

Poet-critic or critic-poet: the interaction and integration of identities——From the 1980s

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Abstract

Since the beginning of China's century-old modern poetry, there has been a derivative tendency for poets such as Wen Yiduo, Xu Chi, and Mu Dan to become critics or critics to become poets. Since the rise of the "New Poetry Wave" in 1978 and the "Intellectual Writing" in 1987, Zhou Lunyou, Zang Di, Geng Zhanchun and others have successively entered a new process of interaction and integration of the dual identities of poets and critics, which objectively created a benign breakthrough in the poetic ecology and bred hidden dangers that are easy to ignore. Around this, we will go deep into the timeline of contemporary poetics. While studying the ideological values and language trends of "poet critics" and "critic poets", we will focus on poetry texts, pay attention to theoretical development, calibrate contradictory events, conduct cross-perspective and disciplinary comprehensive analysis, promote the deconstruction and shaping of writing identity, and carry out in-depth criticism of special information such as the nature of poets and the authority of the poetry world. This will provide new thinking for some of the doubts about the literary ecology and explain academic value.

1. Breaking the Perspective: Poet Critic

Poets with excellent text commentary and theoretical research capabilities have almost all participated in the interpretation and even construction of the current poetic ecology as critics, and have penetrated into the literary scene from another level besides poetry creation, exploring phenomena or proposing new ideas. On a macro level, poets who have become critics have made great achievements, basically creating half of the world of poetry exploration and theoretical evolution, and forming a multi-dimensional mutual learning and mutual verification with pure scholar critics; in specific details, they have effectively supplemented and enriched the traditional poetry criticism system. Over the past 100 years, poets and critics in the field of Chinese modern poetry have had a history of dual identity interaction and integration that is almost as long as the history of the development of modern poetry, objectively creating a path for the study of contemporary poetry that is mixed, diverse, meticulous and specialized. From the beginning of the first generation of vernacular poetry in the New Culture Movement, the "Creation Society" represented by Yu Dafu and Zhang Ziping and the "Experimental School" represented by Liu

Bannong and Shen Yinmo had already developed a critical trend that existed along with writing. Given the relatively limited environment and conditions for new poetry at that time, they often relied on their own or their peers' texts to conduct discussions, error corrections or extended thinking. During this period, their speculation on the structure of words and the exploration of ideological values actually became the foundation for the gradual construction of the critical edifice of Chinese new poetry in later generations. For example, Hu Shi, who can be regarded as the founder of vernacular poetry, once raised the requirement of "natural lightness, heaviness and height" in the rhythm of poetic language in his spare time.^[1] He noticed that the rhythm and sense of language displayed by modern Chinese were different from the patterns of the era of metrical poetry, and were more naturally close to popular vernacular. This objectively paved the way for the research results of Dai Wangshu and Guo Moruo more than 20 years later that "the rhythm of poetry should not only exist superficially, it should not exist on the surface of the rhyme and intonation of words, but also exist in the inner rhythm of emotions"^[2].

Similar to his adherence to "Deweyism" in the field of philosophy, Hu Shi also had a deep belief in Western cultural ideas represented by Europe and the United States in the field of poetics, and constantly tried to apply them to the Chinese literary system to solve various problems. In his poetry writing and critical genealogy, he always showed the humanism rooted in the Renaissance and the "democracy and freedom" ideas expounded under the logic of bourgeois politics. Wen Yiduo was an important figure who promoted the "turn" or innovation of poetic thought after Hu Shi. He created his first modern poem in 1920 and published his treatise "Study on Regulated Poetry" less than two years later, resolutely taking on another burden of theoretical research. The unity of poetry and theory and even the mutual complementation of poetry and theory are his greatest advantages. Unlike the resolute revolution against old poetry during Hu Shi's time, Wen Yiduo realized the importance of traditional Chinese poetry resources very early on. He never advocated the complete overthrow or overthrow of the classical era, but rather the consideration of reviving, innovating, and improving it. He injected new elements, including British 19th century romantic literature, into the theory of metrical poetics in order to gain a new perspective. Wen Yiduo's poetry and poetic theory combined his achievements in archaeology, folklore, and other fields, and with the confidence in local culture, he made outstanding contributions to the development of modern poetry in the past century with an impassioned and romantic attitude.

Xu Chi, who once proposed the idea of "exiling lyricism"^[3], is undoubtedly a rare "all-rounder" in the literary world. In addition to his achievements in prose, translation, and reportage, he has basically established his historical status and value in the field of poetry alone, relying on his huge literary career span and multi-style criticism and creation. Around the 1930s, he was first influenced by the Western "modernist" image writing represented by Ezra Pound, focusing on urban lyricism. Later, during the Anti-Japanese War, he showed a nationalist and shouting language, which was quite revolutionary. By the end of the 1950s, Xu Chi's poetry and criticism were valued by later scholars for their strong political symbolic value. He effectively inherited and passed on the "truth-seeking" thought of poetry criticism in the era of Wen Yiduo, while the responsibility of aesthetic pursuit and language exploration in the dual dimensions of criticism and creation was shouldered by another famous writer. Mu Dan appeared at the forefront of the "Nine Leaves Poetry School" and even the poetry world at that time as a master of "modernism" and Chinese style. According to Hartmann von Oe, the so-called "free verse and poetics have always been in a state of confrontation, or even a state of "mutual destruction""^[4], and Mu Dan happened to be the person who effectively alleviated or dealt with this problem.

His poetry seems to have a clear "anti-traditional" tendency, taking foreign poetry represented by W. H. Auden or William Butler Yeats as the mother model, and is accustomed to creating texts rich in images. While polyphonic narrative and breakthrough changes in the inherent expression habits of Chinese, he focuses on a certain mysterious writing subject. But on the other hand, as one of the earliest poets to promote philosophical expression to a prominent position in the process of modern Chinese poetry, Mu Dan attaches importance to the exploration of the spiritual world and the speculation of multi-dimensional values. In his pen that seems to be full of "symbolism", there is actually a background of awakening and reviving the traditional Chinese "implicit" aesthetics. His criticisms more directly demonstrate the above characteristics. Mu Dan, who wrote "Literary Criticism of Sixty Poems in the Book of Songs" when he was in middle school, has a strong sense of constructing cultural identity. About half a century before the contemporary academic circles discussed issues such as "dialogue between traditional culture/thought and the West" or "reconstructing the Chinese narrative in world history"^[5], Mu Dan had already focused on thinking about how to ensure the independent subjectivity of Chinese poetics and even Chinese culture that is not dependent on the West in the context of globalization. In fact, he has already exceeded the identity scope of "poet critic" before, or it can be said that Mu Dan further defined his value and mission.

A younger generation whose poetic thought is more similar to Mu Dan's should be Zhang Zao, who was very famous among the "Five Lords of Bashu" in the 1980s. First of all, both of them have an academic background that combines both Chinese and Western ideas. They are both relatively elite and precocious members of the group of poets and critics. Zhang Zao's master can be traced back to Feng Zhi, a giant in the field of Chinese sonnets (the teacher of Yang Wuneng, Zhang Zao's master's supervisor). Feng Zhi studied in Germany in his youth and translated and annotated works such as "Goethe's Chronicle". Zhang Zao later set foot on German soil and went to Trier and Tübingen universities. During his doctoral studies, he became a disciple of Paul Hofmann, an expert in "Symbolist" poetry^[6]. Secondly, there is a desire for language reform, breakthroughs and innovation. With strong literary ambitions and outstanding talents, Zhang Zao not only inherited Mu Dan's respect for the mother tongue and the excavation and use of Chinese classical images, but also proposed the concept of "meta-poetry" in the field of criticism, emphasizing immersion and reflection on the language itself. To a certain extent, it knocked down the barriers between Chinese and Western cultures and "modernity" and "classical times", allowing dialectical philosophy and "romanticism" literary thoughts to form a situation where they can influence and involve each other, making Chinese writing more open and unobstructed. For decades, this set of ideas has faced countless praises and criticisms. Supporters believe that this has opened up a more open and changeable guide for modern Chinese poetry writing, while those who refute it often compare it to "Pandora's Box". Excessively personalized and autonomous private writing is like a wild horse that has run away, and the magician's scepter is unrestrained and unregulated. Objectively speaking, Zhang Zao's courage and talent in criticism and creation fully demonstrated the advantages of the role of "poet critic". At that time, it was the golden age of poetry after the "New Poetry Wave". More and more peers and descendants began to flock to the wave under the call of his halo and reputation, heading towards today and the future.

As a representative figure of the "intellectual writing" poet cluster in the 1990s, Zang Di, in the dual dimensions of poetry creation and theoretical criticism, formed a successor to a group of poet critics represented by Zhang Zao. He focused on the derivative analysis and development of the value of "meta-poetry", showed a full interest and talent in philosophical issues, and devoted himself to the research of "intellectualized" expression and attempts at rhetorical innovation for a

long time. The predecessors represented by Mu Dan and Bian Zhilin were highly respected by him. Zang Di almost had the opportunity to absorb the accumulated essence of the development of several generations of "poet critics" in Chinese new poetry, becoming a lucky person and successor of history in a certain sense. As Zang Di wrote in a letter to critic Chen Chao in April 1997, "I have always had a genre-specific fascination and affinity for criticism"^[7]. His poetic literacy and desire for criticism almost exemplify the results of the accumulation of many groups and experiences in the development of modern poetry to this stage. Starting from his generation, outstanding poets seem to have embarked on a destined complex and multifaceted path, and critics have become the poet's armor or another identity card. Compared with the poets and critics who emerged in the third generation of poetry movement, such as Bai Hua, Zhou Lunyou, Shang Zhongmin, Li Yawei, Wan Xia, who were rich in the values of "folk writing" and even "oral language trend", such as "they", "non-nonism", "rough manism" and "holism", Zang Di, who has been immersed in the ivory tower for a long time and studied under Sun Yushi, a master in the field of literature and modern and contemporary poetry research during the May Fourth period, undoubtedly has more knowledge resources and "circle culture" advantages than others. His poetic background and image seem to foreshadow a trend of academicization and professionalization of contemporary poets.

As Huang Canran said, "The only responsibility and conscience of a poet is the exploration of language" ^[8]. Poets with literary conscience and the spirit of language exploration often expand their ideological characteristics in the field of criticism, assisting or even participating in guiding the internal logic of criticism activities. Zang Di once said that "poetry culture is essentially based on the belief that if we want to change our lives, we must first change our language"^[9]. In the field of language sensitivity, poets undoubtedly have unique experience compared to traditional critics. Through a combination of practical writing on the one hand and theoretical analysis on the other, it is not difficult to explore, analyze, and even surpass the previous concept of "exploration" to form a systematic and complex value index in order to correct or assist the development of literature. The poet's lively creative thinking is like a medicine to cure fatigue, which broadens the field of criticism and provides a richer methodology. For example, according to Benedetto Croce, "If 'intuition' relies on imagination to pay attention to individual objects and modal impressions, and even to aesthetic images at will, then 'logic' relies on reason to recognize the common characteristics of heaven and man and universal connections, and to define or name them with concepts"^[10]. In the theoretical research field that generally implements "logic" as the main body, the chain-like literary history tracing and textual research, as well as the immersive deconstruction of text reading or a single field, are like foreign visitors who have little communication with the poet's unrestrained "emotional" thinking. The impromptu bursts of thought such as "flash of inspiration" that poetry creation has long relied on are essentially a way of expression supported by imagination close to "intuition". The so-called "poetry does not work with common sense, but with imagination"^[11] is just like this.

The poet-critic group is good at making up for and repairing the above problems by taking action. Due to the leap and integration of their own identities, their thinking forms mutual involvement and coherence. Especially since 1978, Chinese modern poetry has entered its second "climax period". Under the numerous schools and flags, the verbal battles and spit flying on paper are no longer a situation that the old-school critics have enough energy and experience to cope with. At the Dingfu Village Conference in October 1980, critics such as Ding Li, Song Lei, and Li Yuanluo faced the surge of the literary trend of the new era. Their ideas of simply trying to analyze it with negation or the old theoretical map were ruthlessly pierced by reality. This is only a tiny epitome of the current era. In the larger field, theoretical chapters written by young poets,

represented by "A Destructive Breakthrough of Existing Aesthetic Concepts of Poetry", emerge in an endless stream. The advancement of history makes the birth of new and large numbers of "poet-critics" who have grown into the backbone of the poetry world a kind of inevitability. Since the 1980s, the number of active poet critics and their status in the poetry and theoretical circles have increased dramatically compared with the previous half a century. They are full of signs of the future and are indeed filling the gaps in the poetry landscape. As Fan Yunjing once pointed out, "constructing one's own theory to guide personal writing practice, while also formulating critical standards to observe the writing of peers" ^[12] is the greatest significance of poet critics to poetics in the 1990s and beyond.

This "effectiveness" is almost irreplaceable. Poets are almost naturally closer to the scene of writing than critics. The exploration of the field and even the advantage of participating in the development of the activities are the prerequisites for them to obtain excessive experience and information. As the dual "presence" of poetry, poet critics, like archaeologists or sociologists who have been engaged in field research for a long time, occupy a special and convenient position in the trend of discovering new materials, new problems and building new theories. For example, Xidu studied Zang Di, Luo Yihe studied Haizi, Zhang Qinghua studied Ouyang Jianghe, and Jing Wendong studied Liang Ping. Poet critics are like the "blockchain technology" commonly seen in the field of financial cryptocurrency. They can have close relationships with their colleagues or simple poets and critics, and the ideological accounts of cooperation, integration or different opinions can be clear. This is a foresight and prediction of the development direction of Chinese new poetry, a practice of actual practice, and a summary and return visit to past poetics, a questioning and tribute.

2. Compound Writing: Critic-Poet

Literati who combine poetry criticism with text creation often take critics as their first identity, and the label of poet appears later. In a few cases, such as Zang Di and Wang Jiabin, they take both into account at the initial stage of contact with poetics, and are in a relatively balanced state of knowledge structure and identity consciousness. Tracing the birth and development of the "critic poet" group is a huge issue that is almost a thousand years long and a continental concept. From a macro perspective, from the Southern and Northern Dynasties to the Sui and Tang Dynasties in ancient China, there were cases of literary critics or scholars in the overall cultural field engaging in poetry creation, such as Zhong Rong who compiled "Poetry" and Sikong Tu who created "Twenty-Four Poems". Since the Song Dynasty, with the rise of the trend of literati notes and the heyday of Ci studies, it has become common for scholars to discuss poetry and compete in knowledge. Compiling books to evaluate the works of peers and even predecessors is a common practice for masters such as Wang Yuzhen, Dai Fugu, Zhang Jie, and Yan Yu. Zhao Bingwen, Li Ye, Wang Tingyun, and Zhao Xun in the northern region of the Jin and Yuan Dynasties also inherited a similar attitude of combining scholarship and creation. It can be said that Chinese poetics in the classical era has a long and orderly development of critic poet tradition. Europe, which has long been the center of Western culture, has had the concept of critics engaging in poetry creation for thousands of years. For example, Quintus Horace Flaccus, who compiled the Art of Poetry, lived in the ancient Roman Empire before Christ. Since the modern era, critics after the 19th century, represented by André Breton who wrote the Surrealist Manifesto, have also been keen on personally engaging in text creation. After the rise and development of modern Chinese poetry in the 20th century, the identity of Chinese critics and

poets actually has a dual-link or even diversified historical genealogy to trace and a reference system to follow. However, scholars who grew up in a strong Western learning atmosphere in the early stage were still ignorant when Chinese poetics underwent a major change that had never happened since ancient times. There were still a limited number of poets and poetry works, and poetry criticism was even more scarce and "helpless". In the eyes of later scholars, some critical descriptions of modern poetry almost "completely overlapped" with the systematic description of literary history^[13], lacking the personal summary or originality that critics should have. On the other hand, the ideas and theoretical frameworks are mostly from foreign countries, not from China, which inevitably leads to rejection.

With the rapid development of modern Chinese poetry, after the 1940s, due to the continuous breakthroughs and construction of textual ideas and language systems, literati with dual identities of critics and poets gradually grew up, and the prototype of "critic poets" under the modern concept has become clearer, such as Zang Kejia and Yuan Shupai who wrote "realistic" satirical poems, Chen Jingrong and Tang Xi who promoted the interpretation of the concepts of "metaphor" and "symbol" with the magazine "Chinese New Poetry", Zhu Guangqian who has a strong scholarly temperament, and Ai Qing and Huang Yaomian who are politically ideological, with their respective poetry texts as the main battlefield and theoretical criticism as the trench, forming a picture of mutual reflection and debate. It was not until the 1950s that members of the poetics field faced the situation of being separated between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait or even leaving their homeland due to political factors. Some of them went to the Taiwan Strait and later formed the "49 Generation" represented by Qin Zihao, Luo Fu, Zhou Mengdie, Yu Guangzhong, etc., and the next ten years became the golden age of poetry. Most poets and critics who stayed in the mainland were all integrated into the "New Democratic Revolution" and the mighty "Cultural Revolution" in the 1960s. The creation and development of the identity of "critic poet" almost stagnated. As Li Zehou bluntly said in the 1980s, "the opportunity for re-enlightenment has arrived"^[14]. The "enlightenment" of the entire society and culture is the foundation for the development of poetics.

Finally, the critics and poets reached a relatively perfect state around the 1990s. On the one hand, the identity construction was perfected. After the "old three generations" of intellectuals, the younger generation of literati (born in the 1960s) became the powerful main axis of the local poetry scene with fuller passion and good basic knowledge structure (education level), plus the freedom of information caused by the increasing globalization. On the other hand, it was the urgent need of the times. Due to the long-term development of Chinese new poetry, the language malpractices and changes have reached the point where the bottleneck urgently needs to be broken. The critics and poets with theoretical deconstruction and text innovation capabilities have participated in and even presided over the program construction and text output of different schools. The most outstanding contribution is the awareness and action of self-correction, just as Michel Foucault called the "three relationships" contained in the art of governance^[15] (the first is "truth understood as dogma", the second is "the special and individualized cognition of the individual", and the third is various "reflective skills" including universal rules, special knowledge, perception, methods of review, confession, conversation, etc.). Critics and poets generally have "reflective skills" and are relatively self-conscious. In his poems, Zang Di once talked about "must be more active than experience/must participate in the most active transformation" through the mouths of objects such as "Mallarmé" and "Rose"^[16]. Writing that sticks to the old ways and relies on experience and experience is no longer new in the eyes of critics. Even the description or portrayal of the current situation of the times is a bit boring. The sharp eyes of the academy are aimed at pens with more cutting-edge awareness and pioneering

value. Critics and poets are the representatives who are keen on this. Most of them have "transcendental" thinking. Compared with the speculation or pasting of real elements, they care more about opening new doors and windows in the world of thought. Compared with the overall and macroscopic historical narrative, they are more inclined to microscopic and personalized writing.

The shift or deflection of text value is almost what most critics and poets have been committed to promoting in the past thirty years. With the rapid development of social economy, the fast pace of life is involved in excessive pheromones, and the attitude of "strong intervention" in politics is gradually leaving the scene. A more open and inclusive cultural environment provides a hotbed for criticism and poetry on paper. However, the changes that continue to occur at the same time also include the ideological impact of material desires, which has caused writing to compromise with utilitarianism and commercialization, and even compliance. The "golden age" of poets is also fading rapidly. Compared with 1978-1998, the poetic environment between 1999 and 2019 has undergone great changes, with both advantages and disadvantages. The critics and poets have a deep understanding of the cold and warm. It was during this period that Zang Di gradually restrained or eliminated the romantic lyrical tendencies that he had in his early years. His language began to approach Seamus Heaney's "mutually restrained poetic tension"^[17]. A "depersonalized" thought guided his words, allowing the soul of the poem to travel through multiple historical plots to find "who" to talk to or speak for, that is, to "construct a personal poetics that tends to be inclined towards daily experience and small things"^[18]. This kind of text is enough to travel through the fragments of unofficial history, and even to transform scenes under a dying green lamp. In "Luoyang, the 29th Year of Kaiyuan" he wrote:

*Quietly, I am sensitive to great souls
Almost able to tolerate everything; not that I can't see
My friend's flaws, his neglect
Have also hurt the pride of Haruki in my heart;*

*But in the end I realized that his talent
constitutes the limit of arrival; like a boundary
Dragged back from the distant stars into the peony's pistil.
My genius comes from the time he saves.^[19]*

There are many works about Du Fu. Throughout the ages, starting from his family background, his achievements in the imperial examinations, his years in the officialdom, the turmoil of war, and his sighs in his old age, it has almost become the only way to pay tribute to or express feelings to the poet in the text. Whenever the great poet is mentioned, the great era must be mentioned, which has become a kind of implicit convention. Zang Di chose not to write in this way. He had the courage to cross all the barriers created by the above-mentioned social customs and official historiography, and directly approached Du Fu, conversing with him in the "interstellar" and "peony", and feeling his "flaws" and "pride". Just as he said in the award speech when he received the Lu Xun Literature Award in 2022, "to comprehend the great and the subtle, to listen to the echo of the spirit, and to reach the dual praise of man and nature in the profound dialogue"^[20] is the most prominent poetic feature of Zang Di. When observing the world and experiencing life, he fully mobilizes his "hearing" and "vision", but when creating poetry, he often relies more on "illusion" and "intuition" to repair the spiritual bond and activate the microscopic and fleeting. The poetic space in the middle or even in the air, with its powerful revelation against

decay, allows imagination and freedom to overcome harshness and austerity, just as Martin Heidegger said, "poetry appears in the simple form of play, poetry freely creates its image world and indulges in the realm of imagination, and this play therefore escapes the seriousness of decision"^[21]. After him, several younger critics and poets who entered the poetry world between 1990 and 2005, such as Zhang Taozhou, Leng Shuang, Hu Liang, Li Zhangbin, Hu Sang, and Zhu Qinyun, basically followed this point, and took the path of privatization in the interpretation of history, and developed a richer strategy of "alchemy" or "gazing".

Since the beginning of this century, "critics writing poetry has become a small tradition in contemporary literature"^[22]. With the improvement of identity construction and the rise of the influence of the relevant poetry circles, the cluster characteristics and even certain problems exposed have begun to be discovered by peers, or more other poets and pure critics, becoming a new poetic trend created by "critic poets" passively or unconsciously. First of all, it is about the relationship between the unity of classical poetry, traditional cultural structure and contemporary writing. As literati who provide theoretical fulcrums for texts with "knowledge paths", they often stand at the forefront of the concept of "experimentation", almost in a state of different paths but similar risks with the "avant-garde" that emerged from the folk writing cluster. Critics and poets mobilize their comprehensive interpretive abilities to achieve cultural exchange and communication beyond time and space in a strong interventionist way. Through a language similar to translation, they first grind the objective width of the real time axis, and then reconstruct or continue to build condensed poetic sentences from relatively fragmented and componentized information blocks. They implement a transformation that is almost two-way or parallel to T.S. Eliot's concept of "abandoning tradition in one period, and then people will be curious about how to use traditional forms to conduct new experiments in the next period"^[23], forming a language trial in the context of "abandoning tradition" while promoting feasibility research on the rebirth and continuation of "tradition". There is no absolute monopoly of "this stage" and "next stage". In this process, "trying to add some so-called non-individual and non-self things"^[24] forms a poetic perspective and involvement ability with wider dimensions and broader levels, such as the so-called "historical dark corners that words cannot reach"^[25], which can be included in the scope of writing and presentation. Critics and poets who come from a scholarly background have the foresight, meticulousness and rigor to eliminate or bridge the writing challenges that are full of complexity and conflict.

Secondly, there is the danger of mixing multiple cross-theoretical and cross-disciplinary information elements. Zang Di, who has "two conflicting forces" in his poems^[26], is good at using a series of writings such as "Brief History" and "Festivals" composed of several specific chapters to promote the construction of a macro concept, which includes multi-portal and multi-style knowledge categories and writing objects, thereby breaking through the relatively fixed visual threshold limitations of the past. On the one hand, it can alleviate the anxiety of thinking about cultural reconstruction in the field of modern or even postmodern literature. While abandoning "ultimate value" or "absolute correctness", it does not completely overturn or bypass the context of the Chinese poetic tradition. In "Introduction to Leiden", he once wrote, "If your leap is not limited to/just an accidental observation of the scenery, Glimpse, / Every bridge seems to be protecting fate"^[27]. The "you" in the poem can be Zang Di himself, or it can be seen as a group of critics and poets. "Every bridge" can be understood as information with different value characteristics and different original attributes. At the same time, the image of "bridge" may be interpreted in combination with the ecology of the poetry world, and may get another more sharp interpretation. As Wang Ao said, "The main work of modern poets and critics is to open up new frontiers for new poetry. They participate in the interaction between poetry and politics, history,

religion, science and other fields”^[28]. Zang Di and his colleagues are committed to becoming a “bridge” between disciplines, between information, within life, and between fate. They take communication and coherence as their mission, but do not regard themselves as absolute “spokespersons”.

The rich background of high-level intellectuals, in addition to the foresight advantage possessed by the critics and poets discussed in the above-mentioned extensive research, is also similar to a kind of powerful and inescapable shackles on another level. They have long or even lifelong accepted the attraction from the ivory tower, shaping an almost unshakable academic center, and the theoretical structure participates in or even dominates the thinking of writing. In the end, they inevitably fall into contradictions in their hearts, becoming a contradiction or integrator of “avant-garde” color and “conservatism”, and assuming the role of responsible person or navigator back and forth between the two situations. Poets who are critics have an academic attitude towards their own writing that is no less than that of their career of criticism. Zang Di once said that “the power of form determines the depth of concept” ^[29]. Under the operation of this mentality, the consciousness of maintaining the so-called “orthodoxy” is inevitably strong and divergent. They always take frequent steps to challenge theoretical innovation, but almost hesitate to do so. It seems that behind the desire to make attempts, they are engaged in lingering persuasion or struggle with their own academic cards. This can also be seen in the texts of Xidu, Lu Ye, Jiang Dengke and others. At the same time, they are faced with a mission to break through the inherent “orthodoxy” or advocate for it, and an opportunity to step onto a broader value stage. Zhang Xudong once said, “One question that contemporary Chinese intellectuals and writers must consider is how to maintain cultural autonomy in the context of globalization? How can the continuity of values, ethics, and the world of daily life unfold according to its own logic, rather than being forcibly incorporated into the mainstream discourse and value system of world literature?”^[30] The connotation of his thoughts is highly consistent with the country's current global development policy in the fields of ideology and local culture, indicating the current focus of “intellectuals” and “writers” and the basic path to take action to achieve it. The group of critic poets happens to combine the above two identities in one, shouldering the burden of both theory and writing. They are destined not to merely conduct textual research and creation on the fragmented spatial and temporal information and single cultural elements in a divide-and-conquer manner, but to break through the constraints of ideological baggage, just as Chen Chao called “historical-rhetorical comprehensive criticism”^[31]. They focus on the “imagination” and “summoning” of discourse to enhance the vitality and effectiveness of critical language on poetry, abandon the “relativist” logic that is good at giving birth to moderate texts, and delve into the dimension of “communication” with a corrective mind, creating something new while borrowing from others, so that even ambiguous, distorted, and embellished content can be presented as the Chinese language of the world and have a precise foothold.

3. Symptoms of Thought: Authority and Prejudice

In the past 40 years, especially after entering the 21st century, poets who led the creation of texts were the main creators of poetic language, and critics who presided over text reviews were the main judges of the nature of poetry. This ecological model of the poetry world has been gradually broken. Faced with the continuous rise of the group that both participated in the creation and judged each other, it seems that the relatively balanced relationship between poets

and critics, which included constraints and cooperation, has been completely broken. Some of the "well water" and "river water" of the poetry world have thus merged into a big river. While poets and critics continue to show great positive value, few people have analyzed the problems on the dark side. One of the main reasons is that the privatization and centralization of the "judgment power" or "review power" of poetics has forced the weight of "freedom" and "truth" to face a situation of decline. Members who occupy ivory towers and prominent positions in the literary world almost naturally have the advantage of contacting and even participating in controlling the mainstream discourse. They have long been in a state of competition and cooperation with poets of other social attributes and literary backgrounds over the right to define and the dominance of important concepts such as the linguistic shortcomings, ideological changes or value orientations of contemporary Chinese poetry. The latter are always exaggerated to create a scene of flourishing poetics and a hundred schools of thought, while the former face the disposal plan of being shelved. Only a very small number of literati with academic conscience and an even smaller number of those who betray the "collective interests" will pay attention to this and are committed to uncovering the true reality of "prosperity but not prosperity". Regarding the struggle for the "scepter" of poetics, poets and critics play a crucial but not entirely glorious role. Compared with the middle and early stages of the development of new poetry over the past century, several groups of predecessors who were slightly confused in academic skills and exploration vision but had pure minds and generally humanistic feelings, some contemporary poets and critics have an unconcealable trend of moral decline.

As early as the poetic debate and confrontation between the "intellectual cluster" and the "folk writing group" between 1987 and 1997, there was a great contradiction between the two sides' claims on the "posture" of writing^[32]. The "poet critics" group, which was derived from the former, almost won the majority of seats in the official discourse field with the support or help of some senior academic predecessors in the industry. In the following ten years, they successfully recorded this "advantage" of the year into the history of poetry by compiling "poetry history" or writing "critical essays", and blurred or even concealed some important content related to the definition of nature. With the passage of objective time, a one-way perspective "glass" of time was formed for future generations. It is clear from the academy to the folk, but it is difficult to look at the academy from the standpoint of the folk. With the illegalization of "underground publishing/independent publishing", the folk poetry circle can only rely on Internet communities or purely offline gatherings for oral communication to preserve archives and poetic sparks. Critics and poets have an unshirkable responsibility for causing this kind of inequality in information rights and knowledge channels. Only 20 years later, when I opened the "A Brief History of Modern Chinese Poetry", I saw that Xie Mian's definition of "no difference in standpoint" between the popular consciousness and popularization advocated by folk writing and the so-called Westernization of poetry in intellectual writing^[33] had become an iron rule that was widely cited in the academic community and almost unquestionable. It seemed that the poetic controversy that occurred at that time was just a tea party where both sides had no different standpoints, and a casual "no disagreement" became a stamp of a major event in the history of contemporary poetry. In fact, as Zhao Tingyang said in the field of cultural criticism and philosophical research, competition, discord, cooperation or negation between cultures have become the norm. "Which values are qualified to become universal values, or who is qualified to define what are universal values, has become a fundamental political issue"^[34]. The political struggles between literati often cannot cause any earthquakes in the real world, but in the world of thought, they are undoubtedly earth-shaking or turbulent games. These contents, which should have been valued and even studied to elaborate new artistic pursuits and critical insights,

have encountered blockade or suppression of a certain "survival strategy". In the end, the old scholars released goodwill measures to calm the situation, or settled the matter by achieving a "value appeasement law" of "public" maintenance.

In response to Li Jingze's call that "the Chinese path in literature, like the Chinese path in social reality, should not only highlight its own uniqueness, but also pose a fundamental challenge to the world order, making it more fair and reasonable, and should not be measured by established Western standards"^[35], the contemporary Chinese poetics situation presents a sense of fallacy that the affairs within the field have not yet been sorted out, so how can we talk about clearing the snow outside the field? He Yanhong once directly pointed out that the current Chinese new poetry "has many chronic diseases and some of its bad habits that are difficult to correct, almost making the meaning and value of criticism, as well as its most basic credibility, become very questionable"^[36]. When critics face a crisis of academic credibility and poets face the dilemma of theoretical abstruseness and being out of the guiding value, poets and critics with dual identities are the biggest victims, and at the same time, they are also largely recognized as the biggest troublemakers. From undercurrents to being unable to conceal, the disputes over the development path of poetics and the civil war for dominant power also reflect two other more terrifying or sad problems: the systemic disorder across identities, the chain of interests that needs to be warned but is difficult to solve; the tragedy of literati politics, from the "involvement" of poetic theory to the prejudice and arrogance of moral positions.

Regarding the systemic "disorder" problem, from the perspective of objective development, since the new century, the professional requirements for the identity of poets have been constantly rising, while at the same time, the absolute independence of their identity has disappeared. Similar to the painters, curators, scholars/critics, channel merchants in the art field, etc. have been constantly merging, and the fences between identities have become adhesives. The "evolutionary" direction of shouldering multiple duties and one person with multiple skills has objectively created a new form of the industry. From a subjective perspective, the role played by critics and poet-critics themselves in fueling the trend is a major factor that cannot be ignored. They regard themselves as protectors or rangers of serious literature, and have a relatively strong sense of moralism or moat. Some members even strictly adhere to the critical theory system originated from the West without any changes, and regard it as a guiding principle, completely ignoring the fact that it is incompatible with the context of Chinese poetry. Just as Edward Said and Cao Shunqing explained the problem of "variation" in the frontier exploration of comparative literature, "when a literary theory travels from one country to another, this theoretical discourse is bound to mutate"^[37]. However, in order to defend their own "discourse power" and even their colleagues' group's far-fetched academic self-esteem, some poets and critics often acquiesce in or even promote the growth and spread of things such as language privacy and overly personalized writing styles, which eventually become the main obstacles in the contemporary poetics ecology.

The "psychological distance between the poet and real life, which is reflected in the text as the distance between the text context and the reader"^[38]. The poetry criticism that is shelved affects poetry writing, and the works produced in this way are increasingly far from the public's aesthetic and reading ability. Good texts are not necessarily popular and deeply rooted in the general public, but the texts that are overly entangled, entangled and meaninglessly playful in language have almost become a kind of "misleading" in the contemporary poetry world, providing a "theoretical endorsement" that is extremely correct or reasonable for the formulaic and data-based language. Tang Xiaolin once issued an extremely sharp criticism on this issue, "If a poet's head is full of a lot of Western literary theories, and he talks about this and that all day long, can such a person still write poetry?"^[39] It is very regrettable that in the contemporary poetic

environment, "such people" can not only write poetry, but also often appear on the stage in the guise of critics and poets, and even become important literati who can do things with ease. The reason behind this is that the mutual benefits represented by the personal links of cliques, academic resources and social fame and wealth resources have formed several modules that are as stable and "mutually helpful" as the industrial chain. From small groups between single colleges, schools, and regional literary groups, to large "alliance" systems formed by the careful cooperation of all the above "groups", including the Writers Association, the Federation of Literary and Art Circles, publishing houses, literary magazines and academic journals, academic critics, senior editors, cultural merchants/brokers, etc., it is easy to create or even mass-produce poets and critics in this structure. The whole process of contemporary literary circles, such as publication of works, award nominations, book publishing, recommendation of famous writers, theoretical interpretation, value measurement, joining the Writers Association, project funding, etc., is handled in a routine manner. In recent years, plagiarism incidents have been common, award winners have been frequently controversial, and journal manuscripts have fallen into private hands. Such situations only look at the surface and deal with them as a single problem, which will never cure the huge "inflammatory" system. In the above system, a large number of critics and poets have long maintained a critical and immoral role. The voices and rebuttals of a few conscientious scholars can easily be covered up and strangled by the huge chain of interests and power machinery. As Chen Chao pointed out 13 years ago, "many poetry criticisms lack the function of identifying and upholding values. Their focus is only on the interests and interests within the circle. The arbitrary naming of criticism and the hype of worthless topics are also common drawbacks."^[40] However, to this day, this phenomenon has not changed at all, and has even entered the more central cultural field, making the subversion of public credibility and fairness between pen and paper a normal phenomenon.

What is even more regrettable is that the hope placed on the younger generation of scholars and poets to change or repair the status quo in the future is almost shattered. Most of the poet critics or critic poets born after 1990 have chosen to submit "surrender letters" or "letters of surrender" to the interest system of the poetic ecology and even to individual authoritarian representatives in exchange for space and opportunities for "progress." For example, Ma Siyu, who studied under Zhang Li, a famous critic and deputy director of the Prose Committee of the Chinese Writers Association, praised the poems of He Xiangyang, a famous critic and poet and director of the Creative Research Department of the Chinese Writers Association, with a multi-dimensional praise and deconstruction analysis. He praised the poems in a meticulous manner, regardless of whether they were indeed superior or completely illusory, and as long as he could find any theoretical content, he would not hesitate to praise them passionately. For example, when faced with He Xiangyang's so-called poetry criticism texts in the middle and late period that lacked practical value, lost their sharp thinking, and indulged in "circle culture" to whitewash each other's inflated status, Ma Siyu chose to "follow the will of heaven" and named them "emotional criticism"^[41], and even "erected a monument and biography" for them, calling them a model of literary criticism and promoting them to the world. For example, when faced with a text like "Green" that is made up of short words and supplemented by a line skip key:

*No blue
Can accurately describe
Its proportion
Just like this lake
Open and clear*

*Can you describe
From the past
Tears
Which drop is it^[42]*

This young scholar, born in 1994, skillfully carried out the steps of selecting and refining "advantages" and finally "named" it as a masterpiece of great refinement and condensation. She called the short poem that copied ordinary things, logic and common life onto paper "a short poem with a strong sense of humanistic care"^[43], and even attached the name of "tradition", making the ordinary text of "one-click line break" be rendered as a masterpiece that cares about major themes such as fate and survival. Such behavior is almost the epitome of the younger generation of "lucky" critics. Compared with the level and ethics of several earlier generations of predecessors such as Huo Junming, Fu Yuanfeng, Lu Ye, etc., it is quite different. It is precisely under the cultivation and urging of such a poetry criticism environment and atmosphere that a large number of "same" line poems have gathered strong theoretical evidence and support. The "circle" game rules have become a "knot" that is clearly visible and unspeakable and ineradicable in the hearts of the public in the poetry world. The degeneration of more literati is quite natural in this context.

The issue of unrestrained "guilt by association" is relatively limited compared to the fluctuations in the overall poetics field caused by the above-mentioned systematic disorder. The "firepower" of the confrontation is more concentrated within the critics and poets, mainly presenting theoretical conflicts between the old and the new, and the bottom-line or low-bottom language struggle around theoretical discourse power. The "Panfeng Debate" conference in 1999, the criticism around Lin Xianzhi in 2006, and the criticism around Bei Dao in 2011 are classic cases. However, the former's debate scope still has basic moral constraints. At that time, critics and poets were generally young and did not have the mentality of excessively defending the orthodoxy or rights. The disputes were almost entirely centered on arguments such as "local experience" or "mainstream order" to launch poetic refutations. The latter two situations have broken through the boundaries of literature and even crossed the bottom line of basic respect for personality. For example, Li Shaojun and Sun Wenbo criticized Lin Xianzhi in the name of "moral cognition rather than poetic cognition"^[44], while Zang Di launched a nearly all-round attack on Bei Dao in interviews and long articles totaling more than 90,000 words, which involved a unilateral definition of Bei Dao's poetic level and status in the poetry world, calling him a "second-rate poet." He also labeled Bei Dao with irresponsible labels such as "grabbing international cultural capital" based on personal speculation or imagination (without providing evidence). This huge unilateral attack campaign ended with Bei Dao's disdain to respond in an equal manner^[45]. In essence, Zang Di, who carried out personal attacks under the guise of "justice", frequently used self-talk or "drawing the target first and then shooting the arrow" to carry out targeted criticism against Bei Dao. Hats such as "maliciously smearing the mainland poetry world" were first invented by him and then pinned on Bei Dao's head. Zang Di's core appeal is actually similar to the "Pass Bei Dao"^[46] action of the "third generation" poets, who attempted to expand the "poetry territory" of individuals or their groups through the use of linguistic violence that crossed the basic bottom line. However, his behavior has in fact left a legacy to the critic poet group and even the entire poetry world, namely, the excessive and even politicized struggle among literati.

As Liang Xuebo said, "As a suspicious spiritual heritage, the poetry of the 1980s will inevitably be subject to severe scrutiny from today and the future"^[47]. It is necessary to question

and re-explore the experience, established logic and writing paradigm accumulated in the past poetics. This behavior is almost the key to promoting the rapid progress and iteration of Chinese new poetry in the past century. However, the concept of "examination" cannot be equated with "criticism" or "complete refutation". Extreme cultural struggle and slanderous actions are inevitably full of emotional factors such as prejudice and impulse. In order to realize the desire of "conquering" the poetry world or the purpose of strong value domination for oneself and one's own school, the behavior of forming a party, using the debate of theory and poetry as a cover, and actually completing the potential demand for the struggle for discourse power is completely contrary to the essence of academia and conscience. Even from the perspective of some scholars, "intellectual writing, as the successor of Misty Poetry, not only inherited the idealism and utopian temperament of Misty Poetry, but also had a similar position with Misty Poetry in terms of the publicity of Enlightenment and resistance to mainstream ideology"^[48]. As the "heirs", members of "intellectual writing" lack the most basic respect for the poets of the "Today School" era, which is close to the concept of "patricide". To explore the reasons for such behavior, we may return to the issue of interest circles in the contemporary poetry world studied above. After all, Bei Dao, who settled in Hong Kong in 2007 and officially returned to the Chinese mainland in 2011 when he was interviewed by Xinhua News Agency at the Qinghai Lake Poetry Festival, has been immersed in foreign literary circles for a long time. He is inevitably unfamiliar with the "rules of the game" of the contemporary mainland poetry world that have already been formed, so that when he expresses his opinions, he is prone to "accidentally touch" those tight and invisible "red lines" and fall into the vortex of criticism.

In addition to the disputes within the critic poet group and the contradictions in the overall literary ecological environment, the most noteworthy issue is the relationship between authors and readers. The self-conceit, aloofness and even arrogance displayed by the critic poet group have, to a certain extent, caused the shrinkage of the contemporary new poetry reading group, indirectly leading to the decline of commercial value and the stripping of the "gold content" of the poet's identity. Among the small number of readers who are still willing to be the audience of poetry, apart from practitioners in the field, the majority of ordinary readers also face a sense of alienation on paper. The barrier between poets and readers is difficult to eliminate. In this regard, Zang Di said that "the obscure poems pointed out in the current poetry culture are all a childish reaction of readers' giant baby syndrome"^[1]. Describing readers as "giant babies" almost separates the literati from the reading group and puts them in an unequal and almost confrontational situation. The critics and poets have full confidence in their own texts, and even have an overly strong self-awareness, so they will make such statements. Behind the so-called "childish reaction", it actually reflects a dissatisfaction with the reading group's ability to understand. The subconscious belief is that readers have not been able to keep up with the author's pace and develop and improve, and therefore cannot "understand" and cannot experience the value of "higher life"^[2] in poetry. However, when critics and poets blindly pursue fictional, imaginary and prospective life and emotions, they ignore the most basic characteristics of human nature and thought in culture and art. Li Zehou once pointed out that human nature should not be a priori dominated divinity, but should be rationality in sensibility, society in the individual, imagination and understanding in perception and emotion. Creation and treatment of art should appear in a similar way as a "meaningful form"^[3]. The so-called "meaning" can be understood as not

^[1] Li Lijuan. On the Gains and Losses of Zang Di's Poetic Language Techniques [J]. Oriental Forum—Journal of Qingdao University (Social Science Edition), 2025(1):100-111.

^[2] Zang Di. World Poetry Day [M]. Nanjing University Press, 2023:299.

^[3] Li Zehou. The Process of Beauty [M]. Sanlian Bookstore, 2009:217.

deviating from the habitual thinking basis of human beings, not depriving of the value of being based on reality rather than pure "transcendentalism", not giving up rational thinking, and not completely separating from the value of human and social nature. When critics and poets go deep into the expansion or deletion of the space of surreal literature, they should not completely obey or take the initiative to enter the illusory system like a precision instrument, the flat or concave reality thinking, and should not live in the cage of essence in the superimposed writing of studying things. It is a pity that the literati who broke through the paradigm of the previous era fell into the new paradigm they built with their own hands. The final outcome is that the language magician has become an "abstractist", relying on the struggle of running out of ideas to maintain a seemingly decent but helpless word game. Just as the historical community has long had the problem that "there is often a huge gap between the academic achievements of historians and the historical knowledge of the general public, and the latter always tend to accept and nurture historical myths"^[4], historians have never avoided the existence of the "gap", nor have they treated the public with sarcasm, disgust or even contempt. Scholars represented by Li Kaiyuan, Xing Yitian and Peng Xiaoyu have repeatedly talked about the "3+n"^[5] historical structure, supplementing the presentation and research of history with a variety of "historical narrative" methods, including literary interpretation, dramatic works and other media that are closer to the public. This is not only a pioneering and methodological innovation in the professional academic field, but also actually shows the scholars' humanistic care and understanding of the public.

The literary world, especially the field of poetics, needs critics, poets and poet critics with feelings, talents and creative vision to fight against the dark room of "elite minority" wrapped in authoritarianism, so as to get rid of the "circle" maze formed by the huge interest chain, pick up or revive the most ancient and tenacious critical spirit and poetic will of the century-old new poetry, and continue to reflect. When climbing the spiral ladder of values, should we treat readers as friends or turn around and discard them like worn-out shoes? Regarding the exploration movement of future poetics, will it be aimed at breaking through or expanding the boundaries of "freedom" and "beauty", or will it be about twisting the Rubik's Cube of images, manipulating the dice of language, and calculating a set of "novel" rules in the face of the unfamiliar face of the world and the portrait of oneself? Such a question may become a criticism of "poetry criticism" and is worthy of discussion.

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