

# Zheng Yunhan

## *A Plan from JiXi*

### Edward Sanderson

The artist in China lives with a lot of expectations. He finds himself in a sea of ideology which actively works against any attempts to withdraw from it. It is such a fact of life that one forgets that it is merely a structure, something we make for ourselves, which has the effect of making some things seemingly possible and other things seemingly impossible. To reject ideology altogether is a foolhardy move, it will always come back to confront you at every stage of your work with others.

Zheng Yunhan holds himself apart as motivated purely by local concerns, family, friends, historical events that have left their mark here and there or have been mediated through his contacts. He is like a “conscientious objector” when it comes to ideology, he tries to avoid an active involvement with them in his work.

I'd like to make the case that (at this point in time) the works of Zheng Yunhan can be divided into two major sections, with an intermediate, linking work. This division is picked up by an attention to forms, but also through their development and reception.

The idea that Zheng's work is about its reception leads one to a distinct tone in the way that the works can be understood.

“The viewers and I, in our specific circumstances, are all creating different realities with our actions. I prefer to perceive and apperceive a multiple reality. The fragments of reality, the perspectives and distances, and the constantly restored scenes are just a reproduction of our memories, recollections or even a sporadic fantasy.”<sup>1</sup>

The works *Sing with me* (2004) and *JiXi Research Project* (2004–) (the latter's fullest presentation being at Arario Gallery Beijing in 2007), represent the initial phase of Zheng's works and reception. This is then followed by a transitional work *The Depth of Light (Turbulence)* (2008) (commissioned by the Goethe-Institut for their 20 years anniversary event in Beijing's 798 Art District). At this point his work enters a new stage which announces the position of a new understanding of his works: the works *Sunflower Plan* (2008) and *JiXi Plan—To Walk* (2009–).

### ***Sing with me/JiXi Research Project***

Analyses of Zheng's works tend to focus on their subject matter. *Sing with Me* and *JiXi Research Project* stem from an investigation of his hometown of JiXi, a mining town in North-eastern China. As Zheng explains, he sees these works on JiXi as “a long-take and archive of data about my hometown.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Li Zhenhua (2007), Interview between Zheng Yunhan and Li Zhenhua. In: Li Zhenhua (ed.), *Sustainable Imagination: Media Art in China Exhibition Series 1999–2007*. Beijing: Arario Gallery.

<sup>2</sup> Zheng Yunhan (2009), *JiXi Plan—To Walk (Proposal)*, unpublished manuscript.

“*Sing With Me* can be taken as temporary link with my childhood experience. It’s more or less a stimulant to me. [*JiXi Research Project*] is, in many aspects and to some extent, a continuation of *Sing With Me*. *Sing With Me* is more personal in that it employs subjective expression, while *JiXi* provides more comprehensive information about real life. The whole video is based on a framework composed of real facts about time, geographic information and with a strong sense of social responsibility. In creating and presenting the video, the subjective influences such as the artistic medium are minimized wherever possible.”<sup>3</sup>

Zheng’s earliest piece, *Sing with Me* puts the focus almost exclusively onto the JiXi miners themselves, with their setting being undefined and uncertain.

Most of the short film is shot in a harsh monochrome, recalling for me soviet films of the early twentieth century, and with a soundtrack of a famous rousing patriotic song (“The Luliang Chorus” composed in 1949 by Ma Ke<sup>4</sup>), but taking on an ironic awareness of stylised film techniques, The miners’ figures are the major players, acting predominantly against a pure white background. Fresh from work, their faces and clothes black with coal dust, they re-enact for the camera their typical work movements. As Zheng explains:

“After a day’s work, their faces are dark, with white teeth and simple and honest smiles on their faces. They don’t like to be photographed, they think they are ugly, but actually they are at their most glorious then.”<sup>5</sup>

Their montaged activity delivers a Busby-Berkeley-esque synchronised formation of digging, crawling, stooping, all apparently out of context, a performance divorced from the reality of their place of work. The miners end by crawling, towards us, then the shot is from above, creating a scene heavily reminiscent of the crowd fleeing down the Odessa steps in Sergei Eisenstein’s *Battleship Potemkin*. The crawlers arrange themselves in rosettes which multiply upon themselves, spinning giddily around, until the screen is eclipsed by a shrinking circular mask.

The lack of context is such a striking feature of *Sing with me*, that the appearance of a landscape in one short sequence towards the beginning of the film provides a harsh reminder of what we are missing. The miners stop their activity and freeze in place while their country appears around them: looming mine buildings and lift machinery; aerial shots of a town. And then the workers resume their frenetic activity. This is a brief break in their work for the camera, but thrusts their activity into the world, which appears to be a snowy, inhospitable landscape because of the high contrast of the images. Perhaps here is the meaning of the formal style of the film; the high contrast throughout is a snowy landscape, contrasting the dense black of their underground product with the surroundings on the surface – neither place is particularly welcoming.

And in this series of frames which represent something of a climax for the film, we see the only instance of colour used. The miners walk towards us, multiplying across the screen and then, suddenly, a looming miner’s face is tinted with red. This shot is immediately followed by characters spelling out the

---

<sup>3</sup> Li Zhenhua (2007), *op. cit.*

<sup>4</sup> 《咱们工人有力量》(Translation: Our Workers Have Power), 马可词曲。作于1947年。

<sup>5</sup> Li Zhenhua (2007), *op. cit.*

title of the revolutionary song playing in the film: “Our Workers Have Power,” a famous slogan of encouragement and empowerment for the People.

This is also one of only two points where text is used in the film. In contrast to the potentially ambiguous figure of the miner, the texts seem to be explicit, at least in both cases they have a power behind them, but for diametrically opposed reasons. The first text mentioned above is an emotive statement, designed to inspire the worker. The second, which appears in the final frame, tells us that “Over the first 12 days of January 2003, 241 miners died in coal mining accidents.”<sup>6</sup> This is the twist of the knife for the workers. Any trace of comedy that might have been assumed from the dances of the workers is dispelled, and they are no longer the subject of propaganda, the idealised hero. That they are real people represents the reversal of the previous slogans and reveals a new characteristic of the miner. As will be seen in *JiXi Research Project*, these are not blank cyphers of people. The film is about real people at all points, it is not about representing the idealisation of miners, but deals with their lives in such a dangerous environment where accidents and deaths continue to this day. But also as material for state propaganda.

*JiXi Research Project* is presented as a documentary-like archive of visual and spoken records of the lives of the people living in this town dominated by mining and the consequences of this industry on their lives and landscape. The work mixes contemporary footage of JiXi filmed by the artist with archive material, mixing impressions of this forgotten mining town as it is now, with the visual records left behind by the people.

The heroic qualities of staged photos of comrades, workers, school children and their teachers are presented with studio shots of individuals, babies, couples. More personal snapshots get interspersed amongst the formal pictures, holiday snaps at famous Chinese landmarks. Written comments on the photos and contemporary interviews are also included to build up a growing archive of material.

Again these people are not two-dimensional figures onto which we can project an ideal of the hero. They have a wider history than just to be associated with JiXi, they are not trapped there, they have travelled to Beijing to have their picture taken against the backdrop of Tian’anmen Square, for example. Hundreds of photos, each recording someone from JiXi, leave behind a reminder that this place is full of life and experience. With these pictures Zheng builds up the information that transcends the people and the place. Without being didactic he is saying something like: this is a place, and there are many people who all contributed in some way to make it what it is today. There has been migration in and out of JiXi and this has led to the area and people being intimately connected with the rest of China’s history and geography.

In the gallery this piece is presented as a 4-channel sound and video projection, but an important additional element is an element of interactivity, emphasising the audiences’ participation in the story telling process:

“It may be possible to invite the viewers to JiXi, or bring the whole of JiXi to Beijing. But can I take the audience to the JiXi ten years ago, or bring JiXi back to Beijing? The special characteristics of the media help me a lot in constructing a timeframe, which enables the artwork to be observed

---

<sup>6</sup> [Translation adjusted] 仅2003.1.1-2003.1.12日就有241名矿工死于煤矿事故。

directly and easily. It makes it possible to deliver multi-dimensional information with various factors including time, photos, videos, stories etc. All the factors are incorporated within this single medium and develop into a single unit. Furthermore, adding the interaction with the viewers, their relationship ... becomes more meaningful.”<sup>7</sup>

*JiXi Research Project* in particular, takes what could be called a semi-documentary approach to their subject matter, in that meaning is provided by their reflection of reality, but Zheng recognises that this mediation necessarily adjusts that reality.

“The transformation process between reality and the media itself is a debate and clarification of one’s value system. ...Distortion is relative compared to social reality. I even doubt the existence of the ‘true fact.’ ...the truth itself has different meanings, and can be perceived from different angles. We can reach the truth from every angle, at the same time we skip over other facts.”<sup>8</sup>

### ***The Depth of Light (Turbulence)***

From here his later works move on from the narrow view of local concerns and attempt to reflect on larger issues of people and their beliefs. And the piece which heralds this move is a large-scale commission which Zheng created for an outdoor site in Beijing’s main art district. *The Depth of Light*, from 2008, presents elemental materials, wind, temperature, modulations of light, crystal, all presented in a self-contained world, but reaching out to include our interactions, and our attempts to work with it. The structure is something like a machine for producing environmental effects, with its heavy steel frame, divided into squares, each one holding an industrial fan. The fans force out an onrush of air around the piece, buffeting the viewer in their attempts to get close to see the interior. Inside a crystal-coated mesh is raised in a mini-landscape, lit from above by a powerful searchlight. The light eclipses the surroundings, the sound of the fans is deafening, the wind rejects our advances, but the light on the crystals attracts, in a constant push-pull. The piece counter-plays a physical effect of repulsion with a psychological effect of attraction, forcing the audience to come to terms somehow with their relative attachment to the mental or physical.

The strange reticence of this piece makes *The Depth of Light* the most difficult work to place within Zheng’s output. It brings to his work a new understanding of reality and idealism as subject matter. Zheng would deny trying to present an idea at all – for him it is very simple, his works come from the influence of those things around him, but this piece seems to be the one, out of all Zheng’s works, which most enters the abstract. *The Depth of Light* is a holding at bay of the audience, not so much a feature of reticence as of idealism. In a way it is very matter-of-fact, any meaning it might carry beyond its surface seems quite abstruse, obscured: the piece almost seems to be in the activity of masking its meaning, through dealing with the elements that stand for themselves, rather than being mediated through society into our understanding.

Zheng’s attitude has an affinity with his interest in Tao. He is very open to let things happen in the formation and in the work itself, without letting the meaning influence his actions too much. Hence he does not see his work as being involved in ideology or criticism – the works are spurred on by the people and events around him and as such any ideological corollaries from his works are not overly promoted.

---

<sup>7</sup> Li Zhenhua (2007), *op. cit.*

<sup>8</sup> Li Zhenhua (2007), *Ibid.*

In comparison to Zheng's work as a whole, rather than perform as a conduit for experience, *The Depth of Light* is perhaps the closest Zheng gets to making a "statement." The body is formally absent except as a receptor for the elements, we stand removed, buffeted by the wind and dazzled by the crystals under the extremes of the light. This machine is impassive, situated in reality but stripping reality of much of its ephemera to clarify this vision.

In some ways, *The Depth of Light* is a piece out of sorts with the rest of Zheng's works, in that it takes a difficult tack. He may never produce a piece like this again, but what it shows is that he has momentarily stopped to think about his work, about his subjects and their meanings. *The Depth of Light* is a crisis point in some way: a point at which Zheng's development and our understanding of it becomes unsustainable without attaining a certain, new perspective.

### ***Sunflower Plan/To Walk***

After this piece I think we see a new depth and subtlety to his works. A concern with broader issues treated with a mind to the epic and active. Initially there is the understated *Sunflower Plan* (2008), followed by the saga of *To Walk* (2009–).

*Sunflower Plan* could be said to touch on the epic on a formal level, this single sixteen-metre wide expanse of photograph laid out before us. It reminds me of the Western painted panoramas or Chinese horizontal scroll landscape paintings, which served as a way to represent, but also to demonstrate the human mark on the landscape.

And in actuality Zheng's landscape is marked and made by him. For this piece Zheng commissioned his family and friends to plant a large field of sunflowers in the hills surrounding JiXi. The resulting artwork is an ultra-high resolution composite photograph of this field. On the one side in the distance is the town of JiXi, with its distinctive orange slate roofs, and on the other, barely visible on a green swathe of grass, a memorial marking a mass grave of victims of the Japanese Army of occupation during the Second World War. The sunflowers act as physical link between the living and the dead; a route of remembrance, reflecting during their short lives the remains of life and death all around them.

In the process of creating this field of sunflowers, Zheng is altering the landscape, using the labour to a useless end, to create a view, symbolically joining the two sites of the monument and the city. For Yunhan the process of reaching the final product (the photo) is important, the choice of area, the commissioning of his family and friends to sow the seed, the process of waiting and tending to the field as it grows, and then the process of taking the hundreds of individual photos, which are then stitched together to form the final picture.

*Sunflower Plan* is again an extension of *JiXi Research Project*, into the field of the memorialisation of the dead, and hence touching on ceremony, to bear witness to the proximity of traumatic events to our daily lives.

"JiXi might just be a tiny place not worth mentioning. It's located in a remote mountain area, or simply [a place] where coal is mined. It might just be a small place that does not deserve any special attention, but you cannot deny that many real things happened there. ...

“In JiXi, fossils of mammoths from the glacial period have been found, and remnants of human activity can be traced back thousands of years. Even in modern times, many important battles have been fought at JiXi’s “Tiger Head Fort,”<sup>9</sup> including the Qing Dynasty’s struggles against the Russian army, the fight of the North-eastern United Anti-Japanese Forces against the Japanese invaders, land reform, and even the last battle of World War II happened there. It seems that so much that transpired here in JiXi is connected to the outside world.”<sup>10</sup>

Undertaking this lengthy process of creating the setting for *Sunflower Plan* is a methodology that’s taken up again in *To Walk*. This process becomes a performance, with elements of ritual to get to this single epic image, as a way of expanding the work’s range of meanings and of its relation to the audience. Any set of activities which are laid down and adhered to can become a ritual, and this is taken much further in *To Walk*, with the spiritual aspect surfacing both from the methodology and in the subject matter.

### **Meaning of meaning: history, religion**

I think this development in Zheng’s work makes explicit a direction which was latent and misunderstood before, that is Zheng’s ability to manifest in his work his interest in people and places through ritual, and the available heritage of beliefs. Zheng says he does not believe in any religion as such<sup>11</sup>, but he grew up in an environment where—contrary to the prevailing ideology—animism and shamanism still remain known and understood, although playing a role which has been denied in many respects.

The piece was initiated by the artist’s wish to re-enact his Grandfather’s arduous walk from Shandong to Heilongjiang provinces, around 1949. Over-population in his home had led to famine, forcing people to move to more promising areas. This individual’s movement is linked by the artist to the historical, larger scale movements of people from the centre to the periphery that had been a constant feature of the lives in China, and which was seen as a necessary element in the development of the country by Mao.

“Since the end of the Qing Dynasty, as a result of productivity, the domestic and international environments, pressures of population and the impact of natural disasters, there has been a trend of migration from the inner part of China to the outer. This period has gone through many different wars, until Chairman Mao’s call to develop a place called Beidahuang [in Heilongjiang province], which led to a migration to the North East, the peak of this trend.”<sup>12</sup>

Zheng’s experience of the results of this migration, as seen on the ground in JiXi, leaves him with a cynical view of their long-term benefits: “The migrants’ original intention is hopeless, the process is a failure, and the end is not glorious. But they remain to this day, and thrive in this land.” This end result is as presented in Zheng’s early works. The way JiXi is now, with its glory days behind it, the mines neglected and workers forgotten or ignored by the rest of the country – this is the end result of the patriotic, necessary or forced acts that so many people undertook during the development of the country.

---

<sup>9</sup> 虎头要塞。

<sup>10</sup> Li Zhenhua (2007), *op. cit.*

<sup>11</sup> Email to the author, 17 January 2010.

<sup>12</sup> Zheng Yunhan (2009), *op. cit.*

Zheng's Grandfather is now dead and has been buried in the hills above JiXi, but *To Walk* picks up his story, in reverse. Zheng retraced his route from JiXi back through Heilongjiang, Jilin, Liaoning, Hebei, Tianjin Provinces, covering over 2,000km to Shandong. Along the way he collected objects for a series of installations, and interviewed the people he encountered for their thoughts and experiences of the migrations that have passed that way over the years.

"This project pursues the lives of our forebears over the passage of time, as they move from one location to another, as part of the migration process. By re-running this process, we build up a realistic picture of the cultural and historical network it is a part of, the voices, images, souvenirs, and presenting a broad collection of data as part of the remnant of this network."<sup>13</sup>

The piece is made up of four sections, which have some autonomy, but ultimately build up into a complete systematic investigation of beliefs and materials that have been collected.

The preliminary part of *To Walk* has now been completed. This was the walk itself, the raw material as well as the collection of the raw materials for the ensuing parts. Between June to September 2009, Zheng travelled the chosen route, taking photographs and video, talking to people and picking up objects along the way.

All this material will form the subsequent three parts, *Walking*, *Heritage*, and *Sacrifice*. All three will be performance installations, taking the body as the starting point and presenting milieus based on the collected material. In the first part, *Walking*, the found objects will form a man-made mountain in the installation space, surrounded by projections of the visual and audio material collected. The artist will bury himself amongst this mass of accumulations adding life to the objects by the literal and symbolic interment of his body.

The second part, *Heritage*, is an audio installation built into a traditional cloth structure. The weaving produces a honeycomb structure which is adapted to serve as a speaker system for the audio recordings of the natural environment which the artist made during the walk. For Zheng, the craft nature of the structure and the audio makes an important combination of man and nature: "The intertwining of craft and voice fulfils the traditional Chinese concept of the harmony between man and nature."

In the final section, *Sacrifice*, a ceremony is performed in an environment of religious symbols and accoutrements. In the space Zheng invites a *Tiao da Shen*<sup>14</sup> priest to perform the sacrifice of a sheep on an altar in the space, which is then roasted and shared with the audience.

The "natural" religion of Shamanism takes many forms around the world, and is very common in the North East of China, where Zheng grew up. Although he has not met a real Shaman, he has had experience of the *Tiao Da Shen* priests who are more common in that area.

"The style of worship in the North-East is not such a formal and solemn affair, compared with the South. But it has its own myths and legends, many coming from Shandong, Mongolia or the

---

<sup>13</sup> Zheng Yunhan (2009), *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> 跳大神。



Manchu. All these mixed together leave us with what is called “Shamanism”. We call this: *Tiao Da Shen*.<sup>15</sup>

The *Tiao Da Shen* are called upon to perform ceremonies for the people in JiXi at important moments and have managed to survive in parallel to the State’s own secular ceremonies. While they may not constitute an organised religion as such, and for many years were actively suppressed, they are still very much a part of the local people’s consciousness. As Zheng explains:

“... at *Ching Ming*<sup>16</sup> and [Chinese] New Year’s Eve every year, we burn paper money for my ancestors. The paper money is addressed to where they are in the afterlife through the *Mingwangfu*<sup>17</sup>.”<sup>18</sup>

As the parts progress and build up, Zheng is creating an encyclopaedic artwork of belief based on ceremony. *Walking* addresses that “human instinctual practice” that forms the backbone to the whole project, the body used as producer and container of the material that is the mediation and memory of Zheng’s experience. *Heritage* creates a totemic object which embodies the artists distilled sound recordings. And *Sacrifice* calls upon local traditions and customs to re-enact a ceremony of death and life. Zheng sees this whole process as the collection of data through his body, he presents himself as an immersed anthropologist, mirroring the lives of those around him. The multifarious forms of ritual, and ritual as it becomes ceremony, are a way to connect with our history and ourselves through that history: “No matter where you are, no matter what civilization you are part of, worship is an important means of spiritual communication. It is also an important part of our cultural heritage.”

*To Walk* is an example of Zheng’s “multi-dimensional” artworks, first seen in the *JiXi Research Project*, using the collection of material as a memorial to all these movements of people. He says that the spirit of the piece is a very Taoist appreciation that “we are in this place; we are from that place; we are going to this other place.” But for Zheng the results are disheartening. His interviews with those he encounters, which attempt to gain access to their thoughts about migration, simply demonstrate their self-absorption, a lack of knowledge or care for the past and its affects on the present. The focus of Zheng’s work then shifts to a consideration of the artist’s (and effectively the artwork’s) place within the natural environment, as he moves through the provinces. This is already a concern, articulated as early as the original proposal for the project. An awareness of landscape is there when Zheng quantifies the route by province, cities passed through and finally by terrain: “Hilly in the North-East – Fields in HuaBei – Coastline in Bo Hai Bay – The Shandong Peninsula.”<sup>19</sup>

## Ritual and Ceremony

The walk itself becomes a form of ritual for the artist, a working through of an idea, developing a task set in motion decades and generations before. The end performances, the burying of the artist in a mound of collected objects, the creation of a totemic object as sound installation, and the literal replaying of religious ceremony, all become aspects of the work of remembrance, which is Zheng’s art.

---

<sup>15</sup> Zheng Yunhan (2009), *op. cit.*

<sup>16</sup> April 5, Tomb-sweeping Day.

<sup>17</sup> 冥王府 (celestial government)

<sup>18</sup> Zheng Yunhan (2009), *op. cit.*

<sup>19</sup> “东北丘陵—华北平原—渤海湾（海岸口）—山东半岛”



These ritualistic processes that the artist undertakes, and for which he avoids too much specificity in their meanings and relations to larger concerns, embody a way of approaching the world:

“The purpose of the whole process is to find out where we come from, and where we are going. The key is to understand what we already know from memory and what we don’t know yet. In other words, this is the JiXi of our memory as well as the real JiXi. It makes it possible to conduct research from both the perspective of social science and individual psychology.”<sup>20</sup>

The progress of understanding is not just restricted to the artist, or his audience’s progress with the artwork, it is also reflected in the material that the artist works with. If, as in Zheng Yunhan’s case, he prefers to take a reflective attitude to his material and subjects, he nonetheless must inevitably reflect changes in larger issues because of the impact they have on his subjects. Zheng’s work appears to distance itself, to set itself up apart from such things as politics, ideology, religion, but these things play an integral part in the makeup of everyday life, they are embedded in the warp and weft of everything we do, whether we choose to recognise it or not. Zheng’s work plays a larger role, in that he is collecting material for the future about the way things are, and the changes in his work have also reflected changes in society.

### **Meaning as a fugitive temporal process in Zheng’s work**

I would like to end by considering how Zheng Yunhan forms meaning through his work and how that process makes it important for our understanding of society.

Perhaps there is meaning, understood as being part of the work, inhering within its substance, prior to experience by the audience or even by the artist. At the same time, meaning comes applied from outside by the audience, the artist, and proves dependent on circumstances, events, contexts. Both work together to produce a surrogate event, unique to the individual experiencing the work. That event would be the closest we get to “a” meaning.

If I were to consider the artwork an active participant in the process of knowledge then perhaps I would be anthropomorphising and say that sometimes an artist’s work is hiding its meaning—we could take the case of *The Depth of Light*—and this only reveals itself over time. As a result, as the quantity of works increase they create layers over themselves, which are caught in the process of unfolding like a flower, projecting back into time, building up meaning. This would be a composite, layer on layer, revealing through accretion. At the same time obscuring these “sub-meanings” through their agglutinate opacities. If we are to form an understanding of an artist’s oeuvre, a single work needs reference to all the rest. A “depth” of works allows access to greater understanding. But a full and complete understanding is illusory and simply a facet of our knowledge.

Our understanding follows this progress, this unfolding, from work to work. As the works, these available clues, mount up we form differing views on them over time. This could be seen as the process of understanding, which at one and the same time methodically progresses and suffers catastrophic change every once in a while.

---

<sup>20</sup> Zheng Yunhan (2009), *op. cit.*

This is natural, not hopeless. Nothing is absolute. The absolute denies movement, or further development, stasis. To pursue the absolute is a hopeless task, not just for its endless nature, but also because its goal is akin to death. This does not make it a wasted task, though. There is still something to be got from the activity of pursuing the absolute and this is what the progression of the artist's work (and in the work) gives us, the experience of the pursuit of meaning, forever delayed but temporarily completed.

This understanding of the change of understanding means that, looking at Zheng's work now, after some years of development, we can see that maybe first impressions were mistaken: the first works have been misunderstood in this larger perspective. Based on the additional data which has been provided, we can see how on the one hand there can have been misunderstanding based on available data, mistakes even, mis-readings; on the other there are features in later works which simply are not present in the earlier works, so misunderstanding is perhaps too strong a word. It is part of the process that at one point we are clueless and later on informed, but these are purely relative terms.

What this means in terms of Zheng's work is that this process is a valid constructional element. Our understanding reflects Zheng's own progress of working through ideas, and the progress Zheng's work has made in the world. Earlier works deal with certain subjects which later take on added significance and "depth" (without necessarily surpassing or denying their original "depth").

This progress is in itself important because Zheng's work forms a progression in understanding from the figure of the person to the ideologies that people subscribe to. This progression has ramifications for our understanding not only of the works, but also of the society in which they exist.