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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Academic Journals and Canonization of Contemporary Chinese Poets – A Quantitative Study

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Canon formation remains a central yet difficult question in literary studies. Drawing on quantitative methods and the highly digitalised landscape of Sinophone academic discourse, this essay examines the canonisation of modern and contemporary Chinese poets through data from the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI). The corpus is based on articles from journals listed in three consecutive editions of *A Guide to the Core Journals of China* (2014, 2017, 2020), covering 23,692 articles in 21 periodicals published between 2015 and 2021. After systematic filtering, the target dataset comprises 19 journals, 608 papers, and 270 poets, offering a measurable version of what Boris Dubin calls the “present canon”. Through visualisation and quantitative analysis, the study identifies two major clusters of poets: modern poets born between the 1890s and 1910s, and contemporary poets born between the 1950s and 1960s. Both clusters are dominated by male authors. Mu Dan, Jidi Majia, Zhang Zao, and Hai Zi emerge as the most prominent figures. The analysis also shows that scholarly attention often correlates with special journal columns and commemorative occasions, while women poets remain significantly underrepresented in Chinese academia.

本文運用量化方法，考察中國現當代詩歌經典的建構。研究以中國知網（CNKI）為資料來源，選取《中文核心期刊要目總覽》2014、2017、2020年版所收錄期刊在2015至2021年間刊發的23,692篇文章為初始樣本，經系統篩選，構建出涵蓋19種期刊、608篇論文、270位詩人的“當前正典”資料集（該概念借自俄羅斯學者伯里斯·杜賓）。經多維視覺化分析，研究析出兩大詩人群體：一為生於1890至1910年的現代詩人，一為生於1950至1960年的當代詩人；兩個群體均以男性為主，如穆旦、吉狄馬加、張棗、海子。資料表明，詩人所獲學術關注，多與期刊是否為其開設專欄正相關，而此類專欄又常因紀念性事件而設。近年雖有個別女性詩人廣受矚目，但女性整體在經典化進程中仍嚴重缺席，於學界亦處邊緣。

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**Keywords:** modern Chinese poetry, core periodicals, canon formation, digital humanities, quantitative analysis

**關鍵詞：** 現當代漢語詩歌，核心期刊，經典化，數字人文，定量分析

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## Introduction

The controversy surrounding the idea of a “canon” arose almost simultaneously with the concept itself. Views of literature and art have changed repeatedly over time, but the need to preserve the most representative examples has persisted through all such transformations. The selection criteria, however, may also alter considerably. The echo of the Canon Wars still resonates in the field, forcing researchers not only to read texts mindfully, but to be critical of their own unconscious biases as well. At the turn of the third millennium, the related academic trends reached China, modernising the existing understanding of “classics”. Here, the lecture series held by Douwe W. Fokkema at Peking University in 1993 is usually regarded as the earliest highlight (Hui 2021, 627).<sup>1</sup>

In the 2000s, a considerable number of critics became captivated by the ambition to find and announce a new canonical piece of literature. As Wu Sijing 吳思敬 acutely put it: “The Chinese poetry scene became infected with an anxiety to ‘discover’ classics” (2006, 129). For a fairly long period of time in the history of China, poetry enjoyed the highest status among all literary genres. And yet its position has been challenged profoundly by the arrival of postmodern relativisation and the advance of online communication. Heather Inwood, one of the widely recognised experts on Chinese Internet poetry, has formulated the problem rather succinctly: “For better or for worse, we are living in an age of widespread, unfiltered digital participation in the production and evaluation of culture” (2015, 45). In this perspective, Hölderlin’s line—or, to be more precise, its viral Chinese translation—should be inverted: now the question is not “詩人何為” or “Who wants poets at all in lean years?”, but “何為詩人” or “What is a poet?”<sup>2</sup> And the postmodernist answer may sound like: “詩人是普通人” or “A poet *is* an ordinary person”.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the theory of conceptual art teaches us: an artist is someone who is addressed as such. And, apparently, being a concept, a “classic” should follow a similar logic.

Given such a premise, how should academics approach the process of “canon formation”? A rather drastic solution might be borrowed from German-speaking academia, and particularly from the works of Simone Winko. Some two decades ago she adopted Adam Smith’s famous metaphor of the “invisible hand”, claiming that, at the extreme, the very notion of a “classic” is formed through the multiple actions of countless individuals. Hence, publications (books, reviews, articles, etc.), festivals, ceremonies, and many other events in

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<sup>1</sup> This essay does not assess “canon” as a term and does not implement substantial “qualitative” expertise. For related topics see Tan 2014.

<sup>2</sup> English translation by Michael Hamburger; original: “...wozu Dichter in dürrer Zeit”. The Chinese version of the phrase became largely popular via Hai Zi’s 海子 essay “The Poet I love—Hölderlin” 我熱愛的詩人——荷爾德林.

<sup>3</sup> 詩人是普通人 is the title of a recent anthology issued by Xiron Poetry Club 磨鐵讀詩會—a collective led by Shen Haobo 沈浩波 and Li Suo 裡所. The group is particularly renowned for its dedication to “vernacular poetry” 口語詩歌.

the literary field all together comprise a “resultant” that outlines an author’s or artwork’s “canonical” status (Rippl 2013, 73). In this perspective, names of poets and titles of their creations could be understood as “tags” within the literary system. And these labels potentially may appear in nearly infinite contexts, continuously shaping and reshaping the images in readers’ minds.

However, the exhaustive analysis of every single canon-forming activity could hardly constitute a realistic goal for the present study. At the preliminary stage, the enormity of the influencing factors should be situated within more tangible institutional boundaries. Arguably, one of the most convenient ways to navigate the field was proposed by the Russian sociologist Boris Dubin. Arranging the renovated literary system on the macroscopic scale, he identified three major domains for “classic” formation:

- the “institutional canon” (school syllabi, education textbooks, etc.),
- the “present canon” (mainly academic and literary journals),
- and the “popular canon” (mass media) (Dubin 2010, 68).<sup>4</sup>

Albeit limiting and mutually intersecting, this classification can still serve as an intuitive entry point (and some of its general assumptions will be revisited in the concluding part). For instance, these categories might be applied to existing studies on the different types of canonisation. Hence, the Eighth Pamphlet from Stanford Literary Lab allows a look at five lists of “best” literary works in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the related gender/ethnicity inequalities—a perspective that clearly interacts with the “popular canon” in Dubin’s paradigm (Algee-Hewitt 2015, 8–14). Similarly, the analysis conducted by the research group in the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln specifically discusses Graduate Reading Lists—i.e. part of the “institutional canon” (González 2021). The same applies for Wang Wenjing’s 王文靜 PhD thesis (2019) which provides author’s rankings according to a sample of 120 comprehensive works (histories, anthologies, textbooks) in the field of new poetry.

However, the contemporary Chinese context provides literary scholars with an even more attractive tool. China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI or 中國知網) is, arguably, the largest and the most authoritative Sinophone academic platform, with an almost bottomless repository. This research builds on its general database from which a smaller corpus has been extracted for the purpose of monitoring the “present canon”. In view of the

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<sup>4</sup> A similar tendency to treat magazines as a sub-field in “canon studies” may also be extracted from the Sinophone critical discourse. For example, Ding Fan 丁帆 suggests that writing literary history basically constitutes the second round of selection, while the initial filtering happens among periodicals’ editorial teams (2019, 30). In the same vein, Huang Fayou 黃髮有 evoked the notion of a “journals’ literary history” (期刊文學史), claiming that pivotal points in such narratives usually originate from the pages of magazines (2022, 57).

limitations of individual efforts, the current research aims not for an all-encompassing portrait of the poetry realm, but rather for some cautious methodological considerations. Thus, this essay will primarily address only one particular type of discursive behaviour: the inclusion of poets' names in the titles of papers and columns (further considerations on onomastic discourse analysis can be found in Rutkowski 2020). The following analysis will combine general calculations with visualisation patterns and selective interpretations of the most representative poetic phenomena.<sup>5</sup>

One more comment should be added here. The current paper was initially written in Chinese and was meant for publication in the PRC as part of the author's PhD project. Since the author of this essay does not specialise in programming, all source codes for scatter plots and network graphs (as well as partitioning of poets' names) were created by Huo Shitu 霍世圖. When the first version of the article was finalised, he was undertaking a master's degree in computational Linguistics at Beijing Normal University. By the date of the current submission (i.e. as of July 2025), he is no longer associated with academia and does not consider himself a substantial contributor. Nevertheless, it would not be fair not to thank him here for all the time he invested in the study. Since editing the graphs would require finding another coauthor and was hardly possible in the short term, English translations of the relevant labels have been provided in the captions as far as possible.

## Designing a Corpus

First of all, the current study needed to determine the scope of the periodicals to be scrutinised. The idea of having an ultimate scientometric register is anything but new. In the PRC such initiatives can be traced back to the opening volume of *A Guide to the Core Journals of China* 中文核心期刊要目总览 (hereinafter referred to as "*Guide*"), which came into print in 1992 (*Guide* 2025). As the host institution of the *Guide*, Peking University Library established a powerful partnership with CNKI, and the updated record of core periodicals has now been published every three years since 2008. Following the accepted classification, the present essay limits its scope to one particular category marked by the capital letter "I". This group covers journals associated with literary studies. The data was extracted from three consecutive editions of the *Guide*: 2014, 2017, and 2020. Its scope was determined by several practical factors. As a single-authored project, the experiment had its obvious quantitative limitations. Additionally, the author had to consider online accessibility

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<sup>5</sup> The author of this essay consulted basic provisions of the celebrated actor-network theory (ANT), but preferred a different approach. For the related issues see Latour 2005.

of the material and the degree of digitalisation. Since the main focus is on Chinese modern and contemporary poets, the sample does not include journals specialising in foreign or pre-modern literature, nor magazines publishing creative work (e.g., *Foreign Literature* 外國文學, *Fiction Review* 小說評論, *Studies on "A Dream of Red Mansions"* 紅樓夢學刊, *October* 十月, etc.). Titles of the selected journals are presented below (in alphabetical order of English title):

| Nº | Title (English) <sup>6</sup>                                        | Title (Chinese) | Publication cycle | City      | Foundation date |
|----|---------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|-------------------|-----------|-----------------|
| 1  | Chinese Culture Research                                            | 中國文化研究          | Quarterly         | Beijing   | 1993            |
| 2  | Chinese Journal of Literary Criticism                               | 中國文學批評          | Quarterly         | Beijing   | 2015            |
| 3  | Comparative Literature in China                                     | 中國比較文學          | Quarterly         | Shanghai  | 1984            |
| 4  | Contemporary Literary Criticism                                     | 當代文壇            | Bimonthly         | Chengdu   | 1982            |
| 5  | Contemporary Writers Review                                         | 當代作家評論          | Bimonthly         | Shenyang  | 1984            |
| 6  | Contention in Literature and Art                                    | 文藝爭鳴            | Monthly           | Changchun | 1986            |
| 7  | Journal of Modern Chinese Literature                                | 現代中文學刊          | Bimonthly         | Shanghai  | 1984            |
| 8  | Journal of Nanjing Normal University School of Chinese Language and | 南京師範大學文學院學報     | Quarterly         | Nanjing   | 1999            |
| 9  | Literary Heritage                                                   | 文學遺產            | Bimonthly         | Beijing   | 1980            |
| 10 | Literary Review                                                     | 文學評論            | Bimonthly         | Beijing   | 1959            |

<sup>6</sup> For all selected periodicals, English titles are given according to CNKI translations. Exceptions are made for *New Literary Historical Materials* and *Contention in Literature and Art*, as their profiles either simply provide *pinyin* transcription, or suggest no international version at all.

|    |                                            |            |           |          |      |
|----|--------------------------------------------|------------|-----------|----------|------|
| 11 | Literature & Art Studies                   | 文藝研究       | Monthly   | Beijing  | 1979 |
| 12 | Literatures in Chinese                     | 華文文學       | Bimonthly | Shantou  | 1985 |
| 13 | Modern Chinese Literature Studies          | 中國現代文學研究叢刊 | Monthly   | Beijing  | 1979 |
| 14 | New Literary Historical Materials          | 新文學史料      | Quarterly | Beijing  | 1978 |
| 15 | Research of Chinese Literature             | 中國文學研究     | Quarterly | Changsha | 1985 |
| 16 | Shanghai Culture                           | 上海文化       | Monthly   | Shanghai | 1987 |
| 17 | Southern Cultural Forum                    | 南方文壇       | Bimonthly | Nanning  | 1987 |
| 18 | Studies of Ethnic Literature               | 民族文學研究     | Bimonthly | Beijing  | 1983 |
| 19 | Theoretical Studies in Literature and Art  | 文藝理論研究     | Bimonthly | Shanghai | 1980 |
| 20 | Theory and Criticism of Literature and Art | 文藝理論與批評    | Bimonthly | Beijing  | 1986 |
| 21 | Yangtze Jiang Literary Review              | 揚子江文學評論    | Bimonthly | Nanjing  | 2006 |

Table 1: List of target periodicals

Over the period from 2015 to 2021, these periodicals published a total of 23,692 papers. However authoritative it may be, CNKI does not replicate print issues with 100% precision. Thus, the author is aware that during the digitalisation process some omissions or discrepancies in content may have occurred.

After establishing the preliminary dataset, the next stage involved filtering the articles on poetry via two additional parameters. The primary tactic involved directly addressing past issues of the journals with the purpose of identifying relevant columns. These included “Poetry Studies” 詩論 in *Contention in Literature and Art*, “Poetry Research” 詩歌研究 in

*Contemporary Literary Criticism*, “Manifestations of the Poetry Scene” 詩壇萬象 in *Southern Cultural Forum*, and a few others. The CNKI navigating system provides a special option for “column browsing” 欄目流覽, so the initial sample was compiled rather quickly. However, the data obtained still barely covered the expected variety of the material. Thus, a second strategy was developed with regard to the integrated “specialised” search 專業檢索—another built-in function of CNKI. On November 6, 2022 (the final search date for both methods), the parameters were set to the following values:

- publication time 發表時間: 2015 to 2021
- search formula 檢索運算式: TI = (‘詩’ + ‘詩歌’ + ‘詩學’) AND JN = (‘文學評論’ + ‘文學遺產’ + ‘新文學史料’ + ‘民族文學研究’ + ‘中國現代文學研究叢刊’ + ‘當代作家評論’ + ‘當代文壇’ + ‘中國文學研究’ + ‘南方文壇’ + ‘現代中文學刊’ + ‘揚子江文學評論’ + ‘中國文學批評’ + ‘中國文化研究’ + ‘上海文化’ + ‘文藝研究’ + ‘文藝爭鳴’ + ‘華文文學’ + ‘南京師範大學文學院學報’ + ‘文藝理論研究’ + ‘文藝理論與批評’ + ‘中國比較文學’)
- source category 來源類別: “core journals” 核心期刊

As a result, 1,840 papers were collected, and all the data was transferred into Excel spreadsheets. A simple calculation shows that poetry-related papers in target academic journals account for nearly 8% (1,840 out of 23,692). This (dis)proportion may discourage some poetry enthusiasts, but a brief comparison with the ratio of the other thematic columns shows that these figures should not be interpreted as a signal of the genre’s insignificance. Articles on poetry are no less marginalised than some other sub-topics, such as “media studies” or “literary theory”.

At this point, the metadata on every paper in the current corpus included the title, author’s name, source periodical (and column), publication date (issue no.), plus the rates of citations and downloads on the search date. The number of papers on a topic could help to identify the general academic preferences of the editorial boards and contributors, while the number of downloads reflects, to a certain degree, the interests of the CNKI reading audience (albeit within the specified period of time).<sup>8</sup> Tentatively, it should be assumed that the

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<sup>7</sup> These keywords were selected after experimenting with the CNKI Search Engine and learning its limitations. For example, an inquiry that contains only ‘詩’ will not automatically include ‘詩歌’ or ‘詩學’ into the results—such binomes will be presented rather sporadically. At the same time, adding more thematic markers—such as ‘詩人’ (“poet”) or ‘詩集’ (“poetry collection”)—to the formula does not help either. Combining ‘詩’ and ‘詩人’, most likely, will exclude the lion’s share of the entries that mention ‘詩’ as an independent word. Thus, after a series of trials, the formula that provides the most productive outcome was chosen.

<sup>8</sup> Citation indices, arguably, are the most representative indicators of research impact. However, as the sample for this essay mainly encompasses recent work, the low quotation rates do not provide enough analytical space. For related studies based on citation indices see Shen 2016.

undergraduate students from the PRC comprise the largest users' group on the platform and thus could impact the selected metric.

However, since canonicity could only be measured for a particular phenomenon (such as the status of a writer or a piece of artwork), the designed Excel sheet still required a separate column indicating poets' names. Predictably, not all of the selected titles contained such "personal tags". To simplify the selection process, the collected data was first segmented through the HanLP COARSE\_ELECTRA\_SMALL\_ZH language model and then input into the MSRA\_NER\_ELECTRA\_SMALL\_ZH model. Both packages were borrowed from the official page of the HanLP project—a multilingual Natural Language Processing library (HanLP 2025). Such pre-trained tools are usually utilised for lexical tagging, and thus could be smoothly adopted to serve the goals of this research. Tokens identified as PERSON were copied in the closest unoccupied cells. Yet, such "assisted" partitioning left numerous blind spots that had to be corrected manually. For instance, pen names of some poets were categorised as places (Bei Dao 北島—literally, "northern island"), adjectives or adverbs (Duo Duo 多多—"many" / "much"). Poets' gender and birth and death years were also supplied without the help of machine algorithms. To concentrate more precisely on the Modern and Contemporary periods, it was decided to remove entries on authors who had passed away prior to 1920 from the selection (here the May Fourth Movement was taken as a watershed). After another round of manual intervention, an updated target set was finalised. As illustrated in Figure 1, the final sample comprised 19 journals, 608 papers, and 270 poets.

Labels on the horizontal axis are titles of the selected journals (from left to right): *Contention in Literature and Art*, *Contemporary Writers Review*, *Modern Chinese Literature Studies*, *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, *Southern Cultural Forum*, *Journal of Modern Chinese Literature*, *Yangtze Jiang Literary Review*, *New Literary Historical Materials*, *Literatures in Chinese*, *Literary Review*, *Studies of Ethnic Literature*, *Shanghai Culture*, *Research of Chinese Literature*, *Theoretical Studies in Literature and Art*, *Theory and Criticism of Literature and Art*, *Literature & Art Studies*, *Comparative Literature in China*, *Chinese Culture Research*, *Journal of Nanjing Normal University School of Chinese Language and Culture*. Red indicates the number of papers and blue indicates number of poets mentioned in the corpus of a given periodical.



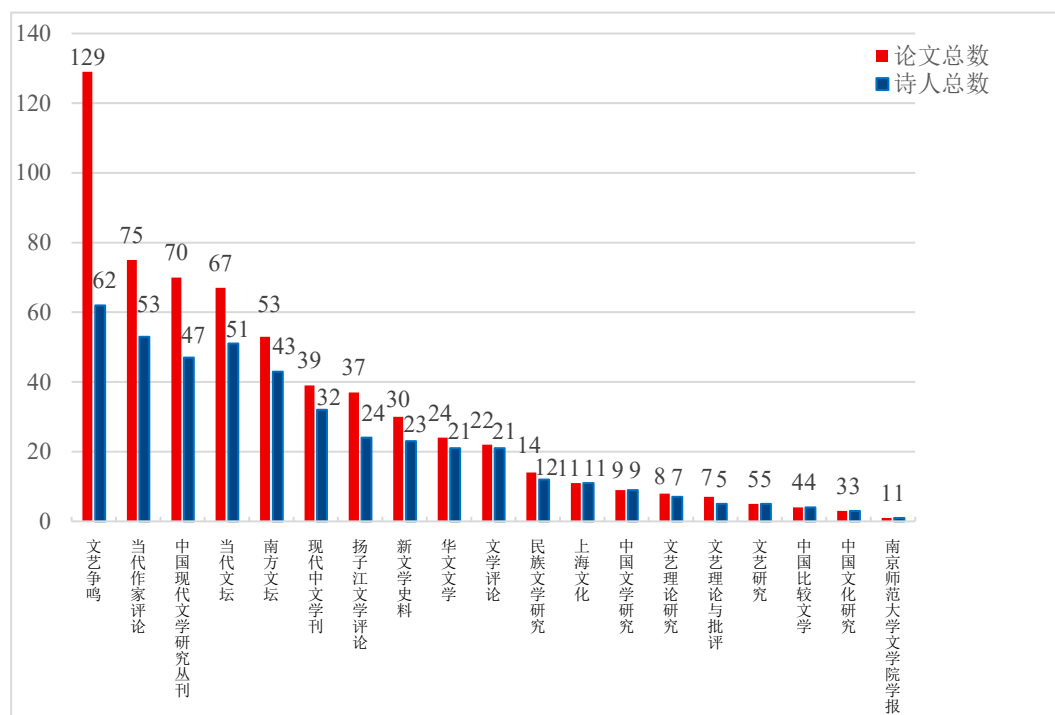


Figure 1: Numbers of papers and poets in the selected core periodicals

A few additional remarks here might be useful. The numbers of papers (論文總數) and poets (詩人總數) generally depend on the overall profile of the journal, its publication cycle, and/or the selected time period. In terms of the journals' profiles, the amount and frequency of poetry-related columns remain crucial factors. For example, judging solely by poets' entries, *Contention in Literature and Art* does not differ significantly from the other leading periodicals, whereas its figure for articles account for approximately one-fifth of the whole corpus. And the collective input of the first five journals, in turn, equals nearly half. Such a ratio is a rather predictable outcome of having more columns on the subject. By contrast, *Journal of Nanjing Normal University* ranks lowest in the current listing chiefly because of its broad thematic scope. Similarly, among the top five, the first and the third journals are issued monthly, and the other three follow a bimonthly cycle. And once again, the position of *Journal of Nanjing Normal University* comes as no surprise, since it is issued quarterly. Finally, it should be noted that the pool of core periodicals in the *Guide* slightly varies over the years. For instance, *Shanghai Culture* and *Journal of Nanjing Normal University* appeared only in the 2014 and 2017 editions respectively, and this fact alone has substantially reduced their contributions.

| No | A<br>Journal                                        | B<br>Issue | C<br>Column                                                  | D<br>Paper                                                                                                                                                                      | E<br>Author                               | F<br>Poet           | G<br>Date of birth | H<br>Gender | I<br>Citations | J<br>K | L   | M<br>Downloads |
|----|-----------------------------------------------------|------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|-------------|----------------|--------|-----|----------------|
| 1  | 文學評論<br>Literary Review                             | 2021.02    | “文史互證”研究<br>Comparative<br>Studies in Literature and History | “70 後”作家的情感結構與敘事詩學——以蘇偉創作為例<br>The Emotional Structure and Narrative Poetics of “Post-70” Writers<br>— A Case of Wei Wai                                                        | 曹霞<br>Cao Xia                             | 魏微<br>Wei Wei       | 1970               | Female      | 1              | 12     | 533 | 1185           |
| 2  | 中國現代文學<br>研究叢刊<br>Modern Chinese Literature Studies | 2021.11    | 詩學研究<br>Research on Poetry                                   | “與世界之創造”：駱一禾詩學建構的存在主義路徑<br>“Hearing the World’s Creation”:<br>The Existentialism of Luo Yihé’s Poetic System                                                                    | 王東東<br>Wang Dongdong                      | 駱一禾<br>Luo Yihé     | 1961               | Male        | 0              | 3      | 200 | 412            |
| 3  | 文學爭鳴<br>Contention in Literature and Art            | 2020.09    | 詩論<br>Poetry Studies                                         | “世界性”的內在構成——論吉狄馬加的詩<br>Internally Composed “Worldliness”<br>— On Poetry by Jidi Maga                                                                                            | 盧慎<br>Lu Zhen                             | 吉狄馬加<br>Jidi Maga   | 1961               | Male        | 1              | 3      | 169 | 336            |
| 4  | 文學爭鳴<br>Contention in Literature and Art            | 2017.08    | 評論<br>Criticism Studies                                      | “雲之歌不僅作美”：海華中冷的隱隱尋詩《雲之自語》<br>“No Longer is the Song of Clouds”:<br>On Ye Zhongling’s Translation of “The Clouds”                                                                | 張靜<br>Zhang Jing                          | 葉中冷<br>Ye Zhongling | 1880               | Male        | 0              | 0      | 85  | 113            |
| 5  | 現代中文學刊<br>Journal of Modern<br>Chinese Literature   | 2016.02    | 現代詩學研究<br>Studies in Modern Poetry                           | “他是屬於未來的詩人”——《婦人畫報》時期徐遲的“摩登”現代詩<br>“He is a Poet of the Future”<br>— Xu Chi’s “Modern” Poetry During the Period of “Women’s Pictorial”                                          | 孫玉石<br>Sun Yushi                          | 徐遲<br>Xu Chi        | 1914               | Male        | 3              | 4      | 151 | 226            |
| 6  | 南方文壇<br>Southern Cultural Forum                     | 2019.01    | 理論新見<br>New Theoretical<br>Insights                          | “以文為詩”與打散詩體——簡論胡適白話詩學主張的形成及其中西理據<br>“Taking Wen as Shi” and Breaking the Poetic Form<br>— An Overview of Hu Shi’s Vernacular Poetics and Its Chinese / Western Rationalisations | 王光相<br>Wang Guanghe                       | 胡適<br>Hu Shi        | 1891               | Male        | 0              | 2      | 326 | 435            |
| 7  | 新文學史料<br>New Literary Historical Materials          | 2020.03    | 新詩學案<br>New Poetic Cases                                     | “以現代為範，以中國為神”——論洛夫詩歌觀的蛻變<br>“Modernity as a Shell, China as a Deity” - Luo Fu’s Changing Views on Poetry                                                                        | 古遠清<br>Gu Yuanqing                        | 洛夫<br>Luo Fu        | 1928               | Male        | 1              | 6      | 265 | 446            |
| 8  | 當代作家評論<br>Contemporary Writers Review               | 2021.06    | 當代詩學論壇<br>Contemporary<br>Poetry Forum                       | “以詩進入歷史，出入戰爭”——王公辛長詩創作論<br>“Entering History with Poetry, Out with War” - On Wang Junxin’s Long Poems                                                                           | 姚洪偉<br>Yao Hongwei<br>韓登科<br>Jiang Dengke | 王公辛<br>Wang Junxin  | 1939               | Male        | 0              | 0      | 113 | 206            |
| 9  | 揚子江文學評論<br>Yangtze Jiang Literary Review            | 2018.02    | 新詩研究<br>Studies in New<br>Poetry                             | “保持整理老舍背上斑駁的痕跡”：再讀多多<br>“Keep the Madness of Ordering the Tiger’s Stripes”: Rereading Duo Duo                                                                                   | 李章斌<br>Li Zhaobin                         | 多多<br>Duo Duo       | 1951               | Male        | 3              | 5      | 252 | 576            |

Table 2: Corpus layout (English translations provided for readers’ convenience). Data in columns J–M illustrates changes in citation and download rates between 06.11.2022 and 11.06.2025. The significant shifts are highlighted in pale grey.

## Assessing Diversity

Approaching the “present canon” as a sociological literary phenomenon requires a suitable metric. On the most basic level, such parameters include poets’ age and gender.<sup>9</sup> The relevant information can be represented in pie charts.

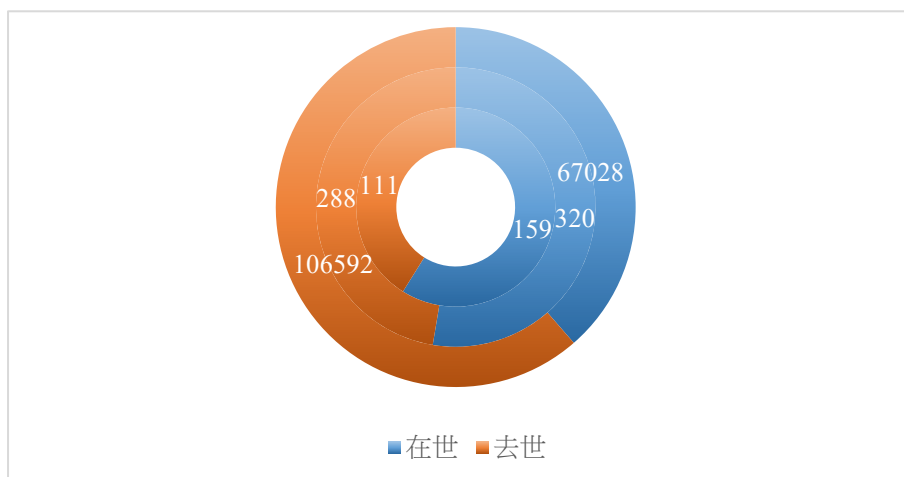


Figure 2: Ratio of deceased (red) and living (blue) poets

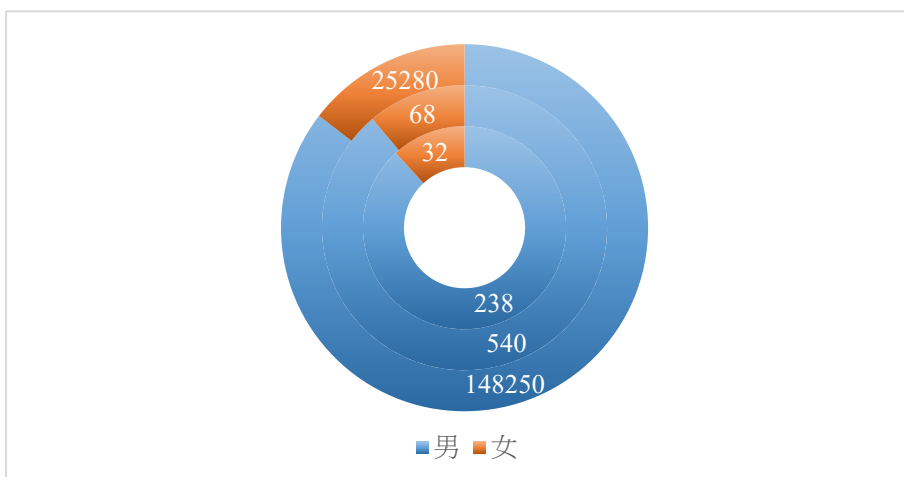


Figure 3: Ratio of male (blue) and female (red) poets

<sup>9</sup> With no reliable criterion at hand, the author refrains from conveying an “ethnic breakdown” (as done, for example, in Algee-Hewitt 2015, 13). The other relevant information was extracted from open sources: chiefly, online encyclopaedias (Wikipedia, Baidu Baike, etc.) or various authors’ bios accompanying their publications.

White digits on the three coloured rings (Figures 2 and 3) represent the total numbers of poets (internal ring), papers (middle ring), and downloads (external ring), respectively. A first glance at the pie charts confirms rather superficial expectations: both scholars and readers express more interest in dead authors. While these poets' ratio here comprises only 41%, the related download index swells to a solid 61%, occupying almost two thirds of the pie. To a certain degree, this disproportion could be explained in an aphoristic manner: "Glory is the sun of the dead." A finalised text—be it a piece of poetry or, indeed, a piece of one's life—is traditionally perceived as a more stable and accessible research object. For instance, some critics—especially in such a relationship-oriented society as China—may feel safer in speaking when they do not have to worry about invading the privacy of their target authors.

Figure 2 displays the proportion between the two genders. The masculinity of the Chinese poetry scene has been a widely discussed bias for a long time, and the current statistics prove this trend. Regardless of the selected criterion, women poets appear to be enormously under-represented: the highest percentage here barely exceeds 14%. Nevertheless, it is important to point out that among 32 women poets in the sample, as many as 25 are contemporary living authors—a situation that could be interpreted in at least two ways. On the one hand, the presence of active female poets in the sample may be interpreted as a sign of growing equality in poetry discourse. On the other hand, the small number of deceased female poets indicates that they have been overshadowed by their male contemporaries over the years and makes one wonder whether the same process of gradual erasure will also apply to the female authors who enjoy a significant popularity today.

Now it is time to switch to more elaborate methods of analysis. Three scatter plots below (Figures 4–6) visualise the dataset in a more detailed fashion. These graphs depict the relationships between poets' birth year (X-axis) and the total or average number of papers and downloads, respectively (Y-axis).<sup>10</sup> On all the grids, dead poets are presented in pale and living in bright tones (blue palette for male and red for female authors). For authors whose numbers surpassed the specified threshold, name labels were also provided.

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<sup>10</sup> The average number of downloads was counted only for those authors who were mentioned in three or more paper titles in the corpus. Although this index could not reflect readers' demand for each individual paper, it still demonstrates a general tendency and rather intriguing shifts in the sample. Aside from the lack of interest in certain poets (or critics), a low average may suggest a predominance of repeated motifs among articles or simply that the demand is satisfied via a different platform (i.e. not CNKI).

| No | Poet                 | Birth year | Papers | Downloads | Dead/Living   Gender      |
|----|----------------------|------------|--------|-----------|---------------------------|
| 1  | 東蕩子<br>Dong Dangzi   | 1964       | 4      | 529       | 在世 · 男<br>Living   Male   |
| 2  | 於堅<br>Yu Jian        | 1954       | 3      | 792       | 在世 · 男<br>Living   Male   |
| 3  | 于賡虞<br>Yu Gengyu     | 1902       | 1      | 151       | 已去世 · 男<br>Late   Male    |
| 4  | 亞楠<br>Ya Nan         | 1961       | 1      | 203       | 在世 · 男<br>Living   Male   |
| 5  | 任洪淵<br>Ren Hongyuan  | 1937       | 1      | 163       | 已去世 · 男<br>Late   Male    |
| 6  | 任溶溶<br>Ren Rongrong  | 1923       | 1      | 667       | 在世 · 男<br>Living   Male   |
| 7  | 何其芳<br>He Qifang     | 1912       | 6      | 2682      | 已去世 · 男<br>Late   Male    |
| 8  | 何小竹<br>He Xiaozhu    | 1963       | 1      | 141       | 在世 · 男<br>Living   Male   |
| 9  | 餘光中<br>Yu Guangzhong | 1928       | 4      | 1161      | 已去世 · 男<br>Late   Male    |
| 10 | 餘寶琳<br>Yu Baolin     | 1949       | 1      | 105       | 在世 · 女<br>Living   Female |

Table 3: Sample data for scatter plots

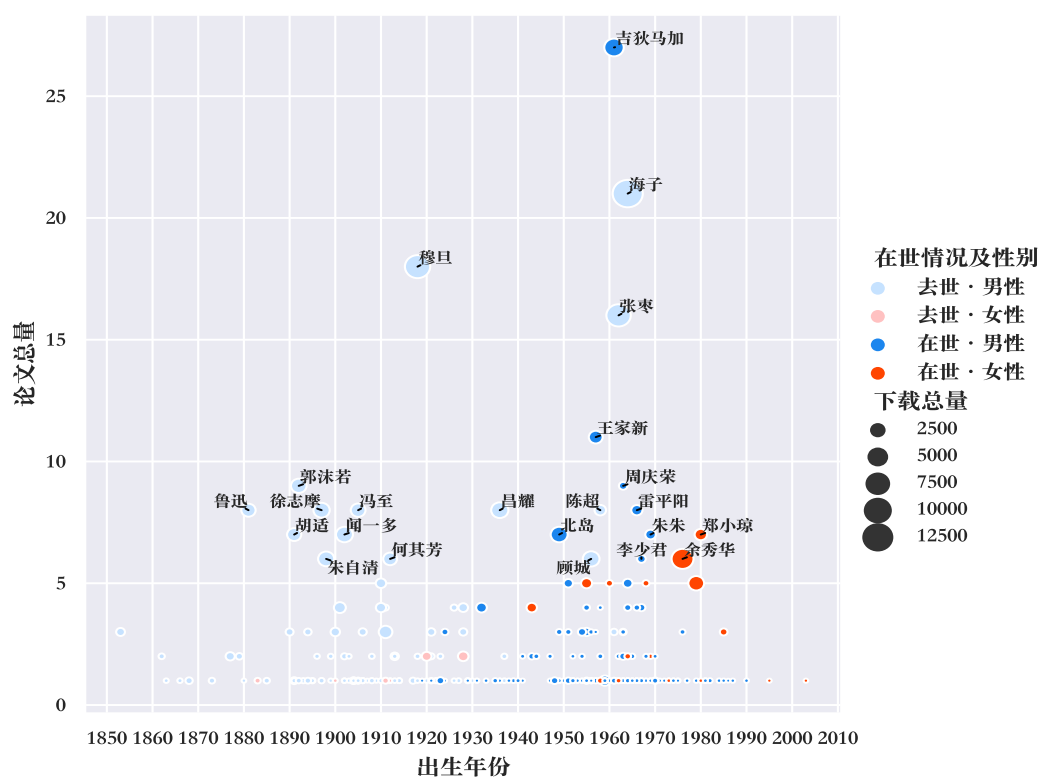


Figure 4: Correlation between poets' birth dates and number of papers (size of dot represents number of downloads)

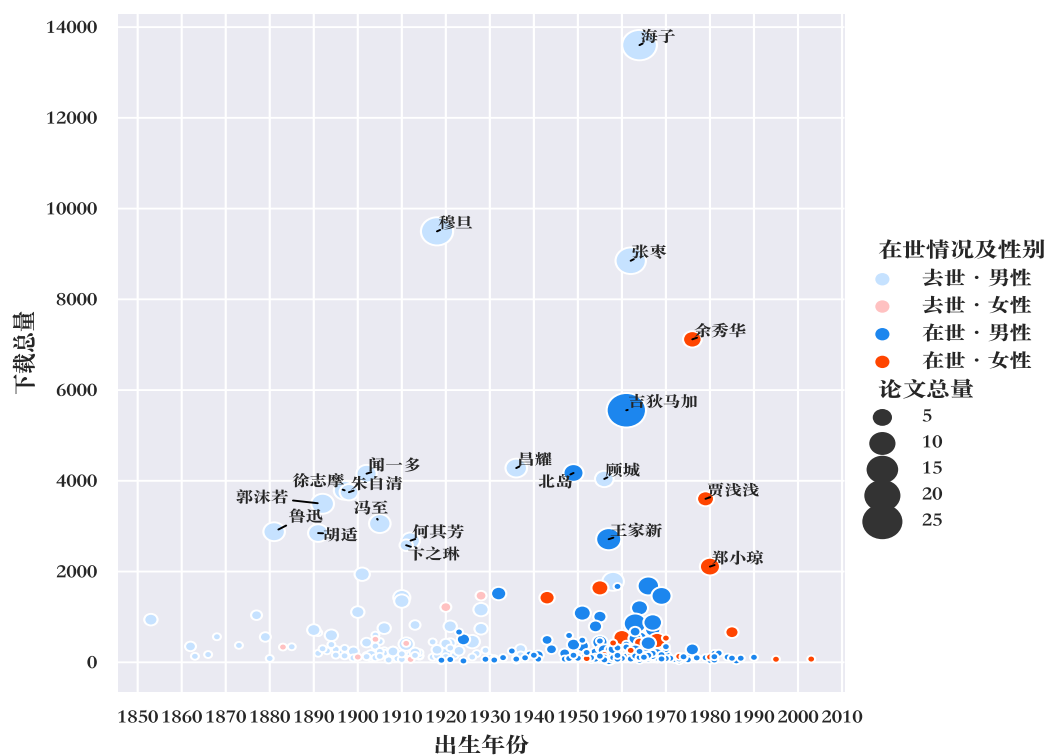


Figure 5: Correlation between poets' birth dates and number of downloads (size of dot represents numbers of papers)

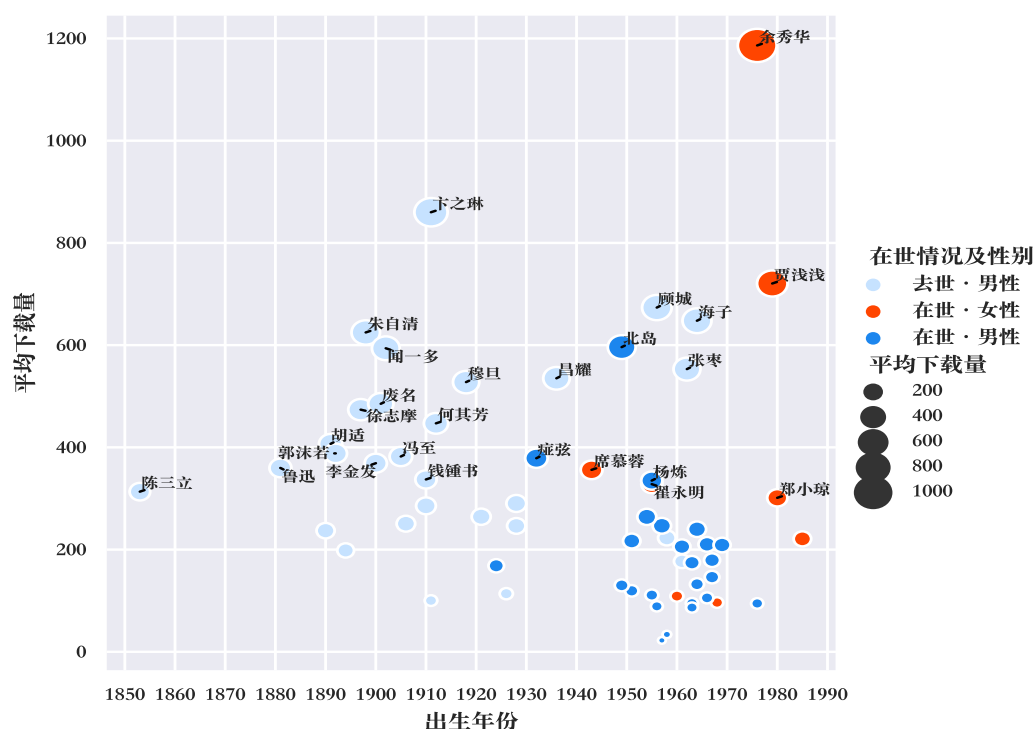


Figure 6: Correlation between birth dates and average downloads of a paper (size of dot mirrors this ratio)

As shown on Figure 4, in terms of critical attention, Jidi Majia 吉狄馬加, Hai Zi 海子, Mu Dan 穆旦, and Zhang Zao 張棗 surpass all other poets. Therefore, understanding of the “present canon” seems impossible without commenting on these four figures.

First, to reiterate the message above, it should be noted that Mu Dan (1918–1977), Hai Zi (1964–1989) and Zhang Zao (1962–2010) have all departed this life. However, it is even more important that each one of them is associated with a particular epoch in the modern history of China. Hai Zi’s case is, probably, the most representative. Over the years, his literary creation and tragic death have evoked a tremendous critical response, and thus will need no more advocacy than a link to the existing scholarship (Rui 2012). In the present-day academic community, it is common to link his suicide with the end of the 1980s—the “golden era” for contemporary Chinese literature (Guo 2018, 78). And judging by years of life, it is clear how Mu Dan and Zhang Zao “expand” the period in question towards the past and future respectively. Mu Dan is frequently viewed as a transitional figure between the May Fourth and post-Maoist iterations of modernism. For some critics, his metaphorical role in the literary hierarchy is nothing less than a “central node of the historical genealogy” 歷史譜系的中心節點 (Zhou Zhiqiang 2008, 28). Yet it appears that his position in the current sample is chiefly defined by papers commemorating the centenary of his birth. Compared with Hai Zi and Mu Dan, Zhang Zao has only just entered the initial stage of canonicity. At

the beginning of 2011, *Contemporary Writers Review* posthumously dedicated a column to him, and this event set a standard for further cooperative discursive actions (Lin 2011, 169). For instance, during the first research seminar on the poet's work held by *Southern Cultural Forum*, several scholars proposed that Zhang Zao had successfully created a mode of writing which allowed him to transcend the romanticised exaltations of Hai Zi and his epigones (Wang & Li 2018, 69–70).

As the author with highest number of papers, Jidi Majia's case deserves separate assessment. Among the academic community he is usually portrayed as a poet situated in between the Yi 彝 (or Nuosu 諾蘇), Chinese, and global cultural domains—a commonplace in the critical narratives that can be traced back to the mid-80s (Sun 1985; Xiang 2019, 136). Such a “triple identity” alone implies a multitude of possible research angles, but over the years of his career, Jidi Majia has accumulated even more valuable resources, serving as a Vice-Chair of the China Writers Association and Honorary President of the China Minority Writers Association (Jidi 2025). Even if the correlation between academic and political discourse remains somewhat speculative, the role of bureaucracy in the PRC should never be underestimated. At least, it is safe to say that holding a high post in China most definitely helps to channel cultural and social symbolic capital. And these resources, in turn, may be converted into conferences, seminars, and other literary activities related to the process of “canonisation”. Nevertheless, Figure 6 shows a trend quite different from the two previous diagrams. While the other three “leading” poets mostly maintained their positions, the dot corresponding with Jidi Majia did not reach the mark of 200 downloads per paper, and thus was left unlabelled.<sup>11</sup> Without further qualitative research, it may be only assumed that so far Jidi Majia's profile is not as visible to the CNKI reading audience as the images of Hai Zi, Mu Dan, or Zhang Zao.

Aside from inquiries into individual cases, the charts presented here could also be employed for macroscopic observations. For example, if we follow the horizontal axis, two clusters could be easily identified: one group covers authors born in the late 1890s up to early 1910s (plus Lu Xun 魯迅), and the other spans a similar period of thirty years from the late 1940s to the late 1960s. Again, we may see how these groups correspond with the May Fourth Movement and the beginning of the Deng Xiaoping 鄧小平 era—two undisputed watersheds in modern Chinese history—while the decades in between are often associated with an opposite aesthetic course, dictated by wars, famine, revolutions, and other social disasters. It is, therefore, quite symptomatic that, from the current sample, scholars prefer to study Chang Yao—a poet consistently resistant to the political lyricism of his era (Zhao 2020, 23).

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<sup>11</sup> In terms of the average downloads index, the case of Bian Zhilin 卞之琳 demonstrates an opposite metamorphosis. For some academics, the interest in his work intersects with Zhang Zao's poetics—a creative practice that integrates both “ancient and modern, Chinese and Western” traditions (Ya 2020, 201).



To a certain extent, authors born at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century have defined the core values of modern Chinese literature. Thus, the high positions of Hu Shi 胡適, Guo Moruo 郭沫若, Xu Zhimo 徐志摩, and several others on the charts were more or less expected. By contrast, the years after 1949 tend to be more volatile, and hence more attractive for the goals of this essay. Of course, the contemporary period also has its obvious favourites: the fame of Bei Dao 北島, Gu Cheng 顧城, and Wang Jiaxin 王家新 spread beyond the borders of China many decades ago. The question then should be posed in a slightly different light: what happened to the other Misty 朦朧 and “intellectual” poets? Why are Yang Lian 楊煉, Ouyang Jianghe 歐陽江河, Xi Chuan 西川 and the rest not labelled on the scatter plots? While in-depth answers might require a separate paper, a more concise formula may be borrowed from Maghiel van Crevel’s work. In a recent study, he argued that in the process of literary translation, Zheng Xiaoqiong 鄭小琼 has become a “synecdoche” for all the group termed “battler poets”:

In sum, those looking for foreign work on battler poetry are going to find Zheng Xiaoqiong and Xu Lizhi before they find anyone else. And if their interest in poetry extends beyond its clichéd status as a romantic accompaniment to personal tragedy, they are going to find only Zheng Xiaoqiong. (Van Crevel 2023, 207)

This argument could easily be extrapolated to the process of canonisation at large: collective patterns are explored through the lens of singular phenomena. Of course, such a state of affairs does not necessarily imply that the interpretive potential of the less studied poets cannot be compared with that of their “luckier” colleagues. More often, it means that canonised poets are just better suited for explanation of some “surface” trends, or are simply more discursively active (not to mention the personal preferences of critics themselves).<sup>12</sup>

A few words should be said about the remaining labelled writers on the downloads graph. For the sake of brevity, this essay will single out only one trait for every author, thus consciously oversimplifying their discursive portraits. Chen Chao’s 陳超 (1958–2014) untimely death shocked the literary community four years after the passing of Zhang Zao. During his lifetime, he combined creative contributions with academic position, and this “double status” played a crucial role in the commemorative practice devoted to his name (Zhang 2015, 143). Somewhat similar to Jidi Majia, Li Shaojun 李少君 represents yet another example of beneficial networking in official circles. His experience in the magazine business—first at *Frontiers* 天涯 and since 2019 as the editor-in-chief of *Poetry Periodical* 詩刊—most certainly corresponds with his numbers in the corpus (Li 2025). To some critics, Zhu Zhu 朱朱 acts as a yet another “intellectual”—his poetic method calls for close reading

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<sup>12</sup> The absence of studies on “vernacular writing” in the corpus is much more comprehensible. Among academics, the colloquial form of postmodernism is tacitly regarded as not being worth serious expertise. In this situation, such influential figures as Yang Li 楊黎, Yi Sha 伊沙, or Shen Haobo 沈浩波 rarely receive a welcome in the core periodicals. Even Yu Jian 於堅—arguably the most traditional among all of them—has only three articles mentioning his name in the title.

and deciphering (Li 2018, 56). Finally, the cases of Lei Pingyang 雷平陽 and Zhou Qingrong 周慶榮 illustrate the other two stylistic tendencies in the field. While the former practises so-called “regional writing” 地方性寫作, the latter continues a tradition of prose poetry—and both trends provide critics with unique entry points (Liu 2019; Sun 2015).

Next, if we step aside from the core clusters, a few words should be said about writers born in the 1970s–1980s. Among these poets, Yu Xiuhua 余秀華, Jia Qianqian 賈淺淺, and Zheng Xiaoqiong instantiate representative cases. Yu Xiuhua’s “viral” profile requires little introduction in the Anglophone context. Born with cerebral palsy, she gained her first recognition in public media in 2014. Since then, her volumes of poetry have sold thousands of copies (a more detailed introduction is available in Huerta 2018). In terms of the total number of papers, she is ranked outside the top ten, but her mean downloads index is absolutely unrivalled. While Yu’s and Zheng’s stories both involve under-privileged settings, Jia Qianqian’s background appears much more stable. The daughter of Jia Pingwa 賈平凹—one of China’s most popular contemporary fiction writers—she hardly lacked educational support. In 2020, *Contention in Literature and Art* dedicated a full column to her work, but there was also another incident that triggered a mass reaction. To summarise, some of Jia’s poems highlight vernacular terms for bodily secretions (for example, “shit” 屎 and “piss” 尿), and a large part of the Internet community regarded this artistic mode unacceptable for the daughter of a renowned writer (the case itself is meticulously covered in Negi 2024). Thus, one way or another, this topic went viral and presumably influenced numbers in the current sample.

A broader view on the place of women writers in the corpus reveals how evenly their birth dates are distributed over the mid to late 20th century: Xi Murong 席慕蓉 (1940s), Zhai Yongming 翟永明 (1950s), Ma Li 馬莉 and Mei Er 梅爾 (1960s), Jia Qianqian and Yu Xiuhua (1970s), Zheng Xiaoqiong and Feng Na 馮娜 (1980s). Among the listed names, each poet has a minimum of three papers. Additionally, the youngest target authors in the sample (far right untitled dots on Figures 4 and 5) are also female: Xing Ya 星芽 (b. 1995) and Li Hua 李華 (b. 2003). However, the deficit of studies on “re-discovered” women writers from the earlier periods does not give the author of this article enough confidence to speak of an explicit progression towards diversity. So far, the body of the observed “present canon” has resembled a forest where several tall and mature trees share their territory with occasional offshoots and dense thickets, while the names of some specimens are still waiting to be properly catalogued.

| ID | Name                   | Node Type           | Papers | Downloads |
|----|------------------------|---------------------|--------|-----------|
| 1  | 陳育虹<br>Chen Yuhong     | 女性詩人<br>Female Poet | 1      | 83        |
| 2  | 趙麗宏<br>Zhao Lihong     | 男性詩人<br>Male Poet   | 2      | 123       |
| 3  | 毛子<br>Mao Zi           | 男性詩人<br>Male Poet   | 1      | 93        |
| 4  | 蕭開愚<br>Xiao Kaiyu      | 男性詩人<br>Male Poet   | 1      | 91        |
| 5  | 雷武鈴<br>Lei Wuling      | 男性詩人<br>Male Poet   | 1      | 74        |
| 6  | 冷霜<br>Leng Shuang      | 男性詩人<br>Male Poet   | 1      | 77        |
| 7  | 鄭小瓊<br>Zheng Xiaoqiong | 女性詩人<br>Female Poet | 7      | 2109      |
| 8  | 胡桑<br>Hu Sang          | 男性詩人<br>Male Poet   | 1      | 51        |
| 9  | 厄土<br>E Tu             | 男性詩人<br>Male Poet   | 1      | 90        |
| 10 | 江汀<br>Jiang Ting       | 男性詩人<br>Male Poet   | 1      | 32        |

Table 4: Sample data for network analysis (nodes)

| Source | Target | Papers | Rating 1 | Downloads | Rating 2 |
|--------|--------|--------|----------|-----------|----------|
| 276    | 1      | 1      | 1        | 83        | 6        |
| 276    | 2      | 1      | 1        | 33        | 10       |
| 276    | 3      | 1      | 1        | 93        | 2        |
| 276    | 4      | 1      | 1        | 91        | 3        |
| 276    | 5      | 1      | 1        | 74        | 8        |
| 276    | 6      | 1      | 1        | 77        | 7        |
| 276    | 7      | 1      | 1        | 149       | 1        |
| 276    | 8      | 1      | 1        | 51        | 9        |
| 276    | 9      | 1      | 1        | 90        | 4        |
| 276    | 10     | 1      | 1        | 32        | 11       |

Table 2: Sample data for network analysis (edges)

## Linking Poets and Journals

So far, the analysis has addressed the left (Table 2, Columns A–E) and right (F–M) parts of the original dataset individually. Hence, the current phase should focus on the links between the “subjects” and “objects” of canonisation, that is, respectively, periodicals and poets. Since the work of editors behind the scenes is hidden from external observers, this essay will generally target journals as institutional units. This new task requires a different visual layout: network analysis has proved to be a flexible and effective tool for various tasks in literary studies and digital humanities at large.<sup>13</sup> This paper utilises an open-access platform called Gephi (v. 0.9.7; Gephi 2025). Numbers of articles and downloads remain two general metrics, but this time they are depicted separately (Figures 7–8). The size of nodes (journals and poets) and the thickness of edges (total amount of papers/downloads on a poet in the journal) were set in proportion to the corresponding items. The data from the original corpus was input into two Excel sheets: one for nodes and the other for edges (Tables 4–5). The first list included columns for the node’s ID, title, category (“male poet”, “female poet”, or “periodical”), plus total numbers of papers and downloads. In a similar manner, the second table encompasses the source and target nodes (journals’ and authors’ IDs respectively), the total numbers of papers and downloads for each entry (with an additional ranking column for both parameters). Then the sequenced data was processed via the Yifan Hu proportional layout algorithm. To keep the graphs concise, the finalised versions illustrate only poets with the highest digits in each periodical: the top three for the number of papers and top five for the number of downloads, all filtered through the “ranking” index.

Even with no explicit time indicators provided, the specialisation of the main contributors still allows us to draw an imaginary line between “modern” (1919–1949) and “contemporary” (post-1949) eras. This disposition is especially evident in Figure 7, where the five large dots associated with the latter period—*Contemporary Literary Criticism*, *Contemporary Writers Review*, *Contention in Literature and Art*, *Southern Cultural Forum*, and *Yangtze Jiang Literary Review*—are situated on the right side. Conversely, *Journal of Modern Chinese Literature* and *Modern Chinese Literature Studies* occupy the left flank.

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<sup>13</sup> Aside from the already mentioned pamphlet from Stanford Literary Lab, perhaps one of the most classic examples here belongs to Franco Moretti: the “Hamlet scheme” from his last essay in *Distant Reading* was even memorialised on the cover of the book (2013, 211).

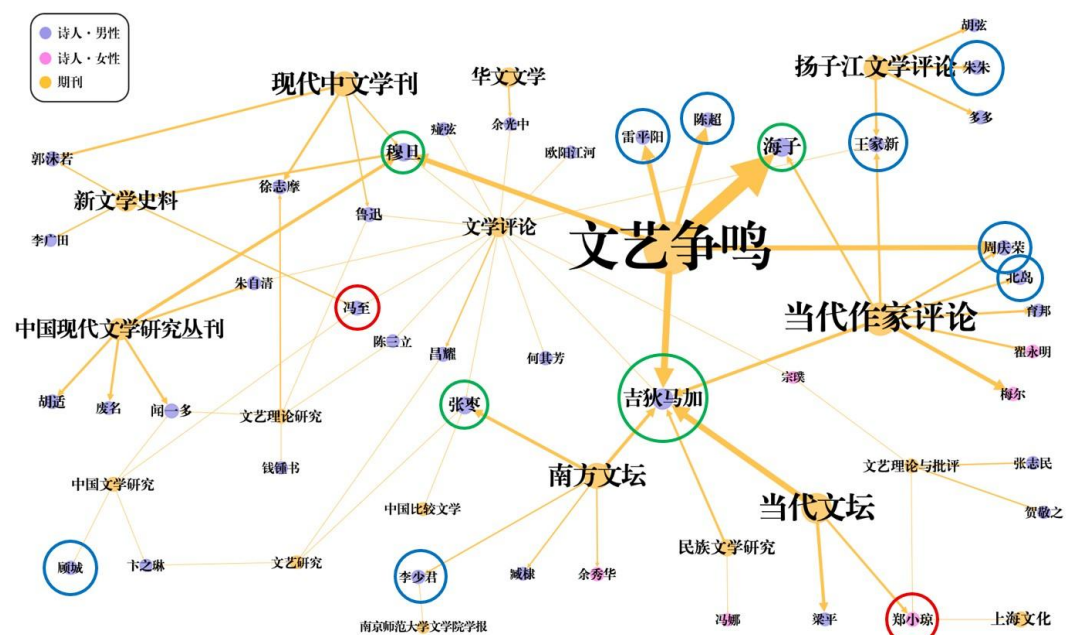


Figure 2: Poets' papers numbers in relation to periodicals

Labels of journals (yellow dots, grouped in five lines separated by semicolon, from left to right, from top to bottom): Journal of Modern Chinese Literature, Literatures in Chinese, Yangtze Jiang Literary Review; New Literary Historical Materials, Literary Review, Contention in Literature and Art; Modern Chinese Literature Studies, Contemporary Writers Review; Research of Chinese Literature, Theoretical Studies in Literature and Art, Comparative Literature in China, Southern Cultural Forum, Studies of Ethnic Literature, Contemporary Literary Criticism, Theory and Criticism of Literature; Literature & Art Studies, Journal of Nanjing Normal University School of Chinese Language and Culture, Shanghai Culture.

For the majority of edges, the thickness parameter does not translate into significant difference. Usually, the most accentuated vectors—those accessible to the unaided eye—correspond with special columns devoted to a target poet. Thus, the following analysis will be limited to the principal trends only. Once again, the former “leading” authors (encircled in green) here constitute the most representative group. For instance, Figure 7 depicts Jidi Majia as the key persona for six periodicals. By that index he outscores any other poet in the current dataset: in Figure 8 Zhang Zao has the same number of arrows pointing at him, but the links are much thinner. In that case, what discursive behaviour might be noted in the case of Jidi Majia? The substantial role of *Contention in Literature and Art* for the corpus has already been stated in the first half of this article, and journals such as *Studies of Ethnic Literature* are expected to publish works on writers from minority groups (the set of names connected to the node provides sufficient evidence). However, the profile of *Contemporary Literary Criticism* deserves a more detailed remark. Institutionally, this journal operates under the auspices of the Writers Association of Sichuan province, and Jidi Majia was born

and raised in Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture, the southernmost part of this region (Jidi 2025). A quick survey indicates that *Contemporary Literary Criticism* printed the first ever scholarly paper on this poet—an account proving a long history of relations between the two discursive actors (Dong 2016, 119). In 2016, this periodical performed another meaningful act, organising a special forum on Jidi Majia’s long poem “For Vladimir Mayakovsky” 致馬雅可夫斯基 (see the fourth issue for this year).<sup>14</sup> Meanwhile, the remaining journals have not developed an equally targeted strategy.

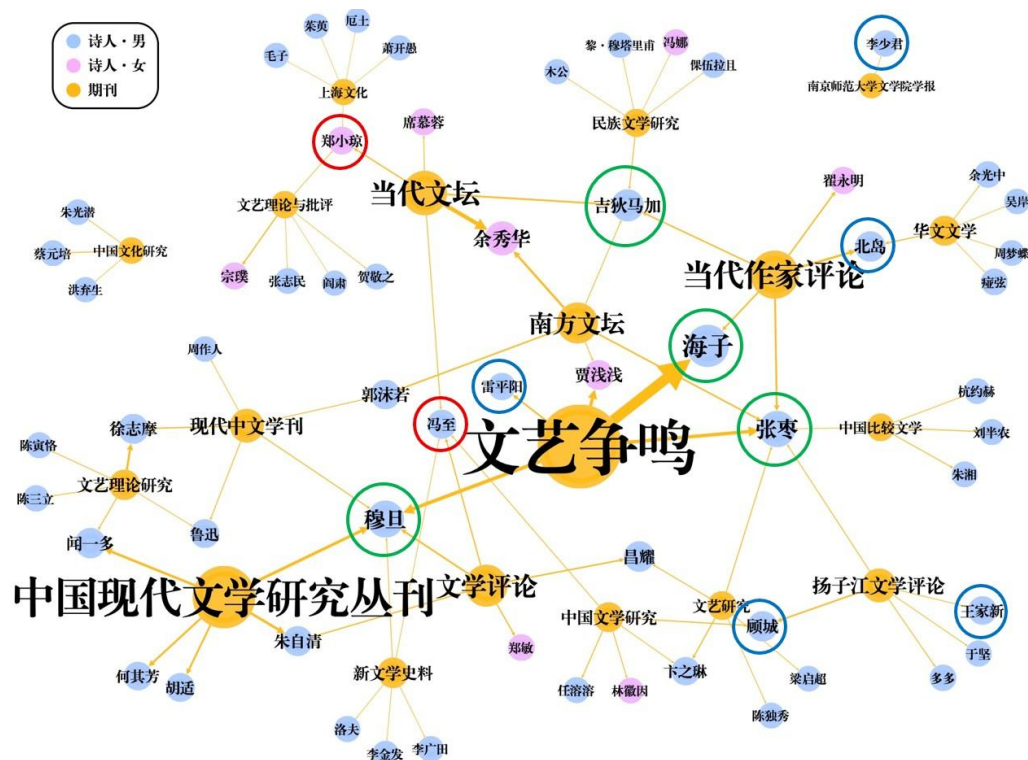


Figure 3: Poets' download numbers in relation to periodicals

Labels of journals (yellow dots, grouped in five lines separated by semicolon, from left to right, from top to bottom): Shanghai Culture, Studies of Ethnic Literature, Journal of Nanjing Normal University School of Chinese Language and Culture; Chinese Culture Research, Theory and Criticism in Literature, Contemporary Literary Criticism, Southern Cultural Forum, Contemporary Writers Review, Literatures in Chinese; Theoretical Studies in Literature and Art; Journal of Modern Chinese Literature, Contention in Literature and Art, Comparative Literature in China; Modern Chinese Literature Studies, New Literary Historical Materials, Literary Review, Research of Chinese Literature, Literature & Art Studies, Yangtze Jiang Literary Review.

<sup>14</sup> In the same vein, this magazine published a considerable number of papers on Liang Ping 梁平, a former editor-in-chief of another important poetry periodical, Stars 星星. This only strengthens the correlation between the official status of a writer and the degree of academic attention given to them.

As regards the other three leading poets, their networks exhibit two general patterns. As was the case with Jidi Majia, Mu Dan's and Zhang Zao's nodes also have multiple vectors directed at them. For example, this form of visualisation makes Mu Dan's "transitional status" even more apparent: he acts as a central writer for both "modern" and "contemporary" periodicals. Similarly, Zhang Zao's "early canonisation" trend is reflected in scarce yet balanced contributions. The only noteworthy actor here is *Southern Cultural Forum* with the already mentioned coverage of the 2018 academic conference. In contrast, Hai Zi's status in the present corpus relies almost entirely on *Contention in Literature and Art*—the link between these two nodes presumably could put him on top all alone. Nevertheless, such a ranking appears to be a result of the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his death, which was commemorated with a special section in the journal (see the third issue for 2019), rather than an illustration of regular attention levels.<sup>15</sup>

Among the remaining authors, attention should be paid primarily to those who have more than two edges on both graphs. Surprisingly, only two writers show that quality: Feng Zhi 馮至 for the modern and Zheng Xiaoqiong for the contemporary period (both encircled in red).<sup>16</sup> However, the thickness of their vectors is hardly comparable to the above mentioned "leaders". And the same is true for the other "scatter-plot leaders" (selectively—in blue circles): even broadly recognised authors such as Bei Dao and Gu Cheng are placed outside the spotlight. As regards figures such as Chen Chao, Lei Pingyang, Li Shaojun, or Zhou Qingrong, their nodes are now much closer to the "unlabelled" poets. This situation points to one simple thing: the canonisation of most of the target writers could only be assessed separately with a closer focus, using more "traditional" critical methods.

The last but not least issue to be discussed in this section is the place of women writers. In terms of audience response, readers seem especially to favour papers on female poets published by *Contemporary Literary Criticism* and *Contemporary Writers Review*. Aside from the above mentioned cases of Zheng Xiaoqiong, Yu Xiuhua's and Jia Qianqian's positions were left unaltered: both show a high download index with quite a small total of articles. However, if we calculate all the unique names on the two charts, it can be seen that the gender ratio has changed positively. Almost a third of female poets are represented on the network (10/32), while for male authors this ratio is as small as 17% (40/238). Thus, although still heavily outnumbered, the women writers' share has climbed from 14% to 20%. Although still rough, these tentative figures may act as a signal for the academic community

<sup>15</sup> Although this essay does not discuss the relations between critics and poets separately, a closer look at the corpus can still reveal a few key personalities for every leading poet. For instance, Jidi Majia relies on studies by Liu Qitao 劉啟濤, Tan Wuchang 譚五昌, and Li Qian 李騫 (3 papers each); Mu Dan's legacy is chiefly explored by Yi Bin 易彬 (4 papers); Hai Zi has two series of articles: one by Zhang Qinghua 張清華 (6 papers) and the second by Shao Ningning 邵甯寧 (3 papers); finally, Ya Siming 亞思明 acts as a leading proponent of Zhang Zao with two entries in the sample.

<sup>16</sup> Some prominent figures of the May Fourth Movement—such as Guo Moruo or Xu Zhimo—also have columns dedicated to them, but their rankings were affected by the absence of the selected poetry-related keywords.

to start tracking the tendency. After all, the scope of the current paper is limited to a few specific indicators that are only suitable for a “present canon” and thus should not be over-extrapolated.

## Conclusion

Somewhat contrary to Dubin’s classification, core periodicals and the *Guide* itself act as an expanded version of an “institutional canon” rather than its “present” version. Modern and contemporary poets tend to be treated as belonging to discrete historical categories (figures such as Chang Yao form rare exceptions), and the central positions on the contemporary side are predominantly occupied by male writers born in the 1950–1960 period. For the majority of cases, the presence of a dedicated section in at least one magazine decides whether a poet’s name will or will not appear on the graphs, and such bursts of interest, in turn, are often dictated by various commemorative reasons. For most of the living authors the only way to match these attention levels derives from unpredictable “viral” incidents. However, such activity alone can hardly conform to any commonly accepted definition of “canon”.

Among all the selected periodicals, *Contention in Literature and Art* stands out as an exceptionally influential node within the network. Combined data on scatter plots and network diagrams unambiguously show that this journal has substantially contributed to the popularity of three leading figures in the corpus: Mu Dan, Jidi Majia and Hai Zi. Indeed, poets like Mu Dan or Hai Zi have already become cornerstone figures in the account of modern Chinese literature, and thus presumably will enjoy similar academic recognition as long as the current historical narrative remains valid. However, the status of Jidi Majia seems less stable: a simple search query shows that in the comparable six-year period (2009–2014), there are only 9 papers that contain his name in the title (compared to 27 in the current sample). Therefore, the potential impact of official status on “canon formation” should not be over-emphasised. And similar caution, most likely, applies to the other dimensions of diversity: despite the rising visibility of female poets, their overall representation in core academic journals remains marginal.

Since the effectiveness of quantitative analysis generally relies on the amount of data processed, well-grounded research usually requires cooperative efforts. The present study has covered only the tip of the CNKI iceberg, and the extension of either the time period or the scope of periodicals may significantly impact our vision of the critical agenda in the PRC. However, while digging deeper into the recesses of the repository, scholars should not forget about its general conformity to official regulations. For contemporary poetry such limitations



may mean the omission of numerous sensitive authors or topics, and the assessment of a canon should always enhance the visibility of excluded individuals and their work. Further steps in research here might include access to digitalised collections of unofficial journals or gathering material directly from the popular WeChat poetry channels where there is less centralised control over information. Consequently, these findings might be compared with the non-Mainland body of scholarly articles—either on Chinese modern poetry, or, indeed, on other (translated?) cultural traditions. For instance, such inquiries may help us to see what types of authors and literary creations act as connecting links between nations, who made them such and through which contexts, as well as which artists deserve more attention and in what capacity. Thus, the author hopes that aside from more or less inspirational and controversial discoveries, this paper will also be read as an invitation to a collaborative search for further methodological syntheses.

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