

Between Iron and Flesh: Rhythmanalysis in Zheng Xiaoqiong's Migrant Worker Poetics

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Abstract. In the late 20th century, Henri Lefebvre proposed rhythmanalysis as a method of understanding the temporal and bodily patterns that structure everyday life. His rhythmanalyst is an ordinary figure who perceives, interprets, and transforms these rhythms to understand social and bodily existence. Given the prominence of his framework in examining urban and industrial experience, this paper situates rhythmanalysis within the context of post-reform China and explores how rhythms of industrial labor manifest in the poetry of Zheng Xiaoqiong, a Chinese migrant worker turned poet. It will explain how her work reveals the female migrant worker as a rhythmanalyst in situ, caught between the rhythms of machine production and biological reproduction. It will interrogate how Lefebvre's rhythmanalyst is a powerful tool for examining the working-class experience; however, his model often presupposes a degree of bodily autonomy not available to the female migrant-worker body and overlooks the violent disruptions of rhythm imposed by industrial labor. Finally, this paper will demonstrate how, through the mechanics of language itself, Zheng extends beyond Lefebvre and transcends the limits of her own body. By taking on the role of an ethnographer-poet, she extends the act of rhythmanalysis from individual to collective in *Records of Women Workers*, thereby constructing a symphonic body of voices that gives form to the sufferings and solidarities of women workers. Ultimately, this paper will demonstrate how Zheng's poetics applies and critically revises rhythmanalysis, expanding its potential as a practice of solidarity, witness, and social memory.

Keywords: rhythmanalysis, migrant worker poetry, Zheng Xiaoqiong, industrial modernity

1. Introduction

Since China's 1978 reforms, millions of young women have left rural villages and migrated to export-processing zones and industrial cities. Women workers started to become the backbone of the global supply chains, working in coastal factories, electronics, and hardware industries. Their high-intensity labor connects products worldwide, contributing to the flow of products, globalization, and urbanization—i.e., broader external rhythms [1]. Nonetheless, they are constantly regarded as “intruders” who don't belong in the city and face numerous challenges, including limited access to public services, wage arrears, and a lack of protection for work-related injuries. While women contributed to productivity, they were still subject to the demands of productive life. Many

experience profound alienation and endure physical harm, including long-term bodily strain and, at times, reproductive trauma as a result of factory life.

Chinese poet Zheng Xiaoqiong's poetry captures this complicated relationship. A female migrant worker herself, Zheng began writing most of her poetry in the early 21st century. In her poems, readers see how female migrant workers are subject to the rhythms of the assembly line, and how their bodies and language slowly become one with the machine. How do we understand the lived experience of factory workers whose bodies move in time with machines? What happens when rhythms of the human body are overcome by the rhythms of industrial production?

Henri Lefebvre's framework of rhythmanalysis and arrhythmia may provide insight into these questions. To him, everyday life consists of rhythms. He proposes rhythmanalysis as a method of sensing and interpreting time through the body [2]. But how do female migrant workers perform such rhythmanalysis when their bodies no longer entirely belong to themselves? When their existence is threatened by the humming and moving of machines?

In Zheng's poems, the female migrant worker lives in dissonance. She experiences arrhythmia as described by Lefebvre, the breakdown of harmony between internal and external rhythms [3], when her body is forced to synchronize with the machinery of production. Yet Zheng's poetry also unsettles Lefebvre's framework. While Lefebvre describes arrhythmia as a temporary or situational disturbance, Zheng depicts it as a chronic condition of factory life, one that is gendered and cumulative. Her female subjects endure both productive arrhythmia and reproductive arrhythmia, as their bodies bear the physical consequences of industrial exploitation.

In addition to an expanded understanding of arrhythmia, Zheng's poetry gestures towards a new way of rhythmanalysis that uses poetry as an extension of the body to register and resist the violence of arrhythmia, not just for herself but also for the community of female migrant workers like her. How can language be a solution for the working class? How do they use literature to narrate their experience? How is community formed through the act of writing? Through redefining rhythmanalysis as a collective act of endurance and expression, Zheng turns the fragmented rhythms of factory life into a shared pulse of resistance among female migrant workers.

2. Rhythmanalysis and arrhythmia

Lefebvre believes that everyday life constitutes the lived human experience. Work, consumption, commuting, leisure... such activities establish the most direct and frequent modes of human existence. For him, "everyday life is profoundly related to all activities," functioning as "their meeting place, their bond, their common ground," a site where textures of human life take shape [4]. Its very substance "human raw material" in its simplicity and richness— "pierces through all alienation and establishes 'disalienation,'" thereby grounding abstract structures in the immediacy of lived experience [4]. An individual's sense of self, or their individuality, emerges from what they perceive and negotiate within these everyday conditions.

Since everyday life grounds human experience, it is also the site where the rhythms of living become perceptible: the pulsing of repetition and difference that occur on a daily basis. Every individual goes through everyday life and experiences its rhythms, as they alternate between working and resting, following the cycles of their daily routines. The ability to perceive and analyze that rhythm, or what Lefebvre calls "rhythmanalysis," can be used to describe an individual's consciousness of their life. In Lefebvre's theory, the individual uses their body to perceive temporal patterns that shape everyday life. Through this process, the individual searches for "the discovery of a 'conception of the world,' of a living totality." [4] Rhythmanalysis thus describes how an

individual uses the body as the primary lens to perceive the rhythms of lived experience and translate that into an awareness of their individuality [2].

This heightened awareness of rhythms also enables the individual to sense when their body's internal rhythms fall out of sync with external ones. Lefebvre uses "arrhythmia" to describe the state in which external conditions infringe on the body's internal rhythms, disrupting the individual's lived experience and causing incoherence and disturbance in their perception of their actuality. Lefebvre's concepts of rhythmanalysis and arrhythmia offer a productive lens for understanding the embodied experiences of China's female migrant workers, particularly as represented in the poetry of Zheng Xiaoqiong. Her work not only illustrates these theoretical dynamics but also extends them, revealing dimensions of arrhythmia that exceed Lefebvre's original formulation.

The female migrant worker has a complicated relationship with the factory. She is subject to the factory's temporal demands, yet she also shapes life in and beyond the factory, leaving a significant mark on the social landscape of the reform era. Under Lefebvre's framework, she is both a sufferer of arrhythmia and, simultaneously, a rhythmanalyst—at once subjected to and interpretive of industrial rhythms, both a subject and a creator. However, while Lefebvre frames arrhythmia as a temporal and situational dissonance perceived through the body [3], this paper argues that, for female migrant workers, arrhythmia constitutes a more persistent and structural condition. Moreover, as Zheng demonstrates through poetry, her writing could be understood as a creative form of rhythmanalysis, shedding new light on Lefebvre's theory.

As a female migrant worker herself, Zheng describes the migrant worker's life as both mundane and precarious. They move through life mechanically, repeating cycles of work, keeping pace with the humming of machines and the demands of production, while struggling to hold onto their individuality amid repetitive tasks. Their attempt to understand their actuality can be interpreted through the framework of rhythmanalysis, and their internal rhythmic struggle against alienation, juxtaposed with external mechanical rhythms, can be described as arrhythmia.

Zheng's poetry describes how the migrant worker is simultaneously constructed and fragmented by everyday production, especially in her earlier collections *Huangmaling* (2006), *Poems Scattered on the Machine* (2009), and *Records of Women Workers* (2012). She writes: "Along with the flow of the assembly line is the flow of people...Crossing between the flow of migrant workers and the flow of products." [5] This describes how the machines' rhythm consumes workers' movements and rhythms. The assembly lines become juxtaposed with the workers until the workers cease to exist amidst the sound of the machinery. In the lines "she stands and sits, with a number, blue uniform, / white worker's hat, her fingers on her workstation, her name is A234, A967, Q36... / or it's plugger-in, sling-loader, screw-turner," [5] Zheng shows how a migrant worker's identity becomes obfuscated by numbers on her worker ID, how she is reduced to a number and an object, how she loses her individuality to the flow of the assembly line.

Through the repetition of production, the migrant worker is almost assimilated into factory life. "The exhausted shadows flung on the machine stations move slowly / turning, bending down, silent as cast iron / iron that speaks in sign language, covered with the disappointment and grief of migrants / iron that rusts over time, iron that trembles in the midst of reality—" [5] In these lines, the worker speaks the language of iron and iron is covered with the worker's emotions. The worker becomes one with iron, an essential raw material for production. They are subject to the external rhythms of production and become a part of the assembly line itself. They are simultaneously constructed and fragmented by everyday production, compelled to submit their breathing and movements to the churning of the assembly line, factory sirens, and remittance payments.

The migrant worker's body is overwhelmed with arrhythmia, a condition Lefebvre describes as the breakdown and disruption of normal rhythms, "a pathological situation" where natural (sleep, activity, and thought) and social rhythms fall apart [3]. In his writing, Lefebvre acknowledges that arrhythmia in the body can stem from injury, illness, or environmental disruption [3]. However, unlike the temporary or situational arrhythmia that Lefebvre often describes, the migrant worker in Zheng's poetry experiences a constant condition, one with no escape, as she continuously adapts to the rhythms of a foreign city and the suffocating factory environment. At the end of her narratives, rather than culminating in what Lefebvre envisions as the end of rhythmanalysis, "a consciousness of a new life," [3] Zheng's work depicts women trapped in relentless cycles of struggle and suffering, both inside and outside the workplace. Lefebvre's concept of arrhythmia, when applied to female migrant workers, overlooks two crucial dimensions in the context of Zheng's subjects: first, the extreme frequency and severity of the arrhythmia experienced by migrant laborers, and second, its distinctly gendered manifestations.

3. Beyond lefebvre's arrhythmia

In fact, female migrant workers in Zheng's writing endure arrhythmia of a severity and persistence far beyond what Lefebvre's theories anticipate. External forces, including factory shifts, bells, work schedules, sleeplessness, and overexposure to toxins, dominate the workers' bodies. "Women Worker: Youth Pinned to a Station" captures the factory's life's mechanical incantation that cannot be reversed. The lines "the screws one screw two screws turning to the left to the right" [5] transform the body into a machine appendage whose movements are no longer self-regulated but externally dictated. The line's rigid structure mirrors the assembly line's tempo: no variation, no pause, no room for the body's natural fluctuations (fatigue, discomfort, rest, etc.). Her "swollen red eyes," "fierce coughing," "irregular periods," and "occupational diseases build up in the lungs" are the machine's toxic byproducts [5]. This is a key distinction from Lefebvre's framing of arrhythmia as a temporary disruption. Zheng shows it as cumulative and degenerative, as the women workers' bodies are permanently infected by such a toxic working environment.

For the female migrant worker, arrhythmia is not just perceived physically: "the screws... / fixing her dreams and her youth to some product..." [5] anchoring her future to the factory and the city she's migrated to. Zheng's poetry evokes such spatial transitions to illustrate the workers' displacement and geographical alienation. The spatial arc in the line "from an inland village / to a factory by the sea all the way to a shelf in America" [5] deepens the worker's arrhythmia as her work severs her from the "root rhythms" of her rural home. The "inland village" represents a world of organic, community-based rhythms, including agricultural cycles, seasonal festivals, and family temporality. In comparison, "the factory by the sea" embodies a space of decontextualized time with only the assembly line's pulse. The worker's "pale youth" ending up "on a shelf in America" signals a complete alienation of bodily rhythms from its origin. Her youth, labor, and body are now a part of a global rhythm that she cannot see, control, or benefit from.

Within the factory, this disintegration intensifies. Zheng's poems vividly depict what might be called a metallic assimilation of the worker's body, a process of sensory and existential colonization by industrial sounds and rhythms. In her poem "Sounds," [5] Zheng renders these experiences with visceral acuity:

These sounds I hear, stiff, vertical,
like an enormous iron hammer on an anvil, clank, clank
...
I see myself resembling this cast iron

bit by bit, burnished, cut out, slowly
becoming an unspeaking component, a tool, an apparatus
turning into this voiceless, this silent, this mute life!

Here, the body is relentlessly shaped by the violent, hammering acoustics of the factory. It is remade in the image of its components—"cast iron," "burnished, cut out," until it becomes a "tool, an apparatus." This fusion signifies a loss of organic wholeness and vocal agency, refashioning the worker into what can be described as a manufactured body: one whose rhythms and very being are synchronized with the cold, relentless tempo of industrial production. This theme is further illustrated in poems like "Middle-Aged Prostitutes," which portray women whose bodies are almost sold to production. Their bodies are exhausted, stiffened, and in perpetual pain – becomes a site of continuous crisis for the worker: "working twelve hours a day in the electronics factory... / her body stiffened and grew clumsy, joints hurting / her remaining fingers repeating motions like a machine..." [5] The body is reprogrammed, its motions become involuntary, machinic, and detached from the conscious will. The "strange pains" and "being crushed by stone" embody the arrhythmic violence of industrial labor, a rhythm that is alien, oppressive, and irreversibly dehumanizing.

In addition, arrhythmia has distinctly gendered manifestations, especially in the case of the Chinese female migrant worker. Zheng moves beyond the arrhythmic productive rhythms to also encompass reproductive rhythms, including bodily cycles of menstruation, the expectations of marriage, and the temporality of youth and aging within the factory system. The female migrant workers' reproductive arrhythmia is the result of their productive arrhythmia, excruciating working conditions, and their alienated environment. Her reproductive trauma is a product of the factory's colonization of her biological rhythms.

The line "a lifetime of irregular periods and fierce coughing" from "Woman Worker: Youth Pinned to a Station," a poem that sets the tone for the *Records of Women Workers* collection, Zheng foreshadows worker Zhou Hong's fate. It is the same industrial condition that disrupts menstrual cycles (12-hour shifts, exposure to toxins like benzene, chronic stress) and sabotages her ability to carry a pregnancy to term. Her "ectopic pregnancy," [5] a life-threatening condition where a fertilized egg implants outside the uterus, is particularly telling of the factory's erosion of the body's natural regulatory systems. When Zheng writes that Zhou "tried Chinese and Western medicine" and her grandmother "visited a witch doctor," she underscores the futility of individual and traditional remedies against a structural problem: no herb, pill, or ritual can repair a reproductive system destabilized by a workplace that treats "irregular periods" as a trivial inconvenience. This is a symptom of rhythmic violence.

The poem ends with the lines "finally divorced you went back to that hotel on Highway 107 / six months later no one knew where you'd gone," [5] highlighting how female migrant workers like Zhou are rendered invisible by systemic violence. The invisibility is two-fold. First, as "temporary labor," her bodily struggles, such as miscarriages, ectopic pregnancies, and divorce, are dismissed as "personal" and irrelevant to industrial productivity. Second, as women whose reproductive value is tied to youth, their disappearance after "aging out" and after losing the ability to conceive is not mourned, but expected. The factory system's logic, which treats female bodies as replaceable. When one worker's reproductive and labor rhythms are broken, another younger, "healthier" body can take her place. Zhou's unknown fate is a metaphor for the countless female migrant workers whose reproductive trauma is erased from the narrative of China's industrial "success"—a trauma that Zheng, through her unflinching poetic documentation, refuses to let remain silent.

Zheng's poetry moves beyond Lefebvre's theory and reveals how arrhythmia is endured differently among female migrant workers, as it is embodied more constantly and manifested in a

distinctly gendered way. As external rhythms demand her objectification and assimilation to the assembly line, as her bodily movements synchronize with those of the machine, as she suffers both reproductive and productive trauma from the production process, her internal rhythms withdraw further and further from the synchronization with her external surroundings. At the same time, her mind yearns for a state separate from her mechanical body inside the factory's cramped space. Arrhythmia becomes an irreversible, constant, and prevalent phenomenon for the female migrant worker, who lives her everyday life in one of its most alienated forms.

4. The Migrant worker and rhythmanalysis

However, the female migrant worker does not remain passive in front of her perceived arrhythmia. She is actively conducting rhythmanalysis, creating and re-creating rhythms, perhaps both willingly and unwillingly. Lefebvre describes the process of rhythmanalysis as the following:

In order to grasp and analyse rhythms, it is necessary to get outside them, but not completely: be it through illness or a technique. A certain exteriority enables the analytic intellect to function. However, to grasp a rhythm it is necessary to have been grasped by it; one must let oneself go, give oneself over, abandon oneself to its duration [3].

Lefebvre writes that rhythmanalysis can be done "through illness or a technique." The body can become subjected to it and embody the new rhythm passively, or one can actively "give oneself over." For female migrant workers, rhythmanalysis is done through both passive perception and active construction of internal and external rhythms.

In terms of passive perception, female migrant workers are forced to embody the effects of factory work: diseases, severed fingers, stiff body, clumsy joints... As Zheng writes in the poem "Zhou Yangchun:" "she couldn't control them strange pains / as though stones were crushing her body she had to extract / a deserted field from her body it made her scream there was a beast / that escaped her sleep..." [5] Internal pains and suffering constitute strange new rhythms of the body. Rhythms once foreign to the worker have now become an intrinsic part of her existence as she is forced to embody them.

At the same time, female migrant workers are actively constructing new rhythms, letting themselves go as described by Lefebvre. In "Huangmaling," Zheng writes: "I settle my body and soul in this town... / I find places for my thoughts, my love, my dreams, my youth on its surfaces / and my lovers, voices, smells, life / are here away from home, beneath its dim streetlamp." [5] She is actively trying to get out of her old self, to construct a new place for herself, to feel the rhythm of the town that was so foreign to her, and to align her internal landscape with the town's external landscape. As the worker fuses external and internal rhythms, she becomes an essential creator of such rhythms.

Zheng was first a worker before she became a poet. As Lefebvre suggests, she had to first abandon herself to the machine's duration, allowing her body to be attuned to rhythms of production before she could write about them and intellectualize them. Yet the way migrant workers in Zheng's poetry conduct rhythmanalysis departs from what Lefebvre's model presupposes. The pace and rhythm of a migrant worker's life are shaped not only by the factory but also by a broader socio-historical context: the post-1978 economic reforms, the pressures of rapid urbanization and globalization, and the interlocking forces of heterogeneous local and global assemblages—all of which compress and accelerate their youth. As a result, they inhabit time in ways that diverge sharply from the presupposed bodily autonomy in Lefebvre's model. This broader societal background exerts a temporal pull on their lived experience that they cannot simply resist or step outside.

5. Poetry: an extension of the body

The female migrant worker's lack of bodily autonomy raises a crucial problem for Lefebvre's model. Her body is less a "tool" for analysis and more a "text" upon which rhythms are violently inscribed. This shift prompts a critical question: if she cannot think with her body in the way Lefebvre imagines, how can her rhythms be made legible?

Zheng Xiaogiong's poetry proposes a possible answer. She performs proxy rhythm analysis through writing, in which words serve as an alternate form of her body, or an intuitively separated part of her body that she chooses to segregate from herself—a part that bridges the gap between the physical body (in the metronome sense) and the mind, allowing her to perform rhythm analysis. She speaks the language of the worker and the language of the machine.

One way readers can glimpse her understanding of words is through her meta-descriptions of them in her poems. In "Foreign Land," Zheng writes, "homesickness, light like black juice and unruffled officers / These unfamiliar words choke my throat like smoke / subtropical plants and their sharp odors / I cannot touch you, my relative, buried in a foreign land." [5] To Zheng, it appears that words are indeed bodily—they render a solid existence. Words in her poetry are an extension of her physical body in language. The poems do not describe the arrhythmia from a distance; they enact it through jarring imagery (severed limbs, metallic fusion), repetitive motions mirrored in repetitive syntax, and screams that rupture the lyrical flow. Her words become an extension of her body as they feel the lived experience of violence, as they suffer from the consequences of arrhythmia as well. In her poem "Water Becomes Water," words are not allowed the comfort of distance, just like the workers themselves. Her words trap readers within imagery of water, machines, and the assembly line. The poems reenact such experiences of working on the assembly line. The line "we must use a defective good to prove we are defective goods, use movement to complete / the machine's deficient movement" repeats the words "defective" and "movement." [6] These words, just as her body, mimic the machine's repetitive movements, demonstrating, at both the literary and the physical levels, how her body and her words are assimilated into the machine. Her words are folded into the machine as they become one with the assembly line, just as her body is.

Indeed, the workers' self-identification, even in poetry, is intricately connected to machines, an almost justification of the machine in this case, and an analysis of the worker's role in relation to it. As such, despite language conventionally posited as an ultimate domain of subjective reclamation, Zheng's writings subvert this expectation. Her writing itself becomes mechanical, reduced to a tool of the machine just as her body is. Her statement, "use the reality of words and screws to realize our own reality," [6] is a pivotal synthesis: like screws as a fundamental component in binding the material world, the word becomes an analogous unit of construction in her poetry. Language thereby becomes a functional and instrumental tool as the hardware she manipulates.

Zheng's words experience the factory in the same way her body does. Her words become an extension of her physical body, subject to the rhythms of the assembly line. The words in her poetry are largely mechanical and serve as tools that complete her experience as a migrant worker. At the same time, language in Zheng's poetry is doing what Lefebvre prescribes the body to do. While recreating the experience of the migrant worker, her poetry creates rhythm analysis as an extension of her body.

Lefebvre's rhythm analyst, in its ideal form, is a flâneur-like figure who possesses the agency to observe, absorb, and intellectually dissect rhythms from a semi-mentally detached stance, while being physically involved [4]. However, this model fails to account for differences in gender, disability, age, and broader societal factors. The Chinese female migrant worker, as depicted in Zheng's poetics, operates under a radically different condition. Her body is not a tool for analysis by

choice but is itself the primary object of rhythmic discipline. The female migrant worker's body has significantly less agency than Lefebvre's rhythm analyst. She is not merely "grasped by" rhythm as Lefebvre describes it; instead, she is overwhelmed by it, often to the point of bodily disintegration and psychic fragmentation, as seen in the imagery of severed limbs. Her capacity for "abandoning oneself to its duration" is not a philosophical choice but a condition of her survival. In this state of profound alienation, the reflective distance necessary for analysis seems almost impossible to maintain. Yet, it is precisely through this impasse that Zheng's poetics transforms and expands the concept of rhythm analysis. She does not perform rhythm analysis from a position of agency but creates agency through the very act of writing itself. Her poetry becomes the means to achieve the critical distance that her physical circumstances deny her. Writing is the act of her rhythm analysis, translating the silent, invisible suffering of the factory dormitories into a critical language that takes on part of the suffering for her and overcomes it, achieving what her physical body alone cannot.

6. The poet-ethnographer: rhythm analysis through a collective body

Zheng's poetry achieves what her physical body cannot: it registers the rhythm and critiques it. But what does that say about female migrant workers in China who do not have access to the voice and language that Zheng does? Do they become a victim of arrhythmia without the capability to create rhythm analysis as a form of resistance?

Zheng Xiaoqiong's poetry notably features collective experiences rather than focusing on her personal struggles. Zheng takes on the role of an ethnographer, along with a poet, as she creates a collective bodily extension for the community of female migrant workers, recording the violence they are subject to and taking on part of that suffering with them, providing them with a means of rhythm analysis as well. Her 2012 collection, *Records of Women Workers*, transcends the boundaries of traditional poetry. It functions as a meticulous ethnographic document that captures the rhythms of migrant women workers through a dual structure of poetic and prose narratives. With the worker's name entitling every piece—Liu Meili, Zhou Yangchun, Zhang Ai—each poem embodies the sorrows and joys of each worker, and is often accompanied by prose commentaries or "handnotes" (手记) that provide sociological context, biological details, and her own reflective observations. This methodical, almost archival approach is a result of six years of interviews and fieldwork, positioning Zheng not only as a worker poet but also as a cultural ethnographer who uses poetry as her primary tool of documentation and analysis. This is what ethnographer Judith Farquhar considers as "methodological creativity", which involves "uniting an anthropology of the body and an anthropology of discourse and practices." [7] She considers writers like Zheng, who employs writing as a critical tool for social documentation and analysis, as her "allies" or "wonderful ethnographic partners." [7]

Similarly, *Records of Women Workers* is an act of collective rhythm analysis, composing a rhythm from hundreds of voices and heartbeats. Each poem is a metronome marking a singular life, as Zheng painstakingly records each woman's name, story, tragedy, births, and deaths. She writes of their unnoticed desires, their families, their labor, and the wounds labor leaves upon them. Each of her attempts seeks to articulate a deeply personal and sometimes ineffable experience, but when juxtaposed, as cultural historian Wanning Sun puts it, "seems to afford the hopeful possibility of overcoming that elusiveness," which is the failure of language to fully capture their sufferings [8]. This collection constructs a collective body that forms a symphonic critique of the systemic rhythms that govern these women's existence — e.g., relentless cycles of shiftwork, overtime, illness, etc. — translating their experience from abstract knowledge to lived experience through writing.

In this process, Zheng also provides answers to the questions Lefebvre posed in his 1958 book *The Critique of Everyday Life* about how communities re-emerge from the destruction of everyday life inflicted by modern capitalist society. Lefebvre notices “the rebirth and reforming of community in factories and working-class neighbourhoods” and questions how such a community can be formed when it is in constant conflict with the modalities of everyday life imposed by capitalism [4]. He notices “an effective alliance between individuals and groups” and questions, “constantly beaten down and then born again, how is this solidarity expressed?” and “how does it translate in concrete terms?” [4]

Zheng’s poems articulate this solidarity by giving voice to those who don’t have it. Her collection comes from the voices of female migrant workers she interviewed. This would be what Lefebvre calls a “valid expression,” or a translation of solidarity among Chinese female migrant workers. Lefebvre honors such literary expressions and laments that “petty-bourgeois individualism has reached the extreme limit of exhaustion,” resulting in a literature of false individuality and unbearable impersonality. He accused the “professional spectators” of literature of understanding life less than anyone else, famously declaring that “there is no substitute for participation.” [4] To him, this kind of literature does not actually capture people’s lived experience because there is no active participation in those experiences [4]. Zheng’s poems are the contrary; they are for the community, done through active participation because she herself is a part of that community, because she herself has lived that experience. They are not just recording her personal life, but also lamenting personal trauma. Zheng even takes this a step further: throughout the first decade of her literary career, her life was, in her own words, “a chronic traversing between factory and literary activities.” Later, as her reputation as a writer grew and she stopped relying on the little wage she earned as a worker, she was careful not to let her recognition distance her from the migrant worker community. When she wrote *Records of Women Workers*, she lived in Dalang, a suburb in Dongguan, still among other migrant workers, and commuted between Dongguan and Guangzhou for work. Travelling from industrial complex to the bustling metropolitan center, from assembly line to business district. She embodies what Sun calls an “amphibian” status in the migrant worker community, lending her an intimacy that any other scholar could only dream of achieving [8].

Therefore, Zheng evolves from an individual rhythm analyst to the voice of a collective one. Her individual body becomes a conduit for a shared experience. The “I” in her poems is often a composite “we,” speaking for the multitude of women whose rhythms have been similarly harnessed and broken. Writing becomes a political act of collective rhythm analysis, preserving it as a public record.

7. Conclusion

Lefebvre’s idea of arrhythmia sheds light on the violence suffered by female migrant workers in Zheng Xiaoqiong’s poetry, providing a framework to understand the alienation felt by these workers when their internal rhythms are out of sync with external ones, the struggle between forcibly embodying such rhythms and trying to escape from them at the same time. Zheng unsettles Lefebvre’s notion of arrhythmia by highlighting its gendered, societal, and situational dimensions. Her poems reveal how women’s bodies are subjected to chronic arrhythmia by industrial modernity, to the point where the line separating body from machine dissolves as female migrant workers embody both productive and reproductive trauma.

Rhythm analysis creates a framework for interpreting Zheng’s resistance to such injustice of the factory life, as female migrant workers necessarily embody and recreate rhythms, both interior and exterior to them. However, this idea of rhythm analysis is further extended in Zheng’s poetry. If

Lefebvre's rhythm analyst listens to the harmonies and dissonances of daily life to reveal its totality, Zheng's factory worker represents the rhythms in their most violent and gendered form. They conduct rhythm analysis through passive perception and active construction simultaneously, using poetry as an extension of the body to grasp and intellectualize these rhythms. She not only perceives rhythms but also uses them as a space for expression in her recreation of these rhythms. By transforming the body's suffering into poetic rhythm through mechanical syntax, repetition, and sensory fragmentation, Zheng achieves a consciousness of the everyday that Lefebvre envisioned but never theorized.

Furthermore, Zheng's rhythm analysis and recreation of this individual rhythm is expanded into a collective one in her later works, particularly *Records of Women Workers*, which combines ethnography and poetry to produce a communal pulse that attests to the lives of women workers who have been silenced, who do not have the language to be a bodily extension that bears their suffering, to create their own rhythm analysis. Zheng thus reinvents rhythm analysis rather than just illustrating it: her writing demonstrates how rhythm analysis becomes a practice of survival and remembrance rather than an objective observation when filtered through the gendered body and collective experience of female migrant workers. Zheng uses poetic, physical, and social rhythm to turn silence into form and alienation into consciousness, not just for herself but also for the collective community, bearing their suffering through the collective bodily extension, and recreating their rhythms to be their voice in a solidary form of resistance against the injustices of everyday life.

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