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The making of Chinese poetry of the nineties

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Chapter One

Background: A Brief History of New Poetry in the People's Republic of China (1949-2000)

The socio-cultural context of the 1990s PRC is the background to Poetry of the Nineties – the site of rivalry between the Popular and Intellectual camps during the Popular-Intellectual Polemic of 1998-2000. However, the general knowledge of the socio-cultural context of the 1990s is insufficient for grasping Poetry of the Nineties. An understanding of the development of avant-garde poetry in the PRC is also indispensable, as the rival camps of the Polemic draw on this poetry to position their respective propositions of Poetry of the Nineties. Besides, many proponents of the Polemic earned their status as belonging to the avant-garde in the 1980s. Their respective positions on Poetry of the Nineties all linked this notion to that of the avant-garde and its genealogy. While the backdrop to the emergence of avant-garde poetry was the severe ideological control by the authorities, the authorities' establishment of such a control turns out to be significant for getting a grip of avant-garde poetry. In other words, the history of the PRC matters to the study of Poetry of the Nineties. As avant-garde poetry is the focus, this chapter is not a detailed or complete historical narrative. Rather, it highlights the frequency of ideological repression in the PRC as the background to the dawn of avant-garde poetry.

I. The Establishment of Orthodox Poetry (1949-1966)

The year 1949 can be taken as a starting point of contemporary Chinese poetry. This year marked the founding of the PRC, when the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) defeated the Chinese Nationalist Party and won the Chinese Civil War. This triumph signified a reform of the system of government. Because a socialist vision of society is the core of the CCP's faith, and the members of the party used Marxism as the foundation to imagine a new China, the CCP's triumph also signified economic reform. This socialist-communist blueprint for the new China gained popularity rapidly. When government authorities of the party became effective at running the nation, the CCP's views on literature and art were also disseminated nationwide. People in the "new China" expected a socialist country defined by communist values, and this included the party's vision of the arts.

The founding of the PRC is the key to categorizing poetry in the PRC. The government system of the CCP was the reason for the viability of orthodox poetry. To be more precise, we can retrace this to Mao Zedong's 毛泽东 view of literature and art. Mao was a founding member of the CCP and then became the founding father of the PRC. His vision of society more often than not became that of the party. In the following decades, Mao and the party came up with various agendas for successive social and economic Five-Year Plans for the nation. However, policies on literature and art hardly changed fundamentally. Such policies were basically the same as what Mao had formulated in 1942 when the CCP was resisting the Japanese invasion and battling with the Chinese Nationalist Party. These wartime guidelines continued after the founding of the PRC in 1949. Mao's 1942 "Talks at the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art" 在延安文艺座谈会上的讲话 served as the frame of reference. In essence, Mao did not see artists, especially writers, as especially gifted or an elite but rather as "workers in literature and art" 文艺工作者.¹ By urging them to trade private pursuits in favor of supporting the social and educational needs of broader audiences, namely, workers, soldiers, and peasants, Mao emphasized the political responsibilities of workers in literature and art. Socialist Realism 社会主义现实主义 is what Mao believed could best serve these needs. In Mao's era, whether it was during the wartime or after the founding of the socialist nation, the arts complied with the party's propaganda, which was aimed at planting the party's, or more precisely, Mao's political agenda in the minds of the masses. Bonnie McDougall notes the resemblance between Mao's view on literature and that of Confucius, in her thorough examination of the "Talks" and its different editions.² Confucius and Mao may have similar views on the profound influence of poetry on public opinion, but Mao takes this to an extreme. Over time, as the following paragraphs will show, by persecuting dissidents, Mao established his taste for poetry as orthodoxy.

After the founding of the PRC, the CCP sought to implement its socialist-communist blueprint, even though it still had to attend to international war at the time. In the early 1950s with the aid of the Soviet Union, the party restored infrastructure, agriculture, and heavy industry in the countryside. To implement the socialist system, the party introduced

¹ Mao 1949: 2; McDougall 1980: 34–35.

² McDougall 1980: 3–41.

reforms in the means of production. Privately owned means of production were redirected into the track of socialization and collectivization despite the struggle of property owners over these processes. Owners of lands and all levels of industry suffered the most during this period. The bureaucrats of a socialist-communist system were also established. CCP members filled positions in the People's Government. The authorities launched the first Five-Year Plan in 1953, and this plan basically followed the Soviet Union's footsteps. In summary, "the essence of the Five-Year Plan, at least through 1955, was an intensive drive for rapid urban industrialization to establish the economic foundations for socialism"³.

This new socialist future also unfolded before the eyes of writers and artists, or "workers in literature and art," as they were called in official parlance. Poets were no exception. Most acclaimed poets upheld the written vernacular Chinese 白话文 promoted in the New Culture Movement of the late 1910s and the 1920s. These poets passionately praised the party leadership and celebrated the founding of the nation in vernacular language, in styles of free verse, verse with clear rhythm and rhyme and stanzas of regular length, sometimes in the genre of folk songs.⁴ To make their poetry a better vehicle for socialist-communist values, some chose to join the masses on battlefields, oilfields, farms, or building sites to learn from them, write about them, and write *for* them. Narrative poetry was favored by these writers. By creating stories led by working-class characters, they developed the plot and revealed countryside life and scenery along the way. These stories were also infused with political messages.⁵ Several poets held high-ranking positions in the party organizations. They carefully paced their poetry to the development of socialist and communist values in China. Despite their positions, however, just like other poets in the early 1950s, all of them polished their poetic expression on a trial-and-error basis. Poets reflected on feedback and criticisms from the masses and the party cadres and attempted to incorporate their comments in their actual writings. Those who resisted or failed to keep up with the "Talks" disappeared from the poetry scene. The situation of poets was not unique; all "workers in literature and art" faced a similar situation.

³ Meisner 1999: 109.

⁴ Hong and Liu 1993: 26.

⁵ Hong and Liu 1993: 24–25.

The harshest criticism of those engaged in literature and art came from Mao. His denouncements were sometimes a prelude to a nationwide campaign of criticism. Not only writers and artists but also the intelligentsia were under the same scenario. Mao and the party gained full control over the literary scene and cultural and intellectual life in the 1950s. Their control was more moderate in the first half of the 1950s than in the second half. Hong Zicheng, a leading literary historian of China, describes how four nationwide campaigns were organized between 1950 and 1955 to criticize writers or scholars, and Mao was either the initiator or an advocate of these campaigns.⁶ Mao's interpretation of artistic productions and literary analysis set the tone for the criticism that followed. Arts and cultural comment were turned into evidence of the intellectuals' ideological crimes. During criticism campaigns, the state-sanctioned press covered denouncements from every corner of China on a daily basis. In each district, the party apparatus organized educational forums of criticism for people from different walks of life. The party cadres distinguished wrongdoings from the right, and participants were assumed to be guided to have the correct way of thinking and to respond to the socialist agenda flawlessly. The party generally offered writers and artists whose behavior it found problematic opportunities to participate in "rectification" meetings. Typically, writers and artists were unable to refute Maoist readings of their work and their ideology during these meetings. These meetings aimed to prepare authors to come up with public self-criticisms in which they confessed their crimes and promised to reform and start afresh. These public self-criticisms were usually not the end of a campaign. Physical punishments could follow, and ideological crimes could land one in prison and labor camps.

Among the nationwide campaigns, the case of Marxist writer and poet Hu Feng 胡风 in particular is very notable. Hu had disagreed with Mao on principles of literature and art since the 1930s. His insistence on the importance of creativity and subjectivity conflicted with Mao's belief that politics takes precedence over all else. Although Mao laid down principles for literature and art in the "Talks" in 1942 and had dominated the discourse since then, he scarcely convinced Hu and other dissenting thinkers that his principles were the only approach to produce literature and art in socialist China. As a senior member of

⁶ Hong 1999: 36–41; 2007: 41–46.

the CCP, Hu never gave up challenging Mao's principles from the "Talks." But, after the founding of the PRC, Hu and his followers' persistent pursuit of ideological freedom was seen by Mao and others as a challenge to government authority. As such, their artistic pursuits led to a political campaign against them in 1955, and they were called counterrevolutionaries by the authorities. Hu was arrested in July 1955. His followers, sympathizers, and those who used to reject Mao's "Talks" appeared particularly vulnerable. The case of Hu Feng's so-called Counter-Revolutionary Clique 胡风反革命集团 in 1955 provided insight into Maoist attitudes toward dissenters.

Major ideological campaigns followed, the most severe of which was the Anti-Rightist movement, conducted against intellectuals in the summer of 1957. Prior to this campaign, however, an interlude in ideological repression took place. The real purpose of this relaxation is difficult to fathom, because Hu Feng's proposal for idiosyncratic expressions had been negatively received by Mao and the party not too long before. In an effort to rationalize this issue, Maurice Meisner considers that the ideological relaxation was due to the party's calculation of the economic development of the PRC, the relationships between China and other communist countries, and the power shifts between Mao and the party bureaucrats.⁷ All these factors may have directly or indirectly contributed to this interlude in 1956. However, this situation did not necessarily mean that Mao and the party changed their views of dissenters. In the spring of 1957, intellectuals faced a prompt crackdown when they expressed radical views of individual freedom. Meisner argued that through campaigns in 1955, 1956, and 1957, Mao exercised his political influence in the party, regaining the power to adopt the radical Great Leap Forward as the core of the Second-Five Year Plan in 1958;⁸ more on this below.

In 1956, Mao and the party encouraged intellectuals to express their opinions freely on social and political experiences, although Hu Feng and his followers were not released from custody. Initially, the intellectuals, which included scientists, scholars, writers, artists, and university students, hesitated to express their disappointment with their everyday life. Eventually, they were convinced to do so with the approval from Mao's public messages, the state-sanctioned press, and party-organized forums. Mao's "Hundred Flowers

⁷ Meisner 1986: 167–203.

⁸ Meisner 1986: 199–200.

Campaign” 百花运动, whose slogan was “let a hundred flowers blossom, let a hundred schools of thought contend,” and which invited critical comment, got underway in the spring of 1957. Intellectuals fiercely criticized the party’s authoritarianism – much more fiercely than the authorities had expected or found acceptable. Mao drastically curtailed this freedom in the summer of 1957, and the approval of such expressions was reversed by Mao, the party, and all media. The Hundred Flowers Campaign then segued into the Anti-Rightist Movement 反右运动. Intellectuals who were associated with Hu Feng and had survived the 1955 campaign were unable to escape the effects of the movement. Many poets were branded counterrevolutionary rightists. Aside from Hu Feng’s clique, “between 400,000 and 700,000 cadres, including at least 10 percent of all Chinese intellectuals, technicians, and engineers, were given the invidious label ‘right-winger’ and sentenced to twenty years of ‘repentance’ in prisons or campus in remote regions.”⁹ The Anti-Rightist Movement indicates the firm denial of the rights of free speech and free thinking by Mao and the party, who were intent on bending the intelligentsia to their will.

The commencement of the Second Five-Year Plan in 1958 diverted attention from the intellectuals’ ideological crimes and was used as an opportunity to accelerate communization in China. The plan consisted of three concepts: the General Line, the Great Leap Forward, and the people’s communes. The General Line reaffirmed the merits of socialism and communism. On the basis of these merits, Mao and the party aimed to motivate the Chinese people to contribute to economic development in the countryside in a campaign called the Great Leap Forward. The CCP developed the people’s communes alongside the General Line and the Great Leap Forward, as the leadership saw the communes as collective units that facilitated economic growth and fulfilled the communist ideal. The General Line emphasized the correct mindset for living in the PRC, the people’s communes enacted the collectivized way of life for Chinese people, and the Great Leap Forward gave meaning to this lifestyle. The leadership viewed the Second Five-Year Plan as an initiative for a long-term and greater leap in agriculture and heavy industry. Ultimately, they aimed for the economic indicators of China to surpass that of the UK in fifteen years or less, as Mao had explicitly stressed on different occasions.¹⁰

⁹ Courtois 1999: 485.

¹⁰ Mao 1974: 111; 1992: 179, 181, 637.

Mao also included the New Folk Song movement 新民歌运动 into this second socio-economic plan. He considered that the folk song was a form of art that could raise the morale of the masses and therefore boost productivity. Mao specified that “the future of Chinese poetry is folk songs first and the classics second. On this basis we can produce a new poetry. Its form should be that of a folk song, and its content should combine realism and romanticism.”¹¹ This principle was rephrased later as “the Combination of Revolutionary Realism and Revolutionary Romanticism” 革命现实主义和革命浪漫主义相结合.¹² Mao instructed party cadres to collect folk songs written by peasants and workers in a process similar to popular visions of the process of compilation of the *Book of Poetry* 诗经, widely believed to date back to the Zhou Dynasty (1046 BC). Hundreds of millions of New Folk Songs were produced during the Great Leap Forward. The party officials helped publish countless anthologies of New Folk Songs between 1958 and 1959.¹³ In principle, everyone could be recognized as a poet on the basis of his or her contributions to the New Folk Song movement. Other forms of poetry were completely marginalized during this period. Mao’s full attention to the New Folk Songs acknowledged their status as orthodox poetry, meaning poetry that was politically sanctioned by the state, although literary historians of China have argued that New Folk Songs were little more than chants interwoven with political slogans and economic policies.¹⁴

Mao’s proposal of New Folk Songs changed the form and the content of the New Poetry that had emerged during the “May Fourth” period in the 1910s and 1920s, then under profound influence from foreign, especially Western, literatures. Indeed, Mao’s proposal causes uneasiness among the advocates of New Poetry. Among them, the most distinctive voice was He Qifang 何其芳. He disagreed with Mao in the form of New Poetry. With his proposition of Modern Regulated Poetry 现代格律诗, He argued that New Poetry should develop its regular stanza forms from classic Chinese poetry and foreign literatures. He’s proposition drew supports from Bian Zhilin 卞之琳, Wang Li 王力, and others. Nevertheless, most poets and literary critics were sided with Mao. The advocates of

¹¹ Mao 1974: 123; 1969: 180; 1992: 124.

¹² Hong and Liu 1993: 164.

¹³ Hong and Liu 1993: 164–166.

¹⁴ Hong and Liu 1993: 166; Wu 2012: 121.

Modern Regulated Poetry were the minority in the New Folk Song movement. The heated exchanges between the Mao's conformists and dissidents marked the poetry polemic that first made history. Despite the polemic on poetry, Mao relied on his political management to eventually replace urban intellectual poets with peasants and workers who resided in rural areas. These changes were unsurprising; McDougall's analysis of Mao's 1942 "Talks" shows that Mao had consistently held a negative attitude toward the literary legacy of the May Fourth writers.¹⁵ Because most urban intellectuals had lost their civil rights one year before in the 1957 Anti-Rightist Movement, few urban intellectual poets participated in the New Folk Song Movement. The New Folk Song and its mass writers were meant to dominate the poetry scene at a time when the Great Leap Forward would produce positive results in terms of economic production.

Claiming positive developments throughout China, Mao asserted in the second half of 1958 that the Chinese economy would overtake the UK economy in only two years instead of 15 years.¹⁶ However, his prediction did not come true. On the contrary, the Great Leap Forward brought great famine as a result of excessive exploitation of natural resources. "Excluding the deficit in births, which was perhaps as many as 33 million ... loss of life linked to the famine in the years 1959–1961 was somewhere between 20 million and 43 million people."¹⁷ Thus, no great leap occurred, no morale was lifted, and – recalling the original rationale for Mao's policy on poetry – no New Folk Songs were needed. The famine did not stop the authorities from punishing dissenters. Intellectuals, party cadres, and the masses were subjected to varying degrees of pressure if they were found to violate the teachings of Mao and the party.¹⁸ Under Mao's and the CCP's governance, only those who were "going all out and aiming high to achieve greater, faster, better and more economical results"¹⁹ were allowed to be a part of the future of China.

The famine slowly came to an end while Mao and the CCP modified the Second Five-Year Plan in the early 1960s. As part of this plan, the New Folk Song movement ebbed away. The succeeding state-sanctioned poetical style was Political Lyricism 政治抒情诗.

¹⁵ McDougall 1980: 13–14, 34.

¹⁶ Mao 1992: 388–389.

¹⁷ Courtois 1999: 495; Becker 1997; Yang 2009a; 2009b; 2012.

¹⁸ Examples see: Lin 2008: 451–520; Courtois 1999: 491–492; Hong and Liu 1993: 172–184.

¹⁹ Mao 1974: 105–106; 1969: 166–167.

As an up-to-date form of orthodox poetry, Political Lyricism was expected to mobilize people's political participation. Hong Zicheng mentioned that the paradigm of Political Lyricism was established around the founding of the PRC, but the term appears to have been gained wide currency in the late 1950s.²⁰ Contributors to Political Lyricism adopted a praising tone, easy language, and rhyme to elaborate the lyricism. Their choice of words made Political Lyricism suitable for recitation and public performance.²¹ This vocal part of Political Lyricism echoed the chanting of New Folk Songs. However, their effect could be diminished by the monotonous content. As Mao and the party deliberately suppressed the idiosyncratic expression since the 1950s, poets who contributed to Political Lyricism were generally those who complied with Mao's literary principles. As a result, Political Lyricism became a vehicle for political propaganda. These poets developed lyricism through the voice and the perspective of the "Big I" 大我, meaning the collective. The voice of the individual was eliminated. A work of Political Lyricism could persuade readers to firmly believe in Mao and the party leadership, it could encourage the audience to sacrifice their private lives for their country, and so on. Poets passionately talked about the communist values of the CCP for Chinese nationals and drew a bright future for their contemporaries.

As a vehicle for political propaganda, Political Lyricism gradually inclined to the political extreme, which meant that poets attached political connotations to most imagery in any given poem. This shift occurred in the first half of the 1960s when Mao and the CCP launched a series of successive campaigns, continuing to oppress dissenters. Their campaigns were either party-wide or nationwide, but they all had a similar theme: targeting rightists and defeating the perceived enemies. Mao was instrumental in defining who were rightists and who were enemies. The reason for these campaigns may be complex; Meisner's observation on the Anti-Rightist Movement reminds us that Mao and other party leaders could use nationwide campaigns to turn the tables on specific political opponents. In other words, the campaigns in the first half of the 1960s may have been an extension of the party's internal struggles for power.

Whatever the reasons for the early 1960s campaigns, Mao and other party leaders targeted not only the rightist individual but also rightist ideology. Rightists were usually

²⁰ Hong and Liu 2005: 93-95.

²¹ Hong and Liu 1993: 187-188.

sent to prisons or camps in remote regions if they survived the severe criticism against their ideological crimes. To eliminate rightist ideology from his country completely, Mao and his followers had been planning to cleanse the intellectual realm and situate Mao Zedong Thought or Maoism in the center of it since the early 1960s. Between 1962 and 1964, Mao and the Maoists wrestled with the academic discourse to keep Mao's communist worldview as a prerequisite to interpret humanities, economics, and arts.²² Around the same time, Mao argued that students of higher education spent too much time working on texts. From Mao's point of view, knowledge gained from labor was better than that gained from universities.²³ Mao eventually launched the Cultural Revolution in 1966, to radically remold ideology, in which Mao and his followers created an intellectual void and filled it with Maoism. According to Perry Link, Mao was the only literary author who received impressive royalties during the Cultural Revolution, whereas almost no other publications were allowed in this period.²⁴

Indeed, during the Cultural Revolution, Mao Zedong Thought was not only the sole material that filled the intellectual gap but also the sole reference and resource for social life and political participation. Mao and Maoist leaders motivated soldiers, workers, and (relatively fewer) peasants to participate in this campaign. The Red Guards, who were Mao's student followers, appeared to be the most militant. University and high school students were free from formal education when schools were closed or severely disrupted in the early days of the Cultural Revolution. Maoism lent student rebels the legitimacy to challenge the established hierarchy inside and outside of school. In the name of Mao Zedong Thought, student rebels sought out conflict with those who did not adhere to Mao's thought. At first, they targeted their teachers, the heads of schools, scholars, and intellectuals at large. Student rebels did not hesitate to escalate from verbal criticism to physical abuse and mental torture. After Mao endorsed student rebels' self-designation of Chairman Mao's Red Guards in 1966 and after Mao urged them to help eliminate so-called backward and counterrevolutionary elements even outside the campus, the Red Guards became increasingly militant and violent, with help from the army designated by Mao. The

²² Goldman 1973.

²³ Mao 1969: 624–629.

²⁴ Link 2000: 130–132.

Red Guards focused on identifying non-Maoist ideologies, and Mao Zedong Thought was their sacred text to justify their crusades. They grew devastatingly eager to obliterate material and spiritual traces that distracted Chinese people from developing a Maoist China. To a degree, the Red Guards lent their energy to Mao to displace his political opponents and realize his political ambition.

However, the Red Guards' readings of Mao Zedong Thought differed internally even from the very beginning of the Cultural Revolution. Although the Red Guards equipped themselves with the *Quotations from Chairman Mao* 毛主席语录, their competing interpretations of Mao's ideas eventually led to severe factionalism among Red Guard groups. A similar situation happened to groups of workers, peasants, and even soldiers. The empowerment of Red Guards and the masses, together with factionalism, was the prelude to China's "Ten Years of Chaos," another name for the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976).

Aside from being the first group to respond to Mao's call for revolution, another feature distinguished the Red Guards from the masses: they became the principal contributors to orthodox poetry in the early days of the Cultural Revolution. The Third Five-Year Plan began in 1966, and workers and peasants had to contribute to economic growth while participating in Mao's Cultural Revolution. The intellectuals in general were the victims in this revolution, which aimed to overthrow established civilization. Even the established contributors to Political Lyricism rarely had the chance to speak for themselves, let alone the intellectuals of other kinds of poetry. By contrast, the Red Guards were free from the channels of formal education, and Mao instructed them to fill their hours with activities that could sharpen their revolutionary spirits. To obey Mao's instruction, on the one hand, the Red Guards liberally interpreted Mao Zedong Thought, burned books that were incompatible with a Maoist vision, tortured versatile minds and innocents, and destroyed materials reminiscent of ancient Chinese civilization. On the other hand, they were eager to create a cultural product of their own, and poetry suited this purpose.

Political Lyricism was the standard poetry for the Red Guards, yet they did not simply copy poetic practice to date; rather, they incorporated Political Lyricism into what became known as Red Guard Poetry 红卫兵诗歌. In the early 1960s, poets of Political Lyricism had

connected imagery and political connotations to broadcast political propaganda; during the Cultural Revolution, in the late 1960s, the Red Guards strictly formulated this connection for the same purpose. For example, the color red could be associated with politically correct situations only, and black was saved for the counterrevolutionary counterparts.²⁵ Anyone who violated this code of conduct could face a political storm. As a by-product of political participation, the fate of Red Guard Poetry was associated with the rise and fall of the Red Guards. Only when Mao and Maoist leaders decided to disband the Red Guards in 1967 did the craze for Red Guard Poetry fade away gradually.

Red Guard Poetry was the only genre of poetry allowed to circulate publicly in the early days of the Cultural Revolution, as Mao approved the Red Guards' political status and welcomed their cultural product that contributed to the political-cultural campaign. At the same time, the circumstances of the Cultural Revolution made Red Guard Poetry a *quasi-official* poetry. In the 1960s and earlier in the PRC, publishing houses were subordinated to the authorities, and every publication needed an official sanction. However, Mao and Maoist leaders stopped almost the entire publishing industry in 1966 at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution. They considered that banning publications on literature, art, and humanities was necessary to encourage and achieve a revolution in culture. While the writing, recitation, and circulation of Red Guard Poetry was not banned, the ban on publications was not reversed either. Mao's recognition of Red Guard Poetry in the context of the Cultural Revolution could be viewed as a quasi-official sanction. This could make Red Guard Poetry the orthodox poetry of the time, but it could hardly be given any official privilege now that the official process of publication had been so severely limited. No channels of publication were available for Red Guard Poetry to become truly "official".

As a result, Red Guards throughout the PRC publicized their poetry unofficially. They brought their poetry to public notice through the publication of Red Guard Tabloids 红卫兵小报. In one edition of the tabloid, poetry was accompanied by political commentaries, other essays, and comics. Works that appeared in the tabloids were generally collective creations, including Red Guard Poetry. Every item was organized under a topic chosen by

²⁵ Wang Jiaping 王家平 described this as Formulaic Writing 套语式写作. For further discussion, see Wang 2004: 145–172.

an editorial team that consisted of like-minded Red Guards. The Red Guards not only contributed to the contents of the tabloid but also edited, printed, and sold the tabloid. The Red Guards' idealist and activist enthusiasm turned them into self-publishers.²⁶ Remarkably, royalty payment is another striking difference between official and unofficial publications during the Cultural Revolution. Unlike Mao, who published his *Quotations* and other writings through an official procedure and is thought to have continually received impressive royalties throughout the Cultural Revolution, Red Guards could hardly measure their success in publication through figures.

II. The Emergence of Underground Poetry (1962-1978)

Undoubtedly, Political Lyricism and Red Guard Poetry dominated the public domain and counted as orthodox poetry in the 1960s, although the political conditions caused Red Guard Poetry to be published unofficially. However, there is evidence to show that contributors to orthodox poetry were not the only groups who had ideas that could be elaborated in poems. It was likely in the late 1950s that other poets started to compose poetry privately and deviated from the orthodox guidelines. As far as the evidence can be traced, Zhang Langlang 张朗朗 and Guo Shiyong 郭世英 were the pioneers of underground poetry 地下诗歌. Zhang started a poetry society called the Sun's Column 太阳纵队在 1962, and Guo founded the X Poetry Society X 诗社 in 1963. These events marked the emergence of a more tangible underground poetry scene. Members of Zhang's and Guo's circles shared non-Maoist readings, unconventional opinions, and their underground writings with each other. They did not intend to publicize their activities and poetry, but the party eventually considered that these societies were breeding counterrevolutionary ideas. Guo's and Zhang's circles ceased to exist in 1963 and 1966, respectively. Zhang and Guo were arrested. Their poetry constituted part of their criminal records. Guo died in the custody of the Red Guards in 1968, and Zhang spent ten years in prison. Several members of these poetry societies were also taken into custody and spent years behind bars. These reactions from the authorities acknowledged the existence of the underground poetry scene, where

²⁶ Wang 2004.

poets, readers, and critics adopted a poetic voice that rebelled against Political Lyricism and Red Guard Poetry.²⁷

When Guo Shiyong and Zhang Langlang were arrested, their poems were seized by the authorities. As a result, Zhang portrayed himself as “a poet without poems,” when, having survived the Cultural Revolution, he had the chance in the 1990s to tell his side of the story about underground poetry.²⁸ By contrast, Guo survived only in other peoples’ stories, and inasmuch as his poetry is cited in these stories, what remains is barely a single complete poem. The authorities’ attention is both the glory and the pain of the underground poets.

Those who tell the stories of Guo’s and Zhang’s clandestine activities suggest that more underground poets may have remained unknown, but the outline of the underground poetry scene can perhaps never be settled conclusively. Such a proposition can be supported by the change in the histories of contemporary Chinese poetry published in China over time. While some reference to the early underground scene were made in scholarship published inside and outside China,²⁹ literary historians based in China offered no information about Zhang and Guo; for example, when the first history of contemporary Chinese poetry was published in 1993, written by Hong Zicheng and Liu Denghan. Zhang, Guo, and their poetry societies did not receive recognition from literary historians inside China until 2012, when Zhang’s and Guo’s achievements were listed parallel to Red Guard Poetry in the same chapter of a survey work on the history of Chinese poetry.³⁰ In this 2012 history, more poetry societies and their members first entered the historical narrative about contemporary Chinese poetry, such as Huang Xiang 黄翔 and the poetry society he helped set up in Guizhou starting from 1963.³¹ As such, the landscape of the underground poetry scene has become visible as storytellers emerge and stories are allowed to be told and heard. Members of different poetry societies might not have been able to communicate with each other at the time, but they seemed to have shared the same social conditions and a similar rebellious impulse toward poetry and literature.

²⁷ Liao 1999; Van Crevel 1996; Wu 2012.

²⁸ Liao 1999: 50.

²⁹ For example, Van Crevel 1996; Yang 1993.

³⁰ Wu 2012: 162–174.

³¹ Wu 2012: 172–214.

Although the boundaries of the underground poetry scene remain contested and blurred and many poets are waiting to be added to this underground scene, the importance of Guo Lusheng 郭路生 has remained a constant. Guo, who wrote under the pen name Shizhi 食指, was the most influential underground poet after the Cultural Revolution broke out. Around 1967, Mao wanted the Red Guards to disband and ordered them to reinvent themselves as the Educated Youths 知识青年 to take part in an “Up to the Mountains and Down to the Countryside” 上山下乡 movement which would rusticate them to the countryside. Mao persuaded the young minds that learning from the poor and lower-middle peasants was necessary to become better revolutionary successors. The “[d]emobilized Red Guards were soon followed by ordinary middle school graduates, and over the years 1967-76 some 17,000,000 urban youth, willingly or not, were sent to live in the villages.”³² Guo was one of these youths. Before being relocated to the countryside, he was a member of the Sun’s Column. Zhang Langlang’s farewell message “faith in the future” 相信未来 to one of his friends later became the title of one of Guo’s most renowned poems.³³ He wrote “Faith in the Future” in 1968, the same year he left Beijing for a small village in Shanxi to comply with Mao’s instruction. Countless Educated Youths repeated a journey similar to Guo’s to the countryside in the following years, and many of them found that “Faith in the Future” and another poem by Guo entitled “This is Beijing at 4:08” 四点零八分的北京 which was also written in 1968, resonated with them.³⁴

Countless Educated Youths read Guo’s poems during the Cultural Revolution, but Guo did not publish any of his poems in officially sanctioned publications until the 1980s. During the Cultural Revolution, the ban on publication was in effect, and Guo would not have immunity from prosecution like the Red Guards. His poems had to circulate secretly and illegally. The Educated Youths made copies of poems by hand, and they circulated these copies among friends; sometimes, the poems could travel further. As the Educated Youths still enjoyed part of the Red Guards’ privileges, such as free use of most public transportation, they could take written copies or give recital from memory anywhere. The

³² Meisner 1999: 369.

³³ Liao 1999: 49.

³⁴ Liao 1999; Liu 2001.

circulation of Guo's poems reveals the dynamics and the network of underground literary activities among the Educated Youths in the late 1960s.³⁵

The Educated Youths also circulated books across this underground interpersonal network. These books were incompatible with a Maoist worldview but had survived the early days of the Cultural Revolution. Some were acquired from abandoned houses or public and personal libraries. The former Red Guards' appropriations of books also contributed to this underground collection. This underground network was established when the Educated Youths noticed the discrepancy between their faith in Maoism and the reality in rural areas where they had been sent "to study." Moreover, they were no longer satisfied with life in the countryside and the peasants' "teachings." Arguably, the Educated Youths developed this underground network to deal with the lack of intellectual stimulation, a situation created by the Cultural Revolution and its anti-intellectual inclination. The power vacuum that resulted from the Cultural Revolution also made this network possible.³⁶

From reading the works of Guo and other poets, the Educated Youths gradually added their own writings to this underground collection. Several of them even turned their dwelling places into "tribes" or "colonies" 群 of poets. These groups served a function similar to that of the Sun's Column and the X Poetry Society. Among all the groups of poets, one based in Baiyangdian and named after this village was the most recognizable one. Mang Ke 芒克, Genzi 根子, and Duoduo 多多 were considered key poets of this group. One of their associates, Bei Dao 北岛, contributed to the recognition of this group. Although Bei Dao was not a resident of Baiyangdian, he had a close connection with Mang Ke and Duoduo. Bei Dao was inspired by Guo Lusheng and would make a breakthrough in the late 1970s. Bei Dao's career in poetry is inextricably bound up with that of the poets of Baiyangdian and Shizhi.³⁷

When the Educated Youths contemplated freeing themselves from orthodox poetics, they broke away from a future drawn up by Mao. The Educated Youths were not the only group who were seeking to break away. In April 1976, Beijing, the capital of the PRC, saw

³⁵ Liao 1999: 53–124.

³⁶ Van Crevel 1996: 35–41; Song 1997; Liao 1999; Liu 2001.

³⁷ Liu 2001.

what became known as the Tiananmen Incident 四五天安门事件, named after Tiananmen Square. This event revealed a widespread general attitude toward the Cultural Revolution. When the Cultural Revolution was launched in 1966, Tiananmen Square was the venue of the meetings between Mao and the Red Guards, during which Mao gave the Red Guards his endorsement.³⁸ By contrast, the 1976 Tiananmen Incident arose from Beijing residents' spontaneous gathering in Tiananmen Square to grieve for Zhou Enlai 周恩来, the Premier at the time and a serious rival of Mao and Maoists, who had passed away in January 1976; they did so on the day of the traditional Chinese grave-sweeping festival of Qingming. Maoist leaders did not welcome public memorial ceremonies to Zhou. However, the growing disillusionment of the public with the Cultural Revolution added weight to Zhou's death. As Qingming drew near, Beijing residents laid wreaths, offerings, and posters in Tiananmen Square in memory of Premier Zhou. A growing number of people joined this memorial ceremony over 4-5 April, and Maoist leaders began to view these people as dissenters, and to note the people's "counterrevolutionary" thoughts in the countless opening speeches, couplets, poems, and essays they delivered in Tiananmen Square. Beijing residents turned a spontaneous memorial ceremony into an open-air meeting during which they vented their concerns about the Gang of Four 四人帮 – Mao's chief assistants during the Cultural Revolution. The general public thus posed an open challenge to Maoism, which was a rare occurrence; in the history of the PRC, the general public had been rarely seen to refuse compliance with Mao's vision of the future.³⁹

The Tiananmen Incident did not end the Cultural Revolution, but it was an important moment toward its end. The police violently dispersed the gathering on April 5. The Maoist leaders cleaned up Tiananmen Square in the following days and labeled the Tiananmen Incident as a counterrevolutionary movement. They also claimed that Deng Xiaoping 邓小平, a rival of the Gang of Four, had instigated the event.⁴⁰ However, Mao's death and, later, Deng's rise back to power brought a great change in the narrative of this event. Mao passed away in September 1976, which led to the overthrow of the Gang of Four. Mao's successor, Hua Guofeng 华国锋, had the Gang of Four arrested shortly after Mao's death.

³⁸ Yang 1993: 13; Meisner 1999: 315–324; Bu 2008: 206–209.

³⁹ Hong 1999: 218–219; Shi and Li 2008: 629–645.

⁴⁰ Meisner 1999: 403–407.

In 1977, he declared the end of the Cultural Revolution.⁴¹ As Hua worked to address the political repercussions of the Cultural Revolution, Deng found his way back to the inner core of the party. Between Hua stepping down as the national and party leader and Deng taking office in late 1978, the authorities gradually relaxed the regulations on publications. They began to allow the publication of so-called Scar Literature 伤痕文学 to reveal the wounds caused by the Cultural Revolution. Later, they allowed so-called Introspective Literature 反思文学 to provide another perspective of Mao's governance.⁴² In the last months of 1978, Deng, who had first been portrayed as the alleged instigator of the Tiananmen Incident, reversed the narrative about this event and its participants. In the course of two years, the Tiananmen Incident was moved from one end of the political spectrum to the other, i.e., from the side of political incorrectness to the side of political correctness.⁴³

Soon after this reversal, the authorities officially sanctioned the publication of the *Tiananmen Poetry Collection* 天安门诗抄 in December 1978. The *Tiananmen Poetry Collection* is a compilation of free verse, rhyming stanzas, prose, and elegies, etc. by Beijing residents during the Tiananmen Incident and was collected and edited by Chinese teachers of the Beijing International Studies University.⁴⁴ The timing suggests the political connotation of publishing this collection.⁴⁵ Although this book was considered a poetry collection, the collector-editors dedicated more pages to slogans, speech-like passages, and so on, simple couplets, and so on, than to poems. Whatever the forms used by the authors of Tiananmen poetry, the individuality was kept to a minimum, and the topics were concentrated primarily on political issues. These expressions echoed New Folk Songs, Political Lyricism, and Red Guards Poetry. In this manner, the authors of Tiananmen poetry applied an orthodox poetics to express their rejection of Mao and Maoism. They prioritized poetry's function over its aesthetics. The trajectory of the publication of the *Tiananmen Poetry Collection* indicates that the public, the critics, and the authorities all

⁴¹ Shi and Li 2008: 647.

⁴² Hong 1999: 240–261.

⁴³ Meisner 1999: 433–434.

⁴⁴ Cheng 2003: 166.

⁴⁵ For further discussion, see: Link 2000.

lent their weight to poetry. Again, poetry, in the broadest sense, played a role in a political event.⁴⁶

III. Tension between the Underground and the Authorities (1978-1983)

Deng's rise to power was also felt by underground poets. Bei Dao recalled, "Starting from the second half of 1978, the political environment of China obviously became relaxed. Chinese are creatures with an extraordinary sense of smell. They can sense any subtle changes by smelling and, therefore, they were eager to get into action."⁴⁷ This atmosphere of political relaxation backed the Democracy Wall Movement in 1978 and 1979 in Beijing, which was initiated by seekers of democracy and underground poets. Huang Xiang and his fellow poets, who came from Guizhou, arrived in October 1978 before Deng reversed the label of the Tiananmen Incident. They brought the first edition of *Enlightenment* 《启蒙》, an unofficial mimeographed journal, and handwritten wall posters of Huang's poem, the "Symphony of the God of Fire" 火神交响诗. Huang and his fellow poets intended to initiate a democracy movement through public activism.⁴⁸ They posted poetry on the Democracy Wall and in other places in Beijing and distributed *Enlightenment* to onlookers. Occasionally, Huang staged recitals for people who gathered around the posters. When Deng demonstrated a positive attitude toward this movement in November 1978, Wei Jingsheng 魏京生, a political activist, joined the movement in early December. Wei posted an essay that demanded genuine democracy on Democracy Wall. Later, Bei Dao, Mang Ke, Duoduo, and others posted the first issue of the unofficial, mimeographed literary journal *Today* 《今天》 on Democracy Wall and in other places in Beijing. They also distributed copies of *Today* in various places in Beijing. Afterwards, an increasing number of more politically inclined texts made their way to the Democracy Wall.

Deng's approval of the Democracy Wall Movement was merely a temporary restoration of the right to free speech. Although Deng intended to redirect China into a direction different from Mao's vision, he, like Mao, did not consider a democratic political system

⁴⁶ Cheng 2003: 166–169.

⁴⁷ Southern Metropolis Daily and Beidao 2008. "从 1978 年下半年起，中国的政局明显变得宽松多了。中国人是有特殊嗅觉的动物，任何微妙的变化闻都能闻出来，于是蠢蠢欲动。"

⁴⁸ Huang 2002: 105.

part of the plan. The authorities tightened their control over the activists associated with Democracy Wall in the spring of 1979. Wei Jinsheng was arrested after he posted another essay that demanded democracy. Other contributors, including those who participated in regional activities that sought a democratic political system, faced a similar situation. Their wall posters and unofficial journals were considered criminal evidence. Some people were soon released from custody, but others, including Wei Jingsheng, ended up in prison for long periods, in some cases extending to well over ten years. As a result, the numbers of wall posters and the publication of unofficial journals dropped dramatically. In the autumn of 1979, the authorities closed the Democracy Wall.

Today survived the fall of the Democracy Wall Movement. It is believed that the literary nature of *Today* – or in other words, its relatively non-political nature – was the reason for its survival.⁴⁹ The editorial board of *Today* held regular meetings for its contributors and readers, and most of the meetings were dedicated to literary discussion rather than political issues. However, their commitment to literature still constituted a political gesture. Because most contributors to *Today* departed from Mao's formula for literature and art and developed their idiosyncratic voices during the Cultural Revolution, their disobedience had led them to become underground authors. The entanglement between literature and art on the one hand, and politics on the other, was emphasized once more as Bei Dao and others considered that an unofficial journal was a good channel to bring their poetry to the public, even though Deng and the authorities had now begun to revive the publishing industry. In this sense, the unofficial journals organized by underground poets were illegal and vulnerable to the authorities. This was very different from the unofficial process of publicizing Red Guard Poetry in the mid-1960s, where there was, essentially, no political conflict between the authors of unofficial poetry and the (Maoist) leadership.

The survival of *Today* offers clues to changes in the regulations on literature and art. When the party agreed with Deng to reverse the counterrevolutionary label of the Tiananmen Incident, they also reached an agreement on economic reform. Deng and the party decided to introduce free market economy components into the existing economic

⁴⁹ Liu 2001: 311.

system of China. In this reform package, Deng and his followers highly valued foreign investments. They may have considered that the process of such an economic reform also required socio-cultural change. At any rate, the authorities arrested no one associated with *Today* and accepted the publication of *Today* tacitly after the Democracy Wall Movement, thereby indicating that the regulation of arts was loosened moderately and that writers' individuality was acceptable to some extent. In other words, the authorities could allow literature and art to depart from politics to a certain degree. The situation of *Today* was yet another indicator that Deng and his supporters downplayed Mao's blueprint for the arts and for China in general.

Ultimately, all activities of *Today* were forcibly stopped in late 1980 by the authorities. Between the first issue of *Today* and the last publication organized by the editorial board of *Today*, over a period of roughly two years, there were a total of 12 issues with 2,000 copies for each issue distributed nationwide. During this period, the editorial board and the associates of *Today* organized two public poetry recitals and cooperated in an art exhibition without official sanctions. It was said there were thousands of people who joined these events.⁵⁰

By the time that *Today* was closed, Bei Dao and his fellow poets Shu Ting 舒婷, Gu Cheng 顾城, and Jiang He 江河 had published their poems in official, mainstream literary journals. As such, the writers of *Today* arrived in the orthodox poetry scene, and their works became accessible to a wider readership that included literary critics who adhered to orthodox criteria. The first criticism of their poems appeared in 1979. Gong Liu 公刘 expressed his concerns about the dark tone of Gu Cheng's poems. In 1980, Zhang Ming 章明 complained that poems written by the generation that appreciated poets behind *Today* were too "obscure" 朦胧 to be understood. Veteran poet Ai Qing 艾青 was also concerned about this point. Gradually, the orthodox poetry scene categorized underground poetry associated with *Today* as Obscure Poetry 朦胧诗.

Unlike Obscure Poetry, the so-called Returnees 归来者 were welcomed warmly in the orthodox poetry scene in the early 1980s. The Returnees were poets who had been labeled as participants in Hu Feng's clique or had suffered during the Anti-Rightist Movement in

⁵⁰ Liu 2001; Liao 1999.

the late 1950s. Because of this history, they were one of the most vulnerable groups during the Cultural Revolution. Their return to the orthodox poetry scene symbolized a correction to the past and to Mao's rulings, and they shared the same background of Deng's promotion of Scar Literature and Introspective Literature. As the publishing industry began to be restored from the late 1970s onward, literary editors nationwide needed poems to fill the pages. The works of the Returnees were suitable for such a purpose, because their renewed social status was suitable for the political climate. Moreover, their experience in writing under Mao's regime meant that their poetry was less likely to be potentially politically subversive. Most of the Returnees had started writing as early as the 1930s or 1940s, and could only return to publicizing their works in the early 1980s.

The authorities were explicit about their negative attitude toward Obscure Poetry in the Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign 清除精神污染运动, which was launched in 1983. Before this campaign, Obscure Poetry seemed to have gained a foothold in the orthodox scene. Not all critics of the orthodox poetry scene were reluctant to accept Obscure Poetry, and some showed their appreciation of it. The most senior among them, Peking University professor Xie Mian 谢冕, showed his support of Obscure Poetry in 1980 in response to Gong Liu's concern. Sun Shaozhen 孙绍振 and the young critic Xu Jingya 徐敬亚 also greatly contributed to the discourse on the rise of Obscure Poetry in the orthodox poetry scene in subsequent years. Advocates viewed Obscure Poetry as a new trend, a new principle and a breath of fresh air in the orthodox poetry scene. Literary critics of both sides could hold their opinions firmly without compromise. They contributed to what literary historians called Obscure Poetry Polemic 朦胧诗论争 between 1980 and 1983. While critics continued the debate for years, Obscure Poetry thrived in official literary journals. Obscure poets continued their everyday life without interference from the authorities. The situation changed once the Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign began. Authorities ordered Xu Jingya to submit a self-criticism document because of his advocacy of Obscure Poetry⁵¹ – this was published in the *People's Daily*, a national newspaper – and Bei Dao was asked to do so as well. Evidently, official recognition of Obscure Poetry was tenuous, given that a

⁵¹ Cheng 2003: 191.

firm advocate and a leading figure of Obscure Poetry were forced to criticize their literary aspirations.

The Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign fizzled out in mid-1984. Unlike the Anti-Rightist Movement or the Cultural Revolution, however, the leadership did not brutally suppress all “problematic” works in literature and art, as indicated by Bei Dao’s reflection on this campaign.⁵² Bei Dao was asked to submit a self-criticism document in 1983 shortly after the campaign began. However, he refused to cooperate. Instead, his office supervisor wrote and submitted the report on his behalf. The self-criticism document was accepted, and Bei Dao was suspended from his duties for months. However, he was not under custody or banned from writing. Unlike the people who suffered under Mao’s regime, Bei Dao and his supervisor were not sent to prison or labor camps after the acceptance of the self-criticism document. Moreover, they were not asked to participate in forums organized by the party apparatus, and they did not receive condemnations that came from newspaper nationwide by their contemporaries, as had happened to earlier generations such as that of Hu Feng. Also, the authorities prohibited Bei Dao from appearing in public for a comparatively short time only. Bei Dao published an official collection of his poetry in 1986; this could be purchased from bookstores. Bei Dao’s case shows that politics was still in command, in Maoist terms, but that the attitude of Deng and the authorities was substantially different from that of the Maoist regime.⁵³

Deng and his supporters’ openness to foreign cultural productions after the Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign showed that they deviated significantly from Mao’s rulings against reading materials that might be considered harmful to a socialist-communist China. Although the economic reform since the late 1970s caused nationwide inflation, corruption, exploitation, and inequality, Deng and his followers insisted on fully embracing foreign investments and elements of global capitalism. Communist tenets were replaced with the beliefs of the free market economy. The leadership cut back on subsidy, welfare, and security of tenure in almost every industry; this approach also applied to the business of cultural productions.⁵⁴ The authorities used to have full ownership of every

⁵² Southern Metropolis Daily and Beidao 2008.

⁵³ Perry Link discusses this issue in chapter Two of his book, see Link 2000: 56–103.

⁵⁴ For further discussion, see Kraus 2004; Link 2000.

publishing house in China. In the 1980s, they began to require publishing houses to keep the business profitable on their own. To keep up with this economic adjustment, Deng and his supporters liberalized regulations on publication, knowledge, and culture accordingly. As the Chinese market was opened up to foreign investments, not only foreign currency but also foreign culture poured into this market. Various Western theories and philosophies were now available in the free market to the general public. Other readings that were also available in this market were Chinese classics prohibited by Mao and materials that the Educated Youths had clandestinely circulated in their underground networks during the Cultural Revolution.⁵⁵

IV. A Shout from the Avant-Garde (1986-1988)

The idea of the avant-garde was introduced to China under this relative relaxation of the social atmosphere. Poets who were active outside the orthodox poetry scene finally had a term and a concept that positively located themselves in the realm of arts.⁵⁶ Xu Jingya, who contributed to the rise of Obscure Poetry, identified avant-garde poetry in numerous unofficial literary journals that appeared in the mid-1980s. As an editor of the *Shenzhen Newspaper for Youths* 深圳青年报, Xu organized special issues of “The Grand Exhibition of Modern Poetry on China’s Poetry Scene, 1986” 中国诗坛 1986 现代诗群体大展 in October 1986. These special issues were dedicated to poetry that displayed a poetics that was different from both orthodox and Obscure Poetry. The Grand Exhibition was the first time that most of the contributors published their poetry officially, and later, this exhibition developed into a survey anthology titled *Overview of Chinese Modernist Poetry Group 1986-1988* 中国现代主义诗群大观 1986-1988, published in 1998 and with Xu Jingya and others as its editors. According to Xu, there were more than sixty poetry groupings and more than one hundred poets that joined this Grand Exhibition.⁵⁷ Incidentally, Xu Jingya is another example that shows that “workers in literature and art” who were considered to have transgressed the ideological rules under Deng’s regime could sometimes return to the public arena fairly quickly. Like Bei Dao, Xu encountered

⁵⁵ For a short list of these publications, see: Hong 1999: 229–230; Wu 2012: 377.

⁵⁶ For a discussion on positively defining underground poetry, see: Van Crevel 2007: 12.

⁵⁷ Xu et al. 1988: 561–562.

problems with keeping his job during the Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign. But by 1986, he was able to use his influence to openly promote avant-garde poets.

The trajectories of contributors to the Grand Exhibition call to mind the emergence of *Today*, with Bei Dao and Mang Ke in central roles. Like-minded poets who had developed their poetics individually were brought together by the unofficial literary journal. The unofficial poetry journals that had previously published the works of contributors to the Grand Exhibition appeared around 1983. *Not-Not* 《非非》, *Them* 《他们》, and *Macho Men* 《莽汉》 were the most influential ones. *Not-Not* was led by Zhou Lunyou 周伦佑, Lan Ma 蓝马, and Yang Li 杨黎. *Them* was headed by Han Dong 韩东, and Yu Jian 于坚. Li Yawei 李亚伟, Wan Xia 万夏, and Hu Dong 胡冬 were in charge of *Macho Men*. Other notable poetry groupings were New Traditionalism 新传统主义, which included Liao Yiwu 廖亦武 and Ouyang Jianghe 欧阳江河, and Wholism 整体主义, which included Song Qu 宋渠 and Song Wei 宋焯. The members of New Traditionalism and Wholism did not launch their own journals, but they had the opportunity to contribute to their fellow poets' unofficial journals. Women poets were publishing as well, but the running of unofficial literary journals and poetry groupings seemed to be a male-dominated business. When the budding poets worked on their poetics and unofficial journals around 1983, Yang Lian 杨炼 and Ouyang Jianghe were seen as new members of the Obscure Poetry group, right at the time when Obscure Poetry was the target of the Obscure Poetry Polemic and the Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign.

However, compared to *Today*, later journals such as *Not-Not*, *Them*, *Macho Men*, and many others faced far less government intervention, because of Deng's economic reform and the concomitant relaxation of ideological control in the 1980s. The authorities rarely handed down rulings on unofficial publications and were scarcely involved in the closure of unofficial journals launched in the mid-1980s. They did not ask Xu Jingya to submit another self-criticism document because of his dedication to the Grand Exhibition. Moreover, the orthodox critics appeared less worried about the future of poetry as outlined by *Not-Not*, *Them*, and *Macho Men*.

The avant-garde who officially published their poetry in the Grand Exhibition gradually came to be referred to as the Third Generation 第三代. Prior to being united under this

category, they had been described as contributors to experimental poetry 实验诗, the Second Tide of Poetry 第二次诗潮, the Newborn Generation 新生代, and, in some cases, Post-Obscure Poetry 后朦胧诗.⁵⁸ The concept of the Third Generation was proposed by poets themselves in the early 1980s and widely accepted by their contemporaries, including contributors to the Grand Exhibition. The Third Generation poets divided the development of the contemporary Chinese poetry into three stages; they considered themselves the third generation, with poets of Political Lyricism as the first generation, and the Obscure poets as the second generation. The category of the Third Generation brought together different poetry groupings with a shared pursuit: to distinguish themselves from the established avant-garde poets, especially the Obscure poets Bei Dao, Shu Ting, and Gu Cheng. A small number of authors could be associated with both ‘generations’: for example, Ouyang Jianghe, Wang Jiaxin, and Wang Xiaoni 王小妮.

While Obscure Poetry had come under political fire during the Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign, the Third Generation poets took issue with Obscure Poetry in regard to language, imagery, subject matter, and the poetic voice. Although Obscure Poetry in the late 1970s and early 1980s had not been called ‘avant-garde,’ the Third Generation’s challenge to it – in the propositions they offered in the Grand Exhibition – made it important elements of the discourse on the avant-garde. The fact that orthodox critics had denounced it and questioned its legitimacy serves as additional evidence. Obscure Poetry was obviously part of the genealogy of the avant-garde in the bigger picture of literary history, and the Third Generation poets’ opposition to Obscure Poetry turns out to be a conflict *within* avant-garde poetics.⁵⁹

V. The 1990s

As noted above, ideological control became more relaxed in the mid-1980s. Numerous imported and domestic reading materials were available to the public as Maoism, Communism, and socialism had given way to elements of capitalism. However, political democracy remained a taboo subject. University students in Anhui led a protest for

⁵⁸ Yeh 1992; Hong and Liu 2005: 202–210.

⁵⁹ For further discussion on the relation and distinction between Obscure Poetry and the Third Generation, see Yeh 1992; Chan 2009: 3–92; Day 2005: 18–34.

democracy months after Xu Jingya published the Grand Exhibition in October, 1986. Deng put a stop to this event. Hu Yaobang 胡耀邦, the Party's general secretary and Deng's disciple, resigned from office because the demonstration came under his responsibility. His resignation did not stop the protests. A veritable protest movement took shape in 1989, initiated by university students in Beijing. It began with a spontaneous gathering in memory of Hu, who died suddenly in mid-April; this prelude calls to mind the Tiananmen Incident of 1976. People brought wreaths to Tiananmen Square and delivered speeches on Hu's importance in promoting political democracy in China. They also criticized the inequality and exploitation created by the state. Students' pleas resonated among other social groups, and more and more people joined the movement. The authorities disapproved of their ideas, and the deadlock between protestors and the authorities continued for more than a month, with media coverage worldwide.

Violence put an end to this deadlock in the beginning of June. Unarmed and defenceless students and other protestors confronted the professional army. The end of this protest has been described by many as a massacre, widely known as June Fourth 六四; in English-language scholarship, the episode at large is often referred to as the Protest Movement. Under Deng's government, death could be the price for demanding political democracy. The surviving dissenters, including active participants, sympathizers, journalists, and party cadres, were imprisoned or exiled. In response, the authorities promptly restored ideological control. Tougher regulations were applied to the publishing industry.

Deng's so-called Southern Tour of 1992, in which he advocated rapid marketization, marked a watershed for most people in China to turn away from the Protest Movement. With regard to the rate of economic growth before the end of the 1990s, Meisner pointed out that "from 1991 to 1997, the average per annum increase of China's GDP was 11 percent, by far the most rapid rate of growth of any major economy in the world."⁶⁰ In translating these figures into a real case of cultural production, Kong Shuyu notes that this trend introduced the idea of the bestseller to the publishing industry of China. Publishing houses worked with the authorities to transform literary publication into a profit-driven business.

⁶⁰ Meisner 1999: 518.

When summarizing this transformation from being politics-centered to being profit-centered since the late 1970s, Kong writes that “[t]he 1980s ideal of creating an autonomous literature and experimenting with the avant-garde ... faded away”⁶¹ in the 1990s. Kong uses the commercial contract between Wang Shuo 王朔, a wildly popular novelist and screenwriter since the mid-1980s, and the publisher in the early 1990s as an example to show that at the time, writers could coordinate with the publisher and respond to demands efficiently, thereby working together to earn a generous profit. She also highlights that women writers benefit from this business model. Under this system of supply and demand, Kong points out that “[c]ontemporary women’s writing, with its remarkably explicit reflections on gender and sexuality, became one of the hottest-selling genres, and publishers competed to bring out the works of the most popular, even notorious women writers.”⁶² This is also the background that gave rise to the category of Women’s poetry 女性诗歌.⁶³

Germie Barmé also discusses the case of Wang Shuo. He uses Wang Shuo and his works as indicators that show that the “liumang 流氓 culture” developed when, in Chinese society, communist / socialist beliefs were no longer practicable and became subordinate to capitalism to a great extent.⁶⁴ The liumang or ‘hooligan’ culture is a subculture strongly associated with Beijing, and it resonates throughout China through Wang Shuo’s works and mass media. Men and/or women joined together because of their shared skepticism and cynicism toward the discrepancy between the party’s formal discourse and the everyday realities of life, which were increasingly determined by trends toward marketization, and the law of supply and demand.

Many Third Generation poets stopped writing, and explored the rule of the market in the 1990s. Some of them returned to poetry as rich patrons of the arts years later. Those who remained with poetry continued to search for their positions in the genealogy of avant-garde poetry and Chinese poetry at large. Such a search has been described by different scholars in different contexts as a case of identity crisis,⁶⁵ an example of a so-

⁶¹ Kong 2005: 3.

⁶² Kong 2005: 2.

⁶³ Hong and Liu 2005: 233-234.

⁶⁴ Barmé 1999: 62-98.

⁶⁵ Yeh 2007.

called cult of poetry,⁶⁶ or as an effort to leave their mark in history.⁶⁷ These poets explored their identity in a time when Wang Shuo could write about themes that are by no means revolutionary from the Maoist aspect; his sarcastic sense of humor was universally accepted by the public, and more or less accepted by the authorities. Just like Wang faced no serious restrictions on making his works public in the aftermath of the Protest Movement, Third Generation poets continually fulfilled their ideal of literary autonomy and avant-garde poetics through the publication of unofficial journals. Xi Chuan 西川 and Chen Dongdong's 陈东东 journal *Tendency* 《倾向》 and its successor *The Southern Poetry Review* 《南方诗志》 were the key publications noted by literary historians after *Not-Not*, *Them*, and *Macho Men* folded in the late 1980s. Literary critics also emphasize Xiao Kaiyu 肖开愚 and Sun Wenbo's journals *Against* 《反对》 and *The Nineties* 《九十年代》, Zhong Ming 钟鸣 and Zhao Ye's 赵野 journal *Image Puzzle* 《象罔》, and Mang Ke and Tang Xiaodu's 唐晓渡 journal *Modern Han Poetry* 《现代汉诗》, as these unofficial poetry journals were launched in the aftermath of the Protest Movement.⁶⁸

The contributors to these unofficial journals did not have the same impact on Chinese society and culture as *Today* or *Not-Not*, *Them*, and *Macho Men* did in the late 1970s and the early 1980s. Nevertheless, these journals offered the possibility of continued explorations beyond the limits of orthodox poetry, and they arguably helped take avant-garde poetry into a next stage of development and into increasing diversity.

Several Third Generation poets were not confined to the domain of unofficial journals and to writing poetry, but also wrote literary criticism and scholarly articles about avant-garde poetry, for publication in state-sanctioned publications. Hong Zicheng lists 17 influential poet-critics in the 1990s, namely, Xi Chuan, Wang Jiabin, Zang Di 臧棣, Zhong Ming, Ouyang Jianghe, Bai Hua 柏桦, Yu Jian, Han Dong, Zhang Zao 张枣, Xiao Kaiyu, Chen Dongdong, Sun Wenbo, Zhou Lunyou, Xi Du 西渡, Huang Canran 黄灿然, Jiang Tao 姜涛, and Sang Ke 桑克.⁶⁹ Some of these poets are the above-mentioned founders of unofficial journals. Most of them are contributors to either the Grand Exhibition⁷⁰ or the

⁶⁶ Yeh 1996; Zhou 2007: 56–94.

⁶⁷ Chan 2009: 3–92.

⁶⁸ Hong and Liu 2005: 249; Van Crevel 2007.

⁶⁹ Hong and Liu 2005: 244, footnote 4.

⁷⁰ Namely Xi Chuan, Ouyang Jianghe, Yu Jian, Han Dong, Xiao Kaiyu, Sun Wenbo, and Zhou

*Overview.*⁷ Specifically, only Zang Di, Jiang Tao, and Sang Ke had less clear association to the Third Generation. Notably, and with reference to the above observation that editorial work in the avant-garde scene was a male-dominated affair, Hong includes no women authors in his list. Many Third Generation poets were also featured in mass media when the avant-garde had the chance to grab the headlines. Hence, while the avant-garde could still publish their works in unofficial journals, unofficial publication was no longer their only choice.

To mass media practitioners, Wang Shuo and his works were profitable enough to give him their undivided attention. Similarly, they saw clear value in “advertising” the dramatic notion of “the death of the poet” since the early 1990s. Haizi’s 海子 death initiated this process. Haizi killed himself several months before the Protest Movement in March 1989. His best friend and fellow poet Luo Yihe 骆一禾 died two months later. During their lives, Haizi and Luo were hardly known by the general public and were not able to publish their poetry outside the unofficial and inner circle journals. However, collections of their poetry became available in the market soon after their deaths. Another little-known poet, Ge Mai 戈麦, died in 1991, and his work was also soon published posthumously. Gu Cheng’s dramatic death in 1993 – he killed his wife Xie Ye 谢烨 before taking his own life – culminated this process. Because Gu was a well-known Obscure poet, and because Gu’s death occurred after Deng had relaxed ideological control in his 1992 Southern Tour, journalists, commentators, publishers, critics, and even scholars engaged with Gu’s death in a sensationalist manner, often linking it to the deaths of Haizi, Luo, and Ge. The discussion on “the death of the poet” rekindled the public’s interests in unofficial literary journals and their contributors after they had begun to lose visibility in the late 1980s, but more attention was paid to gossip and sensation than to poetry and poetics.

From the perspective of the poet-critics of the early 1990s, Haizi’s death and his poetics marked a transitional phase in the development of avant-garde poetry. Obscure poet Ouyang Jianghe mentioned Haizi in his essay, “Writing Poetry Inside China After 1989: Indigenous Disposition, the Mark of Middle Age and Being an Intellectual” 1989 年后国内

Lunyou. See: Xu et al. 1988: 561.

⁷ Such as Wang Jiixin, Zhong Ming, Bai Hua, Zhang Zao, Chen Dongdong, Huang Canran. See: Xu et al. 1988.

诗歌写作：本土气质、中年特征与知识分子身份, published in 1993. As the title shows, this essay is about poetry written after 1989. That is a period of time that Haizi cannot be a contributor. Nevertheless, Ouyang considered that Haizi's and Luo Yihe's physical deaths symbolized an ending that ushered in a new beginning, a beginning that Ouyang's essay aimed for. Ouyang elaborated what he saw as the distinguishing features of the 1990s poetry that is noted in the subtitle of the essay. Aside from the argumentation, Ouyang identified several representative poets, namely Chen Dongdong, Xi Chuan, Xiao Kaiyu, Sun Wenbo, Zhang Shuguang 张曙光, Zhong Ming, Wang Jiabin, Zhai Yongming 翟永明, Bai Hua, Meng Lang, and himself. All of them, except for Zhang Shuguang, are the contributors to the *Overview*, and among them, many are contributors to the Grand Exhibition. In other words, the poets designated by Ouyang may not be the most noted figures of the Third Generation, but all they are the contributors to it. By the designation of these poets, Ouyang tuned his discussion of the 1990s poetry to the genre of the avant-garde without explicitly noting the notion in his essay. Also, this arrangement makes Ouyang one of the first poet-critics who asserted the differences between the poetry written by the avant-garde before and after 1989. Under the circumstances, Haizi and Luo Yihe might have no chance to be the contributors to the development of avant-garde poetry in the 1990s, but Ouyang's mentioning of them in this essay suggests their accountability to the development of avant-garde poetry before 1989.

Another example is poet-critic Zang Di's "Post-Obscure Poetry: Poetry for the Sake of Writing" 后朦胧诗：作为一种写作的诗歌, published in 1994.⁷² By "Post-Obscure Poetry," Zang means the Third Generation of 1984-1988 and Individual Writing 个人写作 of the early 1990s.⁷³ Zang recognized the Third Generation but considered Individual Writing as a correction of it. And, Haizi is mentioned when Zang intended to shift the focus from the Third Generation to Individual Writing. Zang appreciated Haizi's poetry – very much part of the above-mentioned 'cult of poetry' – to a certain extent, but Zang took Haizi's poetics as an example to contrast with what Zang sees as the 1990s avant-garde poetics.⁷⁴ Nevertheless, Zang gave Haizi a unique place in the genealogy of the avant-garde poetry, a

⁷² Zang 1996.

⁷³ Zang 1996: 51.

⁷⁴ Zang 1996: 52–53 and 56–57.

place that is situated in post-Obscure poetry but isolated from both the Third Generation of 1984-1988 and Individual Writing the early 1990s. Indeed, the distance between Haizi's poetics and Individual Writing may not further than the distance between it and the distinguishing features recognized by Ouyang in "After 1989." This assessment is based on the overlap in the lists of the representative poets recognized by Zang in "Post-Obscure Poetry" and by Ouyang in "After 1989." The representatives recognized by Zang are Ouyang Jianghe, Sun Wenbo, Xiao Kaiyu, Zhong Ming, Zhang Shuguang, Bai Hua, Xi Chuan, Chen Dongdong, Zhai Yongming, Lü De'an 吕德安, and Wang Yin 王寅.⁷⁵ All of them, except for Wang Yin, had been recognized by Ouyang. After all, Ouyang's suggestion is verified by Zang. Haizi is an avant-garde poet held accountable for the development of the 1990s avant-garde poetry.

The Designation of Poetry of the Nineties

Ouyang's and Zang's articles did not cause a sensation in popular culture, the poetry scene, or the academia, although they aimed to "primarily grasp and predict the development of poetry in its process of development."⁷⁶ However, their works give inspirations to Cheng Guangwei for the compilation of *Portrait of Years Gone By: Literature of the Nineties, Poetry Volume* 岁月的遗照：九十年代文学书系·诗歌卷. Cheng highly valued Ouyang's and Zang's understanding of, and vision for, the 1990s in his introduction to *Portrait*.⁷⁷ Cheng identified Intellectual Writing 知识份子写作 and Individual Writing, together with in opposition to pure poetry 反对纯诗 and Narrativity 叙事性 as the distinguishing features of the 1990s poetry.⁷⁸ Also, Cheng's list of the representative poets is largely overlapped with that of Ouyang's and Zang's. Cheng recognized Ouyang Jianghe, Zhang Shuguang, Wang Jiabin, Chen Dongdong, Bai Hua, Xi Chuan, Zhai Yongming, (Xiao) Kaiyu, Sun Wenbo, Zhang Zao, Huang Canran, Zhong Ming, Lü De'an, Zang Di, and Wang Ai 王艾.⁷⁹ Zang Di now is recognized as a prominent contributor to the 1990s poetry, and Wang Ai is the other new face that has not been noted by Ouyang and Zang. The overlap

⁷⁵ Zang 1996: 58.

⁷⁶ Ouyang 2001: 49.

⁷⁷ Cheng 1998: Introduction 3-4 and 7.

⁷⁸ Cheng 1998: Introduction 2-8 and 16-20.

⁷⁹ Cheng 1998: Introduction 2.

of these three lists of representative poets reflects that Cheng's designation of poets of the 1990s is avant-garde inclined. Specifically, it inclines to the Third Generation poets who were not as noted as the proponents of *Not-Not*, *Them*, and *Macho Men*.

While *Portrait* is the poetry volume of the first literary series dedicated to the notion of literature of the 1990s, a certain canonizing ambition is attached to it. And, in the eyes of many, Cheng's designation had appropriated the chronological notion of "poetry of the 1990s" 90年代诗歌 for a specific group of poets. One of the first criticism of Cheng's appropriation is Shen Haobo's 沈浩波 1998 essay, "Who is Fooling 'the Nineties'" 谁在拿“九十年代”开涮.⁸⁰ Later, many others joined the array.

Among them, the fiercest opponents of Cheng's designation of poetry of the 1990s, or precisely Poetry of the Nineties – the literary-critical category masked by a chronological indicator and foregrounded in this study – are the anthologists and the sympathizers of the *1998 Yearbook of China's Poetry* 1998 中国新诗年鉴, published in February 1999. The *1998 Yearbook* is in fact not limited to 1998: its editorial board – featuring literary critic Yang Ke, *Them* contributors Yu Jian and Han Dong, and many others – anthologized poetry from across the decade of the 1990s. The oppositional intention of the *1998 Yearbook* is explicated in its introduction written by Yu Jian. In the introduction, Yu deprives of Cheng's designation of Poetry of the Nineties and recategorizes it. Specifically, Yu adopts the term Intellectual Writing in his introduction to note Cheng's proposition,⁸¹ while Cheng considers Intellectual Writing as one of the features that consists of his entire package of the proposition of Poetry of the Nineties. Moreover, Yu positions the *1998 Yearbook* as not only a rectification of *Portrait* but also a representation of the Popular Standpoint and [Popular] Writing 民间立场和写作 that is obstructed by what he calls Intellectual Writing.⁸² Yu's attacks on Cheng and his designation reflect that a certain canonizing ambition is also attached to the *1998 Yearbook*. Also, his designation of the Popular Standpoint and [Popular] Writing is another proposition of Poetry of the Nineties.

To solidify his proposition of Poetry of the Nineties, Yu Jian draws on his personal observation on the 1980s unofficial journals to give meaning to the Popular Standpoint

⁸⁰ Cheng 2003: 352.

⁸¹ Yang 1999: Prefatory Essay 8.

⁸² Yang 1999: Prefatory Essay 6-10.

and [Popular] Writing of the 1990s. Yu recognizes colloquial language 口语,⁸³ an independent spirit,⁸⁴ and finding poetry in everyday life as its distinguishing features.⁸⁵ Also, Yu submits his list of the representative poets of the 1990s, namely Bei Dao, Duoduo, Chang Yao 昌耀, Lü De'an, Zhai Yongming, Zhu Wen 朱文, Yi Sha 伊沙, A Jian 阿坚, Lu Yang 鲁羊, Du Malan 杜马兰, Hou Ma 侯马, Xu Jiang 徐江, Zhong Dao 中岛, Yang Jian 杨键, Lu Xixi 鲁西西.⁸⁶ Except for Lü De'an and Zhai Yongming, all the poets in this list are not seen in that of Cheng Guangwei's. The differences in the poetics between Cheng's and Yu's respective designation may require in-depth analysis to illustrate, but the mutual exclusivity emerging from Yu's list of poets reflects that Yu's designation in the *1998 Yearbook* may just as partisan as that of Cheng's in *Portrait*. In this regard, Yu's approach to the designation of Poetry of the Nineties not only is as ambitious as that of Cheng's, but also attributes a sense of monopolizing ambition to both Cheng's and his respective propositions. In other words, Cheng's and Yu's respective propositions of Poetry of Nineties is not only of canonizing ambition but also of monopolizing ambition.

A Poetry Polemic within the Avant-Garde

The contestation between Cheng's and Yu's propositions escalated when Cheng's favorite poets from *Portrait* reacted to Yu's criticism. Literary historian and literary critics later call this conflict the "Popular-Intellectual Polemic of 1998-2000" 民间与知识份子论争. Yu Jian's introduction to the *1998 Yearbook* spur the emergence of the two opposing camps in the Polemic. On the one hand, Yu's recategorization of Cheng's proposition make those who come to the defence of Intellectual Writing in the Polemic embody the Intellectual "camp," poets and critics alike. On the other hand, while the criticism of Intellectual Writing is central to Yu's articulation of his proposition of the Popular Standpoint and [Popular] Writing, Yu allows those who sympathize with this criticism to be counted as members of the Popular "camp." The name of the Polemic is given accordingly. As Yu himself is a Third Generation poet and so are many members of the Intellectual camp, the late 1990s Polemic turns out to be led by the 1980s avant-garde. In the mid-1980s, they

⁸³ Yang 1999: Prefatory Essay 3-9.

⁸⁴ Yang 1999: Prefatory Essay 8-10.

⁸⁵ Yang 1999: Prefatory Essay 10-14.

⁸⁶ Yang 1999: Prefatory Essay 5.

were fellow Third Generation poets that fought alongside to rise above their predecessors. This time, in the end of the 1990s, they try to reinvent themselves by taking issues with the poetics of their avant-garde fellows of the 1980s.

One of the face-to-face confrontations between the Popular camp and the Intellectual camp is captured by Zhang Qinhua 张清华 in “True Dialogue and the Crossing of Swords in Poetry: A Report on “Turn of the Century: A Seminar on the State of the Art and Theory-Building in Chinese Poetry” 一次真正的诗歌对话与交锋——“世纪之交：中国诗歌创作态势与理论建设研讨会” 述要.⁸⁷ This seminar was held two months after the publication of the *1998 Yearbook*, on April 16-18, 1999. Because of the location of this seminar, it is also referred as the Panfeng Conference 盘峰会议 or the Panfeng Poetry Conference 盘峰诗会. Both Cheng Guangwei and Yu Jian participated in this seminar. According to Zhang, Yu explained the Popular Standpoint and attacked Intellectual Writing on the conference, and his opinions received support from Yi Sha, Xu Jiang, Shen Qi 沈奇, and Yang Ke.⁸⁸ The refutation of the attacks on Intellectual Writing was led by Wang Jiixin and further elaborated by Sun Wenbo, Zang Di, Cheng Guangwei, Xi Du, Tang Xiaodu, and Chen Chao 陈超.⁸⁹ Evidentially, Zhang summarized this confrontation as a contestation between the sympathizers of Popular Writing and Intellectual Writing.⁹⁰

Indeed, Zhang’s report on this confrontation captures a discrepancy between the rival camps’ argument. It appears they use the same term “intellectual” but mean different things. While Yu and his fellows called the contributors to Intellectual Writing “the Intellectuals” and accused of these Intellectuals’ neglect of everyday life and social reality, Wang and his companions tended to use the general sense of an intellectual to argue against the criticism. While the Popular camp’s attack is specific, the Intellectual camp’s refutation goes general. This may be one of the reasons that makes this seminar look to Zhang like the crossing of swords in poetry. Nevertheless, such a discrepancy in the two camps’ argumentation appeared not an issue for both the sympathizers of the two camps and the other participants. Based on multiple sources, the number of participants was

⁸⁷ Zhang 1999.

⁸⁸ Zhang 1999: 69–72.

⁸⁹ Zhang 1999: 72–73.

⁹⁰ Zhang 1999: 71.

between twenty to forty. Mostly, they are poets, poetry theorists, and poetry critics.⁹¹ In Zhang's report, hardly anyone calls into question the different uses of the term "intellectual". Rather, specific and general issues related to Popular Writing and Intellectual Writing consisted of the theme of the total four sections of Zang's report. In the fourth, the closing, section, Zhang noted Wu Sijing's recognition of the conference to conclude the report, a recognition that qualifies it as a gathering of avant-garde poets.⁹²

As Wu's recognition is read together with the backgrounds of the seminar organizers, it, to a degree, reflects the authorities' acceptance of the avant-garde. Indeed, this conference is officially sanctioned. It is jointly organized by the Beijing branch of the Writers' Association, the Contemporary Chamber of the Research Institute for Literature of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, the journal *Beijing Literature* 北京文学, and the editorial board of *Poetry Exploration* 诗探索.⁹³ Among the four, the Writer's Association and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences have unquestionably link to the authorities. The avant-garde poets' contestation on the conference indicates that now they not only can attend the official sanctioned conference but also can have a fight with their avant-garde fellows and receive the recognition from the scholars for of their efforts there.⁹⁴

Moreover, the Panfeng Poetry Conference was not held to settle the contestation among the avant-garde. This point is made clear on the conference,⁹⁵ and it sees that outside the conference, poets and critics mobilized all available media, such as official and unofficial journals, local and national newspapers, and commercial and state-owned publishing houses, to advance their propositions. Journalists found valuable sources of news stories from the poets' promotion of poetics and comments, as well as their denunciations and personal attacks. The authorities were unconcerned about these conflicts. They let the Polemic run its course until it withered away in 2000.

In addition to their contribution of literary criticism and scholarly articles about avant-garde poetry to the official-sanctioned publications, these avant-garde poets' participation

⁹¹ Zhang 1999: 68; Wang and Sun 2000: 391; Yang 2000: 518–523.

⁹² Zhang 1999: 76.

⁹³ Zhang 1999: 68.

⁹⁴ Indeed, Panfeng Conference is not the only case. Another example sees Sun 1999.

⁹⁵ Zhang 1999: 75.

in the Polemic turns out to be another example of the authorities' unconcern about avant-garde poetics in the 1990s. Their trajectories attest to the blurring line between the official and unofficial poetry scene in the 1990s. Besides, their constant contributions to the critical discourse on avant-garde poetry indicate that the avant-garde now can make history by joining the scholars of the official scene to negotiate with the two sets of values encouraging by the official and unofficial poetry scene, respectively. Then, how well do these 1980s avant-garde poets carve out a career as literary critics in the 1990s? The Polemic is a great point of departure for exploring this issue, as 21st-century scholars can not omit the propositions of Poetry of the Nineties submitted by the avant-garde in the Polemic but to appropriately position their research in the discourse on poetry written in the 1990s. Therefore, foregrounding Poetry of the Nineties in those decent studies of poetry written in the 1990s allows an evaluation of the avant-garde's critical work. This is what the following chapters are going to assess.

