

Lǎowài:

The Cultural Othering of Multiple Selves

Watched with curiosity & disdain:
I am the Other that is foreign,
a strange monkey not understanding Chinese ways.

I am hordes of barbarians storming the imperial gates
& monks from shrouded mountains far away.

I am the haughty British opium merchant
with paunchy belly & teeth decayed.

I am the village drunkard
seemingly harmless but crazed.

I am an impoverished girl sold into prostitution
so her parents can eat another day.

I am the demented school teacher
whose calligraphy is above disdain.

I am the aging eunuch
whose testicles rot in a cracked porcelain vase.

I'm that which some pray for
while others scorn.

I am each revolution that allows
the old to become transmute into new norms!

An-Yi: (shaking her head) This poem is counter-revolutionary! In my village, it would be burned.

Daiki: To the contrary — I believe it suggests a real revolution involves
something more than replacing one ruler with another.

Chariya: Real revolution? (laughing dryly) Perhaps a change in human DNA is needed
for that.

Bhāraté: Do you think our genes are the problem?

Chariya: (scratching his head) I honestly don't know what to think anymore. Maybe
we should think less and observe more?

- T Newfields

Begun: 2014 in Tokyo, Japan ≡ Finished: 2021 in Yokohama, Japan

