

MAXIMUM ROCKNROLL

#403

DECEMBER 2016

\$4.99 IN THE US

THE ALL CHINA ISSUE



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SUBS

SUBS is an anomaly on the Chinese independent music scene. They stand out because no other band of their stature has remained fully independent. SUBS is a regular headliner of large-scale music festivals around the country, most notably MIDI, the first such fest in the country. Throughout their career they've consistently refused to sign with record labels, or work with a manager of any kind to guide their path through the rapidly ossifying Chinese indie music industry.

Full disclosure: I joined SUBS as drummer in 2014. But this interview goes way, way deeper into Chinese punk history. Vocalist Kang Mao and guitarist Wu Hao—the band's two founding members—met in Wuhan, China's punk capital. At the time Wu Hao played in Shitdog, China's first hardcore band, and Kang Mao ran a short-lived university dive bar called Boys Toys, which was the epicenter of the Wuhan punk scene for a six-month stretch in the late '90s. She also sang in the all-female band No Pass, which along with Hang on the Box in Beijing, was responsible for introducing feminist punk and riot grrrl concepts into the Chinese punk ether. Kang and Wu moved to Beijing in 2001, forming SUBS shortly after. They're counted among China's most popular and respected rock bands today. I sat down with the duo recently for a long chat about their tumultuous history at a coffee shop in Sanlitun, Beijing's upscale nightlife district, just to ramp up the irony.

Introduction and interview by Josh Feola.

Translation assistance by Emma Sun.

Photos courtesy Kang Mao and Wu Hao.

MRR: Kang Mao, you're originally from Lanzhou. When did you move to Wuhan? How did you first get into the music scene there?

Kang Mao: I moved to Wuhan in summer of 1997, for college. [Music writer and sound artist] Yan Jun was a friend of mine in Lanzhou. When I moved to Wuhan, I got really bored, so Yan Jun gave me a few numbers to call. He told me those were the people who were playing music in Wuhan, among which there was [VOX club/label founder] Zhu Ning. I gave him a call, and he gave me an address of what was maybe the earliest rock venue in Wuhan. It was just a rehearsal space, it didn't even have a name. It was inside a storage warehouse for really large sponges, like for industrial use.

MRR: What about you Wu Hao? You're from Wuhan originally. How did you get into punk?

Wu Hao: Back in those days there was this radio show where everybody could record their own demos and send it to the show, and if they thought it was good you'd be selected to play on the show. It was called "Spring of New Music." That's also when the idea of independent music first became a thing in Wuhan. I was selected by the radio show, and they organized a bunch of people who were selected to have a talk, a salon, on the show, where people could call in on an audience hotline and participate. During the show Zhang Hai, the vocalist of a band called SDL, called in and told me, "Oh, the music that you talk about, I also like it. Let's meet up." I was really excited. Through Zhang Hai, later on I met Wu Wei from SMZB, who introduced me to a bunch of people in town playing in punk bands.

MRR: What was your first band?

Wu Hao: My first band was me on guitar, Zhang Hai on drums, and Liu Xiao on bass. We didn't have a band name, we would just play. Zhang Hai eventually quit because he wanted to play guitar himself, and he didn't

want to drum any more. So it was me and Liu Xiao, we were looking for a drummer for the longest time. At first we named ourselves Mao Mao Band, then we changed our name to Fantômas, after the '80s French movie. Liu Xiao moved to Beijing, but around then a bunch of people moved from Nanjing to Wuhan, including Wang Junping and Shi Xudong, and that later on became my next band, Shitdog. Actually it wasn't called Shitdog at first, it was called Angry Dog Eye.

MRR: Kang Mao—a bit after this you became active in the Wuhan punk scene as a musician and as the operator of an illegal DIY venue called Boys Toys. How did you get started as a musician and how did you get the idea to open a club?

Kang Mao: I actually started playing drums before I went to college. Whenever there were friends wanting to cover a famous Chinese rock song, I'd go play drums with them. That couldn't even be called a band, I was just drumming for my friends. After I moved to Wuhan, I would always go to the sponge warehouse to practice drumming, and that's where I met a lot of people. I already knew a lot of people in that scene by 1997. By 1999, I met three girls—Hu Juan, Yu Xiao, Zhang Yan—and we decided to form our own band, No Pass. Later another friend, Liang Yan, replaced Zhang Yan on guitar. In the summer of '99, after school started, I suddenly found school really boring, and I heard that two students who graduated from my university were trying to start their own business. So I found them and talked them into opening a bar with me. That was Boys Toys, it was three of us running the bar. By then, the Wuhan punk scene had already emerged, and Boys Toys became *the* venue to host shows.

MRR: How did you meet Wu Hao?

Kang Mao: There was a bar in Wuhan called Chameleon, that's where I first met Wu Hao. It was at a rock show. I remember when I walked



in, seeing Wu Hao, I thought he was hot, he kept to himself. I thought, “That guy looks dangerous.” [laughs] After that, Wu Hao started to act strangely towards me. After a party, he would try to convince me to hang at his place to continue the party. Usually we would spend up to an hour on the street with him trying to drag me to his place, and me saying, “No, I don’t wanna go!” I thought he was really annoying and perky. [laughs]

MRR: Haha... Eventually I guess it worked?

Kang Mao: We kind of stopped interacting after that, because I thought he was too dangerous and I never wanted to go to his house. It wasn’t until the summer of ’99, when I started doing Boys Toys, that I moved out of my college dorm to an apartment on the outskirts of Wuhan. I majored in Computer Science, so I was one of the very few people who had a computer of my own at that time. That attracted everyone from the punk scene to come over to my place to play computer games. Wu Hao loves computer games, and that’s how we became best friends. But we never really set the romantic relationship until the spring of 2000. One day all of a sudden, we just did it. [laughs] And started dating from then.

MRR: What was your motivation for opening Boys Toys?

Kang Mao: That was an exciting time, because back then in Beijing there was a punk club called *Scream*, and in Guangzhou there was a venue called *Unplugged*. Both of them were really famous nationwide. But in the middle of China, we were missing a venue that could hold live shows, and as one of the founders of this venue, I felt really proud. Most importantly, it was the venue that hosted all the punk bands in Wuhan. At that time, the biggest bands in Wuhan were punk bands. But as one of the managers of the bar I had to deal with so many different things. For example, Zhang Hai would always take off his pants at the shows, and whenever he’d do that someone would always call the police. And when the police showed up, I’d have to deal with them.

MRR: Can you share a crazy story or two from that time?

Kang Mao: Boys Toys was located right outside the wall of a university, actually in the middle of the wall because that wall itself was a building, and Boys Toys was inside it. Whenever the shows would end and it got really late, all the boys from the scene would get really drunk and start smashing beer bottles on the street. Later at night, when there were no cars, they’d whip

out their dicks and walk around pissing all over the street. Actually Boys Toys only existed for about six months, but during that period of time, every possible thing that could be smashed at the venue was smashed. Whenever people came to play, I never charged them for beer, they always drank for free. Because of that, my two other partners were really mad at me. They really wanted to make money, and they had no idea about what direction I was taking it in. By the time Boys Toys closed, we only had two glasses left, everything else had been smashed. All the toilets were smashed, everything was smashed. Because when people would get drunk, they’d just start smashing shit. [laughs]

MRR: Did you have any problems with the authorities?

Kang Mao: The property belonged to Huazhong Normal University, so we paid rent money to the school. But we also had to pay tax to the relevant government bureaus. Whenever the bureau people came in to check on us, we’d just pretend that we were a normal little bar that didn’t do shows, just sold a few cocktails, even though none of us knew how to make a cocktail. But there was a little door in the venue that led to a second-floor space, which is where bands would rehearse and where the pants would come off. But whenever people came in for

inspection I'd lock that door and say, "It doesn't belong to us, it's not part of our bar."

MRR: When and why did you move to Beijing?

Kang Mao: In 2000 No Pass went to play in Beijing and stayed in an area where a lot of musicians lived, Tree Village (Shu Cun). During that trip the rest of the girls disappeared, they ended up in all kinds of musicians' beds, and I went back to Wuhan alone. I felt bad, because my circle of friends was really small, and I thought it was really hard to find more people to keep the band going. And also, by that time, in the punk scene, a lot of bad things started happening. To me, punk was a thing that widened my horizons. It was something really pure and innocent to me. But the people who kept talking to me about punk at

that time, they'd do things that were against what they talked about. You'd see close friends fighting over a few bucks, fighting over a girl, really beating each other up. And I thought the circle was too small, I needed to go to a bigger city, to Beijing, to expand. So I moved here in October of 2001.

Wu Hao: In '98 or '99, Angry Dog Eye released a cassette tape. After a year we got a new drummer, Fei Lang, and we recorded a full album as Shitdog. We finished recording that in 2000, and in 2001 we went to Beijing to try to find a record label to release it. The band had never been to Beijing before, but Wu Wei and Zhang Hai had been to Beijing. I really wanted to get this album released, even though deep down I really resisted the idea of moving to Beijing. I had gone myself once, and I didn't like the vibe. Even though there were a lot of bands, it still

felt like people were doing it to be trendy. It was all about the looks, what jacket you were wearing, how you pose on stage. That's not my idea of rock'n'roll. But I still believed we should at least try to release the album, so we went to Beijing.

MRR: What was your lifestyle like when you first moved to Beijing?

Kang Mao: When Wu Hao first moved here he was staying with his friend, and then I came to live with him. His friend's apartment was paid for by the company he worked for, it was a tiny two-bedroom apartment on Chunxiu Road in Sanlitun. His friend had a girlfriend, and moved in with her, so we had the apartment to ourselves. Wuhan was perfect for punk, because the city is so hot, everything's cheap, and the people there don't follow the rules. Wuhan was also one of the few places in China that you could easily get cheap secondhand

stuff, and that helped a lot of young, broke punks. It was so different in Beijing. Whenever we left the house we'd have to spend 10 kuai (about \$1.50) on transportation, and that was way too expensive for us at the time. Also we discovered a huge difference between us and the people in Beijing, when it came to playing punk. They'd always talk about what kind of Levi's jeans you should wear, or what kind of spikes look better. In the winter of 2001, out of financial pressure, I got a normal job, as a copywriter and event planner. And in January 2002, the landlord kicked us out of the apartment, because we weren't supposed to be living there.

MRR: Why did you decide to start SUBS?

Kang Mao: Shitdog split up, I think because that big, imaginary road they saw ahead didn't exist. They came to Beijing with a really great piece of work, and they imagined a record label would sign them and



release it, but it didn't happen for them. So I think out of the pressure of life, they split up. But it's better for Wu Hao to tell this story.

Wu Hao: Shitdog broke up for many reasons. For one thing, there were huge differences in lifestyle between Wuhan and Beijing. And then there was financial pressure—we had to make a living in Beijing. But most importantly, our vocalist, Wang Junping, was having relationship issues. Besides music, there were other factors that would really affect a band's career, like romantic love, and brotherhood, friendship between brothers. And Wang Junping couldn't continue, because his love life was having problems. I believed, and I still do today, that Shitdog was China's first, and best, hardcore band. To this day I still think Shitdog was the best band in China.

Kang Mao: I agree!

Wu Hao: We saw a lot of other metal and hardcore bands, they only had the look, the empty structure of it. It was all pretentious. They didn't have the power or strength. But Shitdog had it all. That's why, after Wang Junping couldn't continue, me and Shi Xudong still had the passion to do something. And by that time, Kang Mao's band No Pass had also broken up, and she didn't have anyone to play music with in Wuhan. We were in a relationship, and we wanted to live together, and I had this place to crash in, so I told Kang Mao to move here, at least we'd have a place to stay. So then the three of us started SUBS, that's how it all began.

Kang Mao: Our first apartment in Beijing was in Sanlitun, and it was really close to a lot of venues so we could always walk to see shows. But a lot of bands back then, when they got on stage and played, they really looked like they were just rehearsing. We'd get so frustrated. We wanted to form a band that could wipe them off the stage. So in our tiny apartment in Sanlitun, Wu Hao would play his electric guitar without an amp, and I'd sing without a microphone, just sing into my fist. That's how we would practice. Then we started looking for a drummer. Of course the first person that came to mind was Shi Xudong, and he said, "Fuck yeah, let's do it." We were also looking for a bassist, and we found [former PK14 bassist] Sun Xia. Then we got kicked out of our place by our landlord, and we moved to a place in the southwest corner of Beijing. Sun Xia would come over, and Wu Hao would instruct her what to play. SUBS formed in February of 2002, and very unfortunately, that April, Sun Xia had an internal brain injury, and she couldn't play any more.

MRR: What were early SUBS practices like?

Kang Mao: I was still working that normal job back then. In those days, we practiced in a space on the east side of Beijing. I'd have to change into sneakers on the bus on the way to the rehearsal space. We'd practice from 10pm until after midnight. To save money, me and Wu Hao would make counterfeit bus passes, but they would only work on night buses. We would have to circle the entire city to get home because only buses with certain routes would fall for our fake passes. [laughs] After we started rehearsing, a lot of people would come and watch us, because word got out that even when we were just practicing, I would roll around the floor. Because we had all been in bands and had been on stage before, we weren't in a rush to play shows, we really wanted to write better songs.

MRR: What was your first show?

Kang Mao: It was February 20, 2003, at a venue called CD Cafe. Someone organized a show in memory of a musician who'd died, Sun Shu. We were told that we could play with the rest of the bands, even though our name wasn't on the poster. We played



at the end, when all of the bands on the poster had finished and people had started leaving the venue. We only played four songs, but everyone there was extremely shocked, because they'd never seen a band play this way. A few days later, there was a review of our performance in a music magazine called *Non Music*. So that show was very successful.

MRR: Why did SUBS choose to never sign to a label?

Kang Mao: Actually these days, the shows that SUBS play are slightly commercial. Because we still need to get paid by music festival organizers or event organizers to make a living as musicians. But in the '90s, when we first started playing, the punk that we understood was anti-commercial, against obeying the rules of normal society. I know now I seem like a normal adult, I'm not a fighter who argues with the rest of the world all day. But still, I want to protect the original motive, the reason I wanted to make a punk band originally. The reason why we never signed with a label is that, back when we started, the labels that existed then, what they could do we could do so much better. And now, there are industry bigwigs that pretty much have a monopoly on the independent music scene. Seeing that, comparing that to the original motive for me to make music, it's gone way too far. That's why we still won't sign.

SUBS: What have been the best aspects of remaining independent, and what are some of the worst drawbacks?

Kang Mao: As big record companies grow, the survival space for independent musicians gets smaller and smaller. Because these big record companies have total control in deciding what products to export, and they occupy all the music festivals. They're even taking over live music venues. And it's only going to get worse in the future. So it's harder and harder for us to survive as independent musicians. But the good thing is, I get to tell myself that the punk in my heart still lives. I'm doing this for the same reason I did it 20 years ago.

MRR: Which companies do you think are monopolizing the Chinese music scene today?

Kang Mao: I guess Modern Sky is the one company that comes closest to my idea of an industry monopoly. Because they're trying to take over all music projects, festivals, trying to sign every single band out there. Actually, doing commercial shows is not completely bad for a band, even though that's what a punk band is against at the beginning. But if taking a commercial gig makes the musician's life a little bit better, and it's not against what their music stands for, why not? But companies like Modern Sky are trying to take over everything. They turn everything into their product, including the bands.

MRR: As your attitude towards commercial shows has changed over the years, so has your music. Sound-wise you've shed a lot of your punk / hardcore edge. What about the idea or ideals of punk has stayed with you for your entire career?

Kang Mao: That's a hard question to answer, because if I answer it as an adult, I'd need 10,000 words to give all the history to explain it. But honestly, for me, what punk is...it's an entirely different possibility of what my life could be, that I saw when I was eighteen. And that's it. It's a life that was completely different from the frustrating reality I lived in at the time.

Wu Hao: To me, what punk is... Everyone, when you're sixteen, seventeen, in front of you are all kinds of roads. Some people choose to go on to heavy metal, some choose to go towards Guns N' Roses, some choose punk, some choose Britney Spears. For me, punk will always be the road I chose when I was sixteen.

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BASTARD OF THE NATION

An Interview with Spike of Demerit

Li Yang, known in liner notes and to fans of his band Demerit as Spike, has been a self-imposed outcast in the Beijing punk scene for the last dozen years. He moved from his nearby home province of Shandong to the capital after hitting college age, appeasing his parents with an enrollment slip for the Beijing Contemporary Music Academy in the far-southeast Tongzhou suburb. He mostly cut class, opting to hang with his cadre of fellow Shandong transplants living communally in a practice room / dive bar they ran called Raying Temple. Though there was already a booming punk scene in Beijing in the early 2000s, Li kept to himself in Tongzhou, a lone punk surrounded by his friend network of longhair noise hippies. Tongzhou at the time was a grimy and remote haven with cheap rent and plenty of aimless youth. Li slowly recruited a small Tongzhou punk circle—either convincing friends to move to Beijing or grabbing skaters off the street and converting them—and from that was born Demerit, a blistering metal / hardcore crossover band that has gone on to tour the US and Europe and had their debut album produced by Public Enemy's Brian Hardgroove. I was a roadie / night driver for a stretch of Demerit's tour in 2012, and one thing that sticks in my memory most clearly from that was the frequency with which Spike was asked how he played in a punk band in a Communist country. He would usually say some variation of "I guess the same way you play punk in a Capitalist one", adding that regardless of the political structure at the top, China has relatively recently adopted the same rapacious love of wealth, fashion and accumulation that the West minted long ago. After twelve years in the capital, Spike's now returning to his hometown of Qingdao (or Tsingtao: the city's best known abroad for its beer), focusing his efforts on exposing new bands from across China via his recently launched Dirty Monsters Club (DMC) label.

*Introduction and interview by Josh Feola. Translation assistance by Emma Sun.
Photos courtesy Demerit and Xiao Bei.*

MRR: How did you start making music?

That was in 2002, I was still in high school and I had just started to learn to play guitar. I had two teachers, one said I should keep practicing other people's songs, the other said I should only focus on writing my own songs. I liked the second teacher better so I started writing my own stuff.

MRR: When did you move to Beijing from Shandong? Why?

I came to Beijing before I decided to move here because it was a place I could see a lot of shows and get a lot of bootleg cassettes from Western bands. I didn't really know many people here back then, but I wanted to move here anyway.

MRR: Where did you live at the time?

Before I moved, when I'd just come to see shows I'd stay at friends' houses. I skipped school to do that. And I loved that feeling, and wanted to move here. So I went to see different universities around Beijing, but I didn't like any of them. Then I saw a school in Tongzhou, the Beijing Contemporary Music Academy. I saw students carrying musical instruments on

their back. I didn't know if there were bands, but I thought it was an interesting place. The area just felt nicer so I decided to move to Tongzhou.

MRR: Did you actually study there?

On paper I went, yeah. But that was only for my family's peace of mind. In real life I was just hanging out with my friends, practicing, drinking.

MRR: How did you meet other punks or musicians living around Tongzhou at the time?

There weren't any at first. I called people and gathered them around. At first I called my friend Siyuan, also from Shandong, I told him this is a nice place and he should come over and hang with me. He was in Qingdao at the time. He had spent some time in Beijing before and wanted to move, but was hesitant until I moved first to check it out. Then I called Li Yangyang, another friend from Shandong into harsh noise, and I told him he could stay at my dorm. He's gay, so a lot of people were opposed to it, but I stood up for him. Then to meet more people I would stop random skaters on the street. There were not many people

skating in those days, and I thought if I saw anyone on a skateboard, they'd probably be into punk and we could hang out. So I'd stop them and talk to them. That's how I gathered people around at first.

MRR: Siyuan and Yangyang and their crew would eventually launch the DIY venue Raying Temple. How involved were you with that and their NOJIJI noise label?

At the beginning it was just a rehearsal room. It started off as a bunch of bands, we wanted to do a compilation and call it NOJIJI ("no cock" in Chinese). It was a small rehearsal room, and the older people had the idea of turning it into a bar. So they started to do a few shows, charge a ticket price and everything, and then it later became a bigger place, a real bar. But by then I wasn't really involved, we were too different. The NOJIJI guys were more like hippies. They're really DIY, though. They made a lot of stuff on their own, books, magazines, CDs. I got more into just rehearsing and then going out into the city and playing shows, but I was also into what they were doing. I guess we affected each other.



MRR: How did Demerit start?

I really wanted to start a band for the longest time. First I met the drummer, who was a skater, Zhen Song. Then I had a friend from Tianjin called Zhang Ran, who's now the CEO of a huge music industry festival. He used to be a punk though. He introduced Liu Ke, who didn't have a band at the time but dressed like an old school punk, he had the mohawk and the leather jacket. So it was him, me, and the skater drummer we found on the street. We wrote a few songs, practiced a few times, then I got really sick and had to go home to Shandong for a while. After I came back to Beijing, Liu Ke told me he had to quit because he'd joined another punk band, the Believers, and they had a lot of shows. I was so pissed. I was really down for a long time, but then after six months I met our bassist, Xue Yang, and he was really great. He used to play nu-metal, but the day after he joined our band he got the mohawk and leather jacket too. [laughs] We didn't have a drummer when he joined so we practiced with a Roland TR-505 drum machine.

We heard about this great show in Qingdao that we really wanted to play, so I called my friend there, Zhang Ning, asking him if he wanted to play guitar with us for the show. We recorded three songs at his house and played the show, which was the first rock festival on the beach in Qingdao. Then we played our second show with the Raying Temple crew. After that we returned to Beijing, and still didn't have a regular drummer or guitarist. But then I convinced Zhang Ning to move to Beijing, and later we met a drummer, and American guy named Zac. That was the point where we decided that this was going to be the band, and we started to play every single show we could find.

MRR: Where would you play at first?

The bar we would always play at first was called Ziluolan, a small bar next to Beijing Normal University. At that time there were no real punk venues, all we could do was go to bars and ask if we could use their venue and put on shows ourselves. We'd usually have to bring all of our equipment and play in the afternoon, because at night the bars couldn't host shows, they just wanted to run their bar business. There were some more dedicated rock bars, like Old What Bar and 13 Club, a metal bar. Our first Beijing show was at Old What. We had to earn a reputation to get booked at bars like 13 Club, and we'd always have to play either first or last. A lot of older bands would bully new bands like us.

MRR: What Beijing punk bands did you like at that time?

I was really into Underbaby, one of the earliest

Chinese punk bands. There weren't a lot of other bands that I was really into, because all of them copied too much, they weren't original enough. But I did feel like their hair and outfits were really cool, I didn't see that in Qingdao. [laughs]

MRR: Obviously you made your way as a band and have some pretty impressive career highlights. What was it like recording *Bastard of the Nation* with Brian Hardgroove in 2007? What was the biggest influence you took from him?

He gave us a lot of professional instructions. Back then as a band, all we wanted to do was make our music as tough and fierce as it could be. But his perspective was to make more people actually listen to our music, and maybe like us, so that we could continue making music in the future. So we fought a lot, we disagreed all the time. He had a different perspective from us. I knew he was famous but I'd never even listened to Public Enemy before. So he'd always call me a hotshot, because he'd never worked with anyone who would fight with him so much. But he really helped us a lot, even beyond music. He was really easygoing, and on the day he left, he knew we were struggling financially so he even left us with a few hundred kuai (about \$50). He was really down to earth, didn't act like a big star.

MRR: What was the weirdest or most interesting part of playing *Warped Tour* in 2012?

What was really surprising to me was I never expected to see that many weird bands. I'd always assumed it was an all-punk tour, but there were all kinds of bands when we played, emo, metal, whatever. That was our first road tour, in China we always tour by train or plane. Everything was new and refreshing. On one stop we played on the same stage as Fear, just before them. That's a band I'd listened to after seeing *SLC Punk* when I was a kid, I never expected to see them live or play with them! We became friends with them immediately, we talked a lot with them.

MRR: You've also subsequently toured Europe. How was that compared to China or the US?

The shows in Europe were way more underground, probably because we usually played or stayed in squats. You see a lot of people living there who aren't even into music, that's just their lifestyle. We learned a lot about how different people's mindsets can be. We never went to any places like that in the US, and definitely not in China.

MRR: What kind of message or social ideas

do you put in your music now? How has that changed from the earlier days of Demerit?

It's changed a lot. When I first started making music, there was a lot of impulsive anger without thinking. But now I do more thinking as opposed to just directly venting. When it comes to politics, the understanding I have of the world now...I realize that change is almost impossible. Now when I write songs, I try to talk about things that are more relatable. Maybe about humanity, or things around us that we can all relate to. Now I try to turn the things I see in front of me into a story, then turn it into a song. Before I'd write about really big topics, about changing the bad parts of the world outside us. Now I think that if we can't change the world outside of ours, maybe we can at least make more people think that *our* world is more interesting, and drag more people in.

MRR: You ran your own bar in Tongzhou for a while, DMC. Why did you open it? What were some highlights of its short run?

I first had the idea to open a bar in 2008 or 2009, but I didn't get a chance until 2013. We found a place in Tongzhou, it was me and a few friends. We gathered a few thousand kuai (around \$1,000) and just did it. At first we really wanted to let the place be only about music. We thought there should be nothing other than a stage and equipment. But it wasn't that easy, we had to pay rent, so we started doing ticketed shows. Our first show got really crazy in the end. Everyone ended up on the roof, and we barely had a roof. So people were in the trees, and of course the police came. That's when I decided to have a few big shows every year to gather bands from outside Beijing, big punk shows. That became the concept for DMC. A lot of bands really supported it. They'd come out and play, and not ask about money at all, basically just play for beer. So it was a very equal environment. We would hold beer-drinking contests to decide the playing order. Each band would send out a representative to drink a beer, and whoever finished the fastest decided the order.

MRR: Your landlord tore DMC down last year, and now you've turned it into a label. What's your goal with that?

To do a label was also one of the things I always wanted to do. I had the idea after I opened DMC, in 2013. The first band I wanted to release was Strike Back. I really like them. Demerit invited them to tour with us in the past. I really want more people to know about them. It's hard because they're from Ningxia in the northwest, and they don't really have many opportunities to play shows like bands have in Beijing. I wanted more people to know

their music, so I put out a CD for them under DMC as a label. We don't make any money out of this, it's just an idea to gather a bunch of people to love punk in China and to help spread it. We're all friends, maybe having people listen to one band's music will lead them to another.

MRR: How have you seen the Beijing punk scene change over the last twelve years?

In all the time I've lived in Beijing, I was actually never really deeply involved with the "punk scene." Personally I'm not really into organization, especially when an organization is not about making music together, but about turning things into a standard. "If you're like us, you can come into the circle; if not, get the fuck out." I'm not into that. I know punk is about unity, but if unity means killing your individuality, then I'd rather have nothing to do with it. Demerit always had this problem with the Beijing punk scene. People say that we're distant from it. But the thing is, for one thing, we do live really far away, and for another, there have been disagreements about what "punk" means. They always say that punks need to gather together, but I think that all interesting people can hang out together, drink together. We don't all have to be punks.

In 2004 there were so many people going to see punk shows. That was a good time for punk in China I guess. You'd see a lot of people dressed like punks in the streets. But over time it started to decline. A lot of people, after they graduated from college or passed their 20s, they got rid of it. But in the past few years, more and more people have started to go out to punk shows again. It looks like punk has made a comeback as part of the trendy pop culture. More people think it's cool. But people change all the time. Today they're punk, tomorrow they're whatever. And that's not a bad thing. Now young people here have way more access to really good music. There's so much music out there. It's not like back when I was starting, we only had a few famous bands to listen to. I think that's a great thing for people now.

MRR: Now you're moving back home to Qingdao. Why are you leaving Beijing?

It's because now, Demerit's members are so geographically distributed. We can't even practice in Beijing now, so I figured I might as well go back to Qingdao for a while. I know I'll be back eventually. It's not that different from when I was living in Tongzhou and commuting into the city. It's just a train ride.

MRR: How have you changed personally since moving to Beijing fresh out of high school?

Before I thought music was my entire life. Now I see music as part of my life. Everyone has their own lives going on. But one thing that stays the same wherever I am is that I wake up, I think about writing songs or what to express in my music. That's always the first thought.

Check out Demerit's music at demeritpunks.com and DMC's label page at artist.douban.com/m/dmc.

