehicles, making clear the state's lack of an actual recycling system. Practices that functioned to 'recycle' waste were still widespread, but increasingly occurred through waste workers and garbage pickers pulling out waste of value to sell to informal scrap traders, as well as through lower-income urban inhabitants habitually saving and selling their scrap in ways that avoided the state's bins altogether.

2011. While beginning fieldwork for this project, I encountered a particularly interesting manifestation of the pairing of ecology and modernity: a hefty, bright green garbage bin, with posters on three sides showing utopian green cityscapes underneath fluffy white clouds, floating bubbles, and a mix of English ('Environmental protection'), pinyin (*Shengtai huanbao*), and Chinese characters (*shengtai Kunming, lüse Kunming, yuanlin Kunming* 生态昆明, 绿色昆明, 园林昆明 [ecological Kunming, green Kunming, garden Kunming]). As I got closer to the can, its plexiglass screens retracted and a mechanised female voice loudly and repeatedly instructed me to 'protect the environment, take care of hygiene' (*baohu huanjing, aihu weisheng* 保护环境, 爱护卫生).

Later I found a news article that reported on the project: '48 Smart Garbage Cans Enter Cuihu [Park]' (Zhou 2011). Of course, smart-cans! After all, this was an era when teens sold kidneys to acquire iPhones and other coveted digital devices. Smartness was an emergent idiom of the time, indexing modernity, innovation, and global connectedness. Yet, the stated goals of the smart-can pilot project were more modest: handling growing quantities of waste, preventing the wind from blowing garbage out, containing foul odours, providing space for public service advertisements, and providing light at night so the cans and messages could still be seen. Access to the contents of the bins was restricted by locks, making it almost impossible for the large numbers of garbage pickers active in the park to identify and pull out items that could be sold as scrap. Thus, while the cans' affects were designed to help produce ecologically conscious, modern waste disposers, the project also was enclosing one of the most important material means enabling the urban poor to eke out a living in the city.

2021. When journalists and scholars turn their focus to new approaches of garbage sorting and containment, they would be wise to consider two important questions highlighted in this history. First, how are both the formal and informal infrastructures used to process waste changing in connection with new containment regimes, if at all? And second, how is the approach shifting waste workers' burdens of handling valueless waste while also shifting others' access to waste of value?

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## 2.4 Revisiting the Maoist 'Smart Village'

*Jessica Imbach*

The phenomenal rise of Chinese science fiction since the 1990s coincides with not only China's transformation into the world's second largest economy, but also growing global awareness of the environmental crisis. Several contemporary works, including the science fiction blockbuster *The Wandering Earth* (*Liulang diqiu* 流浪地球, 2019), in fact thematise climate change and other ecological problems very explicitly (Imbach 2021). Yet, an ecological perspective is central to most science fiction media. Lawrence Buell has argued that 'no genre potentially matches up with a planetary level of thinking "environment" better than science fiction does' (Buell 2009: 57). But what is perhaps particularly intriguing about science fiction is the ways it often 'thinks environment' through technology. While current debates on 'green technology' and 'clean energy' give this line of speculative imagination new urgency and relevance, science fiction also helps us locate shifting views on nature and technology in their specific historical and political contexts.

An important trope in this respect is the 'smart village', which appears mainly in socialist science fiction from the 1950s and 1960s. Agricultural themes of course dominated socialist literature until the end of the 1970s. But what makes these stories about high-tech country life and bio-engineered abundance stand out from other literary texts of this period is, among other things, not only their temporal setting in the (near-)future, but also their reliance on technology to achieve the Maoist green utopia. Although some of these texts imagine advances that seem quite absurd to us today (and we should keep in mind that many of these texts were written as 'children's literature'), these visions of techno-pastoral utopianism continue to resonate with current articulations of state environmentalism and its promotion of 'ecological civilisation' (*sheng-tai wenming* 生态文明).

The most well-known smart village of the 1950s can be found in Tian Han's play *Rhapsody of the Ming Tomb Reservoir* (*Shisanling shuiku changxiangqu* 十三陵水库畅想曲, 1958/2000). Its last act offers a rare explicit vision of China's socialist future as it was being envisioned in mainstream culture production during the industrialisation efforts of the Great Leap Forward. In Tian Han's industrialised arcadia, China has found a cure for cancer and an anti-ageing formula, everybody can afford folkloric silk gowns, people travel in private helicopters and 'Beijing' cars, there is commercial space travel, and when people want to enjoy a scenic ride on the reservoir lake they have 'atomic boats' at their disposal. The play gained fame, as it was that same year turned into a movie directed by Jin Shan 金山, which also included live footage of Mao and other party leaders participating in the construction of the reservoir. The cinematic adaptation develops a more explicit agricultural utopia by adding, for instance, a genetically engineered tree that can simultaneously produce a variety of different fruits.

The subgenre of the scientific discovery novel captures perhaps even more vividly the unfettered scientific romanticism and techno-pastoral aspirations of the 1950s. An interesting example is Chi Shuchang's short story *Elephants without Trunks* (*Gediao bizi de daxiang* 格调鼻子的大象, 1956), which centres on a farm village in the Gobi desert that has developed a method for breeding pigs the size of elephants and also produces other culinary delights such as oranges with invisible skins. Such techno-pastoral dreams were, however, not limited to remote and rural locations. For instance, Zheng Wenguang's 郑文光 utopian vignette *Ode to Communism* (*Gongchanzhuyi changxiangqu* 共产主义畅想曲), which was written in 1958, but describes the 30th anniversary of the People's Republic in 1979, depicts not only a new world illuminated by a second artificial sun, but also describes how Beijing 'is no longer a crowded and noisy city, but has become a beautiful garden' (Zheng 1958: 24, 22).

Today, these techno-pastoral narratives remind us of the large discrepancy between the utopian aspirations of the Maoist industrial revolution and its devastating humanitarian and environmental consequences. They reflect not only the Maoist idealisation of the countryside, but also an instrumental and anthropocentric view of nature as an infinite and malleable resource. However, we can trace a similar conjunction of industrial utopianism with pastoral romanticism in current articulations of state environmentalism. Xi Jinping's ubiquitously quoted phrase 'blue rivers and green mountains, are mountains of silver and gold' (*lǜshuǐ qīngshān jiùshì jīnshān yínshān* 绿水青山就是金山银山) may sound benign, but its poetic rhetoric belies the much more martial reality of China's new 'green technocracy' and its use of technological means for environmentally unsustainable and politically coercive ends (Li and Shapiro 2020). The continued relevance of Maoist eco-utopianism is also made explicit in the conceptualisation of the current stage of socialist development with

Chinese characteristics as ‘ecological civilisation,’ which, as numerous Chinese think tanks and party historians have elaborated, is seen as a continuation of Mao’s ‘industrial civilisation’ (*gongye wenming* 工业文明).

In contemporary science fiction, however, we can encounter a darker and more ambivalent take on techno-pastoralism. For instance, Han Song’s recently published *Mountain Camp* (*Shanzhai* 山寨, 2020) is a mysterious fable about a group of writers and literary scholars who go to a conference in a remote research centre in the mountains and become the only survivors of some inexplicable Armageddon event.<sup>1</sup> In a certain sense, it is an allegory on the limits of literature to understand the world – the title, which in contemporary Chinese means ‘knock-off’ also alludes to the story’s play on imitation and originality – and the participants at one point bemoan the fact that no science fiction writer was invited to the conference to make sense of their absurd predicament. But the story also stages a confrontation with the techno-pastoral fantasies of the past, although in Han Song’s industrialised landscape AK47s melt into ‘warped Arabic numerals’ and deer have no skulls and so their brain matter ‘cascades over their bodies like a waterfall’ (p. 21). With technology and nature constantly shapeshifting and mutating in unpredictable and incomprehensible ways, *Mountain Camp* is probably closer to Lovecraftian horror than Maoist eco-utopianism. It depicts a ‘thinking environment’ that stands in sharp contrast to the environmental thought of ‘ecological civilisation’.

### Note

- <sup>1</sup> An interview with Han Song on *Mountain Camp* and a short introduction by Song Mingwei, to whom also go my thanks for graciously sending me a copy of the story, can be found here: <http://www.chinawriter.com.cn/n1/2020/0701/c404080-31765879.html>

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