

# 1949-1979: Jiuye Poets' Survival in the Cracks and the Poetic Art Development

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**Abstract**—In the 1940s, the Jiuye Poetry School completed the “cross-regional cooperation between the North and the South”, and after a short period of glorious development, it fell into difficult times. From 1950s to the end of 1970s, the Jiuye Poetry School withered in the social politics storm, fell and scattered in the literary world, especially the experience and personal development of Mu Dan, Zheng Min and Tang Qi, highlighted that this generation of poets was submerged in the trend of times and history. What made the contrast at the same time was the attention and research of Hong Kong and Taiwan researchers on Jiuye. The paper probes into the most vigorous 30 years development period of the poet's creative life, and elaborates the complex relationship between their survival in the crack due to historical reasons and the emergence of major crises in the development of poetic art.

**Keywords**—*Jiuye Poets; survival in the crack; poetic art development; 1940-70's; Zheng Min*

## I. INTRODUCTION

“Jiuye Poetry School” is a special school in the history of literature, and it has received much attention and research in recent years. The school was formed during the 1938 and 1947, that is, during the period of Southwest Associated University. Xin Di, Mu Dan, Chen Jingrong, Zheng Min, Hang Yuehe, Du Yunxie, Tang Qi, Yuan Kejia and those who have created poems in the 1940s in the “Kuomintang-controlled area” were regarded as a relatively mature poetry school in the history of modern poetry, because of their comparatively similar language style, the integration of Chinese classical poetry and western modern poetry, the comparatively similar pursuit of modernist form, the comparatively consistent progressive position against the high-pressure politics of “national unification”, and the relatively concentrated poetry front “Poetry Creation” and “Chinese New Poetry”, etc. Because there is no association or organization, there is no unified declaration or program of poetry school, and there has never been a leader of the school. If there is any common ideal expression of poems among the nine poets, the article “Our Call” in the preface to the first episode of Chinese New Poetry in 1948 is such expression. This article shows their pursuit and direction: “Faced with a serious time, we should grasp the voice of the whole era”, “Form one's own manners in the river of history, which is to form the style of poetry in the creation of art”.<sup>1</sup> They were

recognized as a poetry school only after the publication of Jiuye Collection in 1981.

The most outstanding poets and representatives of the poetry school were nine people, respectively Xin Di, Chen Jingrong, Du Yunxie, Hang Yuehe, Zheng Min, Tang Qi, Yuan Kejia and Mu Dan, being called “Jiuye Poets” like “nine green leaves”. Before the publication of Jiuye Collection, the works of these poets had not been published in the form of collections for the reasons of times and individuals. It must be pointed out that the creation efforts and poetic exploration of the Jiuye Poetry School was the product of the need of the times and the conformity of personal pursuit with the law of literary development, and the formation of the poetry school is the proof and existence. Because of the convergence of their life attitude and aesthetic pursuit, they finally stood under the same artistic banner in the struggle for democracy and progress, the modern poetry, and Jiuye Poetry School rose rapidly and became a new generation of modernist poetry in the 1940s. This article focuses on the historical fate of these poets, not just the characteristics of this poetry school, so they were known as Jiuye Poets.

In the late 1940s, the Jiuye Poetry School, which difficultly completed the “North-South convergence”, had only existed for a short period of time after it had really converged into one school. Subsequently, great changes have taken place in Chinese society and times. Jiuye poet has just made a short achievement, and then there should be a lot of room for development, but they were hit by the special historical environment at that time.

During the 30 years, the main poets of Jiuye Poetry School have long lost contact with each other. Some of them have gone abroad to study or work, such as Zheng Min, Mu Dan, Du Yunxie, and others have found new jobs, such as Chen Jingrong and Hang Yuehe. But they have a common point that they have almost stopped writing poetry for a long time, or at least lost the right of poetry publication. In the golden development period of poets' talent and learning of poetry art, all their creative desires were suppressed and their creation was banned, and poets had to survive in the cracks. “Stored for winter” for as long as 30 years, the second “development” dislocation was definitely settled. The growth process of Jiuye poets also has an important impact on the return of poetry in the future. So how did “Jiuye” wither in the storms of history? The life circumstances of three stars of

<sup>1</sup> “Our Call” (Preface), “Chinese New Poetry”, 1948, 2-4.

Southwest Associated University, Zheng Min, Du Yunxie and Mu Dan, reflect the helplessness of poets at this generation and the historical fate of being submerged in the trend of the times. Later, when the works of these poets were re-mentioned in the new era, people seemed to have excavated a long history.

## II. "JIUYE" WITHERED IN THE STORM

After 1949, political discourse poetry, as the mainstream cultural form, occupied the main position in the poetry world. In the 1957 "Anti-Rightist" struggle and the subsequent "Cultural Revolution", many poets of Jiuye were beaten into the "Rightist" or suffered other misfortunes, bore different degrees of suffering in life. The art trends and works of modernism have been severely criticized as bourgeois reactionary cultural forms. The monotonous situation of "unification" of ideas and "centralized" of art constitutes the basic pattern of contemporary Chinese poetry, and even the whole literature and culture field. Coupled with the political criticism campaigns one after another, Jiuye poets naturally dared not mention modernism any more, let alone the persistent pursuit of modernist poetry art. A large number of poets, such as Ai Qing, Mu Dan, Tang Qi, Tang Shi and Chen Mengjia, were forced to leave the poetry world. In 1958, the rise of the "New Folk Song Movement" also had a significant impact on the literary world and the development of new poetry. The "July School" poets, who were also active in pursuing the practice of revolutionary realism poetry in the 1940s, were depressed in the continuous political movement because of the case of "Hu Feng counter-revolutionary group".

The mainstream "July" poets were like this, the fate of "Jiuye" poets were even worse that they suffered different degrees physical and mental damage. Since 1951, Du Yunxie has been assigned to the International Department of Xinhua News Agency for literary work, and then sent to do labor work in Linfen, Shanxi Province; in 1958, Tang Qi was sent to do labor work from Drama Daily to Beidahuang for three years, and then returned to Wenzhou to work as a local dramatist. Since the late 1950s, Tang Qi has created a large number of long poems, Lyric Poems and sonnets, which were published until the new era. Zheng Min was forced to "bury the new poems" and left a blank period of poetry creation for 30 years. Xin Di turned to work in industrial field, gave up poetry writing, and his family was searched in the political movement. Although Tang Shi kept on writing during the Cultural Revolution, it was a pity that his works were difficult to publish. Chen Jingrong has worked as the editor of "World Literature" since 1956, and retired from his post in 1973. It is particularly noteworthy that Chen Jingrong did not dare to write again after the 1950s, and has not written again until the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1978, rousing his enthusiasm for poetry creation.

Over the changeable thirty years, the Jiuye Poetry School has always been in the process of ups and downs.

## III. THE HELPLESS SITUATION OF YUAN KEJIA, MU DAN AND ZHENG MIN

Yuan Kejia, a poet, published words of "criticizing on Eliot, New Criticism, British and American Modernist Poetry and Stream of Consciousness Novels"<sup>2</sup>, saying that "too high on political line, simplified ideological criticism and totally negated on art."<sup>3</sup> It was hard to imagine the pain of personality splitting caused by external reasons for Yuan Kejia, a pious poet and critic of modernist poetry. From the early and later academic attitudes, Yuan Kejia was not a critic who turned with the wind, but in that special social and cultural context, he had to say something against his will. In 1958, Yuan Kejia was investigated for his "Rightist Speech" and sent to work with some colleagues for ten months in Xiaomi Village, Jianping, Hebei Province; Since July 1964, Yuan Kejia has been transferred to the countryside of Shouxian County of Anhui Province, Fengcheng County of Jiangxi Province, and Xixian County of Henan Province, etc. carrying out "building institutes in the countryside", and returned to Beijing until July 1972. In March 1973, because of receiving Professor Hsu Kai-yu, his old classmate and an American writer, he aroused suspicion from the public security department that Xu was expelled from the country, and Yuan Kejia was also convicted of the anti-revolutionary crime of "providing information for American spies". He was publicly criticized, exhibited his pictures of crimes, and accepted supervisory labor work in foreign language institutes to clean toilets for four years. It was not until 1979 that he was redressed.<sup>4</sup>

Some poets simply closed their pens because their artistic pursuit was negated and criticized, and "broke off" with their beloved poems. Hang Yuehe was a typical example. He later recalled, "Because the different artistic views and creative styles with the general, Jiuye poetry friends and I had been criticized and treated unfairly by some comrades, and this situation continued after the liberation. As a result, since the 1950s, we have been forced to stop the creation of new poetry, and cannot go on their way of poetry creation normally."<sup>5</sup>

After the founding of the People's Republic of China, Zheng Min chose to study at Brown University in the United States due to the instability of the current situation. She has more in-depth access to one of the sources of British and American modernist poetry; the 17th century English metaphysical poetry represented by Donne, and selected the topic of her master's thesis "The Love Poems of John Donne".<sup>6</sup> In September 1951, Zheng Min transferred to Illinois State University and applied for pre-doctoral studies while working. During her stay in the United States, she had

<sup>2</sup> Yuan Kejia: "Modernization of New Poetry: Seeking for New Tradition", Tianjin: Da Gong Bao's Week Literary Art, 1948.

<sup>3</sup> Yuan Kejia: "Western Modernism and Jiuye Poets", Literature and Art Studies, 1983:4.

<sup>4</sup> Yuan Kejia: "Jiuye Collection: Preface to Jiuye Collection", published by Jiangsu People's Publishing House, 1981.

<sup>5</sup> Hang Yuehe: "Bianyu Xiaoji", "Poetry Creation", 1947:9.

<sup>6</sup> Zheng Min: "Poetry, I found you again", "Poetry and Philosophy are Neighbors — Construction: Deconstruction of Poetry", Beijing Normal University Press, 2012: 604-607.

been lacking in creative passion, and she did not write poetry until the Cultural Revolution. In 1971, the literary world changed greatly because of political factors. Writing poems, reading poems and commenting on poems became the “crime” of poets. The Red Guards found out Zheng Min’s poems published before liberation and investigated the historical problems. Zheng Min recalled that time in her “Shielding and Differences — Answering Twelve Questions of Mr. Wang Weiming” and “Poetry and Philosophy are Neighbors — Construction: Deconstruction of Poetry”, “When the leaders of the Labor Publicizing Group and the Army Publicizing Group came to ask me, ‘Have you really made up your mind not to write poetry?’ My brain was still in a very rigid ‘left’ radical state. I think it is also possible to sacrifice my own poetry life for Chinese Utopian communism. So I said I could not write.”<sup>7</sup> Zheng Min put her collection of poems to the torch and stopped talking about poems with his poetry friends. From 1948 to 1979, Zheng Min was silent in the circle of poetry for 30 years. Fortunately, Zheng Min and her husband escaped from the Cultural Revolution.

Compared with Zheng Min’s “luck”, Mu Dan was the most miserable poet among Jiuye poets. After the founding of the People’s Republic of China, Mu Dan mainly engaged in teaching and translation. Under the special circumstances of highly advocating revolutionary realism, he wrote “Funeral Song” in 1957.

*In this way, like a bird flying out of a long dark tunnel,  
I flew out to meet the sunshine and you, dear readers,  
How many heroic epics have been written in this era?  
But for me, with a poor heart, only my own funeral song.  
There’s not much to sing about: it’s all about it.  
An out-dated intellectual, and the twists and turns he  
experienced;  
Carrying heavy burden with him as you can see, he is  
determined  
To go forward side by side with you, and here is his joy.  
As far as poetry is concerned, I am afraid some people  
will find it not enthusiastic enough:  
There is little yearning for new things and little hatred  
for the old.  
It is because of this...my funeral song is only a half,  
As for the latter half, my dear comrades, please help me  
to make it be my life.*

— Chapter 3 of the “Funeral Song” by Mu Dan.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Zheng Min: “Shielding and Differences — Answering Twelve Questions of Mr. Wang Weiming”, “Poetry and Philosophy are Neighbors — Construction: Deconstruction of Poetry”, Peking University Press: 1999:454.

<sup>8</sup> Mu Dan: “Funeral Song” (Poetry), Edited by Li Fang, “Poetry Collection of Mu Dan: Later Works (1951-1976)” (Five Volumes in total), Chinese Literature Press, 1996.8.

Therefore, Mu Dan was branded with revolutionary realism. From certain sense, a “conscious modernist” was forced to disappear. He was worried as early as in 1957 in Funeral Song, “If I were lost, where would I go to find a warm home?” During the “Cultural Revolution”, when the right and wrong were reversed, the poet made endless serious inquiries about the real existence of personal life. “Song of Wisdom” reveals the past joys of love, friendship and ideals, which are like falling leaves. Later, it calmly shows the pains of wisdom that a serious thinker will inevitably harvest with sour and astringent strokes:

*But there is only one tree of wisdom that does not wither,  
I know it nourishes with my bitter juice.  
Its green is a merciless trick to me,  
I curse the growth of every leaf.*

—“Song of Wisdom” by Mu Dan<sup>9</sup>

In December 1958, the court declared him the crime of “historical counter-revolutionary” and “subject to the control of the departments” on the basis of the “materials” handed in, and was forced to abandon his teaching work and expel him from the classroom to accept the supervision of the Red Guards and labour work in the library of Nankai University.<sup>10</sup> During the three years from 1959 to 1961, Mu Dan was even deprived of the right to visit his parents in Beijing. After the outbreak of the “Cultural Revolution”, Mu Dan was continuously criticized, searched house and sent to the “cowshed” to work. In 1969, Mu Dan was transferred to Wanxian County, Baoding District, Hebei Province, and his wife and four children were separated in two different communes respectively. Later, he was sent to the “May 7th Cadre School” of Nankai University to work. It was not until 1972 that he returned to the library of Nankai University.

After ten years of devastation during the Cultural Revolution, he remained silent for a long time. In 1975, when poetry creation was resumed, Mu Dan worked hard and created nearly 30 works, such as Song of Wisdom, Winter and After the Power Cut, etc., which arouse great influence in the poetry circle in 1976 and became a climax of Mu Dan’s poetry creation. It is true that a few poems, such as Winter, After the Power Cut and the Heart of the City, are not completely developing in the original direction, but as Zheng Min said, “A sensitive mind that can love, hate, curse and often blame itself appears desolate and tame in the later works.”<sup>11</sup> In 1976, he wrote a poem, “Still well written, there are many modernist characteristics. When we read Mu Dan’s poems in 1976, we can see the poet’s bitterness.” “The special “modern flavor” of the contemporary modernist

<sup>9</sup> Mu Dan: “Song of Wisdom” (Poetry), Edited by Li Fang, “Poetry Collection of Mu Dan: Later Works (1951-1976)” (Five Volumes in total), Chinese Literature Press, 1996.8.

<sup>10</sup> Zheng Min: “A Generation of Poets in the 1940s and Chinese New Poetry — Writing for Mu Dan’s Poetry Memorial Meeting”, Literary Thesis- Zheng Min Collection (3 Volumes) (Last Volume), Beijing Normal University Press, 2012: 897-900.

<sup>11</sup> Zheng Min: “Exploring Contemporary Poetry Style: Good Poems in My Heart”, Literary Thesis- Zheng Min Collection (3 Volumes) (Middle Volume), Beijing Normal University Press, 2014: 472-478.



school has disappeared — there is no industrial metaphor, no metaphysical fantasy, no sudden parallelism and contrast, and so on.”<sup>12</sup> Wang Zuoliang believed that this was the poet “surpass the previous stage himself in the next stage”. If life was not particularly stingy with Mu Dan, he might push his modern poetry creation to a new level. It was the prediction of “the harsh winter of life”.<sup>13</sup> However, on February 26, 1977, his tireless poetry stopped beating because he was too tired, and left the world with hatred. This was a real tragedy.

#### IV. FLOWERING OUTSIDE THE WALL: JIUYE POETS MEET OVERSEAS BOSOM FRIENDS

Real gold will eventually shine. When Jiuye poets suffered misfortune or were forced to remain silent, some poets and scholars from Hong Kong, Taiwan and overseas paid great attention to their poetry. In 1963, 12 poems of Zheng Min and 9 poems of Du Yunxie were collected in “Chinese Poems of the 20th Century” edited and translated by Xu Jieyu; In 1974, Huang Jichi, Zhang Manyi, Huang Jundong and Gu Zhaokun in Hong Kong compiled an anthology of “Modern Chinese Poetry: 1917-1949”, which selected their poems created in the 1940s and gave them an objective and fair evaluation, pointing out that “It may be difficult for us to mention who is really a great poet; because of the unpredictable political situation in China, there is not enough time for them to further develop in their own direction”<sup>14</sup>. But they were true to the times and art. Although the development of Chinese poetry in the 1950s and 1960s was more tortuous and did not inherit the development of modernist style of poetry in the 1940s, the efforts of these poets were worth respecting. In 1975, Xu Jieyu has recorded his visits to Yuan Kejia and Zheng Min in his “Chinese Literary Landscape” when he returned to China in 1973, mainly reflecting their living conditions without creation freedom; In the spring of 1977, when discussing the course of his poetry creation, Ye Weilian talked about the influence of poets in the 1930s and 1940s on him, including Xin Di, Chen Jingrong, Yuan Kejia, Mu Dan, Du Yunxie and so on.

Apart from the aforementioned encounters with bosom friends abroad, the study of these poets has not made much progress in mainland China. During this period, Du Yunxie’s poem “Leopard of Rilke” (excerpts) best revealed the dilemma of Jiuye poets, and hit the hearts of the people. The poem expressed that poets and modernist poems always have a bad fate and difficult situation in China. After the victory of the War of Resistance against Japan, Chinese modernist

poetry was faced with special difficulties, but there were also hidden opportunities for development.

*There are more modern leopards*

*In a small circle of modernity, restlessly*

*Rotating*

*Want to jump put but never could*

—“Leopard of Rilke” by Du Yunxie (excerpts)<sup>15</sup>

It can be seen that the torment or persecution suffered by Jiuye poets during the 30 years of storms and rains not only severely damaged their body and mind, but also buried their pursuit of poetry art mercilessly in the remnants of history. For such a long time, no one dared to mention their poems. The various literary histories published in mainland China did not mention poetry genres, and even the names of poets of this genre were seldom mentioned. The artistic concepts of Jiuye School and their poems were really forgotten, so that when they were re-mentioned in the new era, some people thought that their works were the experiments of young poets.

#### V. CONCLUSION

Although Jiuye Poetry School was re-accepted by the poetry circle in the 1980s, they were neglected and in a state of dislocation. Under the new environment, Jiuye poets regained the right to make poem creation, and their long-term accumulated feelings and experiences were expressed again in the form of poetry. This creative process, on the one hand, formed another important period in their creative career; on the other hand, they also dedicated their vicissitudes of poetry art to the new poetry circle.

According to their age and creation experience, “Jiuye poets” also belong to the “returnees”, just because their creation has not been fully accepted by the poetry and academic circles from the beginning, and their silence time was longer than that of some other poets, their names were unfamiliar to many people, and many people did not even understand their artistic achievements in the 1940s. So in the new era of poetry, some people regarded some of Jiuye poets as new young poets, and seldom included them in the “returnees” poetry group. Therefore, Jiuye poets who were still alive and have gained new life come together again. They started anew and never forgot their persistent pursuit of modern poetry. Unfortunately, when they rekindled their enthusiasm for modern poetry creation, Jiuye poets who returned late and being old faced more coldness and challenges.

Jiuye poets began to take root in the poetry circle in the 1940s. Along the way, they came in the storms and rains, and their poetry life also grew and developed. Although as mentioned above, Jiuye poets have experienced the dislocation in their historical destiny, which can be said to be repeated “losing favor” in the process of development, it is precisely their unique historical destiny that has created their

<sup>12</sup> Zhang Mingquan: “The Second Childhood and the Sea — On the Poetry Creation of Jiuye Poets in the New Period”, Journal of Fuzhou University (Social Science Edition), 2004:4.

<sup>13</sup> Mu Dan: “Winter” (Poetry), Edited by Li Fang, “Poetry Collection of Mu Dan: Later Works (1951-1976)” (Five Volumes in total), Chinese Literature Press, 1996.8.

<sup>14</sup> “Introduction”, Modern Chinese Poetry: 1917-1949”, edited by 8 people include Zhang Manyi, Huang Jichi, Huang Jundong, Gu Zhaoshen, etc. University of Hong Kong Press, Publishing Department, Chinese University of HongKong, 1974:35. Later, it was republished in the third contemporary poetry forum anthology, Wang Runhua’s articles in Taiwan.

<sup>15</sup> Du Yunxie “Leopard of Rilke” (excerpts)

own rich poetic feelings and one and another excellent modernist poetry. From 1940s to now, Jiuye poets have formed a historical image different from other inter-generational poets. With their unique poet posture, they strived to engrave their own history, engrave their own lives and pursue poetry life.

The development of Jiuye poetry in more than half a century is like a big tree, which will surely have many details, extensions and influences, and even shadows. However, the author's ability is limited that can't depict every branch and leaf in details, but only the rough lines are drawn, which is more important than the mainstay. The development and research of the historical destiny of Jiuye Poetry School not only includes the people and their poems, but also involves the factors of the times, society and history, which is very complex and meaningful.

Finally, the author quotes Zheng Min's poem "The Footprints of a Camel — To an Indefatigable Intellectual" published in 1989 as the end of this paper. Poetry is the most natural emotional expression, and the poet's feelings are pure and hot. Zheng Min thought so, even said, "The poet's fate is a seer, a prophet, he will always look forward, always think about the fate of mankind, so it will always be the sentry of human history."<sup>16</sup> Perhaps this is the life pursuit of Jiuye poets of this generation.

*The Footprints of a Camel*

— *To an Indefatigable Intellectual*

*How many such noble animals are there in the world?*

*From ancient times till today,*

*With that big footprint,*

*Connected two hemispheres.*

*The sandstorm buried the footprints,*

*It still goes forward one step after another*

*Buried, and up, and buried,*

*Footprints, footprints, footprints...*

*The setting sun shines on its beautiful long neck,*

*In its prominent eyes, there are,*

*The indifference of philosophers,*

*The faithfulness of herdsmen,*

*The perseverance of scholars*

*Ah, in that noble hump,*

*Filled with contempt for difficulties,*

*Haughty and upright, self-sufficiency and loyalty.*

*The camel bells continue from time to time,*

*The sand pile has several layers,*

*The midday heat was burning the brown hair,*

*The cold in the late night made the limbs ache.*

*One light after another extinct,*

*The primitive cave opens wide,*

*The cold moonlight returns to the human world,*

*Why*

*Is there one person who hasn't slept yet?*

*Footprints, footprints, footprints*

*The earth is not the moon,*

*Wind and sand will eventually drown the footprints,*

*But he believed*

*There will be more young footprints, footprints, footprints.*

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