1 **Speaking Truth to Power:**

China’s Artists, Poets and Netizens on the Russo-Ukrainian War, 2022-Present

Daria Berg & Qian Cui,
University of St.Gallen, Switzerland

Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies,
University of Cambridge, 1 February 2024

2 **INTRODUCTION:**

Visual Art & Poetic Narratives

3 **Cao Fei 曹斐: Falling Matryoshka**

On February 25, 2022, one day after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Cao Fei posted on Instagram: “Falling Matryoshka © Cao Fei 2022. Photo from the border of China and Russia. Project commissioned by @garagemca.”
Collaboration with the Garage Museum of Contemporary Art in Moscow in January/February 2022.

4 **‘Martyrs’ (‘Xundaozhe’ 殉道者)**

Liao Weitang 廖伟棠

殉道者

为什么这乌克兰的微笑似曾相识
原来他也曾属于那个西藏男孩。

就像一朵桃花那样的微笑。

她珍爱生命，去拯救被人类放弃的
他珍爱自由，放弃生命去喊出它。

地球没有放弃你们，山和水奔走相告
在炮弹开始流亡的时候， 你们

只有你们知道回家的路。路也追随
你们，渐渐涌起巨浪来。

温柔的，坚定的，一亿朵桃花那样。

5 **China's Utopia: *Locus Classicus***

Tao Yuanming 陶渊明 (365-427)

'Record of the Peach Blossom Spring' ('Tao hua yuan ji' 桃花源记)

6 **China's Dream?**

- Art / poetry on taboo topics in China's media sphere: Taiwan, Tibet, HK
- China Dream: Xi Jinping's motto, Nov 2012

- ‘Great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation’.
- Ai Weiwei: ‘There is no China Dream, only Chinese nightmares.’
- Many unofficial dreams / vernacular culture
- Xi’s many Chinese Nightmares:
  - pandemic,
  - Ukrainian leg of BRI in ruins…

7 **To explore today…**

- Contesting discourses in China’s mediasphere
  - China’s social media: Weibo and WeChat
- 3 Themes:
  - Colours of Ukraine
  - Sunflowers
  - Red & Black
- 3 Poets & 6 Artists

8 **China’s Geopolitics**

9 **Opening Beijing Winter Olympics**

4 Feb 2022:
Beijing Winter Olympics Opening Ceremony, Xi Jinping & Putin pledge ‘no limits’ friendship

10 **Joint Statement: No limits Friendship & Media Mirroring**

11 **National Radio & TV Administration 国家广播电视总局 (2018)**

- 2021 NRTA under Central Propaganda Dept of CCP
- secret agreement with Russia’s Ministry of Digital Development, Communications and Mass Media. Leaked: Chinese media to repeat & amplify Russian propaganda

- Since Feb 2022: converging media narratives Russia / China
  - China amplifies Russia's fake news: Ukraine prepares biological warfare (cf. Hvistendahl & Kovalev, 2022)

12 **China's Mediasphere**

13 **China's Mediasphere**

- 'Mediasphere' (Debray, 1991)
- := 'Cultural production in the visual and textual fields characterised by endless expansion'
- Our sources:
  - Online literature
  - Online magazines
  - Visual art & literary websites
  - Weibo 微博 (Sina Weibo)
  - WeChat / Weixin 微信

14 **China's Netizens**

1.079 billion (1,079 million) netizens
76.4% Internet penetration rate

1.076 billion (1,076 million) mobile Internet users
99.8% of netizens access Internet via mobile phones
(CNNIC, 2023)

15 **Social Media in China**

- Data: monthly active accounts. Weibo, WeChat: 2024.

16 **Official Discourse on China's Mediasphere**

- Pro-Putin, pro-Russia, pro-Ukraine, on social media / Weibo, WeChat in February & March 2022:

- ‘Glorious Russia! Glorious Putin! They have politicians in the West, but Putin, he is a great political player who will go down in history!’
- ‘I support the disintegration of NATO! I support Russia, because when Russia falls, China is next!’ (Weibo, 2 March 2022).
- ‘Russia has done a beautiful job!’
  - (Cf. Bandurski, 2022)

17 **Pro-Russian Propaganda Poem**

Admirer of Plum Blossoms in the Snow N
19 September 2022

American imperialists become the tyrants of the world,
Expanding eastward to the Russian border.
Instigating Ukraine to provoke Russia,
Each Nazi is a demon.
They have killed more than 20,000 Russian civilians,
Many of them women and children.
The Russian army rises to resist the Nazis,
Bravely fighting without fear against the pack of wolves.
They heroically hold on and smash the encirclement,
Ultimately ensuring the defeat of the Nazis.

Imitation of old-style regular poem:
Seven-word couplets, rhyme attempted.
14 likes, 4 comments
Author: 2014 followers; 130,000 likes.

Toutiao 头条 (Headlines) Platform, URL:

https://www.toutiao.com/question/7142737941764129055/?source=seo_tt_juhe, accessed 3 January 2024.

18 **Parrhesia in East & West**

19 **Parrhesia in Western Culture**

- Greek παρρησία — first in Euripides (c.484-407 BC)
  - Literally: ‘saying everything one has in mind’
  - Speaking truth to power, freedom of expression, transparency, duty, idle talk, gossip.

20 **Parrhesia in Western Culture**

- Greek παρρησία — first in Euripides (c.484-407 BC)
  - Literally: ‘saying everything one has in mind’
  - Speaking truth to power, freedom of expression, transparency, duty, idle talk, gossip.
- Foucault, 1983:
  - Condition: truth-tellers face risk or danger for them in telling truth
  - But they feel bound by duty to muster the courage and do so.
    - Foucault, Michel, ‘Discourse and Truth: The Problematisation of Parrhesia’, Six Lectures given at Berkeley, 1983.

21 **Parrhesia Tradition in China**

- Duke Huan of Qi 齊桓公 (r.685-643 BC) established office of ‘admonition officers’ (*jian guan* 諫官) to speak truth to power—until Liao dynasty (916-1125).
- Praised by Xi Jinping’s e-government: He Jing 何静, website of Audit Bureau of Guilin City, Guangxi 广西自治区桂林市审计局.

22 **Parrhesia Mission**

- *Shi* 士 in pre-Qin China
  - Confucius 孔子
  - Mencius 孟子

23 **Parrhesia Risks**

- Sima Qian 司馬遷 (c. 145-c. 86 BC) & Grand Historian to Emperor Han Wudi 漢武帝 (r. 141- 87 BC)
  - Death sentence, commuted to castration and 3 years in prison after Sima Qian defended defeated general Li Ling 李陵 (d. 74 BC)
- Tradition of *xiaoshuo* 小说 — idle talk, gossip — history rather than fiction
- Political critique often indirect

24 **3 THEMES:**

Parrhesia in China's Mediasphere

25 **I.**

COLOURS OF UKRAINE

26 **Cao Fei 曹斐**

27 **Cao Fei on Instagram**

28 **Cao Fei**

1 • Februar/März 2022
- "Found daily colours to support Ukraine"

- Echoes of Ukraine found in China…

29 **Cao Fei**

Conform to the System

- Cao Fei:
  'Comments on China's society, not criticism'

- Avoid direct confrontation with authorities
- Mix art, political & commercial culture
- Design alternative worlds without CCP, new utopias
- 'My future is not a dream'

30 **Cao Fei**

Master of the Art of Indirect Critique
Cao Fei: 'Comments on China's society, not criticism' (NYT, 2015)

31 **Cao Fei**

- Born 1978, Guangzhou
- Lives in Beijing
- Photographer
- Film maker
- Video artist
- Script writer
- Composer
- Sculptor

32 **Multi-media artist CAO Fei 曹斐 (b. 1978)**

33 **Badiucao 巴丢草**

34 **Badiucao 巴丢草**

35

- #StopWar
- #StandWithUkraine
- https://www.badiucao.com/latest-adventure

36 **Badiucao website**

- 57,000 followers on Instagram
- 2200 posts

37 **Badiucao: Interactive Art on Blockchain / Mint**

- NFT (non-fungible tokens / cryptocurrency) Ukraine:
  - allows ‘collectors to write their own message of opposition to China’s authoritarian regime onto the blockchain as part of the minting process, preserving it as a public decentralized record of protest’.
- Badiucao:
  - ‘I have been battling censorship from China‘s authoritarian regime for more than 10 years. When conventional galleries and venues are too intimidated to exhibit my art due to threats from Beijing, NFTs and blockchain technologies not only provide a safe way to offer critical financial support to dissident artists, but serve as an important immutable public record outside of authoritarian tampering and control.’
- ‘Help Badiucao support the brave citizens of Ukraine by collecting this vital work. https://www.badiucao.com/ukraine’

38 **Badiucao**

- Born c. 1986 in China
- Pseudonym
- Lives in Australia
- Active on Sina Weibo, other Chinese social media,
- Twitter, Instagram
- Website: https://www.badiucao.com/latest-adventure

39 **Huang Rui 黃锐**

40 **Huang Rui 黃锐: 'Absence of Black Moon'**

- Art Basel
- 2022
- Oil on canvas, 88 x 99 cm

41 **Huang Rui 黃锐: 'Absence of Black Moon'**

- 'Together for Peace': Exhibition by Ukrainian & Polish Embassies, Beijing, 12 March 2022
- *Dao de jing* 道德經 inspiration
- *Yi jing* 已經 *Book of Changes*

42 **Huang Rui 黃锐: 'Absence of Black Moon'**

43 **Huang Rui 黃锐: 'Absence of Black Moon'**

- Paused his other projects to dedicate himself to a anti-war work about Ukraine after hearing the news of its invasion on February 24.
- 'Absence of Black Moon'

•Finished 3 days later
•Presented at Ukrainian and Polish embassies in Beijing
•Ukrainian flag sliced into quarters by lines of red and white = Russia.

44 **Huang Rui 黃锐: ‘Absence of Black Moon’**

- *1952, Beijing
- 1978 co-published Jintian 今天 Today literary magazine
- 1980s Co-founder & member of Stars Group 星星
- Exhibitions in China, Europe, USA

45 **Deng Kangyan 邓康延**

46 **‘Echoes from the Ukrainian Trenches’ (‘Wukelan zhanhao de huixiang’ 乌克兰战壕的回响), Deng Kangyan 邓康延**

乌克兰战壕的回响

乌克兰兄弟
听到你战壕的笛声离死亡很近
我们揪心
看到你故乡的旋律离太阳很近
我们开心

我们也有过梅花和青天血染的清晨

知道恨与爱的山高海深

请接受遥远东方的和音

比炮弹更响的共鸣

比履带更快的前进

47 **‘Echoes from the Ukrainian Trenches’ (‘Wukelan zhanhao de huixiang’ 乌克兰战壕的回响),**
Deng Kangyan 邓康延

当你的笛声和我们的琴声共振

那是母亲和孩子的声音

那是自由与和平的声音

那是地球山崩地裂的声音

你笛孔里有乌克兰的花黄天蓝

你旋律里回荡着向死而生的国运

没有谁能打败一场心灵的合奏

苍天护佑热爱自由的人民

48 **Deng Kangyan 邓康延**

- Poem above mixes colours of Ukraine’s flag with colour of blood
- b. Kunming, youth in Xi’an
- Geological engineer

• Published ‘Shenzhen Youth’ and ‘Phoenix Weekly’ magazines
• Vice-President of Shenzhen Film & TV Artists Association
• 2021-2022 Artist in residence at Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shenzhen
• Poet, author & documentary filmmaker

49 **II.**

SUNFLOWERS

50 **Badiucao 巴丟草**

51

(Badiucao.com, 25 March 2022), Badiucao website, URL: https://www.badiucao.com/ukraine, accessed 20 January 2024.

52

1/6 series: Six-piece NFT (non-fungible tokens/cryptocurrency) collection dedicated to the brave Ukrainians fighting against the Russian invasion, inspiring the world
All proceeds to go to Ukrainian government

53 **Ukrainian woman confronts Russian soldiers**
Henichesk, sea of Asov
25 February 2022
“Take these seeds and put them in your pockets, so at least sunflowers will grow when you all lie down here.”
Viral on social media
“#PocketSunflowers to grow sunflowers from their graves!” — a Twitter user
(Shweta Sharma, ‘Brave Ukrainian woman wells soldier: ‘Put sunflower seeds in your pocket so

they grow when you die', *The Independent*, 25 Feb 2022)

54 **Seeds in the Pockets**

1 • 25 March 2022

Seeds in the Pockets

is a 6 pieces NFT collection dedicated to the brave Ukrainians who fight against Russian invasion and inspire the world.

March 25th, 2022—Chinese dissident artist Badiucao announces today he has created an NFT collection in support of Ukraine amidst the 2022 Russian invasion. This NFT collection, 'Seeds in the Pockets' is dedicated to the brave Ukrainians who fight against Russian invasion and inspire the world. 'Seeds in the Pockets' features six new works, each with a message of support and empathy for Ukranians who are living through this terrible war.

All proceeds from the sale of this collection will be sent directly to the Ukrainian government, who is now accepting payments via crypto currency.

55 **Xi Yongjun 席永君**

56 **'Ukraine: Homeland of Sunflowers (Poetry Series): Sunflowers', Xi Yongjun 席永君**

乌克兰：向日葵的故乡（组诗）

向日葵

更无柳絮因风起，

惟有葵花向日倾。

——【宋】司马光《客中初夏》

在乌克兰港口城市亨尼切斯克

一位大妈当街怒怼俄罗斯士兵

她大声质问：你们为什么要来

我们这里？你们是侵略者

你们是乌克兰人的敌人

从这一刻起，你们被诅咒了

你们应该把这些葵花籽

放进你们的口袋里，这样

等你们死后，它们就会

在乌克兰的土地上自由生长

那光明，那沉默的爱……

大妈深爱向日葵

向日葵是乌克兰的国花

57 **Xi Yongjun, ‘Sunflowers’ Microblog poem**

- Poem 4/12 in series of six
- Publ. 12 March 2022, Chengdu
- 1110 views
- 39 likes
- On WeChat public channel ‘Poetry, Wine and Tea Republic’ *shijiucha gonghe* 诗酒茶共和, Sichuan

58 **WeChat Channel**

- ‘Poetry, Wine and Tea Republic’ *shijiucha gonghe* 诗酒茶共和 from Sichuan
- ‘Publications of excellent writings on wine culture and tea culture, and also excellent poetry to disseminate the excellent Chinese culture.’

59 **Xi Yongjun 席永君 (b. 1963)**

- b. 1963 Qionglai 邛崃, Sichuan
- Lives in Chengdu
- Poet, with international recognition
- Editor-in-chief of
  - literary magazines
  - Chengdu Evening News, etc.

60 **III.**

WAR & PEACE

(BLACK & RED)

61 **Badiucao 巴丢草**

62 **Badiucao 巴丢草**

- Composite Portrait:
- Xi Jinping & Putin, 2022

- Badiucao’s first solo show
- DOX, Prague, Czechia, May-August 2022

63 **Stop**

64 **STOP 3/6**

65 **STOP 3/6**

Badiucao: ’In my view, if you open the dazzling neon jacket, China’s complexion is nothing more than black and red.
Red is blood, fear and violence.
Black is iron, freezing nights, depression, despair, and the silent corners. It’s the cloth gag covering the screams.
The country is like a giant meat grinder, a layer of fresh blood covering a layer of despair, new despair covering the layer of fresh blood, over and over again.’
https://chinadigitaltimes.net/2013/12/ten-question-badiucao-%E5%B7%B4%E4%B8%A2%E8%8D%89/, accessed 20 Jan 2024.

66 **Liao Weitang 廖伟棠**

67 **‘Winter on Fire’, Liao Weitang 廖伟棠**

Winter on Fire

二二八連假前夕
我坐在路邊
用手機看紀錄片
Winter on Fire:
Ukraine’s Fight for Freedom

68 **‘Winter on Fire: Ukraine’s Fight for Freedom’, Netflilx, 2015**
Winter on Fire

二二八連假前夕
我坐在路邊
用手機看紀錄片
Winter on Fire:
Ukraine’s Fight for Freedom

69 **‘Winter on Fire’, Liao Weitang 廖伟棠**

70 **‘Winter on Fire’**

我想截圖給我防火牆內的朋友看
但只截下來字幕
圖像變成一片漆黑只剩下：

71 **‘Winter on Fire’**

「我的朋友和我
開始搖響所有的鐘」
「聖米迦勒修道院的人
正在阻止這件事發生」
「上一次這些鐘敲響
是在1240年蒙古韃靼人
入侵基輔之時」
我不確定他們能否猜到什麼回事

72 **‘Winter on Fire’**

而我住在基輔、第聶伯的朋友
鐘聲盈耳，無暇寫詩
她們忙於撬開
十字架之上
針孔一般狹窄的天空
就像我住在九龍、港島、大嶼山
每天都經歷著二二八前夕
的朋友一樣

73 **Liao Weitang 廖伟棠**

- b. 1975 Xinxing county 新兴县, Guangdong
- ‘Left behind child’ in rural area
- Moves to Hong Kong (Liu Waitong, pun on *liuwang aitong* 流亡哀痛, ‘Grief in Exile)
- Poet, photographer, writer, magazine editor, bookshop manager
- Literary prizes in HK, Taiwan, abroad
- Assoc. Prof. National Taipei University of the Arts 國立臺北藝術大學 (Literature Dept.)

74 **Qi Shaoting 齐少婷**

75 **Qi Shaoting 齐少婷**

76 **Qi Shaoting**

77 **Qi Shaoting**

2022 Qi and her child fled to Dusseldorf

‘The idea of the project arose because of the restriction of access to materials when we were fleeing at the outbreak of war. I didn’t have paint or rice paper, which are hard to find even in peacetime. If an artist has a passion for art, they can paint with anything: toothpaste, fingers. The first works of art were made in such conditions, in the conditions of war.’

Interview 27 April 2022, Ukrainian Association of Sinologists, https://sinologist.com.ua/en/chi-shaoting/, accessed 20 January 2024.

78 **Li Qiang**

79 **Li Qiang**

- Li Qiang, 21 March 2022, ink and red stamp. ‘Ukrainians sheltering during a Russian bomb attack’

80 **Li Qiang**

- ‘Old man cradling his grandson and protecting his sweet dreams’, painted by Li Qiang on 10 April 2022
- Ink

81 **Li Qiang 李强**

- b. 1963, Qingdao
- Studied in USA
- Qingdao Art Club
- Active in Qingdao
- ‘Flight of Ukrainian Refugees’, after a photograph by Andrea Alexandrova, painted by Li Qiang

on 27 February 2022 in Qingdao’

82 **Concluding Remarks**

- In sum: 3 Themes on war:
  - Ukrainian Colours, Sunflowers, War & Peace (Black/Red):
- Experimenting in mediashere with different strategies of direct & indirect styles of critique & comment on war
- New styles (<=> pro-Russian texts in traditional genres)
- Anti-/Utopian visions deconstruct China Dream into a series of dreams & nightmares
- Shed light on perceptions of the Russo-Ukrainian war from unofficial perspectives
- Provide insights into vernacular culture & new media’s-here
- Contesting voices in a network of social and cultural negotiations and exchanges.

83 ***Thank you!***

84

85 **Xtra Material**

86 **Badiucao NFT for Ukraine**

87 **On Fire**

88 **SeaSaw**

89 **Fuck Putin**

90 **Fuck Putin**

91 **Stop**

92

- 4.3.2022

- https://www.badiucao.com/latest-adventure

93

94 **Badiucao Pseudonym**

BDC: There are really not many things to say. I know many artists pick their name carefully to make sure it contains great meaning. Mine is more like you randomly open a dictionary and pick whatever word appears at top. I know it is probably not beneficial for people to remember my name, but it is true. :)

China Digital Times, Interview with Badiucao, 4 Dec 2013.
https://chinadigitaltimes.net/2013/12/ten-question-badiucao-%E5%B7%B4%E4%B8%A2%E8%8D%89/

95 **Li Qiang**

- Li Qiang, 5 April 2022, ink and red stamp. 'Bucha'

96 **Xu Wenxin**

97 **Xu Weixin 徐唯辛**

- Performance Project: iPad live: Ukraine Landscape
- Every day of war since 24 February 2022 Xu posts one iPad painting on his website in support of Ukraine
- 'Zelenskyi', by Xu Weixin, 1 March 2022

98 **Xu Weixin**

- b. 1958, Urumqi,
- Lives in New York and Beijing
- BA Xi'an Academy of Fine Arts, MFA Zhejiang Academy of Arts
- Professor of Painting, Dean School of Arts, Renmin University, Beijing
- Exhibitions in China and abroad

上海的俄乌之战

俄乌战火烧到了上海
复兴公园里，两位退休老人
一位支持俄罗斯
一位支持乌克兰

双方各持己见，争执不休
继而大打出手，用暴力
捍卫各自的观点

拳脚相加中，一位老人
用力过猛，让另一位老人
牺牲了半只耳朵

请原谅，我在深夜为他们
点赞，我深知暴力
不是他们的唯一选项

2022年3月5日，成都。

100