

Pioneer in the Shadow: The Colloquial Experimental Poetry of Wang Xiaolong

CHAN Tah-Wei *
National Taipei University

Abstract

This article critically examines the poetic trajectory of Wang Xiaolong (王小龙), a pioneering figure whose work was profoundly shaped by the turbulent historical juncture between Misty Poetry (朦胧诗) and the 3rd-Generation Poetry Movement (第三代诗潮). While the Misty poets, particularly those associated with the Beijing-based Jintian School (今天派), spearheaded a new wave of poetic innovation, Wang Xiaolong, emerging from Shanghai, pursued a distinct path characterized by colloquial poetry grounded in urban everyday life and cultural sensibilities. Consequently, his contributions remained marginalized within dominant discourses of poetic historiography. Despite the overshadowing effect of this historiographical exclusion, Wang Xiaolong's colloquial poetic style can be seen as an antecedent to the aesthetic principles later embraced by 3rd-Gen poets. However, following the ascendancy of figures such as Han Dong (韩东), Wang Xiaolong found himself sidelined amidst the collective reconfiguration of poetic paradigms during the post-New Poetry movement (后新诗潮). His work thus occupies a liminal space, caught in the transitional dynamics between two major poetic currents. This article aims to reassess Wang Xiaolong's creative significance and critically reposition his contributions within the broader framework of poetic history.

Keywords: Wang Xiaolong, Han Dong, Pioneer, Colloquial poetry, Experimental poetry

* CHAN Tah-Wei, Distinguished Professor, National Taipei University.

1. Introduction: Behind the Revolution of Poetry

The experimental achievements of the Third-Generation (3rd-Gen) poets in vernacular expression precipitated a paradigm shift in poetic aesthetics, thereby cementing their pivotal position within the historical trajectory of Chinese poetry. This study primarily investigates the vernacular strategies distinctive to 3rd-Gen poetry while delineating their fundamental divergences from the vernacular style characteristic of the May Fourth “New Poetry” movement.

In their revolutionary endeavor to forge a new epoch of modern Chinese poetry, the May Fourth literati deliberately repudiated the prosodic accomplishments of classical Chinese poetry. Consequently, they resorted to appropriating Western poetic rhythms as compensatory mechanisms for the phonological and metrical deficiencies inherent in Republican-era “New Poetry.” The vernacular language deployed in the May Fourth movement fails to authentically replicate quotidian speech patterns, notably lacking the essential “speech tone” qualities. May Fourth poets extensively employed imagistic, topographical, and symbolic devices while simultaneously accommodating readerly aesthetics, ultimately cultivating a “Europeanized vernacular” (欧化白话) that became inextricably associated with intellectual elitism.

This interpretation markedly departs from Hu Shi’s (胡适) theoretical construct, wherein he sought to establish genealogical continuity between classical Chinese vernacular traditions and May Fourth colloquial modernism. Such an approach, however, neglects the crucial distinction that premodern Chinese texts predominantly utilized a “refined vernacular” – more accurately conceptualized as “literary written Chinese” rather than genuine “spoken Chinese.”

Scholarly research since 2000, particularly the work of Fudan University’s Yuan Jin (袁进) and other Chinese scholars, has substantiated that May Fourth poets adopted the “Europeanized vernacular” initially developed by Western missionaries during the Qing Dynasty for Bible translation. This linguistic variant evolved from localized vernacular forms rather than orthodox literary Chinese, representing a distinct linguistic register from the official lingua franca. (Yuan Jin, 2014, pp.1-10)

While this Europeanized vernacular demonstrates greater affinity with colloquial speech patterns than classical written forms, it nevertheless lacks sufficient literary refinement. The May Fourth poets’ creative task thus involved substantial artistic enhancement to elevate this linguistic medium to genuine poetic expression. Essentially, the vernacular deployed in May Fourth New Poetry constitutes a stylistically perfected iteration of the missionaries’ linguistic innovation, while still retaining fundamental

structures of written Chinese. During the Republican era (1912-1949), this synthesized form emerged as the dominant written medium in mainland China.

After the establishment of the People's Republic of China by the Chinese Communist Party, Mao Zedong's literary discourse exerted a profound influence on the trajectory of modern Chinese poetry. His advocacy for the use of Chinese folk vernacular supplanted the previously favored "Europeanized vernacular," thereby impeding the continuity of the May Fourth poetic tradition. During this period, poetry was largely reduced to a vehicle for political propaganda, with its artistic autonomy and expressive breadth significantly constrained.

It was not until the emergence of the Misty Poetry Movement, spearheaded by Bei Dao (北岛) and his contemporaries, that a discernible shift toward the ethos of the May Fourth Movement became evident. This literary resurgence was characterized by an engagement with contemporary Western poetry through Chinese translations. However, the Misty poets deliberately distanced themselves from the colloquial tradition, instead cultivating a new paradigm of elite poetry that diverged from the foundational principles of the May Fourth movement.

2. In the Shadow of Misty Poetry

In March 1979, Poetry Magazine (诗刊), China's most prestigious poetry journal, published Bei Dao's seminal poem "Reply" (回答). This publication signified the formal emergence of Misty Poetry amid a period of intense ideological and artistic debate, catalyzing a gradual destabilization of established aesthetic conventions within contemporary Chinese poetry. The dominant discursive authority in this poetic landscape was largely exercised by the "Jintian school" (今天派), a collective of poets who, as awakened intellectuals and cultural spokespeople, profoundly shaped the trajectory of poetic expression in China.

Initially regarded as a pejorative term, Misty Poetry underwent a significant reevaluation, ultimately being recognized as "a generation's dharma post," signifying its pivotal role in redefining literary sensibilities throughout the 1980s. In the nascent phase of contemporary Chinese poetry, particularly among the distinguished poets associated with the Jintian school, their luminous artistic presence captivated readers across the nation. However, their prominence inadvertently constrained the creative latitude available to other poets of the same generation, irrespective of their geographic proximity to Beijing or their locations in distant literary hubs such as Chengdu and Shanghai. The

evocative and enigmatic essence of Misty Poetry continues to reverberate through its verses, cementing its enduring literary influence.

In 1982, amidst the zenith of Misty Poetry's cultural ascendancy, Shanghai-based writer Wang Xiaolong (王小龙) (b. 1954) authored a seminal critical essay entitled "Far Sail" (远帆). This concise yet penetrating work serves as a valuable historical document chronicling the reception dynamics of Misty Poetry within Shanghai's literary circles, vividly depicting its wildfire-like dissemination and profound cultural permeation. "Back then, whenever poets met, the conversation inevitably turned to Misty Poetry—debating its importance, questioning where it was headed. The media got involved too, with newspapers chiming in on the discussion. Bei Dao and his peers left a deep imprint on the younger generation, their verses quietly shaping the poetry of aspiring writers. College students, captivated by Shu Ting's (舒婷) work, would recite 'Ave Maria' (圣母颂) in a way that almost felt like singing, their voices carrying both admiration and a touch of reverence." (Laomu, 1985a, p.105) This phenomenon underscores the profound impact of the Misty Poetry movement, spearheaded by Bei Dao, in shaping the aesthetic and intellectual orientation of emerging poets. Its influence extends beyond literary innovation, prompting critical reflections on the implications of an evolving cultural landscape—one in which poetic figures transcend their artistic roles and become objects of fervent admiration. Such a development has given rise to concerns regarding the potential for an excessive veneration of individual poets, raising questions about the boundaries between artistic inspiration and the cultivation of an uncritical form of idolization.

During the 1980s, Wang Xiaolong undertook the responsibility of guiding poetry training sessions for middle school students at the Shanghai Youth Palace (上海青年宫), demonstrating a profound dedication to fostering literary growth among young poets. However, he soon discerned a troubling trend: an excessive reliance on the imagery characteristic of Misty Poetry, often to the detriment of originality and substantive poetic engagement. This pervasive emulation, rather than enriching poetic expression, led to a mechanistic manipulation of imagery, ultimately constraining creative depth.

As Wang Xiaolong observed the escalating prominence of this practice, his disillusionment deepened. He lamented the reduction of poetry to an exercise in stylistic excess, where imagery was no longer employed as an organic extension of thought but rather as an arbitrary embellishment devoid of genuine meaning. His frustration became evident in his critique: "Image! It is exasperating—those chaotic and endlessly enumerated 'images' serve merely to validate a sentence or, worse, to mask sheer nonsense." (Laomu, 1985a, p.106) This growing concern underscored his conviction that poetry should transcend superficial aesthetic devices and remain a medium of intellectual and emotional resonance.

Wang's approach to poetry was deeply shaped by his critical stance on excessive imagery. Rejecting the stylistic framework of Misty Poetry, he embarked on a search for an alternative poetic language—an endeavor that, at the time, seemed almost futile. However, the legacy of May Fourth new poetry provided him with a crucial source of inspiration, prompting him to reconsider the role of vernacular Chinese in poetic expression.

As he articulated: “If we think of new poetry sixty years ago as being defined by vernacular Chinese, then it's time to bring that idea back. Poetry today should reflect the true essence of vernacular Chinese poetry. We need to move away from rigid labels, outdated idioms, overly ornamental imagery, and language that feels too scholarly or contrived. What we really want is a kind of everyday Chinese—something direct, powerful, and even a little childlike. It's about embracing natural imagery and humor while steering clear of automatic, formulaic effects. The goal? To capture the magic and unexpected beauty of daily life.” (Laomu, 1985a, pp.106-107)

Wang's vision sought to reinvigorate poetry by restoring linguistic authenticity, positioning it as an organic and resonant form of artistic expression rather than a mere exercise in stylistic embellishment. His insistence on simplicity and spontaneity marked a deliberate departure from prevailing literary conventions, advocating for a poetic sensibility rooted in genuine engagement with lived experience.

The concept of “Chinese colloquial language,” as articulated by Wang Xiaolong, refers to the vernacular language used in contemporary China. Given that May Fourth poets pioneered the use of spoken Chinese as a means of challenging the traditional written Chinese prevalent in classical literature—and considering the declining influence of the May Fourth standard—there arises a pressing need to reaffirm the significance of “daily colloquial writing” as a means of revitalizing poetic expression.

Indeed, what Wang Xiaolong terms “Chinese colloquial language” aligns closely with the idealized linguistic state envisioned by Hu Shi, yet none of the May Fourth poets fully realized this aspiration. At that historical juncture, poets primarily composed in modern written Chinese, a stylistic mode that largely excluded the organic linguistic rhythms of everyday speech from poetic composition. Consequently, reading May Fourth New Poetry often resembles engaging with literary prose rather than experiencing the spontaneity of vernacular expression.

Wang's poetic vision centered on the principle of “speaking naturally in verse”—mirroring the fluidity of everyday conversation while simultaneously harnessing the expressive potential of poetic beauty. The fundamental distinction between these

approaches resides in the notion of “natural speech.” Although Wang’s exploration of linguistic authenticity diverged from the trajectory of May Fourth New Poetry, the experimental ethos underlying both movements remains evident in their shared commitment to integrating colloquial elements into literary form.

This succinct article, written in July 1982, though limited in length, stands as a compelling testament to the significant cultural and literary prominence of poetry during that period. Its brevity does not diminish its analytical depth; rather, it encapsulates the essence of an era in which poetry held substantial influence, reflecting the intellectual and artistic currents that shaped literary discourse at the time.

As early as May 1981, Wang had already composed the poem “Taxi Always Comes in Despair” (出租汽车总在绝望时开来), which served as a compelling demonstration of his engagement with colloquial writing. This work exemplified his deliberate departure from conventional poetic forms, as he sought to integrate the linguistic rhythms of everyday speech into his creative practice. Building upon this experiment, he subsequently articulated a formal manifesto, outlining the theoretical foundations and artistic principles of this approach to poetry, further solidifying his commitment to vernacular expression as a vital force in contemporary literary discourse.

Wang’s poetic contributions did not garner widespread recognition or exert a lasting impact, and his advocacy for colloquial language in poetry was soon eclipsed by the ascendancy of the Jintian school. Nevertheless, the inclusion of his works in several seminal anthologies attests to their significance within the evolving landscape of contemporary Chinese poetry. His poems were featured in the influential *Anthology of the New Poetry Trend* (新诗潮诗集) (1985), *Exploring Poetry* (探索诗集) (1986), and *Anthology of Contemporary Chinese Experimental Poetry* (中国当代实验诗选) (1987), reflecting the recognition of his contributions during that period.

Additionally, Wang’s works appeared in other key anthologies, such as *Chinese Modernist Poems Grand View 1986–1988* (中国现代主义诗群大观) (1988), *Youth Poems 1985–1986* (青年诗选) (1988), and *Selected Poems in the 1980s* (八十年代诗选) (1990). However, as the poetic landscape continued to evolve, his works were gradually omitted from subsequent anthologies, marking a decline in his presence within the literary canon. Moreover, Wang’s absence from prominent poetry reviews and scholarly discussions, coupled with his marginalization within the successive shifts in poetic generations, underscores his diminishing influence in contemporary literary discourse.

Wang’s engagement with colloquial poetry represented a pioneering yet premature endeavor, positioning him outside the dominant literary currents of his time. Despite the

originality of his approach, his works were largely overshadowed by the widespread acclaim of Misty Poetry, which captivated both scholars and general readers, leaving his contributions relatively unexamined.

What is particularly striking is that even the subsequent generation of poets, commonly referred to as the 3rd-Gen, failed to recognize his poetic innovations, further contributing to his marginalization. The later historiography of Chinese poetry similarly neglected his place within the evolving literary canon, resulting in a conspicuous absence from critical discussions on contemporary poetic developments. As Zhuyu (茱萸) has noted, these circumstances precipitated a steady decline in Wang's literary visibility, relegating him to relative obscurity, with only a small circle of individuals remaining aware of his work and legacy (Zhuyu, 2012, p.93).

3. The Enigmatic Inception of Colloquial Poetry

In recent years, several scholars have posited that Wang Xiaolong represents the “enigmatic inception of Colloquial poetry” or serves as its “primordial figure.” This contention arises from the limited public recognition of such a claim. To substantiate the “source theory,” it is imperative to delineate a definitive point of origin and systematically trace its trajectory of reception. In the absence of a discernible lineage of influence, one cannot legitimately characterize a phenomenon as an intellectual or artistic source. The notion of “secrecy” in this context constitutes a dubious and misleading assertion that fosters scholarly irresponsibility.

In the archival records documenting the literary trajectory of the 3rd-Gen of core poets, evidence tracing the reception history of Wang's poetry remains elusive. Apart from Momo (默默) (b.1964), a student in Wang's poetry training program, the only other individual referenced in historical accounts is his fellow Shanghai native, Chen Dongdong (陈东东) (b.1961), who appears in select records.

Chen and Wang Yin (王寅) (b.1962) were classmates in the Class of 1980, third cohort of the Chinese Department at Shanghai Teachers College, sharing a dormitory where Wang Yin first introduced Chen to the world of poetry. During their formative years, they were deeply engrossed in foreign modernist poetry (in Chinese translation) from the college journal reading room, where they meticulously copied poems into categorized notebooks. In 1980, Chen left with an exercise book filled with transcribed works by Odysseus Elytis (1911-1996), the 1979 Nobel laureate, and the following spring, he composed his first poem. Chen exclusively copied foreign poetry, expressing

disillusionment and disdain toward Chinese poetry—even the Misty Poetry failed to impress him (Wanxia, 2014, pp.88-90).

The primary intellectual nourishment for Wang Yin and Chen, which they regarded as “a treasure trove,” also included the influential anthology *Selections from Foreign Modernist Works* (外国现代派作品选) (Vol.1, 1980; Vol.2, 1981), compiled and translated by Yuan Kejia (袁可嘉) and others. This anthology featured works by Émile Verhaeren, Paul Valéry, Rainer Maria Rilke, W.B. Yeats, T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Sergei Yesenin, Eugenio Montale, Federico García Lorca, among others. Later, they further immersed themselves in Walt Whitman, Pablo Neruda, and Allen Ginsberg.

Between 1978 and 1988, China undertook a significant initiative to translate and publish approximately 4,000 foreign literary works, with a predominant focus on Western modernist literature (Yuan, 2018, p.221). This extensive corpus of translated works provided a crucial intellectual foundation for the 3rd-Gen poets, ensuring that the evolution of colloquial poetry in China remained both diverse and multifaceted.

Chen recalls a pivotal event in 1982, during which Wang Xiaolong—a prominent figure in contemporary poetry—alongside several members of the “Experimental Poetry Society of the Youth Palace” (青年宫实验诗社), visited the Chinese Department to deliver lectures and poetry recitations. He expresses a particular fascination with Wang’s poetic philosophy, which emphasizes the use of everyday vernacular to depict the lived experiences of ordinary citizens. However, following the lecture, Chen was unable to engage in a comprehensive analysis of its content (Wan Xia, 2014, pp.95-96).

Furthermore, he vividly remembers Gu Cheng (顾城) delivering a lecture at Shanghai Normal University in 1983. According to Chen, the lecture hall of the Chinese Department was the largest on campus and was filled, reflecting the profound interest in Gu Cheng’s literary contributions (Wan Xia, 2014, p.98). By 1982, Wang Xiaolong had already attained an almost legendary status within Shanghai’s poetry circles, though his influence remained less pronounced than that of Gu Cheng.

While Chen alludes to Wang’s colloquial poetry, he does not delve into its impact on Shanghai’s academic institutions. More significantly, during this period, he, along with Wang Yin and others, was deeply immersed in foreign literature, which served as their primary intellectual stimulus. Conversely, the trajectory of colloquial poetry in Chengdu and other regions was shaped by an entirely distinct set of influences.

Momo asserts that a defining characteristic of the Misty poets’ ethos is their unwavering commitment to justice and truth. In contrast, experimental poets have largely

abandoned the conventional themes of poetry, redirecting their creative focus toward the quotidian realities of everyday life and the exploration of novel modes of poetic expression. Rather than being preoccupied with the thematic concerns of poetry, our engagement with Chinese poetic composition is primarily driven by an interest in its formal and linguistic potential. The emergence of the most dynamic and innovative language in modern Chinese poetry can be attributed to Shanghai's experimental poets, who played a crucial role in bridging Misty Poetry with the 3rd-Gen poets. Notably, the experimental poets maintain a relatively reserved disposition and exhibit minimal interest in public recognition or fame. As a result, the historical trajectory of this poetic collective remains largely obscure (Momo, 2017, p.99). While it is indeed appropriate to designate the Shanghai "experimental poets," under the leadership of Wang Xiaolong, as the pioneering figures in this literary movement, it remains critical to acknowledge that their broader influence—as well as the foundational origins of colloquial poetry in contemporary China—has yet to be comprehensively examined. The absence of sustained scholarly engagement with their contributions has resulted in an incomplete understanding of their role in shaping modern poetic discourse.

When analyzing the poem "Taxi Always Comes in Despair", which emerged in May 1981 as a significant exemplar of contemporary colloquial poetry, it becomes apparent that Wang's approach to poetic composition was profoundly innovative and markedly distinct from the prevailing literary currents of his time. In contrast to the poets of the Jintian School, who endeavored to illuminate readers with their Misty Poetry, Wang's poetic vision was not only ahead of its time but also fundamentally contrarian. His literary trajectory reveals a predilection for solitary exploration within the uncharted domain of colloquial poetry, crafting verses that diverge from the dominant stylistic and thematic norms of his contemporaries.

Notably, "Taxi Always Comes in Despair" eschews conventional political motifs—there are no emblematic squares reminiscent of Tiananmen, no grand historical monuments, utopian ideals, or culturally ingrained symbols. Within the landscape of Misty Poetry, Wang Xiaolong deliberately selects an unconventional urban setting, centering his narrative on an ostensibly trivial episode devoid of overt physical suffering. Through this artistic choice, he seeks to encapsulate the nuances of anxiety and anticipation experienced while awaiting a taxi:

**Just like the last time-
On our way to the wedding banquet
We stood by the roadside
Playing a pair of colorful dolls**

**Pretending to be blissful
Sweating with anxiety inside
I prayed my watch was a quarter fast-
Had we mistaken the address?
Would they come from the north or the south?
So we each kept vigil on one side
Imagining ourselves as spy movie characters
.....
And now again-
She carries teeth, medicine, and dirty clothes
Like a woman stepping out of a prison yard
I count the shuffling feet entering the hospital
Trying to solve the silent riddle:
Are there more men or women in China?
Screw it, I'll stop waiting
It will appear, as it always does
At that precise and fated hour. (Laomu, 1985b, p. 671-672) ¹**

Wang's deployment of colloquial language exemplifies a pragmatic and immersive engagement with everyday life, positioning his poetic practice within the tangible realities of ordinary individuals. In this regard, colloquial poetry derives its thematic and stylistic resonance from quotidian experiences, capturing the nuances of vernacular expression as a medium for literary innovation. The Misty poetic tradition, distinguished by its narrative form, functions as an interpretative framework through which poets convey intricate emotions and societal reflections.

In contrast to poets such as Bei Dao, whose engagement with spatial symbolism transforms public squares—including but not limited to Tiananmen Square—into sites of resistance, defiance, and ideological awakening, Wang Xiaolong eschews overt political discourse. His poetic sensibility gravitates instead toward a conscientious preservation of everyday existence—a realm shared by himself and the citizens of Shanghai. This orientation underscores his commitment to documenting the lived realities of his city rather than infusing his verse with overt ideological critique.

¹ This poem first appeared in a formal publication as part of *Anthology of New Poetry Trend* (新诗潮诗集), (pp.671-673) The most recent revision is found in Wang's collection *Every Song is a Love Song* (每一首都情歌), published by Xijiang Wenyi in Hangzhou in 2016 (pp.3-4), with slight alterations in wording. Wang is known for his propensity to refine and modify his earlier works, rendering later versions susceptible to interpretative shifts. Consequently, reliance on the newer edition carries the risk of distorting the original discourse. To preserve the integrity of Wang's colloquial style as it was formulated in 1981, this article exclusively adheres to the version featured in *Anthology of New Poetry Trend*. The following analysis remains consistent with this textual foundation.

In the early developmental stages of Shanghai's urban infrastructure, private automobile ownership remained a rarity, with family-owned cars constituting a negligible fraction of the transportation landscape. Therefore, taxis emerged not merely as a utilitarian service but as a cultural phenomenon reflective of modernity and economic transformation. By 1980, the city accommodated fewer than 500 taxis, a statistic that highlights both the exclusivity and aspirational allure of this burgeoning industry (Wu, 2017, p.128).

Wang's engagement with urban themes reflects a keen literary sensibility, capturing the intricate dynamics of metropolitan life through the lens of colloquial poetry. The logistical and financial challenges associated with car rentals underscore a broader reality of urban existence—one that necessitates adaptation despite its burdens. Within this framework, Wang's poetic composition emerges as an astute reflection of lived experience, imbued with both immediacy and introspection. His portrayal of the frustration inherent in waiting for a car unfolds across two temporal planes: first recounting a prior experience, then juxtaposing it with his present predicament. This structural duality intensifies the emotional gravitas of his verse, heightening the sensation of anger and despair while reinforcing the stark realism permeating his poetic voice. The convergence of decision-making, action, and quotidian spoken language in his work dissolves conventional boundaries between poetry and non-poetry, illustrating an innovative reconfiguration of literary form.

Despite its significance as an experimental endeavor within the Misty poetic movement, Wang's approach to colloquialization remains understated, its influence subtle rather than disruptive. The act of waiting for a taxi—an unremarkable routine for Shanghai residents—contrasts sharply with the broader poetic landscape of early 1980s China. In many cities and rural areas (Guangzhou being a notable exception due to its thriving taxi industry), access to taxis was uncommon, limiting the experiential scope of poetry enthusiasts. Economic stratification further reinforced this divide, as individuals of lower financial standing primarily relied on buses or bicycles for transportation. Consequently, taxis did not constitute a widely recognized symbol of either hope or despair for the general populace, rendering Wang's poem less resonant among mainstream readers in 1981.

At the time, poetic discourse was dominated by figures such as Bei Dao, whose verse "I—Do—Not—Believe" captivated audiences with its declarative defiance and ideological depth. Within this milieu, Wang's poem—despite its formal ingenuity—remained largely overlooked. However, its deft exploration of colloquial aesthetics did not go unnoticed by discerning critics and poetry connoisseurs, including Yanli

(严力) (b.1954), who further extended the boundaries of postmodern colloquialism in works such as “Don’t Stand Up to See the Darkness” (不要站起来去看天黑).²

“Taxi Always Comes in Despair” occupies a pivotal position within contemporary Chinese urban poetry, reflecting a nuanced engagement with the evolving poetic landscape of the late 20th century. While the work does not directly align with the trajectory of modernist poetic ruptures instigated by Shanghai poets such as Chen Jianhua (陈建华) (b. 1947) following 1968, its emergence predates Song Lin’s (宋琳) “Brothers” (兄弟)(1985) by four years, situating Wang’s poetic endeavor within an earlier phase of urban literary experimentation.

By 1987, the publication of the co-authored collection *People in the City* (城市人) marked a significant shift in urban poetic discourse, eclipsing Wang’s influence within the lineage of city-oriented verse. His status as a pioneering figure—though retrospectively acknowledged—was not actively shaped by his own artistic intent. Crucially, Wang Xiaolong himself remained unaware of any conscious engagement with the formal constructs of urban poetry; rather, his writing served as a direct and unembellished documentation of quotidian experiences in Shanghai.

His poetic inquiry, therefore, was less concerned with thematic categorization than with the experimentation of colloquialism as a fundamental literary device. The organic interplay between everyday language and poetic expression underscores the essential role of urban poetry in shaping the selection and portrayal of material, reinforcing the genre’s function as both an aesthetic and sociocultural medium.

In March 1982, Wang Xiaolong composed “Still That Heart” (心，还是那一颗), a work that exemplifies his refined mastery of colloquial poetry. This piece was published contemporaneously with the draft of “About the Da-Yan Tower” (有关大雁塔) (1982) by Han Dong (韩东) (b.1961), a foundational figure in the 3rd-Gen Poetry movement. Wang’s poetic craftsmanship reflects a remarkable level of sophistication and stylistic maturity, positioning him among the foremost practitioners of colloquial poetics during this period.

² This article does not seek to further examine Yanli’s work, primarily because the colloquial experiment evident in “Don’t Stand Up and Look at the Dark Sky” remained relatively isolated until the publication of “Give Back” (还给) (1986), which more explicitly demonstrated its stylistic incisiveness. However, by the time “Give Back” was introduced, the 3rd-Gen Poetry movement had already gained considerable momentum, rendering the discourse surrounding Yanli’s earlier work less consequential within the broader literary landscape. Consequently, an extensive discussion of his contributions at that juncture would offer limited new insights into the evolving trajectory of colloquial poetics.

“Still That Heart” stands as a significant collection within Wang’s corpus, demonstrating his ability to seamlessly integrate everyday language into poetic form. Structurally, the work consists of four stanzas, each contributing to its thematic and rhythmic progression. Among them, the third and fourth stanzas emerge as particularly compelling, distinguished by their lyrical elegance and nuanced articulation of emotion:

**Back then we worked like hell
Fought and wrote damn well
A man wrestles life
Nobody wins
Every corner, every stop
Holds some tale we swore was true
—even our own bullshit Hu Shi
The wind flushed it all down the drain
Just whistle and move on
Pretend nothing happened
World’s full of faces
And I got married**

**But memory—goddamn memory—
It’s that missing tooth gap
Your tongue keeps poking (Laomu, 1985b, p. 667)**

Wang’s poetic philosophy is rooted in an unwavering commitment to capturing the essence of lived experience through colloquial expression. His reluctance to engage with ideological discourse via the Jintian school poetry, coupled with his disinterest in the structural complexities of “resistance poetics,” underscores his distinct literary trajectory. Rather than subscribing to overt political or philosophical frameworks, Wang Xiaolong dedicates himself to reintegrating poetry into the everyday rhythms of Shanghai life, seeking to preserve its organic connection to urban existence. His poetic craftsmanship is characterized by an acute sensitivity to detail, allowing him to distill the subtleties of human experience with remarkable precision. Through a deliberate embrace of life’s transformative influence on poetic form, Wang Xiaolong fosters an immediacy and accessibility that redefine the relationship between verse and reality. His works promote a distinctive approach to life—one shaped by an audacious spirit and an ambiguous moral stance—often misinterpreted as an embodiment of The Boorism (莽汉主义). In parallel, elements

of the Yujian (于坚) style are also discernible, particularly in passages asserting that **“Every corner, every stop / Holds some tale we swore was true”** However, the intricacies of these narratives remain largely undisclosed, lending his poetry an aura of enigmatic depth.

The concluding statements transcend generational boundaries, marking a radical departure from conventional poetic discourse. At that historical juncture, it was highly improbable for any poet in China to craft such ostensibly innocuous yet fundamentally consequential verses in their closing lines. While Wang’s engagement with Bei Dao-style aphorisms may not have been a deliberate strategy, his nuanced application of condensed, resonant statements wields undeniable influence. His understated yet potent rhetorical devices compel a response, drawing readers into the emotive and intellectual currents of his work.

At the core of Wang’s poetic vision lies a profound articulation of ordinary lyricism—an aesthetic sensibility that emerges organically from the fabric of daily life. His conception of the “ordinary” transcends mere mundanity, reclaiming facets of existence that earlier poets dismissed as unworthy of literary representation. Yet, for Wang Xiaolong, these ostensibly trivial details possess immense poetic significance, serving as vehicles for deep reflection on the intersections between life, language, and urban consciousness.

In the urban landscape, cafés and coffee culture constitute a ubiquitous yet deeply embedded facet of everyday life. Shanghai, characterized by its high population density and vibrant metropolitan dynamism, holds the distinction of having the largest concentration of cafés in a single city worldwide, with nearly 7,000 establishments as of 2021. The presence of coffee in Shanghai dates to its earliest historical developments, with foreign proprietors establishing economically prosperous cafés within the concession areas. This foreign-led initiative in coffee culture paved the way for domestic entrepreneurship, exemplified by the founding of Yipinxiang (一品香) in 1883—the first Chinese-owned café—which subsequently catalyzed the proliferation of coffee establishments across the city. During this formative period, literary figures such as Lu Xun (鲁迅) and members of the China Left Writers’ Union (左联) frequented Gong Coffee Café (公啡咖啡馆), utilizing it as a communal space for intellectual discourse. However, the political climate following the Cultural Revolution recast coffee consumption as an emblem of capitalist indulgence, leading to the systematic closure of nearly all cafés, with the notable exception of Shanghai Café (上海咖啡馆), which remained in operation. The 1980s witnessed a revival of café culture, marking a renewed intersection between urban life and social spaces.

Within this evolving cultural milieu, Wang's poem "Quiet Café" (悄悄咖啡馆) (1984) reflects the intrinsic role of cafés in shaping everyday experiences. The poem adopts a sketch-like aesthetic, weaving together fragmented yet interconnected observations that encapsulate the fluid interplay between thoughts, emotions, and urban existence. His verse articulates a personal aspiration that resonates within the broader sociocultural context:

**I always dreamed of running my own coffee shop
Just some hole-in-the-wall spot near home
Hang a dented copper lantern
Carved into that red pine doorframe
Name, age, sex, hometown, and resume
At night, I'll perch on the counter
Humbly hanging my feet down
Squinting one eye and pointing
At those sparkling glass cups
I ain't in it for the cash
I'll pour coffee for my little friends Momo and Shengying
For retired actors
And union bosses three years deep in retirement's shadows
My fireplace crackles with real fire
My soup's got stories in every spoonful
My coffee is black
Wakes the dreams and dreamers we buried (Wang, 2016, p.29)**

The conceptualization of a café, though yet to materialize, serves as a deeply personal and socially oriented endeavor for Wang Xiaolong. His primary motivation is not financial gain, but rather the cultivation of a communal space designed to offer respite and engagement for students and individuals displaced from employment. Within the evolving socio-cultural landscape of 1980s Shanghai, those with limited economic means still seek avenues of self-expression that align with the shifting currents of urban life. Wang Xiaolong meticulously envisions every aspect of his café's design, ensuring that no fundamental details are overlooked in his pursuit of authenticity. His aspiration extends beyond the mere establishment of a physical space; he seeks to encapsulate a sense of nostalgia, specifically the unadulterated flavors of pre-Cultural Revolution China—an era whose sensory memories persist among both the living and the departed. The evocative power of these flavors, intertwined with collective longing, renders his vision not just an act of revival but an attempt at cultural preservation.

For Wang Xiaolong, moments of idle contemplation embody an idealized form of urban existence—one that resists the relentless acceleration of modernization. His poetry, like his envisioned café, reflects an embrace of everyday occurrences through colloquial expression, reinforcing the purity of experience within a rapidly transforming society. Wang's understanding of urban life is not merely observational but deeply introspective, offering a coherent and fluid stream of consciousness through which he articulates the aspirations of individuals navigating the complexities of Shanghai's urban reality.

Wang Xiaolong demonstrates no deliberate inclination toward composing urban poetry specifically centered on the theme of Shanghai. His poetic sensibility is marked by an unperturbed disposition, reflecting an innate ability to seamlessly navigate the various dimensions of his lived experience. Rather than consciously constructing a literary framework rooted in urban themes, his work organically emerges from the quotidian rhythms and interactions of Shanghai's residents, rendering its authenticity indisputable. His engagement with colloquialism within this experimental context resembles that of a solitary figure advancing through uncharted poetic terrain—an endeavor undertaken without external reinforcement yet defined by its unwavering resolve. In this regard, Wang's approach foregrounds the complexities and innovations of vernacular poetics, positioning his work as a distinctive counterpoint to conventional literary paradigms.

Simultaneously, his poetic experimentation coincides with the incipient stages of 3rd-Gen poetry, a movement poised to challenge and redefine the avant-garde literary aesthetic. Through his unique articulation of colloquialism, Wang Xiaolong contributes to the evolving discourse on poetic modernity, demonstrating how linguistic accessibility can serve as both a radical departure from tradition and a conduit for literary transformation.

4. Who is the True Pioneer?

As a pioneering figure in the field, Wang's colloquial writing exhibits a distinctiveness that differentiates it within the poetic discourse. In contrast to Hang Dong's 1983 work "About the Da-Yan Tower" (有关大雁塔), the present text lacks the radical disruptive force that actively dismantles the aesthetic framework of Misty Poetry, as well as a deeply embedded subversive consciousness. Nonetheless, Wang exercises full creative autonomy, composing poetry in accordance with his own artistic volition. His fundamental engagement with "personal writing" (个人写作) can thus be regarded as an antecedent to Wang's poetic vision. Regrettably, this approach emerged prematurely, transcending the interpretive capacities of his

contemporaries. Contemporary readers of Chinese poetry have only recently encountered Bei Dao's revelatory corpus and acclimated to the oblique and hermetic verse featured in *Jintian*, which they perceive as invigorating. At present, they are engrossed in the dynamic poetry "crafted for the people" (为人民写作). However, Wang's lowercase, introspectively individualized poetry has yet to formally enter the literary scene, and its closest artistic counterpart remains elusive.

"Memorial" (纪念) (1983) is widely regarded as a foundational work in the canon of colloquial poetry produced by 3rd-Gen poets. The initial composition, "Taxi Always Comes in Despair," and its more refined iteration, "Still That Heart," manifest pronounced stylistic divergences, particularly in their deployment of terse, fragmented syntax:

**When I snuff out the match
I glance up—there you are
Smoking, staring into the mirror
Every morning, same routine
Lost in thought, sharp mind, heavy heart
Frustration boils over—
You scold yourself more than anyone else
Your skin is dark
Pores are large
When sadness flickers through your eyes
Autumn exhales its final breath
I am you** (Laomu, 1985b, pp. 673-674)

In engaging with his father, Wang's monologue assumes the guise of a dialogue, albeit one in which his father remains an inaudible interlocutor. Wang's poetic voice is marked by an unfiltered immediacy, conveyed through a stark linguistic economy that pierces directly into the core of his emotional landscape. Moreover, his work is distinguished by an uncompromising analytical rigor—an unflinching examination, critique, and summation of his father's persona, subtly imbued with an elegiac quality. His depiction of paternal attributes, as in "**Your skin is dark / Pores are large**," borders on the provocative, while his lexical choices often veer into the realm of brusqueness. Certain passages even adopt a seemingly accusatory tone, exemplified by his assertion: "**You scold yourself more than anyone else**." Yet, despite the confrontational tenor of his expression, Wang's representation of his late father remains unerringly precise.

Poet and translator Qiu Xiaolong (裘小龙) (b.1953) offers commentary on the longest poem in *Exploring Poems* (探索诗集), foregrounding the phrase “I am you” as a pivotal moment in Wang’s articulation of both filial understanding and critique. This assertion simultaneously encapsulates the poet’s self-awareness and introspective reckoning, engendering a profound and multi-layered emotional resonance (SLAS, 1986, p.254). Such thematic entanglements—particularly those centered on fatherhood and filial dynamics—subsequently became a focal concern among 3rd-Gen poets. Indeed, esteemed colleagues, this methodological approach is one frequently observed within the broader trajectory of their literary practice.

From the perspective of poetry’s reception history, Wang’s colloquial verse occupies an inherently disadvantaged position, akin to a prematurely born entity struggling for recognition. Its internal elements—closely aligned with the aesthetic principles of 3rd-Gen poetry—exist metaphorically within an incubator, subjected to deliberate neglect by the broader literary sphere. As a result, Wang’s work does not assume the role of the “eldest son” within the emerging lineage of contemporary Chinese poetry; rather, the symbolic seat of authority remains conspicuously unclaimed.

Hang Dong, for his part, had never conceived of the possibility of literary ascendance. His poetic practice diverges markedly from that of Wang Xiaolong, shaped instead by a formative experience situated in the lingering shadow of Misty Poetry.

In 1980, Hang Dong experienced his first encounter with *Jintian* (今天), an event that would leave an indelible mark on his literary consciousness. Even three decades later, he vividly recalls its profound impact, describing it as a seismic rupture from which he never fully recovered (Wanxia, 2014, p.18). Under the intellectual stewardship of the Jintian school, Misty Poetry exerted a formative influence on Han’s early poetic development, shaping the trajectory of his apprenticeship in significant ways.

At the time, Han Dong was employed as a faculty member at Shaanxi College of Finance and Economics, situated within a mere 500-meter radius of the iconic Da-Yan Tower in Xi’an. Notably, this period also preceded the composition of Yang Lian’s 杨炼 landmark long poem “Da-Yan Tower” (大雁塔) by a single year. Han’s proximity to this architectural and cultural emblem left a lasting impression on his creative sensibilities, prompting him—almost inadvertently—to draft the initial three-paragraph version of “About the Da-Yan Tower” (有关大雁塔) (1982). This early iteration of the poem subsequently found its way into a humble and inconspicuous

publication, quietly signaling the inception of a distinctive poetic engagement with space, history, and personal reflection.

What is under consideration here is not the finalized version of “About the Da-Yan Tower” (1983), but rather its preliminary draft—a textual iteration that remains in a state of conceptual fluidity. At this stage, the poem had not yet achieved full clarity in its thematic and structural articulation. Notably, the second paragraph was later excised from the composition:

**But
What’s the Da-Yan Tower thinking?
It’s thinking all the good man died out back then--
All the good man
The ones who grew numb to killing
Who’d chug wine from giant jars
Who could bed ten women in a single night
How many fine horses did they break in their time?
In the end, they came to it—
Dropped their blades, just like that, and found enlightenment
But now? the ones who come here—
It doesn’t know a single soul
And it thinks: these petty people...
They’ll never understand that kind of glory (Chang, 2010, p.42)**

When this verse resurfaced—later excised in the finalized version—it revealed a pivotal and historically significant trace of Han’s poetic trajectory as a figurative patricide. Yang Lian’s employment of anthropomorphic imagery effectively eclipsed Han’s formulation of “Da-Yan Tower” is thinking, as well as the lingering influence of preceding poets. Irrespective of the number of figures who attain enlightenment through acts of rupture, their literary relevance remains intact. The cultural and historical gravitas of the “Da-Yan Tower” is inscribed within Yang Lian’s nomenclature, reinforcing its symbolic weight.

It is evident that despite Han’s decisive effort to “kill his father” in 1982, severing his aesthetic affiliation with Misty Poetry proved a formidable challenge. His verse retains traces of Misty’s conceptual framework, yet the shift toward colloquial narration marks a decisive formal divergence, situating his work firmly within the 3rd-Gen poetic paradigm. In the 1983 ultimate edition, Han Dong deliberately excised the fourteen-line passage, later formalizing his creative exploration in “Tessera or Completion & Antithesis.” With

this act, Han Dong laid claim to the symbolic naming rights of the “Da-Yan Tower”, reclaiming authorship over the poetic space previously navigated by Yang Lian. Following the refinement of his original conception, Han Dong accelerated his engagement with “Daemonization or the Counter-Sublime,” (Chan, 2013, pp.34-36) articulating a poetic framework that sought to dismantle inherited paradigms of transcendence. His turn toward colloquialization constituted an insurrection against his own lineage of obscure poetics—what may be understood as a double inversion of the sublime, wherein linguistic immediacy precedes conceptual reflection.

A comparative examination of Wang Xiaolong and Han Dong during this period reveals Wang’s substantial advancements in the domain of colloquialism, as well as the increasing maturity of his artistic practice. However, Wang Xiaolong did not directly challenge or critique the aesthetic foundations of Misty Poetry; rather, he pursued an alternative trajectory, crafting a distinct colloquial mode that integrated urbanization as a thematic cornerstone. Crucially, Wang Xiaolong exerted no discernible influence on Han Dong, nor did his poetic vision serve as a source of inspiration. These two strands of colloquial poetry thus emerge as parallel yet independently evolving expressions, each following its own distinct path.

Wang’s engagement with colloquialism unfolded in tandem with his aspirations to explore the world, coinciding with his early involvement in 3rd-Gen poetry. The Cultural Revolution exerted a profound influence on the younger generation, particularly shaping their attitudes toward travel. One notable trend that emerged during this period was the domestic fascination with *Zvyozdny билет* (带星星的火车票) (1961), which became emblematic of a new era in tourism. Additionally, the wandering consciousness vividly depicted in Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road* (1957) resonated deeply with an entire generation of educated youth, fostering a restless desire for movement and discovery.

Among the works of 3rd-Gen poets, the notion of wandering consciousness was first introduced in Hu Dong’s (胡冬) (b.1962) poem “I Want to Take a Boat to Paris” (我想乘上一艘船到巴黎去) (1984), composed at the outset of that year. By October 1984, Allen Ginsberg (1926–1997) had embarked on a lecture tour across numerous Chinese universities, sparking a fervent enthusiasm for the Beat Generation (Chan, 2010, pp.155-163). During his travels, Ginsberg met with Wang Xiaolong in Shanghai. In March of the following year, Wang Xiaolong authored “Distance” (远方) (1985), a work born at a moment when Shanghai was undergoing widespread infrastructural transformations. At the time, socioeconomic conditions remained precarious, with a significant segment of the population living in poverty and television ownership still relatively scarce. Against such constraints, the prospect of traveling abroad to engage directly with the wider world remained elusive.

For Wang's generation, exposure to Western literary representations of travel and self-discovery provided their initial glimpses into an external reality beyond the confines of immediate experience. Although Wang's poetic vision captured the spirit of wanderlust celebrated by the Beat poets, his capacity for movement remained constrained by the sociopolitical environment, precluding the kind of unfettered mobility—particularly in driving and independent travel—that Kerouac's work so vividly evokes. Wang's metaphysical engagement with movement was thus inextricably tied to material conditions, necessitating his reliance on the railway as a conduit for his ambitions of exploring the world. To counteract his sense of stagnation, he turned to poetry. Thus, the railway became not merely a physical means of transport but a symbolic gateway to a transformative journey—a literary expedition set in motion:

**We ride the rails
Singing all the way—
Across continents
Swaying on the sleepers
Pebbles and hit
Cicadas, hush your buzzing minds—
Talk is cheap, let's move
We wanna travel all around
Just keep walking straight
You'll get where you need to go**

**Moscow, Copenhagen, Paris
Just the next village to sleep in
When tired, lie down by the roadbed
Like some wandering tramp in the tunnel** (Laomu, 1985b, pp.668-669)

The condition of immobility profoundly shapes the experiences of many young individuals, constraining their ability to embark on journeys beyond familiar boundaries. For them, travel commences at the Old North Station in Shanghai, where distant destinations exist solely as imagined projections within an intricate web of railway lines. Even without a ticket, the act of movement itself renders Moscow nothing more than the next waypoint—so long as one continues forward. In the early 1980s, Wang Xiaolong conceptualized the world through a lens uniquely his own. While his worldview remained fundamentally linear, tethered to the railway as its structural backbone, Wang Xiaolong, alongside the educated youth of Shanghai—who had endured a decade of stagnation following the Cultural Revolution—expressed an acute longing to break free from its

confines. He poignantly articulates this sentiment: **“They blame it for cutting through the city / This rusty line that keeps us dreaming / of places we’ve never been”**. (Laomu, 1985b, pp.669-670) Wang Xiaolong infused his poetic journey with stylistic elements reflective of vagrancy, appropriating aspects of the itinerant aesthetic commonly associated with displaced wanderers. At times, his work exhibited a degree of vulgarity, mirroring the irreverent disposition characteristic of 3rd-Gen poets. However, he did not achieve mastery in the depiction of wandering consciousness, nor did his stylistic crudeness ascend to the levels perfected by the Manghan poets 莽汉. As a 31-year-old navigating the residual effects of a tumultuous upbringing, Wang Xiaolong transitioned from an impassioned youth into a poet whose initial fervor gradually subdued. The shift toward colloquialization in poetry and language tempered his expressive intensity, leading to a dilution of emotional urgency. While the avant-garde sensibility of 3rd-Gen poetry had once distinguished Wang’s early works, the evolving literary landscape ultimately displaced him from his once-pioneering position.

Wang Xiaolong, as an individualist poet, found himself marginalized amid the ascendancy of Enlightenment poetry during the flourishing era of Misty Poetry. In contrast, 3rd-Gen poets embraced collective strategies, advancing their literary presence through alliances and what might be termed “group warfare.”³ This tendency toward communal formation stood in stark opposition to Wang’s solitary creative pursuit.

In May 1985, shortly after Wang Xiaolong completed “Distance”, the Sichuan poetry gathering—widely recognized as the largest poetry event in China at the time—took place in the early days of summer. This convergence of poets, fueled by the dual forces of verse and wine, drew participants from various provinces to Chengdu. Seventy to eighty poets gathered in the streets, engaging in fervent drinking sessions. Wanxia (万夏) (b.1962) proudly declared, “I’ve gathered the brightest minds of Chinese avant-garde poetry, all in

³ During the mid-1980s, Chinese poetry underwent a significant transformation with the emergence of 3rd-Gen poets, primarily concentrated in Sichuan and Shanghai. This literary cohort exhibited an unprecedented level of organizational initiative, founding no fewer than 60 poetry societies—an achievement that marked a pivotal moment in the poetic landscape of the era. Their collective efforts extended beyond poetic composition, encompassing the publication of poetry magazines, the orchestration of literary events, and the formulation of new theoretical frameworks and stylistic trajectories. Central to their creative ethos was the categorical rejection of the aesthetic legitimacy of cryptic poetry, a stance that further delineated their ideological departure from preceding poetic movements. One of the defining aspects of their engagement lay in the editorial curation of poetry anthologies that carried considerable historical significance. Through this process, they not only consolidated their individual positions within the literary sphere but also fortified the prestige of their respective poetry groups, effectively marginalizing both earlier poetic pioneers and independent voices. By the 1990s, 3rd-Gen poets had turned their attention toward producing self-reflective poetry theories, narrative explorations of poetic form, and incisive critiques of contemporary poetic discourse. Their objective was twofold: first, to generate citation materials of academic research value, and second, to assert their intellectual dominance in shaping the historiographical perspectives of modern Chinese poetry. In doing so, they sought to inscribe their literary legacy within the evolving scholarly discourse, positioning their movement as an indispensable force in the trajectory of Chinese poetic modernism.

the name of verse and wine. This moment—it could be a dream, a poem, or even a scene straight out of a Wuxia-Romance tale. Years later, the old Wolong Bridge Street was torn down, leaving behind nothing but its name, a ghost of its former self. The physical traces are gone, swallowed by time, and no one can stand there and feel its history anymore. But if you turn to the pages of Chinese literary history from the 1980s, every brick, every tile, every whispered word of poetry still lives on, vivid as ever.” (Wanxia, 2014, p.139)

The 3rd-Gen poets initially maintained a simple approach to their craft, structuring their daily lives around poetry—writing, discussing poetic forms, exploring genre distinctions, and congregating for communal drinking sessions. As poetry proliferated, many poets were profoundly influenced by Misty Poetry, yet they quickly transitioned toward distinct stylistic innovations. The Misty Poetry movement—particularly the Jintian School—wielded substantial intellectual influence. Some viewed its dominance as an excessive force, positioning it as a literary precursor whose overwhelming presence bordered on obstruction, thereby eliciting critical reassessments of its legacy.

Wang Xiaolong demonstrates a remarkable capacity to remain unaffected by the prevailing pressures exerted by Misty Poetry. However, among the younger generation of emerging poets, an acute sense of anxiety permeates their literary aspirations. A notable episode at a YMCA-sponsored literary gathering in Beijing encapsulates this tension: a young poet, filled with audacious ambition, directly confronted Bei Dao, defiantly proclaiming, “Our generation will surpass and surpass you!”.

On October 21, 1986, *Shenzhen Youth Daily* (深圳青年报) and *Poetry News* (诗歌报) jointly launched the “Chinese Poetry Circle 1986 Modern Poetry Group Exhibition”, an event heralded as “an unparalleled moment in the history of modern Chinese poetry ... In 2010, all the major contemporary poetic movements in the Chinese poetry world.” (Xu, 1986) Despite such grand declarations, the exhibition did not yield any particularly significant poetic works.

Later, as various poetry schools were compiled into “Grand View of Chinese Modernist Poetry Groups 1986-1988” (中国现代主义诗群大观), the editor-in-chief opted to incorporate Misty Poetry—led by Bei Dao—alongside an expansive array of 67 other poetic movements, including Feifeiism (非非主义), Tamen Literary Society(他们文学社), Haishang Poems (海上诗群), Boorism (莽汉主义), Holism (整体主义), and Neo-Traditionalism (新传统主义). Among these, Haishang Poems—an influential literary movement rooted in Shanghai—featured notable poets such as Chen Dongdong (陈东东), Momo (默默), Wang Yin (王寅), Lu Yimin (陆忆敏), Menglang (孟浪), Tianyou (天游), Yu Yu (郁郁), Liu Manliu (刘漫流), and others. Notably, despite his contributions to contemporary poetry, Wang Xiaolong was conspicuously absent from this

extensive list, further underscoring his position as a poet operating beyond established literary collectives.

5. Return of the Pioneer

By 1986, the interplay between Misty Poetry and the ascendancy of 3rd-Gen poets marked a decisive shift in the dominant discourse and aesthetic authority within the Chinese poetic landscape. The publication of *Grand View of Chinese Modernist Poems 1986–1988* and *Youth Poems 1985–1986* (青年诗选) in 1988 notably excluded Wang's work. Similarly, his absence persisted in subsequent anthologies, including *The Selected Poems of the 1980s* (八十年代诗选) (1990) and *The Selected Poems of the 1990s* (二十世纪九十年代诗选) (2000). His omission was further compounded by his exclusion from *The Complete Works of Post-Misty Poems* (后朦胧诗全集) (1993) and *The Posthumous Photos of the Years* (岁月的遗照) (1998). Symbolically, during the ceremonial altar of poetry, Bei Dao and several other influential poets were granted seats at the round table, while Wang Xiaolong remained without a chair—an apt metaphor for his marginalization within the evolving poetic hierarchy.

Moreover, as Han Dong and other 3rd-Gen poets consolidated positions of influence, Wang's significant contributions as an early practitioner of colloquialism were systematically overlooked. In the face of a rapidly shifting literary landscape, his pioneering work was overshadowed by the emergence of dominant poetic figures, relegating him to historical obscurity. The selection of poems across these anthologies appears to lack a clearly defined curatorial criterion, and the discourse surrounding these omissions remains largely unexamined. In recent years, however, this artifact has been rediscovered, prompting renewed scholarly inquiry into Wang's place within the trajectory of Chinese modernist poetry.

In the analysis of Wang Xiaolong in *A Brief History of Contemporary Chinese Poetry 1968–2003* (中国当代诗歌简史)(2018), Zhang Taozhou (张桃洲) (b.1971) underscores Wang's significance as a pioneering figure who, at the height of Misty Poetry's influence, consciously integrated colloquial and informal linguistic elements into his poetic craft. His deliberate departure from the dense, enigmatic style of Misty poets positioned him as an early innovator of a more accessible mode of poetic expression. Among his representative works are “The Taxi Always Comes in Despair”, “The Surgical Ward” (外科病房), “That Year” (那一年), and “The Isolated Bird” (孤立无援的小鸟), each exemplifying his approach to deconstructing conventional poetic forms. Wang's strategic insertion of seemingly arbitrary

sentences serves to diffuse the intensity of imagery, mitigating the opacity that often characterizes the deeper progressions of his poems.

Zhang further contends that this symbolic framework—embodied in Wang’s work—laid the theoretical groundwork for 3rd-Gen poets, who would later enact a widespread rebellion against Misty Poetry (Zhang, 2018, p.80). His stylistic innovations thus represent not merely an individual experiment but a precursor to the broader aesthetic rupture that came to define the trajectory of contemporary Chinese poetry.

While this assessment may be regarded as conservative, it nonetheless retains a considerable degree of accuracy. Wang Xiaolong deliberately departs from the conventional poetic framework of Misty Poetry, which traditionally emphasizes cohesive imagery and grand thematic exploration. Instead, he embraces an urbanized, modern colloquialism that foregrounds the intricate details of daily life in Shanghai, thereby fostering a poetic mode deeply rooted in the immediacy of lived experience.

His stylistic approach is marked by an unrestrained, dynamic tone and a relaxed narrative cadence, devoid of any overarching ambition to systematically reshape the trajectory of modern Chinese poetry. Rather than engaging in a deliberate aesthetic rupture, Wang Xiaolong positions himself as a pioneering figure in the experimental domain of contemporary colloquial poetry. His work occupies a crucial space in the literary landscape, offering a nuanced contribution that mediates the aesthetic transition between Misty Poetry and 3rd-Gen poetic practices. Through his engagement with colloquialism, Wang Xiaolong facilitates a dialogue that bridges these stylistic and ideological divides, underscoring the significance of his poetic innovations within the broader evolution of modern Chinese verse.

Reference

- Chan, T.-W. (2013). The naming and completion of the Da-Yan Tower. *Chinese Literature*, (118), 31–36.
- Chan, T.-W. (2010). Winks in the shadow—Influence study of America’s Beats on Li Ya-wei’s “Mang-han poetry”. *Bulletin of Chinese Literature*, (48), 153–182.
- Chang, L. (2010). *A study on Tamen’s writers*. Shanghai Sanlian.
- Laomu. (Ed.). (1985a). *A conversation of poetry by young poets*. Peking University May Fourth Literature Club.
- Laomu. (Ed.). (1985b). *Anthology of new poetry trend*. Peking University May Fourth Literature Club.
- Momo. (2017). We are a mirage: A history of poetry by one person—Experimental Poetry Society and Experimental Poetry Journal. *West Lake*, (6), 89–99.
- SLAS. (Ed.). (1986). *Tansuo shiji*. Shanghai Literature and Art Society.
- Wan, X. (Ed.). (2014). *The word of God: Criticism and self-criticism of the third-generation poet*. All-China Federation of Industry and Commerce.
- Wang, X. (2016). *Every song is a love song*. Xijiang Wenyi.

- Wu, Y. (2017). *Research on Shanghai industrial tourism development*. Jiaotong University Press.
- Xu, J. (1986, September 30). Chinese poetry 1986' modern poetry group exhibition. *Shenzhen Youth Daily* [深圳青年报].
- Yuan, J. (Ed.). (2014). *The pioneer of new literature: The occurrence, evolution and influence of Europeanized vernacular in modern Chin*. Fudan University Press.
- Yuan, K. (2018). China and modernism: Ten years of new experience. In J. Li (Ed.), *Research materials on translation and introduction of foreign literature* (pp. 221–234). Baihuazhou Wenyi Press.
- Zhang, T. (2018). *A brief history of contemporary Chinese poetry*. China Youth Press.
- Zhuyu. (2012). The expression of the times of the street rounds: A brief discussion on Wang Xiaolong and his poems. *Modern Chinese Poetry*, 92–97.