

© Cambridge University Press 2006.

Research Report

Dissidence and Accommodation: The Publishing History of Yang Lian from Today to Today

Jacob Edmond

ABSTRACT The career of the poet Yang Lian provides a case study of the tension between dissidence and accommodation in PRC literary publishing over the past quarter of a century. In the 1980s, Yang published unofficially and officially, attempting to maintain his dissident independence while also taking advantage of the accommodations available within official culture. In 1989, the accommodation that Yang had reached with official culture collapsed. Since 1989, Yang has been promoted outside China as a dissident. Inside China, Yang's work has been adapted to the demands of censorship. This study shows that accommodations with China's official publishing system have been important to the careers of writers like Yang throughout the 1980s and 1990s. It also suggests that dissidence has played an important role in the achievement of such accommodations. The findings of this case study are pertinent to the situation of many artists and writers in the PRC today.

It is commonplace in the study of post-Mao Chinese literature to contrast the purist attitudes about the independence of art and the artist, and the lofty goals for art put forward by some elite writers and artists in the early 1980s, with the more commercially savvy and politically realistic views held by this same social group in the 1990s and 2000s.¹ The underlying economic and political basis for such a shift is undeniable. Writers in the People's Republic of China have modified the way they pursue their careers in the face of the changes caused by the loosening of official control of the publishing market through its increasing commercialization, the growth in the sheer volume of outlets for literature and art, and the general depoliticization of the arts.² Yet the contrast between the pre-

1. See, for example, Claire Huot, "Here, there, anywhere: networking by young Chinese writers today," in Michel Hockx (ed.), *The Literary Field of Twentieth Century China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999), p. 200. For an example of the lofty goals of the late 1970s and 1980s, see Maghiel van Crevel, *Language Shattered: Contemporary Chinese Poetry and Duoduo* (Leiden: Research School CNWS, 1996), pp. 63–65. On the general intellectual foment of the 1980s, see Jing Wang, *High Culture Fever: Politics, Aesthetics, and Ideology in Deng's China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

2. For an outline of the beginnings of these changes and the persistence of politicization in literature in the 1980s, see Perry Link, *The Uses of Literature: Life in the Socialist Chinese Literary System* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); and He Yuhuai, *Cycles of Repression and Relaxation: Politico-Literary Events in China 1976–1989* (Bochum: Herausgeber Chinathemen, 1992). For accounts of the depoliticization and commercialization of Chinese art and literature in the 1990s, see Richard Curt Kraus, *The Party and the Arts: The New Politics of Culture* (Oxford: Rowman, 2004); and Geremie Barmé, *In the Red: On Contemporary Chinese Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

and post-1989 periods hides important continuities in the ways in which writers have pursued their literary careers over the entire post-Mao period. Although, as Perry Link has argued, the old socialist literary system had collapsed by the early 1990s,³ in poetry at least, the distinction between official and unofficial publications continued to be important. Writing in the mid-1990s, Michelle Yeh describes the unofficial poetry scene as “independent and autonomous” from the official scene.⁴ For Yeh, “official” designates all those publications “funded, edited and published by the state at various administrative levels (e.g. central, provincial, city).”⁵ “Unofficial” designates a range of material that does not fit into the “official” category, from technically legal materials not falling within the system to clearly illegal materials. This distinction breaks down to a certain extent in the 1990s, when the requirement to make a profit led to a loosening of editorial control. Nevertheless, the distinction remains useful up to the present day because of the continued role of state ownership in the publishing industry and because of the ongoing requirement that publications in China be officially registered (through, for example, the book numbering system), a method of control that now also extends to the internet.⁶

While Yeh provides a necessary corrective to those who would emphasize only discontinuities between the 1980s and 1990s in the position of the arts in China, her emphasis on the autonomy of the two scenes does leave an important issue unexplored. In both decades, many important poets – and writers and artists in other media – did in fact operate in both scenes. Through a case study of the publishing career of the poet Yang Lian, this article explores why they might have done so. Yang’s career exemplifies how writers in the post-Mao era have negotiated the official and unofficial literary fields within China and also the international literary field, which since 1989 can be seen as having an interactive relationship with the poetry scenes inside China somewhat analogous to the relationship between the unofficial and official circuits.⁷ I argue that reaching the accommodations with the authorities necessary for success within China’s official publishing system was important to the careers of writers like Yang throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Moreover, I suggest that dissidence, through unofficial publications inside China and an openly dissident stance outside China since 1989, has in fact played an

3. Link, *The Uses of Literature*, p. 14.

4. Michelle Yeh, “Contemporary Chinese poetry scenes,” *Chicago Review*, Vol. 39, No. 3–4 (1993), p. 279.

5. Michelle Yeh, “The ‘cult of poetry’ in contemporary China,” *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 55, No. 1 (1996), pp. 51–52.

6. For a general guide to the contemporary Chinese publishing industry, see Robert E. Baensch (ed.), *The Publishing Industry in China* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 2003). For more on official control of the internet in China, see Gudrun Wacker, “The internet and censorship in China,” in Christopher R. Hughes and Gudrun Wacker (eds.), *China and the Internet: Politics of the Digital Great Leap Forward* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), pp. 58–82.

7. Van Crevel also draws this analogy (*Language Shattered*, p. 98).

important role in the achievement of accommodations with officially sanctioned publishing channels from the 1980s to today.

Yang is one of the most important mainland Chinese writers alive today. Because he has been so strongly associated with dissidence, his career provides a key test case for a reassessment of the relationship between dissidence and accommodation in post-Mao literary publishing. He and the other poets associated with Obscure poetry (*menglong shi*), such as Bei Dao (pseudonym of Zhao Zhenkai) and Gu Cheng, are often considered to exemplify the dissident struggle for independence that leads Claire Huot to write of the “purist and dramatic outlook” of the 1980s and of a “breach between the 1980s and 1990s.”⁸ Obscure poetry became a prominent example of dissident art in the 1980s because of its association with the Democracy Wall (*minzhu qiang*) and because of the debate over it that took place as part of the controversy over modernism in the early 1980s. The exile of several of the most prominent representatives of Obscure poetry in the immediate period after 4 June, including Yang, Bei Dao and Gu Cheng, reinforced the designation of these writers as dissidents. However, the persecution of Obscure poets has tended to deflect attention from the equally important role that accommodations between them and officially sanctioned institutions in China have played in their careers.

This article focuses on two examples of the tension between dissidence and accommodation in Yang’s publishing career. First, there is the way in which Yang published both officially and unofficially in the 1980s. By pursuing both paths simultaneously, Yang, like many of his contemporaries, worked to establish an independent publishing world for so-called pure literature and sought to be accommodated within the official publishing world. Secondly, the article addresses Yang’s re-engagement with the official Chinese literary market after 4 June, focusing on the publication of his collected works in Shanghai in 1998. The accommodations that Yang made to censorship in that collection and the importance of his overseas dissident activities to the marketing of this book within China demonstrate that the tension between dissidence and accommodation persists in Yang’s literary career right up to the present day.

Dependent Independence: Yang Lian’s Career to 1989

The December 1978 publication of *Today* (*Jintian*) magazine was a landmark in Chinese literature. Taking advantage of the new openness marked by the Democracy Wall, Bei Dao and Mang Ke (pseudonym of Jiang Shiwei) established the magazine as China’s first unofficial literary journal since 1949. Yang joined the *Today* group in August 1979 through an introduction from Gu Cheng. Over the next year, he published in *Today* initially, in the eighth issue of the journal, under the pseudonym Fei Sha, but then under his own name, in the ninth and final issue which he also edited.

8. Huot, “Here, there, anywhere,” p. 199.

The history of *Today* illustrates the fluctuating status of unofficial publications in the early years of the post-Mao era and the relationship between dissidence and accommodation established at that time. As Perry Link has noted, unofficial magazines such as *Today* were not illegal when they appeared in 1978 and 1979; “they could be openly exchanged and sold, both on the street and through subscriptions.”⁹ At the end of 1979, however, new rules were introduced that required the publishers of people-run (*minjian*) publications to register their operations and request permission for publication and putting up posters, and, as a result, most unofficial publications ceased in early 1980.¹⁰ Yang and his colleagues, however, sought to continue *Today* through a combination of accommodation and dissidence. On the one hand, they attempted to register *Today* with the authorities, who rebuffed all their efforts to make the magazine legal. On the other, they continued to publish and sell *Today* in defiance of the new law until September 1980, when the magazine was finally declared illegal by the Public Security Bureau because it had failed to register. Yang and his fellow writers then made another attempt to reach an accommodation with the authorities, while also pushing the limits of the new law. They established the Today Group for the Study of Literature (*Jintian wenxue yanjiu hui*) and continued to publish *Today* under the new title *Materials for Internal Exchange* (*Neibu jiaoliu ziliao*). As an internal publication, the magazine could not be sold, but it could be distributed to “members.” Three issues of *Materials* were published before, in December 1980, “the police advised the editors that arrests would be made if they continued their activities, and *Today* went out of business altogether.”¹¹

Extraordinary changes took place in official policy towards literary publication during the late 1970s and the 1980s that allowed Yang to reach new accommodations within the official publishing world. Despite the closure of *Today*, the prominence of the unofficial magazine helped the writers associated with it break into and begin to change the official literary system. The changes, of course, were also promoted from on high with the revival of the “hundred flowers” policy, and support for reformers within official organizations.¹² The privileged position of Yang and some of the other young poets helped too, allowing them to engage in a kind of protected rebellion. Bonnie McDougall and Kam Louie note that Yang “became notorious as a literary ‘hooligan,’ enjoying a flamboyant way of life under the protection of his parents’ connections.”¹³ As a result of these multiple pressures from below and above, Yang was able to

9. Link, *The Uses of Literature*, p. 188.

10. For a contemporary account of the publications associated with the Democracy Wall, see David S. G. Goodman, *Beijing Street Voices: The Poetry and Politics of China's Democracy Movement* (London: Marion Boyars, 1981).

11. Van Crevel, *Language Shattered*, p. 66.

12. For an account of the revival of the “Hundred Flowers” policy, see Michael S. Duke, *Blooming and Contending: Chinese Literature in the Post-Mao Era* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), pp. 1–28.

13. Bonnie McDougall and Kam Louie, *The Literature of China in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 438.

publish in major journals such as *Poetry (Shi kan)* and *Shanghai Literature (Shanghai wenxue)*, in many anthologies, and, as shown in Table 1, from 1985 he published individual collections of his poetry through state-run publishing houses.¹⁴

Yang's successful accommodation within the official publishing world did not mean, however, that he ceased to publish unofficially. As Table 1 shows, he published every one of his major works of the 1980s in mimeographed editions. He produced these books in small print runs of between 200 and 500 copies, paying for the printing himself and distributing them throughout China through a network of contacts.¹⁵ By continuing to publish and distribute his work unofficially, Yang was part of the unofficial tradition established by Bei Dao, Mang Ke and other poets in various cities in China in the late 1970s and 1980s.¹⁶

There are a number of reasons why Yang and others persisted with unofficial publications while also pursuing official publication with considerable success. First, unofficial publications were a response to the oscillations between reform and relaxation, on the one hand, and restriction and retrenchment, on the other, which Richard Baum calls the "Fang/Shou Flux" and that he identifies as characteristic of the Deng era.¹⁷ As the history of *Today* demonstrates, writers such as Yang were vulnerable to the periodic crackdowns that continued throughout the 1980s. For example, in 1983 the police attempted to arrest Yang after his poem "Norlang" was attacked as part of the Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign. Because of this erratic official policy, it was in Yang's interests to participate in official culture in periods of relaxation while also keeping alternative, unofficial paths of publication open in case of periods of restriction and retrenchment.

Secondly, publishing unofficially was part of a stance of dissident independence from the official literary system taken by many writers in the 1980s. These writers helped to create a large unofficial poetry scene in China which created a separate cultural space and gave writers total aesthetic control. That such control might have been important can be seen from the removal of some poems, apparently for commercial rather

14. Yang's journal publications included "Zhi yu bo" ("Weaving and sowing"), *Shi kan (Poetry)*, No. 8 (1980); "Wode xuanyan" ("My manifesto"), *Fujian wenxue (Fujian Literature)*, No. 1 (1981), pp. 60–61; "Nuorilang" ("Norlang"), *Shanghai wenxue (Shanghai Literature)*, No. 5 (1983), pp. 54–57; and "Zizaizhe shuo" ("The self speaks") *Wenhua: Zhongguo yu shijie (Culture: China and the World)*, No. 1 (1987). For Yang's books before 1989, see Table 1. Yang's work also appeared in numerous officially published anthologies including: *Dangdai qingnian shuqingshi sanbaishou (300 Lyrical Poems by Contemporary Young Poets)* (Guizhou: Renmin wenxue, 1985); Lao Mu (ed.), *Qingnian shiren tan shi (Young Poets Talk about Poetry)* (Beijing: Beijing daxue wusi wenxue, 1985); Lao Mu (ed.), *Xin shi chao shiji (A Collection of New Wave Poetry)* (Beijing: Weiminghu congshu, 1985); and *Menglong shi xuan (An Anthology of Chinese Misty Poetry)* (Shenyang: Liaoning chun feng wenyi, 1985).

15. Yang Lian, personal correspondence with the author, 8 January 2004.

16. For more on these unofficial journals, see van Crevel, *Language Shattered*, pp. 86–91. See also Link, *Uses of Literature*, pp. 186–191.

17. Richard Baum, *Burying Mao: Chinese Politics in the Age of Deng Xiaoping*, 2nd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), pp. 5–6.

Table 1: Unofficial and Official Books Published by Yang Lian in the People's Republic of China, 1980-2003

| <i>Year</i> | <i>Unofficial books</i> | <i>Official books</i> |
|-------------|---|---|
| 1980 | <i>Tudi (Earth)</i> (Beijing: mimeographed, 1980) | |
| 1981 | <i>Taiyang meitian dou shi xinde (There's a New Sun Every Day)</i> (Beijing: mimeographed, 1980 or 1981) | |
| 1982 | <i>Haibian de haizi: Sanwen shiji (Child by the Sea: A Prose-poetry Collection)</i> (Beijing: mimeographed, 1981 or 1982) | |
| 1983 | | |
| 1984 | <i>Lihun (Ritualization of the Soul)</i> (Beijing: mimeographed, 1984) | |
| 1985 | | <i>Lihun (Ritualization of the Soul)</i> (Xi'an: Shaanxi dangdai Zhonguo qingnian shiren, 1985) |
| 1986 | | <i>Huanghun (Barren Soul)</i> (Shanghai: Shanghai wenzue, 1986) |
| 1987 | | |
| 1988 | | |
| 1989 | Ⓞ (Sign created by author, pronounced "yī") (Beijing: mimeographed, late 1988 or early 1989) | <i>Huang (Yellow)</i> (Beijing: Renmin wenzue, 1989, pulped after 4 June) |
| | | <i>Ren de zijue (Human Self-Awakening)</i> (Sichuan: Sichuan renmin, 1989, pulped after 4 June) |
| 1990 | | |
| 1991 | | <i>Taiyang yu ren (The Sun and Man)</i> , with an essay by Dong Yufeng (Changsha: Hunan wenyi, 1991) |
| 1992 | | |
| 1993 | | |
| 1994 | | Yang Lian, and You You, <i>Renjing, guihua: Yang Lian, You You haiwai piaobo shouji (Peoplescapes, Ghostspeak/Lies: Yang Lian and You You's Notes on Overseas Exile)</i> (Beijing: Zhongyang, 1994) |
| 1995 | | |
| 1996 | | |
| 1997 | | |

1998

Dahai tingzhi zhi chu: Yang Lian zuopin 1982–1997 shige juan (*Where the Sea Stands Still: Works by Yang Lian, 1982–1997 – Poetry*) (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi, 1998)

Guihua: Zhili de kongjian: Yang Lian zuopin 1982–1997 sanwen, wenlun juan (*Ghostspeak/Lies: The Space of Intellect: Collected Essays of Yang Lian, 1982–1997*) (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi, 1998) (both reprinted in 2003)

1999

2000

2001

2002

2003

Xingfu guihun: Shouji (*Happy Ghost: Notes*) (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi, 2003)

than political reasons, in Yang's first book, *Ritualization of the Soul* (*Lihun*).

Thirdly, unofficial publication created an alternative market – not a market where money could be made, but a market where one's popularity could be increased and one's cultural capital raised.¹⁸ Yang's independent stance was, therefore, not only a matter of necessity and conviction, it was also a good marketing strategy. By adopting the stance of a rebel operating outside the system and keeping alive his association with the rebellious history of the *Today* group, Yang increased his appeal amongst China's urban youth who were drawn to figures of cultural rebellion. Unofficial publication also allowed writers like Yang to publicize their new work as soon as they had written it, without waiting for a publisher.

Finally, Yang's unofficial publications helped establish his reputation abroad. Bonnie McDougall knew many of the young writers associated with unofficial literature including Yang and she recalls that they wanted to escape China, both literally and in their writing: "Everyone I knew was disgusted with China, with the government, with Chinese life. I would be approached all the time by people asking me to translate their poems, to

18. The distinction between cultural and economic capital in the arts comes from Pierre Bourdieu's theory of the "literary field." For applications of Bourdieu's theory to modern Chinese literature, see Hockx, *The Literary Field of Twentieth Century China*.

get them invitations abroad.”¹⁹ From the early 1980s, Yang gave John Minford a number of his mimeographed books.²⁰ Minford in turn arranged Yang’s first publication outside China in a 1983 issue of *Renditions*, where Yang’s poems were published in Chinese and Minford’s English translations as part of a selection of Obscure poetry.²¹ Minford also included Yang’s work in an anthology of new Chinese writing published in the following year.²²

The persecution of unofficial literature also assisted the development of Yang’s career abroad. The publication of Obscure poetry in *Renditions* in 1983, for example, was accompanied by a commentary on the Obscure poetry debate. In the first edition of *Renditions* that he edited in 1985, Minford devoted considerable space to Yang’s poem “Norlang,” which had been attacked at the start of the aborted Anti-Spiritual Pollution campaign in 1983. More explicitly, Bonnie McDougall has acknowledged that in response to the targeting of Bei Dao, Yang and others during the Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign she and other translators orchestrated a campaign to promote Bei Dao’s poetry abroad, not only through “the publication of translations but also through direct overtures to the Western diplomatic community in Beijing.”²³ The fact that officially sponsored attacks on one’s work can be a good marketing strategy has been widely recognized by commentators on Chinese literature in the 1990s, but Yang’s case illustrates that a dynamic relationship between Chinese and foreign literary reception was already establishing itself in the early 1980s.

Unofficial and overseas publication raised the profile of writers like Yang and so made it more difficult for official culture to ignore them. This put pressure on official institutions to be more lenient in cultural policy, so that Yang’s unofficial publications supported his efforts to be published officially. In order to maintain cultural hegemony, official culture needed to be able to accommodate the unofficial or to suppress it, but total suppression was becoming less and less viable because of the weakening of central control caused by market reforms and general cultural liberalization. Increasingly in the 1980s and through the 1990s, therefore, the authorities chose the path of accommodation, despite ongoing bouts of repression, when unofficial publishing helped preserve the gains in cultural pluralism.

19. Interview quoted in Julia Lovell, “China’s search for a Nobel Prize in Literature: literature, and national and cultural identity in twentieth-century China,” dissertation, University of Cambridge, 2002, ch. 4, pp. 16–17. For more details on McDougall’s circle of acquaintances, see “Breaking through: literature and the arts in China 1976–1986,” *Copenhagen Papers in East and Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 1 (1988), pp. 35–65.

20. Minford later deposited these books, which are signed by Yang and dated between 1980 and 1989, in the University of Auckland Library in New Zealand.

21. Yang Lian, “Selections from *Bell on the Frozen Lake*,” trans. John Minford and Seán Golden, *Renditions: A Chinese-English Translation Magazine*, Vols. 19–20 (1983), pp. 249–265.

22. Stephen C. Soong and John Minford (eds.), *Trees on the Mountain: An Anthology of New Chinese Writing* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1984).

23. Paraphrase from an interview with McDougall in Lovell, “China’s search for a Nobel Prize in Literature,” ch. 4, p. 8.

Some scholars have suggested that writers such as Yang took a political stance by refusing to participate in the official system, and that this was their major reason for publishing unofficially. For example, using Miklós Haraszti's terminology, Geremie Barmé describes some of the *Today* writers as "Maverick Artists":

They are the real enemy, for they reject the very presuppositions of state culture and its lucrative rewards. Few of China's Maverick Artists were known overseas before 1989, although a number of the celebrated "misty" [Obscure] *menglong* poets belonged to this group. For years they produced their own samizdat literature in preference to being published in official journals.²⁴

Although, as Barmé documents, Bei Dao and Gu Cheng resisted attempts to co-opt them fully into official culture, refusing the government jobs that they were offered in the late 1980s, Yang, Bei Dao, Gu Cheng and other Obscure poets also published in official journals and through official publishing houses.²⁵

Publishing unofficially was a statement of dissent, an attempt to create an alternative cultural sphere that did not rely on the favours of those in positions of power. But this oppositional and independent role was undermined by the utilitarian aspect of unofficial publications. That is, unofficial publication was not directed simply at creating a separate realm for literature outside official regulation but was also an integral part of attempts by writers such as Yang to establish themselves within the official literary field. The level of official recognition in the mid-1980s shown by Yang's publication record does not bear out the view that his unofficial publications were part of a refusal to participate in the state system. On the contrary, Yang seems to have been happy to take advantage of the growth in official publishing opportunities in the 1980s, while still actively participating in the unofficial scene.

The situation of writers like Yang in the 1980s resembles to some extent the "dependent independence" of cultural intellectuals that Edward X. Gu has described.²⁶ Gu argues persuasively that it is "methodologically problematic and empirically misleading" to use such conceptions as "civil society against the state" in discussions of Chinese intellectual culture in the 1980s. Gu's basic point is that intellectuals were "highly segmented" as a group "with different segments having different links to the state." As a result, "the institutional base for the opposition of intellectuals to the party-state was weak." Actions against the state were not mainstream and instead intellectuals generally "utilized the institutional leeway ... to develop their group life and to get the intellectual groupings institutionalized."²⁷ Yang and his fellow *Today* poets are

24. Barmé, *In the Red*, p. 12

25. *Ibid.* p. 12 and p. 384 n. 47.

26. Edward X. Gu, "Cultural intellectuals and the politics of the cultural public space in Communist China (1979–1989): a case study of three intellectual groups," *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 58, No. 2 (1999), p. 390. Gu borrows the term "dependent independence" from Gordon White, Jude Howell and Shang Xiaoyuan, *In Search of Civil Society: Market Reform and Social Change in Contemporary China* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996).

27. Gu, "Cultural intellectuals and the politics of the cultural public space," p. 427.

sometimes taken as exceptions to this rule, as maverick outsiders, as Barmé would have it. Yang's publishing record suggests, however, that there were two contradictory impulses at work. On the one hand, Yang chose to operate within the unofficial cultural scene. On the other hand, like the intellectuals whom Edward Gu describes, Yang sought institutional status, and his unofficial and overseas publications helped him achieve this goal.

A Small but Sharp Distinction: Yang Lian's Career after 1989

The delicate balance between dissidence and accommodation established over the course of the 1980s was seriously challenged by the events of 1989. As a result of official recognition, from 1986 onward Yang had opportunities to travel abroad. While on a trip to Australia in 1988, he and Gu Cheng were invited by John Minford to the University of Auckland. Yang arrived in New Zealand in February 1989 to participate in the New Zealand Writers and Translators Workshop and to lecture on non-mainstream Chinese literature since 1979, joining Gu Cheng who had moved to Auckland the previous year. When martial law was declared on 20 May, Yang took up the role of political dissident in New Zealand, leading protests against the Chinese government. Together with Gu Cheng and others, he organized a protest rally at the University of Auckland. In the aftermath of the massacre, Yang's two books that had just been printed in China were pulped, excepting a few copies of one of them that made it out of the country.²⁸ In response to the massacre and the subsequent crackdown, Yang, Gu and others organized another demonstration in Auckland and then travelled to New Zealand's capital, Wellington, where Yang led a protest outside the Chinese Embassy. In August, Yang, Gu and local supporters organized a memorial concert, which they named after the Beijing poetry group the Survivors (*Xingcunzhe*), thus drawing a link between survivors of the Cultural Revolution, the 1978–79 Democracy Movement, those persecuted during the crackdowns of the 1980s and those killed in the Tiananmen Square massacre.²⁹ They also helped create a monument to the victims of the massacre, for which Yang composed an epitaph. Over this period of protest, Yang wrote some of his most overtly political poems. These were published in the Taiwanese newspaper *United Daily News* (*Lianhe bao*), to which Yang and Gu also sent a joint statement in response to the massacre. Soon afterwards, Yang was effectively stripped of his Chinese citizenship and became, at least initially, an exile. At first, he did not want to return to China, but when he wanted to travel, he had to apply to renew his

28. These books were *Huang* (*Yellow*) (Beijing: Renmin wenxue, 1989), some copies of which survive, and *Ren de zijue* (*Man's Self-Awakening*) (Sichuan: Sichuan renmin, 1989). I know of no extant copies of the latter book and have only learnt of it through correspondence with Yang. I have been unable to find independent corroboration of the book's publication.

29. In 1987, Yang established the Survivors group with Mang Ke and Tang Xiaodu. The group organized readings and published two issues of an unofficial journal of the same name, *The Survivors* (*Xingcunzhe*), one in 1988 and one in early 1989.

Chinese passport. The Chinese authorities refused, so that he had no choice but to apply for refugee status in New Zealand. From this point, he lived overseas, first in New Zealand and Australia, then in Germany and the United States, before settling in London. Yang's international profile, already established in the 1980s, grew greatly after he became an exile and, despite initial difficulties, since that time he has enjoyed a successful international career as a poet. His poems and essays have been translated into many languages. He has received several awards and writers' scholarships, including the prestigious Italian Flaiano International Prize for Poetry in 1999 and the writer-in-residence for Taipei City in 2000, and regularly appears at writers' festivals around the world. Along with Gao Xingjian and Bei Dao, he was said to have been in contention for the Nobel Literature Prize before Gao received the Prize in 2000.³⁰

Since 1989, Yang has been viewed with suspicion by the PRC government because of his prominent role as a critic of the government and the Chinese Communist Party since 4 June and because of his perceived association with the 1989 student protest movement. Yang, Gu and the former *Today* poets generally were associated with the 1989 protests for a number of reasons. First, the work of these writers had been a symbol of the loosening of social and political control in China throughout the previous ten years, so that whenever there were conservative reactions against liberalization, such as in 1983 and 1987, the poets were singled out for criticism. Secondly, Bei Dao had organized the 13 February 1989 open letter to Deng Xiaoping that was signed by prominent Chinese intellectuals.³¹ Thirdly, the Survivors poetry club of which Yang had been a member was associated with the student protests. On 2 April 1989, the Survivors had organized "a grand poetry reading" to mark the tenth anniversary of the first *Today* recital in 1979.³² The timing of the reading helped establish a link in the minds of officials between the poets and the student protests, which began about two weeks later on 17 April, after Hu Yaobang's death on 15 April. After 4 June, the club's magazine, *Survivors*, was banned as, in Yang's words, "a black hand behind the student movement."³³ Finally, the rebellious spirit of these poets, particularly in their early poetry with its humanist self-expression, appealed to the students, and during the protests a quotation from a poem by Bei Dao appeared in a prominent position in the Square.³⁴

While the events of 4 June continued to resonate internationally, the crackdown after 1989 was neither as long nor as harsh as some had expected. In China, Yang's publishing career continued as a combination

30. Discussion of Yang in relation to the Nobel Prize dates back to when Goran Malmqvist, the newly elected member and first sinologist of the Swedish Academy, mentioned him at a major international Shanghai conference on contemporary Chinese literature organised by the Writers' Association in November 1986. For more on Yang and the Nobel Prize, see Lovell, "China's search for a Nobel Prize in Literature," ch. 4.

31. He Yuhuai, *Cycles of Repression and Relaxation*, p. 400.

32. Van Crevel, *Language Shattered*, p. 90.

33. Yang Lian, personal correspondence with author, 4 February 2004.

34. McDougall and Louie, *The Literature of China*, p. 430.

of engagement in both official and unofficial publications. At first it was considered risky for official publishers to touch Yang's work. The only strategy that could work was to publish quietly, but that meant low sales and therefore publishing at a loss. This seems to have been what happened with the publication of Yang's epic poem from the 1980s *Yi*. Yang had published the first part of *Yi*, "The self speaks" ("Zizaizhe shuo"), in 1987 in the first issue of the journal *Culture: China and the World* (*Wenhua: Zhongguo yu shijie*).³⁵ He had also already published the entire work in an unofficial mimeograph version in late 1988 or early 1989 (see Table 1). The full legally published version appeared under the title *The Sun and Man* (*Taiyang yu ren*) with a long essay by Dong Yufeng in October 1991 (see Table 1). According to Yang, everything was arranged by Dong, who apparently said that getting the book published was "more difficult than to claim heaven."³⁶ Two things allowed the editor to avoid political repercussions: the book was published in Hunan, at a distance from Beijing, and there seems to have been little or no publicity and distribution. According to Yang, "almost nobody knew the book."³⁷ Despite the lack of promotion, the book was still published in a print run of 6,200 copies. Because it seems to have been published in defiance of political caution and economic rationality, it can be viewed as an example of how book production in China has not always worked as one would expect given the political and economic constraints, but often depends on connections and political and cultural sympathies and allegiances.

Two years after Deng Xiaoping's Southern Tour in 1992 had given further direction to the reform agenda in China, Yang's second official PRC book of the 1990s appeared. This was a collection of essays by Yang and his wife, the prose writer Yo Yo (the pen-name of Liu Youhong) from their time in exile and was entitled *Peoplescapes – Ghostspeak/Lies* (*Renjing – Guihua*) (see Table 1). This publication was still considered politically risky, but the political and economic environment had changed considerably since *The Sun and Man* was published. In contrast to the 1991 publication, there was a strong economic rationale behind the decision to publish the 1994 book. Gu Cheng had killed his wife and himself in 1993. This created frenzy in the Chinese media. The rights to Gu's book *Ying'er* were sold for what was at the time the highest price ever paid for an unpublished manuscript, and numerous newspaper articles and books about Gu appeared.³⁸ One of the reasons for the

35. This journal was produced by the Culture: China and the World editorial board, a central group in the Culture Fever of the 1980s, and was published by the Joint Bookstore. For more on the Culture: China and the World editorial board, see Edward X. Gu, "Cultural intellectuals," and Chen Fong-Ching, "Popular cultural movement of the 1980s," in Gloria Davies (ed.), *Voicing Concerns: Contemporary Chinese Critical Inquiry* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001), pp. 78–79.

36. Yang Lian, personal correspondence with author, 4 February 2004.

37. *Ibid.*

38. For more on the deaths of Gu Cheng and his wife and the mythologizing publications that followed this tragic event, see Anne-Marie Brady, "Dead in exile: the life and death of Gu Cheng and Xie Ye," *China Information*, Vol. 11, No. 4 (1997), pp. 126–148.

decision to publish the book by Yang and Yo Yo may have been the desire to cash in on this phenomenon. Yang and Yo Yo were very close to Gu Cheng and his wife, and one short essay by Yo Yo at the beginning of the volume concerns her shock at hearing of their tragic demise.³⁹ The book was published in Beijing in a print run of 20,000. The location of the publishing house and the size of the print run indicate the increased acceptability of Yang's work in China.

Further evidence of the rise in Yang's official fortunes came when he visited China in December 1993 for the first time since the Tiananmen Square massacre. Gu Cheng also visited China that year,⁴⁰ and Yang has made fairly regular trips to China since then. For several of the most prominent Chinese writers, however, access to China and the official Chinese publishing market after 1989 has been more difficult. Bei Dao was turned around at Beijing Airport in 1994 and when he was finally allowed to visit in late 2001 and early 2002 he did so under official restrictions. Bei Dao's first book since 1989 finally appeared in China in 2003, published by Nanhai Press in Hainan, rather than by a more prestigious Beijing or Shanghai press.⁴¹ Yang's family connections and his less prominent role in the 1989 protests may have saved him from similar treatment.

After 1989 Yang also continued to publish unofficially in China. The establishment of a national unofficial poetry magazine in 1991 was a landmark event for Yang's career in China and for unofficial poetry publishing generally. The new magazine was called *Modern Chinese Poetry (Xiandai Han shi)*. The first issue, published in spring 1991, begins with four new poems by Yang. By placing an exiled poet at the front of the first unofficial national poetry magazine, the editors asserted artistic independence from official culture. They also registered the high status Yang enjoyed in the unofficial cultural sphere.

The distinction between unofficial and official, however, became more difficult to maintain as the 1990s wore on, as the poet Xi Chuan notes:

Some people all along sought to legalize their writing. They sought opportunities and financial resources to buy ISBN numbers from publishers (this method has now been banned), in order to publish their poems and other writing themselves. The official writing system reacted to this. They admitted some people into the Writers' Association, and published some works from unofficial journals.⁴²

As can be seen from Table 1, Yang did not publish any more unofficial books in China after 1989. This may have been because he was no longer living in China and had good access to Western, Taiwanese and Hong

39. You You, "E'meng – Gu Cheng de xiaomie" ("Nightmare: Gu Cheng's death"), in Yang Lian and You You, *Renjing*, p. 1–3.

40. Van Crevel, *Language Shattered*, p. 97.

41. Bei Dao, *Bei Dao shige ji (Collected Poems of Bei Dao)* (Haikou: Nanhai, 2003).

42. Xi Chuan, "Guanyu minkan: Zhongguo shige xiao chuantong" ("Concerning *minjian* publications: a small tradition in Chinese poetry), *Minjian zhenying (The People's Faction)*, <http://www.ceqq.com/Mjzy/Mjzy-mk/003.HTM>.

Kong publishers.⁴³ But it also reflects a general trend amongst unofficial poets in China. Although unofficial journals continue to flourish, poets have to some extent moved away from the unofficial publication of books because of the greater access to official publication that Xi Chuan notes and, in recent years, also because of access to the internet.⁴⁴

During the period of cultural liberalization in 1998, Yang had a major publishing breakthrough.⁴⁵ The editor of Shanghai Art and Literature Press decided to publish his collected works in two large volumes.⁴⁶ Notwithstanding the cultural licence given by the authorities in 1998, the editor of the Shanghai press was still nervous about the political reception of Yang's book. This can be seen particularly in the changes made to "Behind the lies" ("Huangyan beihou"), the poem cycle that was sent to *United News* after 4 June. The poem in that cycle that originally appeared outside the PRC with the title "To a nine-year-old girl killed in the massacre" ("Gei yi ge datusha zhong siqu de jiu sui nühai") appears in the Shanghai collected works as "To a nine-year-old girl who died suddenly" ("Gei yi ge cusi de jiusui nühai").⁴⁷ The date 29 June 1989, which appeared in the original publication, has also been removed. The poem originally entitled "1989" (in the related cycle "The dead in exile") is still included in the collection, but its title has been changed to the unspecific "Death's year" ("Sizhe zhi nian")⁴⁸ and the date 21 January 1990 has been removed to make it less obvious that the poem refers to 1989. However, a letter entitled "They have been killed by lies again (Yang Lian's letter to the editor of *United Daily News*)" ("Tamen you bei huangyan shasi [Yang Lian zhi *Lianhe bao* bianzhe de xin]"), dated 25 July 1989, has been removed entirely.

43. Yang Lian has published several Chinese and bilingual Chinese-English books outside the PRC since 1989, including: *The Dead in Exile*, trans. Mabel Lee (Canberra: Tiananmen, 1990); *Masks and Crocodile: A Contemporary Chinese Poet and His Poetry*, trans. Mabel Lee (Sydney: Wild Peony, 1990); *Non-Person Singular*, trans. Brian Holton (London: Wellsweep, 1994); *Guihua (Lies/Ghost Speak)* (Taipei: Lian jing, 1994); *Where the Sea Stands Still: New Poems*, trans. Brian Holton (Newcastle: Bloodaxe, 1999); *Yueshi de qi ge ban ye (The Seven Midnights of the Lunar Eclipse)* (Taipei: Lianhe wenxue, 2002); *Yi*, trans. Mabel Lee (Los Angeles: Green Integer, 2002); and *Concentric Circles*, trans. Brian Holton and Agnes Hung-Chong Chan (Tarsset, Northumberland: Bloodaxe, 2005). Translations of Yang's works into other languages include: in German, *Masken und Krokodile: Gedichte*, trans. Wolfgang Kubin (Berlin; Weimar: Aufbau-Verl, 1994); *Geisterreden: Essays aus Auckland, Berlin, New York*, trans. Mark Renné (Zürich: Ammann, 1995); in French, *La maison sur l'estuaire*, trans. Chantal Chen-Andro (St. Nazaire: MEET, 2001), *Masques et crocodiles*, trans. Chantal Chen-Andro (Dijon: Virgile, 2002); in Italian, Yang Lian and Gao Xingjian, *Il pane dell'esilio*, trans. G. Santamaria (Milan: Medusa, 2001); *Dove si ferma il mare*, trans. Claudia Pozzana (Milan, Scheiwiller, 2004).

44. There are many poetry websites in China today. For a list of major sites and discussion boards, see the links page on *The Poetry Newspaper (Shige bao)*, <http://www.shigebao.com/lianjie.htm>. See also Michael Day's growing archive of Chinese poetry internet sites in the *Digital Archive for Chinese Studies*, <http://www.sino.uni-heidelberg.de/dachs/leiden/poetry/index.html>.

45. On 1998 as a year of "cultural licence," see Barmé, *In the Red*, pp. 345–363.

46. *Dahai tingzhi zhi chu: Yang Lian zuopin 1982–1997 shige juan (Where the Sea Stands Still: Works by Yang Lian, 1982–1997 – Poetry)* (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi, 1998), and *Guihua: Zhili de kongjian: Yang Lian zuopin 1982–1997 sanwen, wenlun juan (Ghostspeak/Lies: The Space of Intellect: Collected Essays of Yang Lian, 1982–1997)* (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi, 1998).

47. Compare Yang Lian, *The Dead in Exile* p. 44; and *Dahai tingzhi zhi chu* p. 301.

48. Compare Yang Lian, *The Dead in Exile*, p. 50; and *Dahai tingzhi zhi chu*, p. 309.

In his 1989 letter to the editor of *United Daily News*, Yang writes: “Those killed by bullets are now once more being killed by lies.”⁴⁹ But in Yang’s 1998 Shanghai collection the letter with this crucial statement has been removed from the cycle in compliance with censorship. This accommodation to censorship is ironic considering Yang’s own censored words, his prominent role as a spokesperson against human rights abuses in China when in the West, his condemnation of the lies propagated by the PRC government about 4 June and his criticism of writers and artists who implicitly or explicitly condone the Chinese authorities. Writing in the late 1990s, Oliver Krämer commented on Yang’s political activism: “He is also politically active, venting his anger at the disregard of human rights in China in numerous articles in German newspapers when he was living in Stuttgart in 1995–6. Since moving to the United Kingdom, he has been engaged with the organization Index [on] Censorship.”⁵⁰ Yang has also published regularly in *Beijing Spring* (*Beijing zhi chun*), a Chinese journal run by people opposed to the PRC government outside China. Reflecting on his involvement with the opposition to the Chinese government, Yang himself has linked true literary success with dissent from the accommodations required in the Chinese literary marketplace, criticizing those writers and artists in China who compromise their artistic integrity and political independence for the sake of making money. According to Yang, writers who worship money also end up supporting the regime. He writes: “Between authentic success – in literature, in art, in *humanity* – and success in [the Chinese] market, there is a small, but sharp, distinction.”⁵¹

The small but sharp distinction between the two versions of the poem “To a nine-year-old girl” points to the dilemma that Yang faces in China today. He confronts the contradiction between his presentation outside and inside China. Outside China, he is still often presented and sold as an exile, despite the fact that he has been visiting China since 1993. Promotional materials often claim that Yang’s works are still banned in China, something that is patently untrue today.⁵² Human Rights Watch also demonstrated this common misunderstanding of Yang’s position when it awarded him a Hellman/Hammett grant in 1999. These grants “are given annually by Human Rights Watch to writers around the world who have been victims of political persecution and are in financial need.” The appendix to the 1999 Human Rights Watch’s annual report describes Yang as follows:

Yang Lian, Chinese poet and essayist, took part in the 1979 Beijing Spring democracy movement and edited an underground literary magazine. In 1983, government authorities attacked an epic he wrote about Tibet and banned his writing for one year. Lecturing in New Zealand at the time of the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre,

49. Yang Lian, *The Dead in Exile*, p. 43.

50. Oliver Krämer, “No past to long for?” in Hockx, *The Literary Field of Twentieth Century China*, p. 168.

51. Yang Lian, “Market lines,” *Index on Censorship*, No. 1 (1997), p. 79.

52. See, for example, the blurb on the back of Yang Lian, *Yi*.

he organized demonstrations. Since then all his work has been banned in China, and he fled to England, where he has been living in exile.⁵³

While Yang certainly has suffered persecution, the quoted biography misrepresents his present status and that of his work in China. Yang published his collected works in Shanghai in the year prior to the publication of the Human Rights Watch statement that since 1989 “all his work has been banned in China.”⁵⁴

Inside China, meanwhile, Yang’s place as a classic of post-Mao poetry is emphasized in promotional material. But more important in recent promotions has been his international reputation, which arguably rests in part on his being a political dissident and exile, something which cannot be mentioned officially in China. The importance of Yang’s international reputation is evident in the marketing strategy for the three books published by Shanghai Art and Literature Press. The blurbs on the backs and inside flaps of the books are made up of a combination of Taiwanese, American and European reviews of Yang’s work. Yang is marketed as a Chinese writer who has made it big abroad.⁵⁵ The appeal to those interested in or impressed by the international arts scene is also clear in the choice of cover design. The covers of all three books are by Rebecca Horn, a German artist who has exhibited in prestigious museums and galleries around the world, including the Guggenheim and the Tate Modern. Similarly, his 1994 Beijing book is marketed on the blurb as being by one of the Chinese writers whom the Chinese specialist on the Nobel committee tips for winning the Nobel Prize in Literature. The blurb also emphasizes that Yang is one of the major Obscure Poets and in this way draws on his dissident history for promotional purposes, albeit without mentioning his most radical dissident activities.

Yang’s position today inside and outside China illustrates the ongoing tension between dissidence and accommodation in the Chinese literary system. The dilemma that this tension poses for Yang and many other Chinese writers is illustrated by the adjustments made to “Behind the lies” in his 1998 Shanghai collection. Changed or unchanged, the publication of these poems necessarily takes a stance of either accommodation or dissidence. On the one hand, the change in the title of the poem addressed to a nine-year-old girl is an accommodation to the authorities that undermines Yang’s image as an uncompromising poet. On the other hand, one could argue that including the poems and having the book banned would have obscured Yang’s poetry in a cloud of political controversy, focusing attention on his dissidence and undermining his

53. *Human Rights Watch World Report* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1999), <http://www.hrw.org/worldreport99/appendix>.

54. At the time applications closed for the Human Rights Watch grant on 1 December 1998, Yang’s collected works were still to be published (they were published in December 1998). The books were certainly available in China, however, by the time the grant results were announced in spring 1999.

55. Stephen Owen has also noted the importance of an international reputation for success as a poet in China (review of *The August Sleepwalker New*, by Bei Dao, *The New Republic*, 19 November 1990, p. 32).

desire to have his poetry judged purely as poetry. In the face of such dilemmas, to remain independent seems an almost impossible task, the product of the tension that has persisted over the past 25 years between dissidence and accommodation. This is a case study of one poet, but the situation described is pertinent to many more authors in various genres and media in art and literature in the People's Republic of China.