Leiden University
Institute for Area Studies (LIAS)

September 16, 2018

ResMA Thesis

Grassroots-Government Interactions in the Literary Field:

The *Dagong* Poets' Community of the Pearl River Delta, China

Name: Balys Astrauskas

Programme: Asian studies (research)

Word count: 27 566

Supervisor: Prof. dr. Maghiel van Crevel

Abstract

Keywords: China, literary field, *dagong* poetry, rural migrant workers, cultural policy

The thesis analyses grassroots-government interactions in the formation and the development of the *dagong* 打工 poetry scene of Pearl River Delta in Guangdong province, China. *Dagong* poetry is a wide and eclectic literary genre, written by Chinese rural migrant workers, often referred to as Chinese subalterns, who move to the cities to make a living, because of a lack of economic opportunities in the countryside.

I use Bourdieu's theory of the literary field to survey three main types of agents involved the *dagong* poetry dynamic and its discourse: (1) grassroots activists, (2) party-state-affiliated cultural policy institutions, and (3) intermediaries, meaning various individuals who advance the interactions of (1) and (2), and may be considered as belonging to both groups.

By surveying textual sources, including literary journals, websites and public WeChat accounts, and through qualitative interviews with poets, critics, literary scholars and other agents involved in *dagong* poetry discourse, I provide in depth case studies of some of most important *dagong* poetry-related persons and organizations in the Delta region *dagong* poets' community.

The thesis shows that party-state cultural policy institutions play a significant role in formation and development of a literary community that began as a grassroots movement. Their far reaching influence is present in many aspects and is mainly executed through negotiation with grassroots groups, in which a crucial role is played by top-down and bottom-up intermediaries that are very helpful for attracting financial, political and also discursive support for the *dagong* poets' community, but also ensure that *dagong* poetry discourse remains controlled and in line with government's cultural policy.

Contents

1. Introduction

> In the Pearl River Delta region of Southern China's coastline exists a group of ordinary and at the same time extraordinary *dagongzhe*. What makes them ordinary, is that like many other *dagongzhe* they have tasted all the bittersweet flavours of life as *dagongzhe*, living in a constant displacement. What makes them extraordinary, is that they always embrace ideals of beauty, on the way borrowing the warmth of the words for spiritual enlightenment, use their youth spent in wandering to compose their dreams and to sing about their lives, they raise a flag for hundreds of millions of *dagongzhe* in their struggle with fate…
>
> They *dagong*, they write poetry. There is one unique label to denominate their special status – *dagong* poets.
>
> 在中国南方珠三角长三角等沿海地区，有这样一群普通而又特殊的打工者——他们普通，是因为他们与许多打工者一样，饱尝了打工生活的苦辣酸咸，有着颠沛流离的人生；他们特殊，是因为他们始终怀抱美好的理想，跋涉途中藉文字的温暖照亮心灵，用漂泊的青春抒写梦想、吟唱生活，为千百万打工者树立了一面与命运抗争的旗帜……
>
> 他们打工，他们写诗，一个独特的称谓很能表明他们的特殊身份——打工诗人。(Xu et al 2009, p. 1, my translation)

This is an opening passage of the preface to *The Best of Chinese Dagong Poetry 2008* 《2008 中国打工诗歌精选》, an important anthology of *dagong* or rural migrant workers' poems, a grassroots publication compiled by *dagong* poets themselves. It emphasizes the situation of these people – poor, uneducated, engaged in unqualified low paid jobs, yet full eager to write poetry – an activity mostly associated with cultural-intellectual elite, not with the precarious cheap labor force that official media discourse associates with bad manners, erratic behaviour and a lack of cultural capital.

Dagong poetry, sometimes also referred to as *diceng* 底层 (subaltern) poetry is a wide and eclectic literary genre, written by Chinese rural migrant workers (*nongmingong* 农民工), who move to the cities to make a living, because of a lack of economic opportunities in the countryside. *Dagong* 打工 is a Cantonese slang word that roughly means "working for the boss" and usually refers to having a temporary low skilled and mostly manual job in a private sector. The people doing such job are called *dagongzhe* 打工者. Starting from the 1990s and especially since the 2000s, members of this group have produced large amounts of poetry, which has become known as *dagong* poetry.

1.1. Research topic and questions

In this project, I am going to focus on grassroots-government interactions in the formation and the development of the *dagong* poetry scene of Pearl River Delta (Zhu Sanjiao 珠三角) in Guangdong province, China, the oldest, biggest and the most active *dagong* poets' community.

Being a relatively young and "minor" genre of contemporary Chinese literature, *dagong* poetry is not only seeing a rapid growth of its literary corpus but is also witnessing an increasing attention from academia, mass media and established cultural institutions. Poets such as Zheng Xiaoqiong 郑小琼 (b. 1980), Guo Jinniu 郭金牛 (b. 1966) and Xie Xiangnan 谢湘南 (b. 1974) have already gained a certain degree of national and international recognition. Other talented authors are also entering the limelight, especially by the help of other poets or poetry critics, with projects such as Qin Xiaoyu's 秦晓宇 (b. 1974) anthology of and documentary (codirected with Wu Xiaobo 吴晓波 [b. 1968]) about *dagong* poetry being a recent example (See van Crevel 2017a).

In China, traditionally a monopoly of poetry writing was held by the cultural-intellectual elite. The rise of *dagong* poetry leads to the following questions. Why is it that in recent years, so many migrant workers, many of whom have limited formal education and little of what would conventionally be considered cultural capital, have started writing poetry? Wherein lies this poetry's significance? Who are the various agents involved in the emergence of a *dagong* poetry discourse, how is it of interest to them and what is at stake for them?

For one, poems by rural migrant workers can be treated as a form of historical documentation and are often regarded as "some of the most authentic, if not authoritative and objective, evidence about life and work of a marginalised yet populous mobile community" (Sun 2012, pp 998-9). Descriptiveness and supposedly authentic representation of grassroots voices constitute some of the primary reasons why *dagong* poetry attracts the attention of various venues, including academia, journalists, NGO's etc. But is there more to it than this historical-documentary perspective?

Notably, the very formation and existence of *dagong* poetry scene is not independent from political control but a result of the interplay between grassroots and various agents in the Chinese party-state institutions that affects *dagong* poetry discourse through practices of political intervention in the literary field (Sun 2014b, p 182). This can be seen in the light of a broader framework of the socialist Chinese literary system, surveyed in a seminal study by Perry Link (2000). However the said study is limited to the situation until the early 1990s, and rapid marketization has since brought

substantial changes to the literary system. The introduction and popularisation of the Internet in the early 2000s has made yet another crucial impact on the dynamics within the literary field in China (Hockx 2011, pp 61-2).

Party-state institutions remain a crucial agent in Chinese literary field and impose a set of rules through the process of negotiation with other agents in the field. In case of *dagong* poetry discourse, the most important interaction of said institutions occurs with a second type of agent, i.e. grassroots activists of *dagong* poetry. However, within government-grassroots interactions, there are many individuals that can be considered as simultaneously belonging to both groups. These individuals play a significant role and are a third type of agent, which I refer to as intermediaries.

In my thesis, "grassroots" refers to *dagong* poets themselves and other members of *dagong* poetry community and their publications via various forms of media (print journals, blogs, public WeChat and other social media accounts etc.). These publications are founded and run by grassroots activists themselves as opposed to the official publications of party-state institutions. By institutions I mean bodies affiliated with the government or the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) actively involved in dealing with *dagong* poetry, sometimes as part of cultural production at large, through implementing cultural policy towards *dagong* poets' community that on one hand incentivises cultural production of migrant workers, yet on the other, set limits on its artistic expression. There are two types of intermediaries who support *dagong* poetry: former *dagong* poets who are now government cadres, who will be referred to as bottom-up intermediaries; and cadres of party-state cultural institutions who were never *dagong* poets themselves, who will be referred to as top-down intermediaries. By using their intersectional positions of being in-between grassroots and government, they serve the interests of both groups and their own interests.

By the *dagong* poets' community, I mean an informal literary group of individuals that share a *dagong* poets' identity. It can be understood as a certain form of what Benedict Anderson calls an imagined community, in a sense that it is "a deep horizontal comradeship" (Anderson 1983, p. 7). While it does not have unified leadership or formal structure, there have been several attempts by both grassroots activists and government institutions to establish *dagong* poetry based literary societies, similar to the ones that existed in Republican China (Hockx & Denton 2008, pp 10-11). While no single literary society can claim its leadership over *dagong* poets' community as a whole, activities of these organizations play a crucial role in forming, strengthening and defending *dagong* poets' identity, as well *dagong* poets' position in the literary field.

This leads to the following research question: How have interactions in the literary field between grassroots and governmental institutions contributed to the formation and the development of the *dagong* poetry community of the Pearl River Delta region in Guangdong Province, China?

And to these two sub questions:

- What are the roles of the main agents, namely grassroots, party-state institutions and intermediaries involved in these interactions?
- What does the government-grassroots negotiation of *dagong* poetry tell us about cultural policy?

In order to answer the questions, I am going to analyse some of the most salient agents from each of three groups as case studies. For grassroots, I am going to focus on the role of *The Dagong Poet* 《打工诗人》, one of the most important grassroots poetry journals as well as *The Dagong Poets' Association* 打工诗社, the most organized and active online *dagong* poetry organization that operates several accounts on various Chinese social media platforms with public WeChat account *Dagong Literature and Art* 打工文艺 being the most active, therefore I will concentrate my research there.

One governmental institution I will be focusing on is Guangdong Young Industrial Worker Writers Association 广东省青年产业工人作家协会 a literary society devoted to *dagong* writers that is affiliated with the Guangdong provincial branch of the Chinese Communist Youth League 中国共青团, and organizes training sessions, literary awards and wide variety of other activities devoted to the *dagong* poets' community of the Delta region.

The case study for the intermediaries will concentrate on Yang Honghai 杨宏海 (b. 1951), a cultural bureaucrat, actively involved in the formation and promotion of all forms of *dagong* literature, including poetry.

There are various translations of the Chinese term rendered here as "*dagong* poetry" (打工诗歌), such as: migrant worker poetry, workers poetry, labor poetry, battlers' poetry etc. Rather than translating *dagong* into English (in expressions such as "*dagong* poetry" and "*dagong* literature"), I will use the Romanized Chinese term throughout. Since the phenomenon of *dagong* poetry has only recently started to gain attention in the English language academia, there is no consensus so far on the best English translation for the term.

1.2. Literature review

The literary system of the PRC before the era of marketization, when the socialist economic system got replaced by a predominantly market economy based one (i.e. 1990s) is thoroughly analysed by Link (2000). Kraus (2004) surveys the broader question of interaction between art and politics in mainland China. Kong (2005) explores the marketization of the Chinese literary field in 1990s that signified the waning patronage function of party-state institutions. Hockx (2015) addresses the profound and rule-changing impact to the literary field by the Internet in mainland China. By treating poetry as a "social form", which encompasses both textual and institutional sites, communication and interplay among culture, cultural producers and consumers, and social practices such as gatekeeping through which meanings are created and contested, Inwood (2014) explores poetry scene discourses.

When it comes to *dagong* poetry, while a significant amount of research is done in Chinese language scholarship, there are very few attempts to discuss *dagong* poetry related issues in English language academic literature so far. Most of the English writings to date focus on *dagong* poetry at the intersection of class and gender, sometimes working through the framework of subaltern theory, which, adapted to contemporary mainland Chinese context, treats the migrant workers as a subaltern class.

Lu Xinyu (2010) argues, that the working class, which was previously considered as backbone of Chinese socialist state has been downgraded to the subaltern status. She explains the said phenomenon as a "collapse of class consciousness", which took place after China's industrialisation phase was replaced with the market economy (p. 73). Pun Ngai and Chris Ling-Chi Chan (2008) analyse how the working class has suffered a double "alienation" of class formation: from state orchestrated articulation of "class struggle" during Maoist period (1949-1976) to the abrupt subsumption of the class discourse during the market reform period (p. 76). Sun (2014a) and Park (2014) demonstrate how denigration of rural migrant workers' subjectivity and self-consciousness is imposed through a "personal quality" discourse disseminated through education, mass media channels and manifold means of propaganda. It stigmatizes the rural Chinese population, deemed as lacking of decent manners, portrays them as a source of social disorder, moral indecency and stereotypes rural migrant workers as being culturally inferior to their urban counterparts (Sun 2014a, pp 172-3).

In her monograph on media and cultural practices of rural migrant workers, Sun (2014b) provides the most comprehensive overview of the *dagong* poetry phenomenon to date. By presenting definitional issues, historical development, main themes and debates related to *dagong* poetry, she demonstrates how *dagong* poetry interacts with market forces as well as officially validated cultural

hierarchy, whereas a pursuit of cultural capital leads to simultaneous articulation and disarticulation of class consciousness. A theme of the *dagong* poetry at the crossroads with politics is also invoked in Gong's (2012) analysis of ecological motifs within the genre. Inwood's (2011) survey shows *dagong* poetry in the broader picture of a century long debate of the role of poetry vis-à-vis Chinese society, while Zhang (2011) emphasises the significance *dagong* literature as the core and the most specific element in the regional literary circles of Guangdong province.

Studies of *dagong* poetry at the intersection of gender are generally limited to inquiry into the writings of female migrant workers. Jaguścik (2011) illustrates how Chinese state media renders stereotypical representations of female migrant workers as either loyal servants or objects of sexual desire. By taking literary analysis of Zheng Xiaoqiong's poetry and Wang Lili's novel as case studies, Dooling (2017) surveys self-representation of female migrant workers within the realm of *dagong* literature. Jaguścik also (2014) explores the themes of gender, body writing, injury and environmental degradation in Zheng Xiaoqiong's oeuvre.

Chinese language scholarship on *dagong* poetry range in topics that generally falls under the fields of history of literature and literary criticism. He Xuan (2010b) surveys a significant growth of *dagong* poetry publications since 2001, paralleled by the increase of public and academic attention towards the issue. One of the leading scholars in the field is Liu Dongwu. Liu provides historical overview of separate genres of *dagong* literature (2012), and analyses positionality of *dagong* literature vis-à-vis avant-garde, urban, rural, children and the Internet literature traditions (2014). In a series of his articles (2006, 2008a, 2008b and 2010), Liu delves into literary analysis of body, pain, injury and voice tropes throughout the *dagong* writings. By conducting semiotic and narratological analysis of the poems from three *dagong* poetry anthologies, Shi (2014) discerns that the main motifs in *dagong* poetry are misery, nostalgia for one's hometown, and daily life struggles. A more in depth and in scope study on *dagong* poetry's narrative, which arrives at similar conclusions, is conducted by Zeng (2012).

1.3. Contribution and Significance

Sun Wanning's study indicates a significant entanglement of governmental institutions into *dagong* poetry discourse (2014b), an issue that so far has not been thoroughly studied. I hope my thesis will contribute to increasing understanding of interactions of *dagong* poets and governmental institutions.

1.4. Sources

Generally speaking, most of the main sources in the thesis fall into the category of metatext that van Crevel (2008) refers to as "discourse on poetry" (p. 30), in this case, discourse on *dagong* poetry. The sources can be further divided into three groups. The first group of sources is print publications and online presence of the grassroots communities and party-state institutions I have researched, namely websites, Internet forums and WeChat public accounts as well as various relevant documents and articles published through the said accounts.

The second group of sources are the articles of literary history and literary criticism that document interactions among grassroots, party-state institutions and intermediaries. Some of the main examples of this group of sources are essays by authors such as Yang Honghai, Liu Dongwu 柳冬妩 (b.1973) and Luo Deyuan 罗德远 (b. 1968) et al.

The third source is the data I have gathered via interviews with people related to *dagong* poetry scene and through participant observation of poetry events. My fieldwork on mainland Chinese *dagong* poetry scene took place between 13 February and 3 July 2017 in Guangdong and Fujian provinces. During my stay I conducted fieldwork research in the cities of Xiamen (Fujian), Shenzhen, Guangzhou, Foshan, Huizhou and Zhuhai (Guangdong). References to interview data will be marked as "PC", abbreviation for "personal communication".

The fourth source is *dagong* poems per se, to provide the reader with understanding of form and content of the genre.

1.5. Theoretical Orientation and Methodology

I am going to use Bourdieu's literary field theory, especially with Hockx's (1999) adaptations for the context of mainland China. Bourdieu's theory positions interactions between agents involved in literary production in the literary field, where they operate according to the autonomous principle through witch symbolic capital is distributed and the heteronomous principle, adhering to which produces economic capital. Each agent's behaviour in the field is determined by one's habitus – a set of values and dispositions that organize individuals' perception of social reality and responses to it.

Hockx suggests that for a better understanding of Chinese literary field, a third dimension – a semi-heteronomous principle of *political* capital has to be introduced (p 17).

To my understanding the sub-field of *dagong* poetry is positioned at the very bottom of the literary field of mainland China, and adhering to its principles can award one with symbolic capital but hardly with economic and political capital. Symbolic capital is earned through the *dagong* poet's status as a *dagongzhe* and the ability to express his/her experiences as a *dagongzhe* through poetry in a way that is recognized as authentic by their peers and wider public at large and at the same time, through what Bourdieu refers to as "disavowal" of economic motives behind literary production (Bourdieu, 1980, pp 261-263). This symbolic capital to a significant extent is valuable outside of the sub-field of *dagong* poetry and can be converted into different forms of capital through two different strategies: through directly converting symbolic capital into economic capital or through converting symbolic capital into political capital first, which in turn is converted into economic capital. The former capital accumulation strategy is outside the scope of the thesis, while the latter is the principle on which grassroots-government interactions are based upon, therefore I will explain it in detail.

Due to lower class habitus and generally unfavourable financial situation, *dagong* poets usually tend to be quite tolerant towards government interventions in their sub-field or towards their peers getting involved into party-state affiliate institutions as long as it helps to escape their subalternity. For this reason, the sub-field of *dagong* poetry might be significantly less autonomous than those of some other, mostly avant-garde related poetry groups in China. Therefore many *dagong* poets would tend to follow the rules (in Bourdieu's terms, the doxa) of the main or official literary field, which are largely controlled by party-state cultural institutions that require political capital, granted by becoming a member of the Writers Association and/or other party-state adjacent institutions, becoming a cultural cadre or an editor in official literary publication, producing literature that adheres to or at least does not go against the Chinese Communist Party ideology, knowing what and how (not) to talk, write etc. *Dagong* poets that possess a high level of both symbolic and political capital, in other words, are close to, but still inside the dividing line between the sub-field of *dagong* poetry and the field of political power; in this thesis, they are considered as bottom-up intermediaries. In order to be considered both as genuine *dagong* poets and members of party-state bureaucracy they have to attain a balanced position within the field, as moving too much upwards the political axis (i.e. getting outside the dividing line of the sub-field) would result in losing one's *dagong* poetry based symbolic capital.

Literary journals and online platforms devoted to publishing and promoting *dagong* poetry both grassroots or government based provide means of accumulating capital, which enables *dagong* poets to further their positions in the field.

Subaltern theory, specifically its adaptation to workers class of the Post-Socialist China by Lu Xinyu, Sun Wanning and Pun Ngai will also be employed when necessary.

Methods used for processing my material include close reading, content and discourse analysis. Textual research will be supplemented by the data collected in fieldwork. During my fieldwork trip to Fujian and Guangdong I interviewed various poets, poetry critics, publishers and/or other agents in migrant workers poetry scene. I used unstructured qualitative interviews that were helpful in understanding the cultural, social and political context of the issues discussed in the paper and participants' position towards these issues. Another method used in the fieldwork was participant observation of the workers poetry events. This provided me with insights on worker poets' community organisation and its practices.

1.6. Limitations and pitfalls

The research scope is mostly limited to the *dagong* poetry scene of the Pearl River Delta region in Guangdong province, because it is the biggest, oldest and most developed *dagong* poetry scene in China. *Dagong* poetry communities from other geographical locations, such as Picun 皮村 near Beijing, are outside the scope of this study. While this is not necessarily a limitation in the strict sense, it is important to note that *dagong* poetry in other places than the Delta may not automatically work in exactly the same way.

This thesis concentrates on a limited number of institutions and intermediaries, thus leaving out a number of potentially important agents. Since I was told by informants that current PRC laws prohibits state media workers from giving interviews[1], I had to cancel my plans of talking with editors of the local newspaper in Shenzhen. For this reason, the influence of news media is not included into the study, even though, based on my observations, it plays an important role. I will however, offer informed speculations on the role of the media as and when this is helpful to the analysis. Other

[1] See "China's Media Regulator Places New Restrictions on Journalists and News Organizations" (November 5, 2014). Retrieved from https://www.cecc.gov/publications/commission-analysis/china%E2%80%99s-media-regulator-places-new-restrictions-on-journalists-and

potentially important agents - NGO's, labor rights activists, New-Left intellectuals, and commercial publishers – are also outside the scope of my thesis.

1.7. Structure

The thesis consists of six chapters. Chapter 1 is the introduction. Chapter 2 "Main Issues of *Dagong* Poetry", based on earlier scholarship and my fieldwork data, delivers a general overview of the *dagong* poetry phenomenon, including its main features, historical development and definition as well as a brief analysis of the most common themes of *dagong* poetry. Chapters 3 to 5 will analyse activities of different agents within the literary field. The first section of each chapter will provide a more general overview of the importance and working principles of each group of agents, while the following sections will provide specific case studies through which said principles will be explored in greater detail. Chapter 3, "Grassroots activities: Building a Worker Poets' Community", surveys the importance of print literary journals and online social media in *dagong* poets' community building. Chapter 4, "Government Institutions and Their Negotiation of Dagong Poetry", discusses the ways in which party-state institutions interact with grassroots and these institutions' role in shaping the *dagong* poetry discourse. Chapter 5, "The Role of Intermediaries", focuses on the role of individuals who assume a liminal position in between grassroots and government and play a significant role in formation and development of *dagong* poets' community. Chapter 6 is the conclusion.

2. Main issues surrounding *Dagong* poetry

This chapter will provide some context for the *dagong* poetry phenomenon. I will start with a discussion on the social background behind *dagong* writings, i.e. rural migrant workers as a post-socialist subaltern class. Then I will move to a general historical overview of workers poetry in mainland China from the Republican period (1911-1949) to *dagong* poetry phenomenon in recent times. The debate on definitions of *dagong* poetry will be discussed in the third section of this chapter. The final section will survey main themes of dagong poetry texts.

2.1. Migrant Workers: Social Background

The economic reforms initiated in China in 1978 gave rise to one of the biggest internal migrations in world history, as countless inhabitants of poor inland provinces started moving to the rapidly developing urban metropolises on China's coastline. This numerous group of people, which as of 2013 were 262 million people, or roughly more than a quarter of the global mobile population (Sun 2014b, p 19), is often referred to as *nongmingong* 农民工, which literally means "peasant worker", but signifies anyone who has rural residential status but works in urban or suburban areas (ibid, p 12). This type of "floating population" is mostly prevalent in Pearl River Delta area, China's manufacturing powerhouse, as well as other metropolises such as Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin, Wuhan, Chongqing etc.

Another term, widely used in migrant workers' discourse is *dagong* 打工, a slang word originated from Cantonese dialect, which literally means "working for the boss" and connotes the commodification of labor, where "the boss" refers to a capitalist boss and labor is exchanged for wages according to the rules dictated by market forces, in contrast to labor relations of China's socialist period when everyone was employed by the state (Pun 2005, pp 12-3). A person who "works for the boss" is called *dagongzhe* 打工者. It is difficult to come up with a proper English language equivalent for the term. Van Crevel (2017a) discusses various translation possibilities and rules out most of them as problematic. While "workers", "laborers" or "precariat" sometimes are used to translate *dagongzhe*, each of them leaves something more to be desired. Van Crevel suggests that the Australian English colloquial term "battlers" seems to be closest to the Chinese original as it denotes its colloquial register and most of the connotations while at the same time being concise and easy to use (van Crevel 2017b).

It should be also noted that while the term *dagongzhe* is gender neutral, gendered terms, i.e. *dagongzai* 打工仔 (lit. "working-for-the-boss boy") for males and *dagongmei* 打工妹 (lit "working-for-the-boss (younger) sister") are also very commonly used.

Jacka (2006, pp 6-7) points out three reasons for the emergence of Chinese rural migrant population in the late 1980s: stagnation of the rural economy, which led to a widening rural-urban income gap, rampant corruption and substandard quality of public services compared to the cities, and mass media influence, which catalysed a yearning among the rural population to see more of the world and to enjoy consumer pleasures unavailable in the economically stagnant countryside. At the same time, rampant economic development in the cities has dramatically increased the need for manual labor and rural migrants are willing – or compelled – to provide this at a lower cost than the urban population. Or, as in the case of Shenzhen, the local population was too small to satisfy business needs for labor force in the first place[2].

Chinese migrant workers are also often considered as belonging to *diceng* 底层, literally the "low(est) class or stratum" in society and often referred to as postsocialist subalterns in academia. Postsocialism is an ambiguous term coined by Arif Dirlik that defines a residual influence of socialist mind-set in former socialist societies in a similar fashion as postcolonialism defines the remnants of colonial influences in postcolonial societies (Hockx 2015, pp 12-13). The term "subaltern" was taken from Antonio Gramsci's writings and popularised in academia by the Indian Subaltern Studies Group to analyse agents that were previously underrepresented in colonial discourse. Chinese media scholar Lu Xinyu started applying the concept of subalternity to the context of postsocialist China. According to her, as of the early 1990's, what had previously been unitary social spacial relationships in Chinese society had collapsed, leading to a separation between the lowest classes and the rest of society (Zhao 2010, p. 20). For this reason rural migrant workers as are often treated as "other" by Chinese media and society.

There are several structural means, judicial and discursive, that reinforce the "othering" of rural migrant workers by government and society. The main judicial means are strict household registration (*hukou* 户口) laws that assign rural inhabitants to an inferior position. While initially created to control domestic migration, and to keep the cities from overpopulation, since 1980's the *hukou* system has been gradually alleviated to allow rural migrants to work in cities but without granting them social welfare and protection of workers' rights. Thus, by being officially registered as "rural residents", a

[2] According to Wikipedia, Shenzhen only had 30 000 inhabitants in 1979, when it was proclaimed Special Economic zone, a stark contrast to 11.9 million population in the urban area as of 2016. Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shenzhen (Accessed 11 Dec. 2017).

status which is extremely difficult to alter, rural migrant workers and their children are subject to almost inescapable poverty and exploitation (Chan & Selden, 2016, p. 3).

In terms of discursive practices, the rural migrant population is demeaned by a discourse on "personal quality" (*suzhi* 素质). Chinese mass media frequently stereotypes people of rural origin as lacking "culture", irrational, rude, misbehaved and ignorant, and thus they are pressured by media narratives into internalising the need of "self-regulation" and "self-development" in order to improve their "quality", yet feel inferior due to their inability to do so (Jacka, 2006, p. 41-2). This contributes to the justification of their subaltern position, and the "quality" narrative is also helpful in devaluing their labor, thus allowing employers to keep the wages of migrant rural workers low (Zhang, 2014, p. 18). An illustrative example of this phenomenon can be taken from a detailed survey on Foxconn electronics manufacturing company business practices by Pun et al (2016). In spite of high market value of iPhone cell phones, manufacturing for which mostly takes place in mainland China, as of 2010, Chinese labor cost had only accounted for 1.8% of individual product's US retail price (p. 169).

Media practices play a substantial role in the formation of migrant workers discourse. Mistreatment by business enterprises and government institutions often drives migrant workers to seek various kinds of redress. Since legal means for solving issues, such as petitioning to the relevant government institutions, rarely provide the desired results, desperation can drive mistreated migrant workers to violence, prominently including suicide, with frequent suicides of Foxconn assembly line workers since 2010 being a notable example that has generated much media attention. Even though in covering these incidents mass media seems to give voice to migrant workers to express their grievances, the final say on representation of subalterns lies in the hands of power structures, as the portrayal of *dagongzhe* varies greatly from sympathy to mockery depending on political guidelines as well as business interests adhering to capitalist logic (Sun 2012a, p. 872). That said, the 2014 suicide of *dagong* poet Xu Lizhi 许立志 (1990-2014), a Foxconn employee, has become a powerful sensation, which contributed to a major surge of interest in *dagong* poetry among both academics and public. The case of Xu Lizhi demonstrates the power of *dagong* poet's status, which can be a viable tool for attracting public's attention to migrant workers' issues.

2.2. Historical Overview*:* From Worker Poetry to *Dagong* Poetry

The origins of Chinese working class poetic writing lies in the emergence of modern Chinese poetry as part of the "May Fourth" movement (五四运动) and the New Culture Movement (新文化运动) of the late 1910s and 1920s that attempted to modernise Chinese literature (See Hockx, 2016). In the early 1920's, debate over the purpose of poetry writing divided many intellectuals into two camps: the former were advocates for poetry for poetry's sake, while the latter saw it as means of serving the masses (Inwood 2011, p. 50)[3]. Among the proponents of poetry's role of improving society there were many leftist intellectuals. According to Wu Ji 吴季, a key theorizer and advocate of worker poetry, one of them, Yin Fu 殷夫 (1910-1931), can be considered as the pioneer of worker-themed literature in China (Wu 2015, p. 1). Nevertheless, neither left wing writings, nor May Fourth literary corpus at large held any significant impact on working class population that at the time was mostly illiterate (ibid). However a certain type of workers' songs (工人歌谣) that could be considered as a prototype of worker poetry existed. Since Chinese population was predominantly rural and most workers originated from countryside, workers' songs had usually appropriated form and melodies from rural folk music, yet the lyrics focused on factory work related themes. The Republican era workers' songs used to be transmitted orally, a tradition that has since died out, and only a fraction of the songs, collected by ethnographers, has survived to this day (ibid, p. 3).

During the socialist period, cultural policy in China was based on Mao Zedong's *Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art* 在延安文艺座谈会上的讲话, two speeches from 1942 that delineated the function of art and literature as that of a political tool that has to reflect the life and feelings of the working classes. To serve this agenda, "worker-peasant-soldier" (工农兵) literature, which intended to portray life of these three social groups, became a mainstream genre. Based on "socialist realist" (社会现实主义) and "revolutionary romanticist" (革命浪漫主义) aesthetics, it was intended to represent working classes adhering to a set of strict political guidelines that did not leave much space for creativity. Socialist-period workers' poetry, sometimes referred to as "old workers' poetry" (老工人诗歌) tended to express a collective voice, an optimistic, uplifting tone and explicit patriotism, combined with unanimous praise for the CCP, Chairman Mao and the socialist political system. The more individualistic and pessimistic post-socialist *dagong* poetry is a very different thing

[3] The similar debate has resurfaced several times in Chinese literary circles ever since, one of the more recent its of its manifestations being Popular-Intellectual polemic ("知识分子写作"与"民间写作"之争) of the late 1990's (see van Crevel 2008, pp 399-458).

(Wright 2017, pp 54-57). If in *dagong* poetry *dagongzhe* are often portrayed as oppressed, mistreated and lacking control of their destiny, "old workers' poetry" portrays workers as being in control of their fate (Qin 2015, p. 46).

In the Post-Mao era, market reforms caused a decline in both workers' status and government control of literature, which gave rise to different literary forms. In 1985 Shenzhen municipal government cultural policy researcher Yang Honghai found what he would later identify as the earliest known example of *dagong* poetry written on a toilet wall, and was inspired to engage in more thorough research on and cultural advocacy for the genre (Yang 2011, p. 397). The earliest *dagong* poems were anonymous, short in length because due to brutal working and living conditions the authors had no time or financial means to engage in writing longer or more complex literary forms.

Since early 1990's situation began to change. Writings by *dagong* authors, including prose, poetry and essays started to appear in local periodicals and literary magazines of Delta region, including *Dapeng Bay* 《大鹏湾》, *Special Zone Literature* 《特区文学》 in Shenzhen, the *Yangcheng Evening News* 《羊城晚报》etc. With help and promotion by Yang Honghai[4], writings by rural migrant authors started to be referred to as "*dagong* literature" 打工文学, a pigeonholing term that has begun to be used by critics, mass media and academia, even though many *dagong* authors themselves found the term pejorative and not everyone liked it[5]. Nevertheless, with the help of media and scholarly attention, the first generation of *dagong* poets, a term commonly describing the ones who were born in 1960's and 1970's and started writing and publishing their poetry in 1990's, came into being. Some of the most successful first generation *dagong* poets, such as Xie Xiangnan, even managed to rise to national fame.

The turn of the millennium saw tremendous growth in both *dagong* poetry as well discourse on this poetry. In 2001, a group of *dagong* poetry activists, led by Xu Qiang 徐强 (b. 1973), Luo Deyuan and others, established *The Dagong Poet* 《打工诗人》, an unofficial grassroots *dagong* poetry periodical, initially based in Huizhou and later in Guangzhou. While various short lived grassroots *dagong* poetry publications existed before, with *Labor Circles* 《劳动界》, founded in 1988, probably being the earliest (Qin 2015, p.4), *The Dagong Poet* became the most influential due to its authors' dedicated efforts in providing structural survey, support and promotion of *dagong* poetry

[4] According to Yang (2011), Yang Honghai was the first to use the term "*dagong* literature" in academic discourse, which he did in his 1991 article《打工世界与打工文学》（Dagong World and Dagong Literature）, published in Guangdong based journal of literary criticism 《当代文坛报》（Contemporary Literature Forum magazine）. Ever since he was engaged in promotion and advocacy work for the genre (p. 400).

[5] Personal communication with *dagong* poets Chen Nianxi (March, 2017) and Huang Jiwen (June, 2017).

scene (van Crevel 2017b). The success of the periodical led to a number of *dagong* poetry anthologies, edited by Xu Qiang, Luo Deyuan and Chen Zhongcun 陈忠村 (b. 1975). Besides grassroots periodicals, *dagong* poetry would frequently appear in various official media publications, like *Dagong Literature* 《打工文学》, a weekly supplement to *Bao'an Daily* 《宝安日报》, an official newspaper of Shenzhen Bao'an district, home to the city's one of the biggest migrant workers' populations, being a prominent example.

Besides print publications, another form of media, the Internet, became the realm of *dagong* poetry activities. According to Huang Jiwen (PC, June 2017), most *dagongzhe* started using computers and the Internet in early 2000's. Online poetry communities on BBS discussion boards, websites and personal blogs helped spreading *dagong* poetry discourse, opening possibilities for the growth of a *dagong* poets' community, allowing for it to spread outside of its initial geographical borders. *Dagong* poets that were born in the 1980's and became active in the 2000s have become known as the second generation. This include several well accomplished authors including Zheng Xiaoqiong, the most well-known *dagong* poet in China and abroad, whom Inwood calls "a poster girl" for the genre (2011, p. 53).

After 2012, the massive use of smartphones and development of the Chinese mobile Internet have increased access to *dagong* poems, via microblogs and the WeChat social media platform. This has led to the establishment of the all-China *Dagong* Poets' Association 打工诗社, which has an active online presence on WeChat (see Chapter 3), as well as various local *dagong* poetry associations, such as that in Picun near Beijing (WeChat public account name *Picun Gongyou* 皮村工友), the Gansu-province based Long Dong Dagong Literature 陇东打工文学 etc.

While *dagong* poetry has become more accessible than ever before, the number of successful *dagong* poets among the ones born in 1990's is much smaller than in earlier generations. In *My Poetry: Outstanding Works of Contemporary Workers Poetry (Poems of Contemporary Workers)* 《我的诗篇:当代工人诗典》, a comprehensive anthology of workers' poetry, edited by Qin Xiaoyu and released in 2015, Xu Lizhi 许立志 is the only author born in the 1990's whose writings were included. Also, most of my informants expressed lament that poems by the youngest generation of dagong poets, with the notable exception of Xu Lizhi, are lacking quality. While Yang Honghai (PC, May 2017) mostly feels optimistic about the newest generation of *dagong* poets and believes that it is a matter of time when young talents will enter the limelight, Wu Ji holds a pessimistic stance, believing that *dagong* poetry has lost its momentum, and since 2012 has entered its withering phase, since most of

its original members are no longer within the ranks of the subaltern class, therefore can no longer produce authentic *dagong* literature (PC, March 2017).

2.3. *Dagong* Poetry Discourse: Debate on Definitions

The definition of *dagong* poetry as well as the need for such a term in the first place are highly debated topics within the *dagong* poetry discourse. The most detailed survey of various positions towards the issues in the discourse is done by Sun Wanning (2014b). Since further contribution to the analysis of the definitional debate is beyond the scope of the thesis, in this section I will shortly summarise Sun's discussion, which I will supplement with my own fieldwork observations.

As mentioned in the previous section, the poets with a rural migrant working background did not come up with *dagong* label themselves, instead it was done by government cultural policy researcher Yang Honghai and his colleagues. Some *dagong* poets find the label beneficial for two main reasons. Firstly, it provides visibility for unknown, yet talented underclass people, for whom otherwise it would be difficult to establish themselves in literary circles. Secondly, it gives them the opportunity to express the voice of the subalterns through their poetry to make their plight more visible in the public eye. On the other hand, many authors find the label degrading, as they suspect that being "a *dagong* poet" implies being inferior to simply being "a poet". Such a suspicion has a certain amount of rationale – many literary critics, while praising *dagong* poetry for its authentic depiction of subaltern experiences as well as its alleged positive social impact on society, often tend to depict the genre as a whole as lacking artistic quality (Sun 2014b, p. 172). This leads to a broader issue of the criteria of poetry evaluation. While there is multitude of aspects based on which poetry could be judged, it is fairly common in China that elitist literary critics evaluate it mostly through elitist-aesthetic aspects, thus according to *dagong* poet and literary critic Liu Dongwu, denying *dagong* poets entry to the literary field (Ibid, p 174). Therefore Sun concludes that "*dagong* poetry" label is "a double-edged sword, simultaneously stigmatizing and confirming" (Ibid, p. 172).

Another significant question is what can and cannot be considered as *dagong* poetry. There are three main positions in the discourse: poetry written by *dagongzhe*; poetry that deals with *dagongzhe* as its subject matter; poetry that depicts perspective of *dagongzhe* as a subject, rather than merely portraying them as objects (Sun 2012, pp 1001-2). Simply put, there are author-based, subject matter-based and perspective-based definitions of the genre; however, they often converge. It could be

deducted that in order to write from the perspective of *dagongzhe*, one has to engage with *dagong* subject matter and in order to do so persuasively, experience of being *dagongzhe* would come in handy, hence the three definitions are by no means contradictory. For example, many of my interviewees were of the opinion that what they perceive as authentic *dagong* poetry expresses certain emotions that people who have had *dagongzhe* experiences can relate to, and they would emphasise the necessity for the poet to have a significant amount of *dagong* experience in order to produce such impact. And while Yang Honghai holds that there were cases of authentic *dagong* poetry written by people outside of the social group (mostly journalists and cultural anthropologists who have spent long time surveying migrant workers), such poets are rare exceptions (PC, May, 2017).

However for how long one can be considered a *dagong* poet? Is it a lifetime label or can it signify a particular period in a poet's oeuvre? While the answer to the second question is far from clear-cut, and depends on many different variables, according to my observations, "*dagong* poet" is a lifetime personal identity in most cases. Many *dagong* poets often remain to be labelled as such long after leaving their subaltern statuses and moving away from *dagong* themes in their writing altogether. Some, like Luo Deyuan who currently works as a vice chairman of Zengcheng district Writers Association of Guangzhou, a high level position within the government bureaucracy, still embrace this label as it allows him to act as an intermediary between subalterns and party-state institutions.

Quite a different example that demonstrates overwhelming power of labelling is Chen Nianxi 陈年喜 (b.1970)[6]. Born in rural mountain area of Shaanxi province, he started his poet's career in 1990 while working as a farmer in his native village. While being initially considered as a "rural poet" (农民诗人), he won numerous awards for his poems, which granted him moderate fame within literary circles. In 1999, due to insufficient income in the countryside, he started his *dagong* period – worked as a demolition expert in coal mines in multiple locations in China. Poems from this period, specifically the ones that deal with his work experiences as subject matter, has brought him international acclaim, especially – many years later – due to his participation in the documentary by Qin Xiaoyu that was mentioned above. However due to major health issues, Chen was forced to quit his job in late 2015. He currently works as a content writer in a local travel agency of Guizhou province, a white collar job and ever since has ceased to belong to subaltern class and his newest oeuvre no longer deals with the *dagong* issues. While only the middle period of Chen's oeuvre can be considered as *dagong* poetry, he still often remains labelled as such, even though he himself objects to this and would like to be referred to simply as "a poet" instead (PC, March 2017).

[6] Chen Nianxi biographical details are summarised from Wang (2016) as well as personal communication (March, 2017).

Another label, closely related to *dagong* poetry is "contemporary worker poetry" 当代工人诗歌 that shares its name with but is slightly different from the worker poetry of the Mao Era that is "the old worker poetry". The fundamental difference between the two is that *dagong* poetry is a genre written by people working in the private sector (mostly rural migrant workers), while "worker poets" are the ones that work at state enterprises. Differences in style, subject matter, even living conditions of the poets are not always significant, yet there is a clear cut divide in poetry discourse between these two groups. According to Shengzi 绳子 (PC, March 2017), a self-identified worker poet, there is a sense of enmity from *dagong* poets towards their worker counterparts. It is often assumed that state industry employees have more stable jobs with various benefits and privileges, therefore they lead much "easier" lives as opposed to *dagongzhe*. While this is not always the case, confrontation with some members of the *dagong* poetry community led Shengzi to founding a web based poets' community, called Worker Poets' Union 工人诗歌联盟 in 2003, which in 2005 launched *Worker Poetry* 工人诗歌 magazine, unofficial publication, coedited with Wu Ji.

While sharing many similarities in terms of style and subject matter, worker poetry possesses certain differences as compared to *dagong* writing. According to Wu Ji (PC, March 2017) worker poetry is more consistent with worker rights issues, sometimes openly embraces New Left or Marxist political standpoints, while *dagong* poets merely use their writings as "a bridge to fortune", and after elevating themselves from subaltern statuses, tend to forget about their former peers. According to him, such behaviour has led *dagong* poetry to decline in creativity, because the core members of the movement have followed either business or governmental careers, while there are not many talents in the younger generation to keep the community vibrant. Workers, on the other hand, are more likely to retain there working class statuses for entire life, thus they tend to be more consistent in their literary writing.

2.4. Poetry: Form and Content

In this section, I am going to discuss stylistic and thematic features prevalent in *dagong* poetry. To better illustrate my argument, I will provide several excerpts from dagong poems, taken from *Iron Moon: An Anthology of Chinese Migrant Worker Poetry* (2016), edited by Qin Xiaoyu and translated into English by Eleanor Goodman.

Dagong poetry, similarly to other literary genres based on author's identity (exile literature, women's literature, queer literature etc.), triggers what van Crevel calls the preposition game: we can ask whether *dagong* poetry can or should be a poetry written *by* the *dagongzhe*, *about* the dagongzhe, *for* the dagongzhe or *of* the dagongzhe, which signifies *dagong* subject matter as something like the property of the *dagong* poets (van Crevel 2017c, p 37). Also, can a *dagong* poet write anything but *dagong* poetry? A cursory look into almost any *dagong* poet's oeuvre would reveal that far from everything written by *dagongzhe* deals with *dagong* related topics, and in some cases (as with Chen Nianxi), *dagong* themed poetry would merely constitute a tiny fraction of a particular poet's writings. Considering the fact that the genre is mostly defined by its authors' social background and its subject matter, rather than by specific aesthetic or formal features, it is no surprise that *dagong* poetry is a highly eclectic genre in terms of technique and themes. Still, one could argue that certain characteristics make *dagong* poems recognisable as a distinct genre, although far from every poetic text written by a *dagong* poet would fall within the range of these characteristics.

Since most rural migrant workers lack formal education, one of the most explicit features of their poems is that they tend to be relatively "unpolished" in terms of tone, register, rhythm, line length etc. (van Crevel 2017a). *Dagong* poetry usually tends to employ simple structure and colloquial vocabulary to express ideas in a fairly straightforward way. It generally falls within the range of *minjian* 民间 (can be translated as "popular", "people's", "of the people", "folk", "commoners'" etc.) poetry, a highly contested and debated concept, widely used in Chinese literary discourse to describe literary position that claims to represent the common people, as opposed to the government and "intellectuals" (See van Crevel 2008, pp 399-458 and van Crevel 2017c, pp 46-56). The definition of *minjian* is elastic and can refer to various issues, such as genre, the author's identity, subject matter, sentiment, position etc. (Li, 2008 p.188). Most of the *dagong* poets I interviewed during fieldwork identified themselves and *dagong* poetry genre at large as a form of *minjian* writing.

Another salient feature of *dagong* poetry is close connection between the texts and its authors' biographies. As mentioned earlier both critics and general public mostly value *dagong* poetry as a source of authentic subaltern experiences, therefore the poems that are closely connected to its authors' real life experiences and manage to portray such experiences effectively are generally most valued. The ability to represent *dagong* experiences bestows *dagong* poets with authenticity and credibility to speak on behalf of *dagongzhe*, which is one the main types of *dagong* poets' subcultural capital (Sun 2014b, p. 181). For this reason *dagong* poetry is often marketed in the way that enforces its authors' biographical connection to the content of his/her poems. A vivid example for this could the portrayal of previously mentioned poet Chen Nianxi in *The Verse of Us* (Qin and Wu 2015). The film goes to

great lengths to portray Chen as a demolition worker who spends most of his time in mountain mines, away from his family, and later shows Chen's elderly father – critically ill and completely dependent on his son's care and finances. In "Demolition Mark" 《炸裂志》, one of the most famous poems by Chen Nianxi, we find passages that reflect exactly same narrative as depicted in the documentary:

> I spend my middle age five kilometres inside mountains
> I explode the rocks layer by layer
> to put my life back together
>
> My humble family
> is far away at the foot of Mt. Shang
> they're sick and their bodies are covered in dust
> whatever is taken from my life
> extends the tunnel of their old age (Qin 2016, p. 60)

Chen's biographical details suggest that a viable way to interpret the poem is to assume that the narrator of the poem is its author himself. At the same time, the laconic nature of the lines, that are free of overly personal details, also allows one to construe the "I" in the poem not as a voice of a specific person but as a voice of every demolition worker, even as far as every *dagongzhe* that shares a similar fate. The "I" reflects a personal tragedy, which at the same time is a collective tragedy of every *dagongzhe* at large – going away from their families to sacrifice their bodies in a form of capitalist labor-value relations, to at least temporally save their families, even though this "saving" usually making their own lives even harder or indeed sacrificing them.

In this way many of the most successful *dagong* poems allow a multi-level reading:

1. As an expression of personal experiences;

2. As an expression of collective experiences of a group;

3. As an expression of experiences by migrant workers at large as a social class.

To sum up my argument here, in order to attain such an effect, ideally, a *dagong* poem is personal enough to recognise its author's biographical details (which provides the sense of authenticity), yet applicable to other migrant workers' situation.

There is a plethora of issues reflected in *dagong* poetry that can be loosely classified into five main themes: working conditions, living conditions and urban environment, experiences of displacement, depiction of social issues as well as portrayal of certain historical events. Each of this theme can be addressed in a variety of different ways, from blunt documentary depiction of the events to parable, historical allusions, mockery, satire or irony. It is also very common for these themes to overlap in a single poem, and there are many poems that do not fall into any of the five categories.

One of the main themes in *dagong* poetry, as already demonstrated in "Demolition Mark", is labor conditions. The merciless assembly line, rusty towering cranes, exhausted bodies dripping with blood and sweat, workplace injuries and deaths etc. – these are frequently encountered subject matter in *dagong* poems that depict grim and depressing reality of working conditions China's subaltern population has to put up with in their daily lives. An illustrative example of this could be an excerpt from "Plastic Molding Factory" 《在一家塑胶厂》 a poem by Chen Caifeng 陈才锋 (b. 1979):

> Accidentally dropped into the mountains, no echo to be found
>
> More than a thousand tons of plastic molding machines live in half a
> square kilometer, and at noon the mechanical arm
> practices its stroll in the air, a group of ants frantically
> works the assembly line, groups of plastic pellets
> hurry to the firing, high temperatures, extrusion
>
> On the worktable is a small blade, tape,
> tape dispensers, production labels, and in the end no one knows where it
> all goes (Qin 2016, p. 97)

It can be noted that in this poem the machinery is personified ("machines live", "the mechanical arm") and portrayed as big and powerful ("more than a thousand tons of plastic", "half a square kilometer"), while people are depicted as small and deindividuated and insignificant ("a group of ants"), creating a surreal imagery. This motif of workers being frail and insignificant as compared to massive size of industrial machinery is also powerfully depicted elsewhere, especially in Wang Bing's 王兵 (b. 1967) critically acclaimed documentary *West of the Tracks* 《铁西区》 (Lu 2010, p. 62). Such depiction, among other things, confirms a notion that in this type of poetry, *dagongzhe* are generally portrayed as frail and lacking control over their fate (Qin 2015, p. 46).

Another example, the poem "Watch Factory" (钟表厂) by Chi Moshu 池沫树 (b. 1980) is slightly different in tone and style:

> I work in a watch factory
> the watch factory gives no days off
> since time keeps on going and life doesn't stop
> our work doesn't stop either
>
> I fit my life into the assembly line
> Dividing it into lunch and dinner, and breakfast used for a nap
> at night working overtime until ten, I adjust the watches' dials to twelve (Qin 2016, p. 155)

This excerpt of the poem is a blunt description of a worker's everyday schedule. It is light in tone, slightly ironic and lacks explicit imagery, yet it again shows a *dagongzhe*, who in this case is the narrator of the poem, as merely a cog in the machine of production, who lacks control of his own life. The assembly line, instead of merely being a working tool, is portrayed as a central axis, according to which the narrator's rhythm of life is set. Widespread labor rights violations, such as (likely unpaid or underpaid) overtime work and lack of days off lead to fatigue, which forces the "I" of the poems to forfeit breakfast in order to compensate the lack of sleeping time. Therefore Chi's poem, similar to most of the *dagong* writing, depicts working conditions as exhausting, hard to bear, damaging health as well dehumanising; at the same time, *dagongzhe* are portrayed as powerless and lacking agency to bring about any meaningful change.

Besides working conditions, exilic subject matter is also very common in *dagong* poetic writing. Many *dagong* poems depict life in the city, which in some cases is contrasted to their rural hometowns. Since the cruel living and working conditions and social discrimination of migrant workers is rampant in urban areas, cities in *dagong* poetry are unsurprisingly depicted in a mostly negative light. Urban imagery is commonly employed for the sake of emphasizing loneliness and the alienation migrant workers experience in cities. For example, the city lights in "Industrial Zone" 《工业区》, a poem by Zheng Xiaoqiong, are set to expose the migrant workers' vulnerabilities:

> The fluorescent lights are lit, the buildings are lit, the machines are lit
> exhaustion is lit, the blueprints are lit…
> this is Sunday night, this the night of August 15th

the moon lights up a disk of emptiness, in the lychee trees
a light breeze sways an internal whiteness, many years of speechless
quiet, in the evergreen grasses the insects hum, the city's lights illuminate
the industrial zone, so many dialects, so much homesickness,
so many weak and insubstantial bodies placed there, so much moonlight shining
…
And the tears, joy, and pain we've had
our glorious or petty ideas, and our souls
are all illuminated by the moonlight, collected, and carried afar
hidden in rays of light no one will notice

(Qin 2016, p. 269)

The scene painted by the poem is easy to grasp: an industrial zone at night, full of migrant workers ("so many dialects, so much homesickness") lit by street lighting and a full moon. The electric lights of the city seem to collaborate with the moonlight in lighting up the scenery, yet simultaneously light up the migrant workers' feelings, emotions and thoughts. The phrase "insubstantial bodies" evokes a similar sentiment of migrant workers' weakness and lack of agency, like "a group of ants" in Chen Caifeng's poem discussed above. Their frailty seems to be so obvious that it cannot be hidden in the night's darkness.

On the surface level the poem serves as a vivid depiction of an industrial zone in a Guangdong (signified by lychee trees) hot tropical summer night. An important keyword that sets the mood and helps to understand the poem at deeper level is "homesickness". The experience of alienation and estrangement far away from home and feeling nostalgia for one's home, yet being unable to come back for economic reasons, can be interpreted as exilic experience. Longing for one's hometown is a common trope in *dagong* poetry, however, as Sun Wanning observes, home space in most of the poems is rendered as nostalgic imaginary space to which there is no possibility to return (Sun 2014b, p. 166). A useful example could be Tang Yihong's 唐以洪 (b. 1970) poem "Returning Home Backwards" 《退着回到故乡》. The poem re-enacts the narrator's whole life memories backwards, providing a brief story back in time in space, from current life to childhood, from the city where the "I" of the poem lives now to cities where he has previously lived and eventually to countryside:

…
return and return, return from the factories
return from machines, return from tears,

return from forty back to thirty
to twenty, to ten… home is still
very far, it's a pair of lost straw sandals
return and return, facing the future
return to your mother's body – and there
there's no glory or dishonour, no difference between rich and poor
no separation between city and country. There are no tears
and everyone you meet is family （Qin 2016, p.51）

As the lines "from forty back to thirty / to twenty, to ten" suggests, the narrator returns to his/her childhood, which makes the journey a thought experiment rather than an actual physical return. The juxtaposition of factories, machines and tears, which in the next lines is paralleled with a person's age periods of being in their forties, thirties, and teens, shows that unhappy recent city life is contrasted with the idyllic childhood in the countryside, among one's family members. This nostalgic space is too distant, in fact, completely unreachable but by the narrator's memory. Therefore *Returning Home Backwards* can be understood as an exile poem.

Serious social issues are another prominent kind of subject matter in *dagong* poetry. Social critique present in *dagong* poetry encompasses various problems, from unfair treatment by the boss, unpaid wages, to feminist critique of gender inequality, ecological problems or the ills of modern consumerist society. Zheng Xiaoqiong's poem "Kneeling Workers Demanding Their Pay" 《跪着的讨薪水者》 is a powerful depiction of *dagongzhe* being mistreated by commercial enterprises and the government. Like in other most well-known poems by Zheng, by using fairly coarse and laconic language, is able to provide a staggeringly realistic portrayal of a situation many migrant workers have experienced:

… today they kneel facing the big bright window
the black uniformed guards the shiny cars the green bushes
the dazzling factory sign glints in the sun
they kneel at the factory entrance holding a cardboard sign
with scrawled words Give us our hard earned money (Qin 2016, p. 126)

Although the text realistically depicts a single, unspecified event, as a poem it elevates it to the level of collective experience in a similar way as Chen Nianxi does it in "Demolition Mark". In the poem, by depicting a specific scene of four suffering women, the author reflects the issues that are

common to many *dagongzhe*: humiliation from their bosses by not paying wages, mistreatment by government officials and law enforcement, and desperate attempts to redress their grievances through petitions and protesting.

While Zheng's poetry sparingly uses concrete historical details, some *dagong* poems deal with specific historical events. Some poems record personal life events, such as Zhang Shougang's 张守刚 (b. 1971) poem on how he lost four fingers in a workplace accident ("1993: Repair Shop in Jiangkou" 《1993：江口的汽修厂》); poems about the infamous Sun Zhigang incident, in which a student, who came to Guangzhou for seasonal labor, was stopped by the police and asked to provide his temporary residence permit (暂住证), a document all migrant workers used to be required to carry with them all the time and was beaten to death by failing to show one; or other issues *dagong* poets tend to find salient. In Li Zuofu's 李祚福 (b. 1979) ironic poem "A bowl" 《一只碗》 China is playfully compared to a food bowl in which many of the scandals that plagued China in recent years are referred to: pyramid schemes, food safety, the Wenzhou High-Speed-Rail disaster, the SARS epidemic, medical impostors, as well workplace accidents: "The hardware factory's severed finger drops into the bowl, an overcooked / three-meal life" (Qin 2016, p. 100). While the poem addresses issues touched upon in previous examples, the grotesque imagery and highly sarcastic tone distinguishes the poem from other previously discussed.

To sum up, despite being considered by some critics and readers as vulgar and lacking quality, *dagong* poetry genre has a rich variety in both form and content, and while artistic quality of *dagong* varies from author to author, some *dagong* poets have gained national or even international recognition.

3. Grassroots activities: Building a Worker Poets' Community

This chapter will discuss the role of grassroots initiatives in the formation of the *dagong* poets' community. I begin with a brief overview of the role of grassroots initiatives within the context of *dagong* poetry. Then I will move onto my case studies. Firstly, I will survey the unofficial periodical literary journal *The Dagong Poet,* arguably the most significant *dagong* poetry grassroots publication in the Delta region and mainland China at large. After discussing one of the most significant grassroots *dagong* poetry initiatives regarding print publication, I will move to a case study surveying the online presence of the *Dagong* Poets' Association, founded and administered by grassroots activist Ran Qiaofeng, which is an illustrative example of how Chinese social media platforms can serve the purpose of strengthening and enriching *dagong* poets' community.

3.1. Grassroots in the Context of *Dagong* Poetry

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines the term "grassroots" as "the basic level of society or of an organization especially as viewed in relation to higher or more centralized positions of power". The Chinese language equivalent for the term *caogen* 草根, a literal translation of its English equivalent is a relatively popular term in Chinese official and academic discourses. "Grassroots" is seldom used as an aesthetical term for *dagong* writing as in an article by Guo Daorong, a literary critic and *dagong* poet himself, who applies the term "grassroots poetry" to denote qualities of writing by poets of "the most ordinary social background" (Guo 2017, p. 6). However, it can also signify other types of activities in the literary field besides writing literature such as publishing, organising literary events, groups, or any type of activities on the Internet that contribute to the formation of literary community and allegiance to collective identity, in this case, the identity of "*dagong* poet". The bottom line here is that it is not initiated by party-state institutions, even though, as will become clear in the forthcoming analysis in the next section, people involved into grassroots activities can themselves be the members of party-state institutions, especially the Writers Association, the Chinese Communist Party or its Youth League etc. As van Crevel (2017c) points out, the line between official and unofficial poetry scenes are getting increasingly blurred and official cultural institutions of China are becoming more and more entangled into even the most nonconforming poetry genres (p. 29).

Connections with cultural institutions and the political capital they provide play a catalysing role in creating *dagong* poetry publications. Even though all of the early issues of *The Dagong Poet* magazine that fall under the scope of this thesis (i.e. issues circa 2001-2009) bear an indication "Internal exchange" (内部交流), which is a standard practice to get around governmental control of publishing and censorship mechanisms and to run a publication without obtaining a publishing licence and ISBN number, it boasts a strong endorsement from a number of "official" literary institutions. A single notable example of this (many more to come in section 3.2) is that title calligraphy of *Dagong Poet* was provided by Yang Mu 杨牧 (b. 1944), the editor-in-chief of *Stars* 《星星》an official poetry periodical of the Sichuan province Writers Association (Luo 2001, p. 1).

Such a high profile act demonstrates that grassroots initiatives are not always isolated from involvement of the persons associated with official institutions. On the contrary, people, who work for the government can get involved into grassroots projects and even use their position of power and cultural and political capital to validate and promote them. The opposite is also true – it is quite common for grassroots activists to get accepted into government institutions as this is also the case with many editorial board members of *The Dagong Poet* that before the birth of the publication have worked as editors in various official literary magazines. Therefore the roles of various actors, playing in the literary field of China are fluid and situational rather than absolute and clear cut, and same agents can shift their roles between grassroots and government at times or sometimes to play for both sides simultaneously.

It has to be noted that *dagong* poetry grassroots initiatives are not limited to print publications and also include collecting poems and publishing anthologies, documenting and researching on *dagong* literary history, writing literary criticism, organising live events, creating online discussion groups and forums, public Weibo or WeChat Internet accounts that spread the message of this type of poetic writing and the discourse on *dagong* poetry more effectively. Not the least important activity is networking and crowdfunding to provide financial means for said initiatives. The means of financing through crowdfunding and private donations constitute one of the main defining features of grassroots projects, while projects by party-state institutions are funded by local or central governments. The unstable nature of funding channels for grassroots projects translates into irregular publishing frequency, varying printing and production quality and limited audience reach compared to the governmental initiatives, hence grassroots projects often tend to be either short-lived or plagued by frequent financial troubles that often lead to extended periods of inactivity.

As opposed to print publications that require substantial funding, online grassroots projects can survive on a shoestring budget. That said, grassroots online *dagong* poetry accounts are also marked by extended periods of inactivity. In his overview of the development of *dagong* poetry scene since founding *The Dagong Poet*, Xu Qiang talks about ever increasing online presence of the *dagong* poets' community and provides hyperlinks to the *dagong* poetry discussion board as well as public QQ discussion group with more than 200 active members (Xu, 2009, pp 268-9), but regrettably, at this writing (April 2018), both were inaccessible. This example illustrates a common tendency of Internet resources, namely changeability, instability, and sometimes their disappearance outright. There are multiple reasons for this, prominently including censorship, however it can also happen due to more mundane technical reasons: the expiration of domain names or hosting services etc., or webpage owners' decision to delete their accounts for whatever reason. Even when a website remains online, its content can get altered or appear on screen differently depending on device and software used to access it, therefore doing research on online texts poses very different challenges than that of literature in print (Hockx 2015, pp. 18-20).

In recent years, the rapid development of mobile Internet applications in China has helped rural migrant workers, to whom mobile phone is often the only device for browsing the Internet, to engage in *dagong* poetry discourse on unprecedented scale. For this reason, there exist several *dagong* poetry related WeChat public accounts. They generally provide news on *dagong* poetry or poetry at large, publish poems, literary criticism articles and interviews etc. In sum, the content they publish is roughly similar to that of print poetry magazines. However, similarly to grassroots initiatives on other fronts, WeChat accounts are rarely updated and occasionally get deleted for unspecified reasons. That said, the existence of accounts helps *dagong* poetry to transgress its geographical boundaries and makes communication among *dagong* poets scattered around different location to stay involved in the *dagong* poets' community.

To conclude there exist a variety *dagong* poetry related publications, both in print and online that play a significant role in formation of *dagong* poets' community. Now I am going to analyse this role through two case studies.

3.2. Activities in Print: *The Dagong Poet* and the Normalization of Discourse

Dagong poets: bards of the extraordinary times;
Dagong poetry: a banner of resistance against fate!
Our aspiration:
To write about reality and dreams of the disadvantaged youth,
To stand for the floating youth!

打工诗人：一个特殊时代的歌者；
打工诗歌：与命运抗争的一面旗帜！
我们的心愿：
用苦难的青春写下真实与梦想，
为漂泊的青春作证！
(The *Dagong Poet*, the opening poem, my translation)

This short poem appears on number of issues of *Dagong Poet,* placed right next to the frontal title of the publication. The opening poem that appears on number issues of *The Dagong Poet* explicitly announces the values and the objectives of this publication. It renders *dagong* poets as important for their ability to reflect on the current juncture in mainland China (i.e. "extraordinary times") that is the era of rapid economic development, initiated by the economic reform policy initiated in the late 1970s, and to reflect on this juncture from the lower class point of view. Therefore the first line self-prescribes the publication with a historic mission, thus emphasising its importance. The second line, on the contrary, points out the importance of this type of poetry for the subalterns as a form of resistance against their "fate", which is the state of precariousness. A warlike imagery ("a banner of resistance") emphasises active agency and decisiveness and, in my opinion, the most important message of the poem – an ambition for *The Dagong Poet* to play a leading role over the *dagong* poetry discourse. The remaining two lines put an emphasis on youth as *dagong* poets are mostly young people, whom the publication pledges to stand for.

As van Crevel (2017c) points out, women, despite being as good in poetry writing as their male counterparts, are heavily underrepresented in organizational roles of poetry groups and other activities related to discourse on poetry in mainland China (pp.5-11). This also applies to *dagong* poetry where all grassroots initiatives are almost exclusively dominated by men. By way of an example, the four

dagong poetry activists who in 2001 founded *The Dagong Poet*, one of the most significant *dagong* periodical publications in the Pearl River Delta region and nationwide, were all men: Xu Qiang, Luo Deyuan, Xu Fei 许非 (b. 1964) and Ren Mingyou 任明友 (b. 1976). A grassroots publication, which, with certain periods of inactivity and despite some ups and downs as well as changes in its editorial board, runs up to today, this journal has played a historic role in forming *dagong* poets' collective identity as well as establishing connections among the individuals that take pride in sharing this identity.

The third day of the first lunar month of 2001 (27 January 2001) is officially considered as the day when the idea to create "*dagong* poets' own journal" was conceived (the story of founding *Dagong Poet* follows Luo, 2001, p.1). On that day, four of its founding editors gathered by the West Lake[7] in Huizhou city, initially to celebrate Lunar New Year by chatting and enjoying a meal, however their conversation at some point moved to their common interest of writing *dagong* poetry and the necessity for a publication that is devoted to this type of writing. It also helped that by that time all for friends were working as editors at various government-affiliated literary journals of the Delta region. This meant that in spite of limited formal education – a common characteristic for most migrant workers – they possessed all the experience, know-how and a solid amount of cultural capital in the institutionalized state as well as substantial social capital, i.e. a network of connections necessary to run a successful literary journal. In addition to that, by the time of founding the publication, Luo Deyuan had already acquired some political capital from a short yet spectacular political career in his home village as a local Youth League secretary and "the youngest in his county" village chief at the age of 20 (Luo 2013, pp 28-29). He Xuan (2010a) also indicates Luo being a CCP member (p.196). Probably that was the reason why they managed to receive a high profile endorsement in a form of calligraphic inscription of the publication title from Yang Mu, a big authority in Sichuan province Writers Association. The first issue of *The Dagong Poet*, published in May 31, 2001 also received welcoming feedback from a number of local official literary publications, including *Stars* 《星星》, *Three Gorges Poetry Journal* 《三峡诗刊》, *Huizhou Literature* 《惠州文学》, among others, as well as from national level *Poetry Magazine* 《诗刊》. Several publications even expressed their endorsement by reprinting some of the poems, initially published in *The Dagong Poet*. The second issue, published in September, 2001 set a pattern of releasing two to three issues per year, albeit no

[7] The choice for the location might have been a straightforward one – West Lake scenic area is the cultural and historical symbol of Huizhou and its one of the biggest recreational spaces. On the other hand, the venue might hold a symbolical meaning – Huizhou West lake area used to be a place of exile for Su Shi 苏轼 (1037 – 1101), a famous Northern Song dynasty (960-1127) poet, a native of Sichuan province. Coincidently or not, all founding members of the magazine are also Sichuan natives: Luo Deyuan and Xu Fei originate from Luzhou, Xu Qiang from Liang County and Ren Mingyou from Chongqing that historically used to be under administration of Sichuan, yet in 1997 it became a direct-controlled municipality.

regular intervals of publishing were ever set. The later issues also tend to receive recognition from official publications with even more poems that appear on the magazine to get later republished in official publications, such as *Artworks* 《作品》from Guangdong, the Hebei-based *Selected Poems Magazine*《诗选刊》, the Anhui-based *Poetry Monthly* 《诗歌月刊》 etc.

The early issues of *The Dagong Poet* were printed in newspaper format in black and white colour scheme with an addition of titles, texts and graphic elements in red colour. Each issue consists of four pages (版), each arranged according to a prescribed theme, i.e. each page has its own designated, mostly four character title. Taking issue 7 (released November, 2003) as an example, the themes for each page are as follows:

Page 1: The Drifting Tribe

Page 2: Looking Back at *Dagong*

Page 3: The Emotional Relay Station

Page 4: Information and Commentary

一版：漂流部落

二版：打工回眸

三版：情感驿站

四版：休息评论

(*The Dagong Poet,* issue 7, p. 1)

Stylistically, most if not all of the poems published in the publication are directly related with *dagong* themes and share a variety of common keywords, such as *dagong*, hometown (家乡), assembly line (流水线) etc. Family related words, such as "brothers and sisters" (兄弟姐妹) are used when talking about their fellow rural migrant workers demonstrates the affinity of *dagongzhe*. That said, the content on each page differs and loosely follows a special designated theme even though not in an explicit way. "The Drifting Tribe" refers to migrant workers being away from their hometowns in a constant state of moving from place to place and exilic experiences that include uprootedness, alienation and homesickness – some of the main *dagong* poetry themes, discussed in the section 2.4. The motive of displacement is also present in the last line of the opening poem – "To stand for the floating youth". Displacement themed poems are common in *The Dagong Poet* and had the whole page dedicated for them in quite a few issues, but each time under a different title, such as "Reading the lines about the floating" 漂泊行唸 in issue 4 etc. "Looking Back at Dagong" signifies one of the most common poetic themes in the publication, which is the poems about *dagong*. Page 3 is usually

devoted to the less common topics, as in this case – lyrical subject matter, but it can also be poems about one's youth or sometimes the whole page is reserved to young poets, women poets etc. Page 4 in most issues (there are a few exceptions) is devoted to general information and literary criticism. The most common author, whose articles can be found under this section is Liu Dongwu – some of his most famous essays, later republished elsewhere, have originally appeared in *The Dagong Poet*. His crucial role in analysing *dagong* poetry phenomenon in scholarly and systematic manner has played a significant role in formation of the discourse.

It is interesting to note that the poems or articles published in *The Dagong Poet* are usually supplemented by rather detailed information about its author, that not only include his/her literary achievements, but also (most often) workplace address and telephone number. What is the purpose of such policy? It seems to me that by giving access their contact information, *The Dagong Poet* assists in facilitating communication in at least two directions. Firstly, it helps *dagong* poets to get in touch with each other and also with their readers, thus establishing a network of relationships united by a common interest, i.e. *dagong* poetry, which I refer to as *dagong* poets' community. The more people in the community know each other, the stronger the community gets. Secondly, it makes it easier for other literary journals that might be interested in having certain poet's writing published in their publications.

The editors of *The Dagong Poet* quite explicitly demonstrate that republishing of their journal's content in other, especially mainstream official publications, is highly celebrated. In fact, the cases of *dagong* poems appearing in official literary journals as well as poetry anthologies are meticulously documented in "*The Dagong Poet* Archive Room" (《打工诗人》档案室), a section that appears in the most issues of the publication, usually on the page 4. It summarises most significant recent events, including information on when and which *dagong* poems have been published in which publication, newest books releases as well as information on literary awards won by *dagong* poets etc. This it is a highly valuable historiographical record that allows to get a track of *dagong* poetry's appearance in print, and also demonstrates that one of the purposes of *The Dagong Poet* was to help this type of writing to get validated by official discourse.

This argument can be further elaborated by taking a glance at political standpoint of the publication. To my understanding *The Dagong Poet* is not a politically charged magazine. It does not present a clearly defined political stance on issues such as labor rights advocacy etc. For this regard, *The Dagong Poet* falls into stark contrast to *Worker Poetry* 《工人诗歌》 magazine which I will not attempt to analyse here in depth (it would make an interesting research topic on its own), however I

feel that a brief comparison with *The Dagong Poet* will be highly useful here. Compared to *The Dagong Poet*, *Worker Poetry* appears to be slightly more articulate in expressing its explicitly leftist political stance, with signifiers of socialist terminology, such as "proletariat", "revolutionary literature" or "class consciousness" widely used in a number of poems, essays, editorial columns and articles. A notable example can be its introductory poem *Words of advertisement* 《广告词》, whose first stanza reads:

> If you are a worker
> [You] are a member of tens of thousands strong great industrial army
> [You] are a member of the proletariat
>
> 如果，你是一位工人
> 是千千万万产业大军中的一员
> 是无产阶级的一分子 (*The Worker Poetry*, issue 1, 2005, my translation)

In contrast, while also dealing with very similar subject matter, *The Dagong Poet* mostly eschews socialist jargon and refers to its audience in much broader and less ideological term of identity (身份) rather than social class (阶级). That said, *The Dagong Poet* can still be understood as a political publication but only in the sense of identity politics, which is explicitly stated in one of the magazine's main devices:

> *The Dagong Poet:* To unite China, and her every poet that has a *dagong* identity. To unite China, and her every person that writes on *dagong* subject matter!
>
> 《打工诗人》：【团结中国，一切具有打工身份的诗人】【团结中国，一切写作打工题材的人！】(*The Dagong Poet,* my translation)

What can be discerned from this device is that *The Dagong Poet* aims at unifying poets that identify with *dagong,* as opposed to unifying *dagong* individuals by the help of poetry. In other words, the emphasis is put on "poet", not on "*dagong*". Therefore, the overlying trend of the publication seems to be to construe *dagong* poet identity and to make it operational in the literary field. As opposed to what could potentially be misunderstood by an uninformed bystander, the end goal of *The Dagong Poet* is not about politics or challenging dominant discourses but rather about abiding the rules in order to normalize and destigmatize *dagong* poetry and to facilitate its mainstream acceptance and also to open the venues for poets that on the basis of their social status traditionally used to be deemed incapable of writing literature.

To sum up, it can be claimed that despite being unofficial, *The Dagong Poet* is not a low-profile publication that stands in the opposition to official establishment and it is not exactly "underground". Quite on the contrary – the appearance of *Dagong Poet* has been welcomed by a great number of "official" literary critics, scholars and cultural bureaucrats. Such situation might seem paradoxical to those unacquainted with the mainland-Chinese literary field, yet it is quite common[8]. I argue that the fact that *The Dagong Poet* emphasises relations with official literary magazines and celebrates republishing their poems in official literary publications proves that in mainland China, *dagong* poets' community demonstrate attempts to position itself as a part of Chinese literary mainstream. Instead of attempting to facilitate a counter-cultural literary movement that challenges official institutional hierarchies and pose itself as a viable alternative to it, *The Dagong Poet* actually accepts the rules set by cultural bureaucracy and plays by them while at the same time pushing the boundaries to gain more mainstream acceptance and recognition for *dagong* poets. Based on my analysis, it seems that the end goal for *The Dagong Poet* is to normalize *dagong* poetry phenomenon by means of negotiation and to clear its name of negative or demeaning connotations in the discourse. To use Bourdieu's terminology, their ultimate goal is to legitimize and enhance said group of poets' position in the literary field or to enlarge the sub-field of *dagong* poetry within the main literary field. According to *dagong* poet Huang Jiwen (PC, June 2017), their primary need is to write poetry they want, and to discuss it with fellow poets without getting bothered by elitist literary critics that used to abuse their discursive power by ferociously attacking *dagong* poets. As such *The Dagong poet* helped to provide a solid backing, firstly by strengthening *dagong* poet identity and building bonds among subaltern individuals that happen to write poetry, thus creating a certain form of imagined community that is *dagong* poets' community.

3.3. Activities Online: The *Dagong* Poetry Association

Created by Ran Qiaofeng 冉乔峰, a *dagong* poet of the so called post-90 (90 后) generation of poets in 2011, The *Dagong* Poets' Association 打工诗社 is an online group whose core leadership is based in the Pearl River Delta region. By operating on various Chinese Internet platforms, such as WeChat (account name *The Dagong Literature and Art* 打工文艺), Weibo, and online discussion boards etc., it attempts to unify *dagong* poets from all over mainland China. It is currently one of the more successful online *dagong* poetry initiatives powered by grassroots activists. For the analysis I will

[8] For an in-depth analysis of unofficial literary publications vis-à-vis the publishing industry in PRC, see van Crevel 2007.

focus on the Association's WeChat public account. Besides a quick overview of its functions and content, I will mostly concentrate on its introductory article that I found the most useful in understanding the aims, purposes, values as well as the structure and of The *Dagong* Poets' Association. The document was published in 2015, and not updated afterwards.

Like most other poetry related WeChat public accounts, the one of The Dagong Poets' Association regularly posts poems, essays, articles and book reviews somehow related to, in this case, *dagong* poetry. The account has three main sections: "The Dagong Poets' Association" section that provides basic information and announcements about the organization *per se*, "Workers' Poetry Magazine" (工人诗刊) section where poems, essays and various poetry related articles are published and "Bookstore" (书书坊), a section to promote books by authors of the community.

The most regularly updated and arguably most worthwhile of deeper inquiry is the "Workers' Poetry Magazine" section. The *Dagong* Poets' Association initially used to have two magazines: *Dagong Writers* 《打工作家》 and already mentioned *Workers' Poetry Magazine* (Dagong Shishe, 2015), however, according to the announcement, *Dagong Writers* was merged into *Workers' Poetry Magazine* in order to concentrate Internet traffic towards a single WeChat account (Dagong Shishe, 2015). I am not aware of the difference between the two magazines, however according to my observations the word "workers" in the context of The *Dagong* Poets' Association is used synonymously with *dagongzhe* and it does not seem to make any distinction between the two in the way that some other publications or poets themselves do. Unfortunately, I was unable to find out whether it is a strategic move to be inclusive of both groups or is it merely a coincidental usage of the term disregarding some of its prevalent connotations.

Poems of the *Workers' Poetry Magazine* deal with the most common *dagong* poetry themes, already discussed in previous chapters. The magazine has several theme based columns, such as "Workers' Poetry Square"工诗广场 for labor related poems, "Female Workers' Poetry Garden" 女工诗苑 for women writing, "Starlight" 星光擂台 for special, non-regular topics (e.g. poetry by post-90s authors, best poems of the year 2015 etc.) or "Classics Revisited" 重温经典 a section devoted to older *dagong* poems of canonical status. Additionally, articles of poetry criticism, or various *dagong* poetry related news are presented. One peculiar section is devoted to jokes (大口马牙, lit. Big Mouth Horse Teeth) and could be considered to be out of place, however its existence seems to suggest that as opposed to more highbrow official or avant-garde literary journals, this publication puts more

emphasis on its entertainment value instead of posing itself as a serious literary magazine, thus satisfying demand of its primary target audience – lower class poetry enthusiasts.

After briefly discussing the content, now I will move to the organizational structure of The *Dagong* Poets' Association. According to the information in the introductory article (Dagong shishe, 2015) the organization aims at becoming one of the main grassroots online platforms that publishes *dagong* poetry. It started in 2011 with an intention of connecting *dagongzhe* individuals interested in writing poetry as a free time activity and by the year 2015 it reportedly had a complete and fully functioning structure, standardized management, over 3300 members, and 8 regional branches in provinces like Guangdong, Hunan, Shaanxi, Jiangsu, Guizhou, Yunnan, Chongqing municipality etc. (ibid). It also boasts collaborating with other Chinese online poetry platforms, including *China Weibo Selected Poems Journal* 《中国微博诗选刊》 among others and organizing print or online publications of *dagong* poetry, thus playing a viable role in forming and strengthening the *dagong* poets' community.

The organization is said to be based on the theoretical framework of pan-literature (泛文学), a term used by some Chinese literary scholars to define development of the literary field in the most current juncture, which can be defined by the erasure of boundaries between high and low forms of literature, commercialization, bestsellerization, and growing importance of Internet literature and the notion that everyone can be a writer (see Wang & Xiao, 2011 and Fang, 2014). In other words, the concept denotes low entrance requirements into the literary field, which are highly beneficial for underprivileged groups of writers, such as *dagong* poets and while it is not specified by the editors of The *Dagong* Poets' Association, it can be speculated that is the main reason why the leaders of this organization find it useful.

The authors of the introductory article describe its mission as providing guidance for "effectively creating a big active family of *dagongzhe*" (倾力创造一个活跃的打工大家族) and also to:

> … pay more attention to subaltern members of society, hear their lowly voices, pay more attention to the insights of truth of life and the secrets of soul behind the texts, emphasise unique narratives of the writings, emphasise the spirit of the authors' psychological lives, decisively oppose vulgarity, mediocrity and hypocrisy.

> … 更注重底层社会人员的生活，聆听他们低微的声音，更注重文本对人生真相的洞悉和心灵秘密的发掘，重视作品独树一帜的叙述面貌，重视作者的心理生活的精神，鲜明地反对流俗，反对平庸和矫情. (*Dagong Shishe,* 2015, my translation)

The paragraph identifies the self-ascribed mission of The *Dagong* Poets' Association, which is twofold: to strengthen the *dagong* poets' community and to provide a platform for subaltern self-representation through poetry, but also to set certain level of quality standards for such representation.

The article also provides a Poets' Community Statute (诗社章程), a set of 25 clauses, based on which activities of The *Dagong* Poets' Association should be regulated. It designate promotion and development of *dagong* poetry as well as improvement of Chinese popular culture (大众文化, lit. "Culture of the masses") as its main objectives (clauses 1 and 2). It is supposed to be executed through establishing strong organizational management (clause 8), publications, organizing various cultural and networking events (clauses 9, 10) and strengthening communication ties with other literary groups (clause 11).

It is also worth noting a strongly emphasised adherence to the laws and regulations of China. As numerous as six clauses (i.e. clauses 3, 5, 12, 13, 18 and 19) explicitly emphasise unconditional adherence to the governmental laws and regulations, communist ideology and strictly following "One China Policy" when communicating with literary organizations from Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau. Such strong emphasis on political regulations is absent from *The Dagong Poet* publication, which might be explained by the fact that the government of China sees an organized online grassroots movement as potentially more dangerous than an unofficial print publication which naturally has significantly smaller audience reach, therefore the organizers of The *Dagong* Poets' Association had no choice but to include said clauses in order to avoid legal troubles.

Two other important issues, designated in the Statute are membership and organizational structure. Clause 15 states that each person, whose original poetry work has been published by The *Dagong* Poets' Association can fill in the membership application form and upon the decision of the Standing Committee (常务委员会) can acquire The *Dagong* Poets' Association membership. Full time members of the organization have a right to directly (according to the principle of democratic centralism 民主集中制 [9]) elect the Standing Committee, which in turn elects Chairperson (主席) and Council (理事会), which in turn, with approval of academic advisor (学术顾问) appoints Secretariat (秘书处) and administrative bodies responsible for policy, review, publicity, editorial work as well as

[9] Democratic centralism, one of the main organizational principles of the Leninist communist organizations, which is defined by encouragement of free discussion and exchange of ideas during the initial stage of planning, but sole power of the decision making lies at the hands of central authorities, whose orders must be obeyed unconditionally and unquestionably (Joseph, 2014, p. 154). It can be noted that this term is also used in the China Writers Association statute (see http://www.chinawriter.com.cn/403936/403957/index.html) as well as statutes of every official provincial, municipal, district etc. level Writers Association (for example, see Guangdong Writers Association http://www.gdzuoxie.com/v/201401/24.html). I assume that it is a legal requirement for a literary organization to be organized according to the principle of democratic centralism that applies to grassroots literary societies as well.

external relations respectively. Such an elaborate organizational structure demonstrates the high ambitions and the establishment aspirations of the founders of The *Dagong* Poets' Association and stands in stark contrast to the one of *The Dagong Poet* that would only consist of a seven to nine-member editorial board, formed separately for each issue, with two or three of its members acting as executive editors.

Talking about personalities, there is no surprise that Ran Qiaofeng, who founded the organization, acts as its chairperson. What might be worth paying more attention to is the fact that the position of the academic advisor is given to Luo Deyuan, probably not only due to his outstanding expertise in *dagong* poetry as one of its core figures and grassroots activist, but also due to his high position in the literary field. Having an important leadership position in Writers Association provides him with substantial political and cultural capital and hence his patronage of The *Dagong* Poets' Association yields it some of the capital as well as legitimation in the eyes of literary circles and official institutions in a similar way as a newspaper title inscription by Yang Mu did for *The Dagong Poet*. His role as a grassroots activist in *The Dagong Poet* as well as his poetic oeuvre has provided Luo with symbolic capital and recognition by both fellow *dagong poets* and party-state cultural institutions, which in turn has helped him to gain political capital by getting promoted to high position in Writers Association. Thus by simultaneously belonging to both sides of the discourse – grassroots and government Luo in this case works as an intermediary between the two that helps to further normalize *dagong* poetry discourse and helps to advance dagong poets' position within the literary field.

While there are many more issues to be analysed and discussed about The *Dagong* Poets' Association and online *dagong* poetry grassroots initiatives at large, I believe that this brief analysis suffices to come to a conclusion that The *Dagong* Poets' Association has the same purpose vis-à-vis *dagong* poets' community building as *The Dagong Poet* – a platform not only strengthens *dagong* poets' identity but also helps to increase mainstream visibility and acceptability of said identity.

4. Government Institutions and the Negotiation of *Dagong* Poetry

This chapter will survey the role of a certain type of governmental cultural policy institutions i.e. official writers associations in *dagong* poetry discourse. While the days when all literary production used to be strictly controlled by Writers Association are long gone and postsocialist market liberalization policies have drastically changed the rules of the literary field in China, official literary institutions still play a significant role in negotiating literary discourse as it can be seen in the case of *dagong* poetry. I will start with a general overview of the China Writers Association and its main functions, paying the most attention to the ones of the highest significance vis-à-vis *dagong* poets' community. Then I will move to a case study of Guangdong Provincial Young Industrial Worker Writers Association, an organization with close ties to provincial branch of the Chinese Communist Youth League of Guangdong and its flagship literary journal *Golden Era*《黄金时代》. A substantial part of my analysis will be devoted to the Annual Ye Guangrong Poetry Award, one of the most significant events in terms of *dagong* poetry, organized by the Young Workers Association.

4.1. The China Writers Association

The China Writers Association 中国作家协会, (later referred to as the Association) is a multilevel top-down organisation that supervises literary production, provides assistance, educational, financial and institutional support for writers, literary critics etc. The Association has multilevel hierarchical structure with its subordinate branches in each province, city, district or county, however there are also some specific subordinate associations for specific professions, such as military personnel, police force, oil industry workers etc. as well as for certain ethnic minorities, for example the Korean Writers Association of Yanbian Korean Autonomous prefecture in Jilin province. China Writers Association is in turn a substantial part of the China Federation of Literary and Art Circles 中国文学艺术界联合会 (later referred to as the Art Federation) which includes organizations devoted to other art forms that would usually have similar organizational structure as the Association (Link 2000, pp 118-122). The Art Federation together with the Chinese Communist Youth League, the China Youth League, the All China Women Federation and other similar organizations is under control of the United Front Work

Department (中共中央统一战线工作部), an organization that ensures their subordination to the Central Committee of the Communist Party and issues policy directives for the subordinate institutions to follow. Therefore, by affiliation to party-state structures, the Writers Association executes a certain level of control over the literary field.

The Writers Association historically used to be the dominant gatekeeper and the sole rule setter of the literary field in Mao-era China. Founded in 1949 and initially called the China National Literature Workers Association (中华全国文学工作者协会) it gained its current name in 1953 (Hong 2007, p. 27). During the period of Mao Zedong's rule, but before the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) when its activities were disrupted by political turmoil, it used to be an institution that coordinates and ensures authors' creative activities, artistic exchanges, as well as safeguards writers' rights and interests, however from the CCP's point of view, its main functions were control over writers' literary activities, and implementation of politically correct ideological norms and standards of literary writing. Participation of famous authors and literary scholars as well as formal endorsement by the Party were used to validate its authority (ibid).

A Writers Association membership used to be crucial for most writers as a prerequisite for being published in literary journals and by state-run publishing houses that held monopoly in publishing industry of the PRC before the 1980s. It was the Association that was responsible for paying royalties for publications and steady salaries for its full time positions. Interestingly enough, writers used to be paid per number of printed copies regardless of sales figures, i.e. royalties for writers were based on supply instead of demand (Link, 2000, pp 130-131). Besides financial support, members of the Writers Association were given various benefits – from housing assignments to free excursions, dinner banquets, cultural events as well as educational activities. Therefore Kong (2005) summarizes the role of Writers Association in the pre-1980s as that of "the exclusive 'work unit[10]' for Chinese writers" (p. 12).

In the 1980s, due to China's transition towards a market orientated economy, the Writers Association started to lose its previously held hegemony over the field and the dramatic plunge into a more market driven economy in the 1990s meant that the Association could no longer provide the "iron rice bowl" 铁饭碗 (as it was colloquially referred to in China), meaning job security, steady income and welfare benefits guaranteed by the socialist system for its members and employees, as

[10] Work unit, or *danwei* 单位, a term to refer to someone's workplace, however before market reforms work units used to have a large amount of specific functions, such as managing household register of its employees, food supply, medical services, issueing marriage, divorce, birth and death certificates etc. Additionally, belonging to a work unit used to constitute a significant part of a persons identity (See He, 1998, pp. 43-44).

governmental subsidies have dramatically shrunk. As a result, the Writers Association and its regional chapters were forced to severely reduce its funding for projects and to close many of its previously respectable literary journals or at least to water down its artistic integrity by pandering to market demands (ibid, p. 13). Decline in economic capital has also led to declined influence in the literary field, with private businesses and the rules of capitalist logic now playing major role in literary production. Yet, while "the golden age" for the Writers Association is long gone, and being its member no longer holds same weight and prestige as during the Mao years, the role of the Writers Association in the literary field is still far from obsolete.

When applying Bourdieu's field theory to literary societies in modern China, Michel Hockx argues for the necessity to include a third, political principle (the other two are symbolic and economic) into the analysis of literary production. While symbolic principle is autonomous and economic principle is heteronomous, the political principle is only partially heteronomous, which means that while pursuing political capital in the form of participation in the Association activities contribute to a writer's upward mobility within the field, it does not necessarily increase his/her symbolic or economic capital (Hockx, 2003, p. 158). The same can be said about *dagong* poets. *Dagong* authors that are recognized for their oeuvre as the most talented (therefore having the highest symbolic capital in the field) are not necessarily the ones with the highest position in the Writers Association. For example, as a deputy chair of Zengcheng district Writers Association, Luo Deyuan is one of the most successful *dagong* poets in terms political capital and while he can also boast a significant level of symbolic capital, as one of the biggest dagong poetry activists and also a highly talented poet, it could be said that in terms of symbolic capital his position is lower than that of the most honoured *dagong* poets such as Zheng Xiaoqiong, Guo Jinniu or Xie Xiangnan, even though their positions in the Association are lower. In fact the opposite is often the case: high symbolic capital can often give an author an invitation to join the Writers Association or a promotion within its hierarchical structure, hence symbolic capital can be turned into political capital.

The rationale for attracting artistically successful authors to its ranks is quite straightforward: without representation of talented authors the Writers Association will not be taken seriously and would lose its authority within the field, therefore symbolic capital plays a fundamental role in building authority for the Association. On the other hand, a membership in the Writers Association can be construed as a negative quality for an author and to diminish his/her symbolic capital, in the eyes of other writers and society at large, which may no longer see said author or his/her writing as authentic. It is especially the case with *dagong* poets, whose symbolic capital is mostly gained through the authentic representation of subaltern experiences and membership in the Writers Association might

stand in the way for a *dagong* poet to be construed as a genuine voice of the precariat. A vivid example of this is the case of the most famous *dagong* poet Zheng Xiaoqiong, whose membership in the Writers Association as well as a decision to work at *Artworks* 《作品》, official literary magazine of Guangdong Province Writers Association, has attracted a significant amount of criticism for no longer being an "authentic" *dagong* poet. Paradoxically enough, by the time of writing some of her most "iconic" *dagong* poetry pieces, Zheng was already a member of the Writers Association (van Crevel, 2017b, p. 256).

However, while the most famous *dagong* poets can quite easily get accepted into Writers Association, the majority of *dagong* poets barely have any chance to join even its lowest chapter, i.e. district or county level Association. In addition to that, commercial publishing venues are also usually off limits, as poetry is not the most profitable genre, and most publishers are usually reluctant to run a risk of publishing young unaccomplished authors, let alone *dagong* poets. The only venue for such poets to be published would be grassroots publications, which I already talked about in the previous chapter, but unfortunately for the party-state institutions, this means a large number of writers being outside the scope of governmental control, and considering the fact that *dagongzhe* account for a large portion of the Chinese population, especially in Guangdong, the government would presumably not want for their literary activities to stay unchecked. Therefore a wide set of top-down initiatives are put in place in order to help young *dagong* authors to become qualified for a membership at district/county level Writers Association. It includes special literary journals, literary awards, established especially for *dagong* writers, teaching facilities as well as lower level writers associations that are generally outside (i.e. below) the structure of the China Writers Association. Due to limited scope of this thesis and also the lack of access to most of said facilities, I am going to concentrate on one: the Guangdong Young Industrial Worker Writers Association and especially its annual Ye Guangrong Poetry Award for outstanding *dagong* poets.

4.2. The Guangdong Province Young Industrial Worker Writers Association

Based in Guangdong province with one of its main centres in Foshan city, the Young Industrial Worker Writers Association 广东省青年产业工人作家协会 (which will later be referred to as the Young Workers Association) is an institution, established by the Guangdong branch of the Chinese Communist Youth League, whose registered proposal was approved by the Civil Affairs department

of the Guangdong provincial government (Wang Wanbing's blog, 2012). With its main headquarters located inside the office of *Golden Era* magazine, a flagship culture related publication of the Guangdong branch of the Youth League and with several members of its editorial board holding important leadership positions in the Association, it is fair to say that the Young Workers Association is not a grassroots-initiated movement but rather a top-down party-state institution that constitutes a vivid example of former grassroots *dagong* literature activists playing on the government side of the grassroots-government spectrum.

The Association was founded in 2011. Its opening ceremony was attended by several high ranking officials from both provincial and municipal level government, CCP, the Youth League, the Art Federation and the Writers Association structures, with deputy Party secretary of Guangdong Zhu Mingguo 朱明国 and Guangdong Youth League secretary Chen Dong 陈东 being highest by rank. Attention of such high profile provincial leadership signifies several issues. Firstly, it shows that *dagong* literature plays an important role within the framework of cultural policy in Guangdong. Secondly, it renders the Young Workers Association as a significant if not the main instrument of cultural policy towards *dagong* literature.

A cursory look into the leadership structure of the Young Workers Association suggests it clearly being a government affiliated institution as opposed to grassroots literary society. The Association is led by its chairman Zhou Chongxian 周崇贤 (b. 1970), a first generation *dagong* fiction writer of Sichuanese origin. Zhou ticks all the boxes necessary for such position: originally a rural migrant worker, author of some of the most famous *dagong* novels which endows him with substantial symbolic capital; but he is also a CCP member, a member of the China Writers Association, and works as an assistant editor-in-chief of the *Golden Era* magazine among other credentials that bestow him with political capital. Below him in institutional hierarchy stand at least eight vice chairs – also famous *dagong* literature figureheads turned cultural cadres, including *dagong* poet-cum-literary scholar Liu Dongwu, famous *dagong* writer Anzi 安子 etc. (Wang Wanbing's blog, 2012). The editor-in-chief of *Golden Era* and his/her deputies double as Secretariat of the Association and presumably ensure Youth League's direct control of the Association. *Golden Era* often publishes the Young Workers Association related content and doubles as its official publication (Chinanews, 2011).The control of governmental and cultural institutions is also enforced by a long list of advisors for the Association, that include both secretary and deputy secretary of Guangdong Youth League, high level Federation, provincial government officers, writers, cultural cadres and scholars, including the aforesaid Yang Honghai, whose contribution to the genre will be surveyed in Chapter 5.

One peculiar detail is that even though the Association predominantly targets *dagong* authors, the term used in its official title is "young industrial workers". It seems to me that there are at least three reasons for such choice of words. First of all, "industrial worker" seems to be a politically correct term that eschews pejorative conations of *dagongzhe*, i.e. that of poor, low skilled, uneducated laborer, of rural origin. Industrial worker sounds more formal and professional. Secondly it eliminates a distinction between the ones working for private and state-run enterprises and treats both types of workers as a single group, thus it is more inclusive. However from the viewpoint of the Youth League the most important emphasis in the name should be put on age signifier, i.e. "young". It seems to me that by denoting the category of age in the Association's title, the Youth League legitimizes its right to be in charge of a writers association, something that is not its direct responsibility. Why the Young Industrial Worker Writers Association should be under the jurisdiction of the Youth League instead of the China Writers Association or any other party-state institution is an interesting question, but lies outside the scope of this thesis.

According to its official WeChat account, the aim of the Association is "to lead healthy and uplifting spiritual and cultural life […] to [d]iscover and cultivate writers and literature lovers among young industrial workers" (Qinggong hui, 2017). It is said to engage in the "Double Hundred" 双百 project, whose objective is to "train hundreds of outstanding young industrial workers and writers, and support hundreds of outstanding work literary works" (Chinanews, 2011). Simply put, the main purpose of the organization is to provide training for young, unaccomplished yet promising industrial workers and to improve their creative writing skills. For this purpose, the Association has established special training centres, for example one in Foshan (PC, Guo Jieguang, May 2017). It also organizes various writing competitions and literary awards for young *dagong* writers, one of which, the Ye Guangrong Poetry Award ("叶光荣诗歌奖"), I am going to discuss in more detail.

Organized by the Foshan branch of the Association, the Ye Guangrong Poetry Award is an award designated to support the most successful and influential *dagong* poets. It was founded in 2015 and named after Ye Guangrong, a school bus driver and famous *dagong* poet and activist from Foshan, with whom the Association signed a twenty-year contract to run an award named after him. During award ceremonies held in Foshan each year late spring-early summer since 2016, the Association would award one or two *dagong* poets over their new or old but artistically accomplished poems. The first prize winner gets a sum of 5000 Chinese Yuan and the second prize winner (if awarded) gets a slightly smaller amount of money. In 2016, the award was posthumously given to Xu Lizhi, the year 2017 saw male construction worker Cheng Peng 程鹏 awarded with first prize and female textile

factory employee Wu Xia 邬霞 with second prize, and in 2018 it was given to Luo Deyuan, who got admitted into the China Writers Association at national level just shortly prior to receiving this award (Qinggong Hui, 2018). During my fieldwork I was able to attend the second edition of the award ceremony that took place on April 29, 2017.

The event took place in a top-class Chinese restaurant and, including the lunch, lasted for around four hours. The main guests were seated according to name card placement and by each seat there were brochures with basic information that included the list of participants, the event's schedule, as well as a booklet with poems by award winners Cheng Peng and Wu Xia, supplemented by short essays of poetry criticism. The list of participants consisted of twenty-five art and literature related guests, representatives of eight non-literature related governmental organisations and the prize winners themselves. Among literature related guests, the majority were from various level leaders of the Foshan city CCP and government affiliated literature institutions, with the chairman of the Young Workers Association Zhou Chongxian, who also doubled as a moderator for the event, the chief of the Foshan CCP Propaganda Department Xie Hanqiang 谢汉强 and the chairman of the Foshan Writers Association Zhang Kuang 张况 were of the highest status. Other guests included prominent writers, poets, and poetry critics, most coming either from Foshan or other cities in Guangdong province. The event in total was attended by approximately fifty persons, all closely connected with either *dagong* literature or party-state cultural institutions.

The event started with formal speeches by high ranking officials, followed by the speech of Ye Guangrong himself. One of the speakers, vice chairman of the Young Workers Association Lü Xiaotian 吕啸天 (b. 1970) emphasised the importance of *dagong* literature as mean of worker's spiritual enlightenment since "the biggest problem facing subalterns is not material but spiritual poverty". The event was followed by a discussion of Cheng Peng and Wu Xia's works by Luo Deyuan and Shao Mingchuan 邵鸣川, with the latter speaker providing a more rigorous, systematic literary analysis. By evoking words by famous avant-garde poet Ouyang Jianghe 欧阳江河 (b. 1956) that once said that much of the Chinese language is dead, Shao emphasised the importance of *dagong* poetry as a source of authentic language that could rejuvenate Chinese literature. This was followed by poetry recitation conducted by professional actors. Finally, the awards were delivered to Cheng Peng and Wu Xia thus finishing the formal part of the event.

Based on my experience with this event, a few observations can be made. The prominent presence of municipal and provincial level party-state officials in the event shows how important the *dagong* poetry is for cultural policy institutions that by promoting events like *dagong* poetry awards

might have a double purpose. On the one hand, official party-state cultural institutions play undeniably big part in strengthening *dagong* poets' community. They provide educational, institutional and even financial support for young and talented yet underprivileged poets, thus helping them to accelerate their writing careers. However this comes with the increased control over what can or cannot be said or written. Various measures of institutionalisation ensure that no poet would pose any threat to the ruling power, while a potential space for grassroots workers literary organizations to emerge is filled by the top-down organisations, making *dagong* poetry discourse easy to control.

Another aspect worth paying attention to is the treatment of *dagong* poetry as a part of local cultural identity of the Pearl River Delta region of Guangdong. Central party-state institutions in Beijing might not have as much interest in supporting *dagong* literature as provincial and municipal level CCP/government branches in Guangdong province. In a study of regional scenes of Chinese poetry, Zhang Qinghua identifies *dagong* as the core and the most specific element in Guangdong's literary circles (Zhang, 2011). Disproving the stereotype of newly developed cities in Guangdong as a "cultural desert" is one of the main issues local cultural workers and propaganda officers have to face, which makes promotion of *dagong* poetry a significant part of cultural policy in Guangdong.

It is important to emphasise one more time that some of the cultural workers in governmental institutions in Guangdong themselves are (former) *dagong* poets. Their participation in grassroots-government interactions is of crucial importance. Such people have empathy and understanding for their *dagong* poet counterparts and in most if not all cases have genuine intentions to help *dagong* poets' community to attain higher position in the field, and they employ a wide set of institutional and financial resources to achieve this objective. However, these people are also instrumental in furthering the goals of the institutions they are part of, such as the sanitization of *dagong* poets' community from any unwanted discourses and activities without provoking strong objections from the community itself. Such process can be understood as a certain form of negotiation between grassroots *dagong* poets, official party-state institutions and former *dagong* poets turned cultural cadres that act as intermediaries between the two and ensure that both sides will come to a compromise. In this negotiation the government side has much to offer for *dagong* poets: by playing by the rules, *dagong* poets can gain political capital in form of institutional recognition, which in turn leads to economic capital, something that is extremely important for migrant workers. At the same time, the cultural bureaucracy of Guangdong provincial and municipal level institutions is in need of quality literature to justify its authority, therefore it cannot afford to go overboard in stifling creative freedom of *dagong* writers, and therefore it renders the role of intermediaries in negotiation extremely important. The role,

operating principles and motivations of these intermediaries will be further discussed in the following chapter.

5. Mediation

This chapter will explore one of the most important aspect of grassroots-government interactions in the literary field, which is mediation between the two, executed by people that simultaneously either belong to or stand for both sides. Firstly, I am going to talk about two different types of intermediaries that are common within *dagong* poetry discourse. Then I will present a case study of Yang Honghai, one of the most significant persons involved in *dagong* poetry discourse in Guangdong and beyond, and a prominent example of intermediaries.

5.1. Agents in between: Two Types of Intermediaries

According to my research findings, in the context of grassroots-government interactions of the *dagong* poets' community, two types of intermediaries can be discerned. The first type, whom I will call bottom-up intermediaries, are persons that started off as *dagong* poets themselves, but were later accepted to join official writers associations and/or party-state institutions. A large proportion of the most prominent *dagong* poets would become bottom-up intermediaries at some point of their careers, including previously mentioned figures such as Luo Deyuan, Xu Qiang, Zhou Chongxian, Liu Dongwu, Zheng Xiaoqiong etc. These intermediaries significantly contribute to the position of *dagong* poets' community in the literary field. The second type, whom I will call top-down intermediaries, denotes persons that hold governmental positions and intervene into the *dagong* poets' community, and by using their status, institutional and political power catalyse the development of the *dagong* poets' community in their preferred direction. They played a tremendous role not only in helping for *dagong* poetry discourse to emerge but also to lead it towards a direction that aligns with cultural policy. Cultural bureaucrats of Shenzhen Municipal Art Federation, that were in charge of its affiliate *Special Zone Literature* magazine, or editorial board of Bao'an district government affiliate *Dapeng Bay* literary journal, where the earliest pieces of *dagong* writing has been published, can be considered as top-down intermediaries. Yang Honghai, a high profile government official and researcher who vigorously committed to facilitating the development of grassroots *dagong* literature movement ever since the mid-1980s is arguably one of the most outstanding example of such intermediaries, therefore his role is going to be discussed in more detail in the next section.

But first let us look at bottom-up intermediaries. How can a *dagong* poet become an intermediary? Let me briefly analyse the case of Liu Dongwu, who is one of the most prominent figures in the *dagong* poets' community, who has also made a spectacular career in cultural institutions. He was born 1973 in rural Anhui as Liu Dingfu 刘定富, and was interested in literature (most of all in poetry) ever since his high school years. The lack of job opportunities led Liu to come to Dongguan 东莞 city of Guangdong as a rural migrant worker, where he would soon become not only one of the most prominent *dagong* poets, but also a self-taught scholar and critic and one of the most authoritative experts in the field of *dagong* literature. In his essays, Liu not only provides solid analysis of *dagong* poetry but also staunchly defends the genre and offers compelling arguments for its value and significance (van Crevel, 2017b, pp. 268-271). In 2005 Liu Dongwu was awarded second prize in the Kunpeng Literature Prize (鲲鹏文学奖), a prestigious award given by central leadership of the Chinese Communist Youth League, designed to support young and promising poets, which is fairly often given to *dagong* poets, thus making it a springboard to wider institutional recognition. (Xu 2007, 500). He has subsequently joined China Writers Association, become a chair of Dongguan city Literary Critics' Association, and vice-president of the Dongguan Institute for Literature and Art, a subsidiary of Dongguan municipal Art Federation, where he has established a training centre for *dagong* writers (van Crevel, 2017b, p. 269).

The example of Liu Dongwu shows how an active member of *dagong* poets' community can get accepted into the cultural bureaucracy, and simultaneously continue to remain an active supporter of the *dagong* poets' community, hence becoming an intermediary. Mediation in this sense can go in both directions. Intermediaries can employ their newly acquired cultural, political and economic capital to engage in cultural brokering, i.e. to lobby for causes, beneficial towards *dagong* poets and poetry, such as establishing publications, training facilities, conferences and awards; but on the other hand, they can become agents through which party-state institutions execute their policy, for instance by contributing to censorship by guiding what can and cannot be written. Becoming an intermediary is also personally beneficial for a *dagongzhe*. Considering a constant state of precariousness that most rural migrant workers face most of the time, it is not surprizing that many *dagong* poets tend to accept any opportunity to escape such living conditions even if that would mean sacrificing one's political independence. Cultural factors also play a highly significant role in taking such decisions, as the autonomy of art, an idea that is prevalent in the West is much less articulated in China, where there is traditionally an expectation for an intellectual to be actively involved in political life (Hockx, 1999, p. 12). Therefore becoming an intermediary in this sense can be even construed as being "patriotic" and

a continuation of the age-old tradition of Chinese scholar-officials, commonly known as *literati* (文人).

The motivation for top-down intermediaries to engage in the discourse can also be explained through the same lens, i.e. doing what could be construed as beneficial for society in China, which is helping for talented subaltern individuals to express themselves through creative writing, yet at the same time enforcing government guidelines on what can or cannot be said or written, a process that in official CCP discourses is often referred to as social harmony (社会和谐). On the other hand, this type of mediation can lead to a successful political career and accumulation of cultural capital, gained through assuming the role of patron of the arts, as is demonstrated by the case of Yang Honghai, to whom we now turn.

5.2. Yang Honghai and the Cultural Policy of the "Special Zone"

Yang Honghai's involvement in the development of *dagong* literature, including *dagong* poetry, as well as spreading awareness of the existence of this phenomenon can be hardly overestimated. He was among the first persons to publicly use the term "*dagong* literature" in the mid-1980s, by the time when the phenomenon itself had just emerged. His role in the formation of *dagong* literature genre can be interpreted in two ways: as a visionary prediction of the trends to emerge and as an active, directive pursuit to make his predictions come true. Yang envisioned the emergence of *dagong* literature before this genre has actually existed, and did everything in his command for it to take shape: from searching for any "evidence" of migrant workers writing, to encouraging said workers to produce more of such "evidence", to establishing literary magazines, a radio programme, conferences and literary awards that would facilitate such form of writing, and then to organize and conduct research on this newly emerged form of literature.

A native of Meizhou, Guangdong, Yang was born in 1951. He initially worked as a teacher in his home city, but in 1985 he was transferred to Shenzhen, to work as a researcher in the Department of Culture of the Shenzhen municipal government, to conduct research on "Shenzhen Special Zone culture" 深圳特区文化 (Yang, 2011, p. 1091). Throughout the years of his career in Shenzhen and before his retirement in 2016, Yang worked as a director of the Centre for Shenzhen City Special Economic Zone Cultural Research 深圳市特区文化研究中心, a distinguished professor of Shenzhen

University, vice-chair of Shenzhen Art Federation and a various other positions. During this time, he has been a researcher, a kind of "ethnographer", but also a theorist, developer and active promoter of the "Special Zone culture" to a wider public in China.

Designating Shenzhen as a Special Economic Zone in 1980 led to a rapid economic boom for the city, and the government felt there was a necessity to facilitate the development of culture as well. Government culture policy for special economic zones was based on the premise that special economic zones should produce a specific form of culture, referred to as the "special zone culture" (特区文化), different from the rest of mainland China. In his 1986 article, co-authored with Wang Xiaowen 王效文, Yang advocated for liberalization of Shenzhen cultural policy, in order for the city to become a "window" to Hong Kong and the outside world at large. In order to achieve that, they argued, the Shenzhen government had to become more accepting of all forms and manifestations of capitalist culture, including "Oscar-winning Hollywood films and best quality Hong Kong cinema" (Yang, 2011, p. 12). This would be of crucial importance for a creative beneficial environment for foreign investment, necessary for developing Shenzhen's economy. Thus cultural development was argued to be an inseparable part of economic development in Shenzhen (ibid, p. 15).

In subsequent years Yang Honghai would further develop his theoretical framework of the "special zone culture" in Shenzhen. In his 1989 article (ibid, pp 41-44), Yang defines five main aspects of this culture: migrant culture (移民文化), since over 90% of the population in the city consisted of rural migrant workers; "window" culture (窗口文化), which defines Shenzhen's international image; cultural pluralism (多元文化), referring to synergy of various cultural forms, but still unquestionably dominated by socialist values; "bridge building" culture (引桥文化), referring to Shenzhen's cultural interactions with Hong Kong, Taiwan and overseas Chinese diaspora; and an open cultural mindset (开放型的文化心态) that denotes the Shenzhen population producing and consuming different, i.e. more liberal, open minded and West-oriented forms culture than the rest of China. This unique form of Shenzhen culture would play an important part in the wider scheme of the "New Lingnan[11] culture" (新岭南文化), a cultural policy for the greater Guangdong area. The aim of the policy was to create a new cultural identity for Guangdong province that combines traditional culture of the region with modern culture of the immigrants. Therefore in both cultural policies of Shenzhen and that of

[11] Lingnan 岭南, the region in south eastern China, south of the Nanling 南岭 mountains, that had traditionally consisted of the areas currently under jurisdiction of Guangdong, Guangxi, Hainan provinces and the northern part of Vietnam. Nowadays the term "Lingnan culture" is usually used to refer to cultural forms of the Cantonese speaking areas, including Hong Kong and Macau.

Guangdong province, cultural production by rural migrant workers would play a significant role (ibid, pp 238-244).

For the term that Yang Honghai refers to as "migrant culture", he later came up with a local Cantonese dialect colloquialism, i.e. "*dagong* culture", and its derivatives "*dagong* literature" and "*dagong* poetry" that had become widely accepted ever since. These terms did not settle overnight. In his review article of the *Dapeng Bay* magazine, published in 1990, Yang uses gendered variants of said terms not seen in his other writings: "*dagong* boy literature" (打工仔文学) for male migrant worker authors and "*dagong* sister literature" (打工妹文学) or "*dagong* woman literature" (打工女文学) for their female counterparts (ibid, pp. 413-415). However, it seems that these gendered variations of the term have not been widely used and as early as in 1992, by the time when the *"Dagong Literature" Book Series*《"打工文学"系列丛书》– the earliest anthology of the genre – was launched, the term "*dagong* literature" worked as a default name for the genre.

Besides predicting and naming the phenomenon of *dagong* literature, Yang Honghai also provided a substantial contribution to acceleration of its development. With *dagongzhe* constituting such a substantial part of Shenzhen's population, it was clear to Yang that *dagong* culture should become an integral part of its cultural identity, therefore he enthusiastically engaged in searching for any of its manifestations. In order to encourage more *dagong* literature to appear, Yang Honghai established a radio programme at the local Shenzhen radio station, named *Dagong World* （打工天地, lit. *Dagong* heaven and earth） dedicated to young *dagong* writers, where he would not only read and critique any *dagong* writing he would come across, but would also encourage migrant workers to write more. Since the radio programme was broadcasted live, many young *dagong* writers had a chance of calling a studio, thus making themselves known to the wider public (Yang, 2011, p. 408). This way Yang has become familiar with some of the earliest *dagong* writers, whose novels, with active help from Yang, were first published in the mid-1980s, while the early 1990s also saw the first *dagong* poems published in print.

Additionally, the radio programme at the time was one of the first mediums to bolster *dagong* writers' (and to the lesser degree poets') collective identity. Another such medium was a district level *Dapeng Bay* magazine, founded in 1989 and specifically devoted to *dagongzhe*. Yang Honghai played an important role in promoting this magazine to a wider public and other literary journals in the area, most importantly the municipal level *Special Zone Literature*, which subsequently started to publish *dagong* literature as well (ibid, p.414). This opened opportunities for *dagong* authors to get published

in other publications, in Guangdong and beyond, allowing *dagong* literature to grow both in terms of quantity as well as quality.

Since the beginning of 1990s, it has become clear that *dagong* writing phenomenon is not just limited to Shenzhen but also to other cities in China. With deepening market reforms, the differences between special economic zones and the rest of mainland China have gradually become less significant. As a result, Yang's theoretical approach and ideological justification for *dagong* literature has also slightly shifted. In his foreword to the *"Dagong Literature" Book Series*, published in 1992, Yang Honghai no longer talks about *dagong* literature as an element of the "special zone" culture, but as a unique cultural phenomenon on its own, with strong roots in Guangdong, but also radiating into other parts of China. Furthermore, he emphasises that *dagong* literature is a part of a global phenomenon of the worker literature, widespread in USA, Japan, Taiwan etc. (ibid, p. 418). Thus he portrays *dagong* literature as not just a localized phenomenon, but a worldwide trend. This in turn makes Yang's plentiful expertise on *dagong* literature highly valuable, thus providing him with substantial cultural capital and authority.

Being considered as one of China's biggest experts on *dagong* literature, Yang Honghai has engaged in extensive work of advocacy for the genre. He organised conferences, engaged in academic debates, encouraged research and promoted all forms of *dagong* literature, including poetry, fiction, essays and drama. A significant part of the advocacy was done by providing a theoretical basis for compatibility with the current ideological Communist Party line of the time. In 2005, after the concept of a Harmonious Society (和谐社会) was promoted during the National People's Congress as the new doctrine of CCP ideology at the time, Yang wrote several articles in which he argued for treating *dagong* culture as an integral part of this policy. In the article "Dagong Community and Cultural Rights" 《打工群体与文化权益》 (ibid, pp 448-454), Yang argues that of three types of rights – political, economic and cultural – for *dagongzhe*, cultural rights are not only the most lacking, but also of having the biggest impact on their lives. For this reason, it is necessary to grant *dagongzhe* freedom of self-expression in order to enrich them spiritually for the sake of diverting their social frustrations and to avoid social unrest. However, Yang Honghai by no means advocates for laissez-faire cultural policy towards *dagongzhe*. On the contrary, "*dagong* culture, like all other cultures has progressive, backward and corrupt elements" (ibid, p. 454). Therefore the government should assume a proactive position in making efforts to improve *dagong* culture.

This demonstrates the role Yang Honghai took as a top-down intermediary between *dagongzhe* (including the *dagong* poets' community) and the government. On one hand, his advocacy efforts has

significantly contributed to the growth and mainstream recognition of *dagong* literature discourse, while on the other hand, he made sure that the discourse will be formed in the government's terms. Therefore in the process of the negotiation of discourses, Yang Honghai as an intermediary has helped both sides to reach the most mutually beneficial compromise.

6. Conclusion

In this thesis, interactions between grassroots and government agents in the field of *dagong* poetry have been surveyed. By analysing three main types of agents, namely grassroots activists, party-state affiliate cultural policy institutions and intermediaries, I have shown that party-state cultural policy institutions play a significant role in the formation and development of the *dagong* poets' community of the Pearl River Delta. Their far reaching influence is present in many aspects and is mainly executed through negotiation with grassroots groups, in which a crucial role is played by top-down and bottom-up intermediaries that are very helpful for attracting financial, political and also discursive support for the *dagong* poets' community, but also ensure that *dagong* poetry discourse remains controlled and in line with government's cultural policy.

My research shows that *dagong* poetry grassroots activists have played a leading role in forming, strengthening and defending the position of the *dagong* poets' community. Grassroots print publications such *The Dagong Poet* and online literary societies, including The *Dagong* Poets' Association constitute a highly significant platform for poets to publish their writings which reward them with symbolic capital, which is fundamentally important for position taking within the literary field. Besides these platforms working as gatekeepers for the sub-field of dagong poetry that help distributing symbolic capital to the members of dagong poets' community and setting hierarchies within the sub-field, they also operate as an important "springboard" towards higher calibre (in terms of hierarchy of the Writers Association) literary journals and often are important first step towards wider literary and institutional recognition within the literary field of mainland China. However in order for this springboard role to be legitimized, the leaders of said grassroots publications or literary societies have to possess certain levels of political capital and act as intermediaries between grassroots and party-state cultural institutions, at least that was the role assumed by the editors of *The Dagong Poet* and academic advisor of The *Dagong* Poetry Association – my case studies for grassroots activities.

Party-state cultural institutions, such as the Youth League-affiliated Young Workers Association, have some of the same functions as grassroots literary societies in terms of gatekeeping, recognition and promotion of young *dagong* poets, and it also allows them to form bonds, highly beneficial for strengthening the *dagong* poets' community. However, it takes over the niche of *dagong* literature-based societies from grassroots groups and in this way lends control of *dagong* poetry discourse to party-state institutions. Such control is conducted through negotiation, which allows both

sides to reach a mutually beneficial cooperation. By playing by the rules set by the system, *dagong* poets are awarded by political and cultural capitals that give them more economic security, while cultural policy institutions can ensure that *dagong* poetry discourse does not move toward dissent.

As for intermediaries, this study shows them to be some of the most important agents in said type of interactions. They help negotiation between grassroots and government to go more smoothly as well more beneficial for both sides. As my case studies suggest, most if not all *dagong* poets dealing with the grassroots-government interactions in the literary field on both sides are bottom-up intermediaries. By acting in a way simultaneously beneficial for both *dagong* poets' community and party-state cultural policy institutions, they also earn capital for themselves. Top-down intermediaries by having much higher political and cultural capital than any *dagongzhe*, can also play a significant role within the field. Yang Honghai is among the historically most significant intermediaries, not only having coined the term *dagong* poetry, but also catalysed and guided its development. Through his role as researcher and cultural policy strategist he has managed to successfully advocate for recognition and acceptance of *dagong* poetry within the government circles and academia but also has facilitated government's intervention into *dagong* poetry discourse right from its earliest stages of formation.

These research results suggest that *dagong* poetry plays an appreciable role in cultural policy of the provincial and municipal governments in Guangdong. Being traditionally viewed as a "cultural desert", the municipalities of China's "workshop of the world" of the Delta region had to put much effort into creating its own cultural identity, in which *dagong* poetry perfectly plays a part. However, the often pessimistic tone and social issues related subject matter give *dagong* poetry the potential to be subversive, or at very least to tarnish the positive image of the cities to which they come to work. For this reason, the cultural policy towards *dagong* poets' community in the Delta region is highly interventional, while remaining lenient enough to ensure an acceptable degree of creative freedom for the poets.

The research findings provide a better understanding of the principles on which the *dagong* poets' community operates in the literary field and especially the government's role and influence in these principles. I believe that the results of this thesis are beneficial for improving our understanding and deepening our academic knowledge on the subject of *dagong* poetry.

Research can be further continued in several different directions. Firstly, its scope could be expanded geographically to see if grassroots-government interactions work same way in other *dagong* poetry scenes, such as the Picun community in Beijing among others. An alternative approach could be to concentrate on specific *dagong* poets and to follow their literary careers through the lens of

capital accumulation and show how their roles in the field would shift from grassroots activists to intermediaries and cultural cadres. Survey into other agents present in *dagong* poetry discourse, such as the commercial publishing industry, labor rights groups and NGO's, media, academia etc. may also provide fruitful insights. Finally, transnational comparison of issues such as these would be interesting. I believe the phenomenon of *dagong* poetry to be very much anchored in Chinese traditions (see van Crevel 2017c, pp 38-46), but perhaps it is precisely this point that would make transnational comparison interesting.

Bibliography

Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London: Verso Books, 1983.

Bourdieu, Pierre, and Richard Nice. "The Production of Belief: Contribution to an Economy of Symbolic Goods." *Media, Culture & Society* 2, no. 3 (1980): 261-93.

Chan, Jenny & Mark Selden. "The Labor Politics of China's Rural Migrant Workers", *Globalizations,* (2016): 1-13.

Chinanews. "Quan Guo Shou Geshengji Qingnian Chanye Gongren Zuojia Xiehui Zai Guangdong Chengli"全国首个省级青年产业工人作家协会在广东成立 (The first provincial youth industrial worker writers association was established in Guangdong), *Zhongguo Xinwen Wang* 中国新闻网 (Chinanews), October 30, 2011. Retrieved from: http://www.chinanews.com/df/2011/10-30/3424309.shtml [Accessed August 2, 2018].

Dagong Shishe. "'Dagong Zuojia' Xingguang leitai: Gongren Shikan tuijian "2015 Zhongguo haoshibang" shige mingdan"《打工作家》 [星光擂台]:《工人诗刊》推荐 "2015 中国好诗榜" 诗歌名单 (Starlight of Dagong Writers: Workers Poetry Magazine recommends '2015 Best Chinese Poems' list) (2015, October 13) Retrieved from: https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/mb0jPUHTJsP3Ku5ir6BCrA [Access 21 June 2018].

Dagong Shishe. Dagong Shishe | chupin 'shi she ziliao zhan guan' 打工诗社 1 出品《诗社资料展馆》 (The Dagong Shishe| Presenting 'Community Information Exhibition Hall'), (2015, May 13) Retrieved from https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/HGifcxjitcTme8u1ZneiDw [Access 21 June 2018].

Dagong shishe. Dagong shishe she xun: Shoujie Dagong shi she wenxue jiaoliu hui, Wu yue yi hao zai shenzhen yuanman juxing 《打工诗社》社讯: 首届打工诗社文学交流会，五月一号在深圳圆满举行 (The Dagong Poetry Community News: The First Literary Exchange by The Dagong Shishe was Held Successfully in Shenzhen on May 1), (2015, October 18) Retrieved from https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/Izrj0JPFlDUEAb-fDLE8yg [Access 21 June 2018].

Dooling, Amy. "Representing Dagongmei (Female Migrant Workers) in Contemporary China", *Front. Lit. Stud. China*, 11(1), (2017): 133–156.

Fang Yingwen 方英文. “Shilun ‘Fanwenxuehua shidai’ de wenxue – zai Shangluo xueyuan de yangjiang” 试论’泛文学化时代’的文学—在商洛学院的演讲” (A Discussion on the Literature in the Era of ‘Pan-literature’ — Speech in Shangluo University), *Journal of Shangluo University*, 28(1), (2014): 13-15.

Gong Haomin, “Toward a New Leftist Ecocriticism in Postsocialist China: Reading the ‘Poetry of Migrant Workers’ as Ecopoetry,” in Wang Ban and Lu Jie, eds, *China and the New Left: Political and Cultural Interventions* (Lanham: Lexington, 2012), 139-157.

Gongren Shige 工人诗歌 （Workers’ Poetry）, eds. Shengzi 绳子 and Wu Ji 吴季，Gongren Shige Lianmeng 工人诗歌联盟 (Worker Poetry Union), issues 1 (2005) and 2 (2009).

Guo Daorong 郭道荣. *Lun caogen shige de biaoda shoufa yu jingshen jingjie* 论草根诗歌的表达手法与精神境界 (About Grassroots Poetry Expression Techniques and Spiritual Realm), Mangzhong: Xiabanyue, 4, (2017): 6-7.

He Xinghan, “People in the Work Unit”, in Michael R Dutton (ed.), *Streetlife China*. Cambridge [etc.]: Cambridge UP, 1998.

He Xuan 何轩, ed. Zhongguo “Dagong Shige” Jilu yu Pingdian《中国“打工诗歌”辑录与评点》(Chinese “*Dagong* Poetry”: A Critical Collection). 武汉: 湖北人民出版社, 2010a.

He Xuan 何轩. “Xin Shiji Dagong Shige Yanjiu Shuping” 新世纪打工诗歌研究述评 (A Review of the Research on The Labor Poetry in The New Century), Yunmeng Xuekan 云梦学刊 (Journal of Yunmeng), 31 (2), 2010b: pp. 115-119.

Hockx, Michel, ed. *The Literary Field of Twentieth-Century China*, Richmond: Curzon, 1999.

Hockx, Michel, “Theory as Practice: Modern Chinese Literature and Bourdieu”, in Hockx, Michel and Ivo Smits, eds, *Reading East Asian Writing: The Limits of Literary Theory*, London: Routledge Curzon, 2003.

Hockx, Michel & Denton, Kirk A., eds. *Literary Societies of Republican China. Lanham*: Lexington Books, 2008.

Hockx, Michel. “The Literary Field and the Field of Power: The Case of Modern China”, *Paragraph* 35 (1), (2011): 49–65.

Hockx, Michel. *Internet Literature in China*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2015.

Hockx, Michel. “Literary Communities and the Production of Literature”, in Denton, Kirk A., ed. *The Columbia Companion to Modern Chinese Literature*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2016.

Hong Zicheng, Day, and Day, Michael. *A History of Contemporary Chinese Literature*. Leiden [etc.]: Brill, 2007.

Inwood, Heather, “Between License and Responsibility: Reexaming the Role of the Poet in Twenty-First-Century Chinese Society,” *Chinese Literature Today* 2, no. 1 (2011): 49-55.

Inwood, Heather. *Verse Going Viral – China's New Media Scenes.* University of Washington Press, 2014.

Jaguścik, Justyna, “Representation of Dagongmei in Contemporary China,” in *DEP* 17 (2011): 121-138.

Jaguścik, Justyna. *Literary Body Discourses: Body, Gender and Class in Contemporary Chinese Female-Authored Literature*, PhD diss. (University of Zürich, 2014).

Joseph, William A. *Politics in China: An Introduction, Second Edition*. Second ed. Oxford UP, 2014.

Kong Shuyu. *Consuming Literature: Best Sellers and the Commercialization of Literary Production in Contemporary China*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005.

Kraus, Richard Curt. *The Party and the Arty in China: The New Politics of Culture*. State and Society in East Asia 400481138. Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004.

Li Dian. “Naming and Antinaming: Poetic Debate in Contemporary China”, in Christopher Lupke, ed, *New Perspectives on Contemporary Chinese Poetry*. 1st ed., New York, NY, Palgrave Macmillan, (2008): 185-200.

Link, P. (2000). *The Uses of Literature: Life in the Socialist Chinese Literary System*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

Liu Dongwu 柳冬妩. Cong Xiangcun dao Chengshi de Jingshen Taiji: Zhongguo ‘Dagong Shige’ de Baipishu《从乡村到城市的精神胎记: 中国'打工诗歌'的白皮书》 (Spiritual Birthmark on the Journey from the Village to the City: A White Paper on China's “Dagong Poetry”). Guangzhou: Huacheng Chubanshe 广州：花城出版社, 2006a.

Liu Dongwu 柳冬妩. “Dagong: Yige Cangsang de Ci “打工: 一个沧桑的词 (Dagong: A Word of Vicissitudes), Tianya 天涯 (Frontiers), 2, 2006b: pp. 26-36.

Liu Dongwu 柳冬妩. “Shenwei yu Changwei: ‘Dagong shige’ de Zhuti tonggan” 身位与场位： “打工诗歌” 的主体痛感 (Position and field: the topic of pain in "dagong poetry"), Nanfang Wentan 南方文坛 (Southern Cultural Forum), 6, 2008a: pp. 58-62.

Liu Dongwu 柳冬妩. “Shenti de Zhenxiang – ‘Dagong Poetry’ “身体的真相 ——“打工诗歌”关于身体的另类书写 (The Truth of Body - The Alternative Writing of Body in “Dagong Poetry”), Wenyi Zhengming 文艺争鸣, (Literary Contention), 6, 2008b: pp. 102-113.

Liu Dongwu 柳冬妩 2010. “Yi zhong Shengyin de Xiezuo “一种有声音的写作 (A type of Voice Writing), Nanfang Wentan 南方文坛 (Southern Cultural Forum), 4, 2010: pp. 61-66.

Liu Dongwu 柳冬妩. “Dagong Wenxue de Leixing Xifen“打工文学”的类型细分 (The Classification of “Literature on Migrant Workers”), Hainan Shifan Daxue Xuebao (Shehui Kexue Ban) 海南师范大学学报 (社会科学版) (Journal of Hainan Normal University (Social Sciences)), 118 (2): 2012a pp. 120-126.

Liu Dongwu 柳冬妩. Dagong Wenxue de Zhengti Guancha《打工文学的整体观察》 (A Comprehensive Survey of Dagong Literature). Guangzhou: Huacheng Chubanshe 广州：花城出版社, 2012b.

Liu Dongwu 柳冬妩. “Dagong wenxue de Leixing Ronghe” 打工文学的类型融合 (The Fusion of dagong literature genres), Nanfang Wentan 南方文坛 (Southern Cultural Forum), 4: 2014: pp. 22-26.

Lu, Xinyu. “West of the Tracks: History and Class Conciousness”, in Lisa Rofel, Lü Xinyu, Chris Berry (eds.), *The New Chinese Documentary Film Movement: For the Public Record*, Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010.

Luo Deyuan 罗德远. “Wei piaobo de rensheng zuozheng” 为漂泊的人生作证 (To testify for the floating life), *Dagong Shiren* 打工诗人 (Dagong Poet), 2: September 2001.

Luo Dehui 罗德会. “Yi lu bashe yi lu huange”一路跋涉一路欢歌 (A Road of Trekking, a Road of Joyful Singing), in Da Xinan 大西南, ed. Dagong Qianyan de Gezhe: Luo Deyuan Qiren

Qiwen 打工前沿的歌者：罗德远其人其文 (The Bard of *Dagong* Forefront: Luo Deyuan and His Writings). Beijing: Zhongguo Xiju Chubanshe, 2013.

Park, Yeonkyeong. "Voice and Silence of The Subaltern: Rural Women in The Public Culture of Post-Socialist China." Electronic Thesis or Dissertation. University of Toronto, 2014. ProQuest/UMI. 16 October 2016.

Pun, Ngai & Chris Ling-Chi Chan. "The Subsumption of Class Discourse in China", *Boundary*, 35 (2), (2008): 75-91.

Pun, Ngai, Shen Yuan, Guo Yuhua, Lu Huilin, Jenny Chan & Mark Selden, "Apple, Foxconn, and Chinese workers' struggles from a global labor perspective", *InterAsia Cultural Studies*, 17 (2), (2016): 166-185.

Qin Xiaoyu 秦晓宇, ed. Wode Shipian: Dangdai Gongren Shidian《我的诗篇: 当代工人诗典》 (My Poetry: Outstanding Works of Contemporary Workers Poetry). Beijing: Zuojia Chubanshe 北京: 作家出版社, 2015.

Qin Xiaoyu 秦晓宇, Wu Feiyue 吴飞跃 dirs. *Wode Shipian* 我的诗篇 (The Verse of Us) Shanghai Yiteng Yinghsi Wenhua Youxian Gongsi (Daxiang Jilu), 2015.

Qin Xiaoyu, ed. *Iron Moon: An Anthology of Chinese Migrant Worker Poetry*. Translated by Eleanor Goodman. Buffalo NY: White Pine Press, 2016.

Qinggong hui 青工汇. "Di san jie Ye Guangrong Shige Jiang banjiang dianli zai Foshan Guoji Taoci Cheng Longzhong juxing" 第三届叶光荣诗歌奖颁奖典礼在佛山国际陶瓷城隆重举行 (The 3rd Ye Guangrong Poetry Awards Ceremony was held in Foshan International Ceramics City). *Qinggong hui,* June 15, 2018. Retrieved from: https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s?__biz=MzI4MzY2NDAzMw==&mid=2247486197&idx=1&sn=0ba9e49e95153526c7e7d41b9ccff4a2&chksm=eb86013bdcf1882d27f9b6e273e4c215594068c658129036bba08eb9862991d8a9a263f9c040&mpshare=1&scene=1&srcid=0616KMxPOyINLVR4SGeq6FZS#rd [Accessed July 25, 2018].

Qinggong hui 青工汇. "Guangdong sheng qingnian chanye gongren zuojia xiehui gedi fenhui qichang wenxue shengyan" 青工汇. 广东省青年产业工人作家协会各地分会齐唱文学盛宴 (Guangdong Provincial Youth Industrial Workers Writers Association All Branches sing a

literary feast) *Qinggong hui,* June 15, 2018. Retrieved from: https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/jYovCchPyo8FpFSe3K4N_A [Accessed July 15, 2018].

Shi, Ruiting 施瑞婷. "'Kanbujiande Diceng': Dagong Shige Chengxiande Diceng Tiyan" "看不见的底层"： "打工诗歌"呈现的底层体验 (Invisible Bottom: The Underclass Experiences in Migrant Workers' Poetry), Nantong Daxue Xuebao. Shehui Kexue ban 南通大学学报·社会科学版 (Nantong University Journal. Social Sciences Edition), 30 (4), 2014: 107-114.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in Rosalind Morris (ed.), *Can Subaltern Speak? Reflections on History of an Idea*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2010, pp 26-76.

Sun, Wanning. "Desperately Seeking My Wages: Justice, Media Logic, and The Politics of Voice in Urban China", *Media, Culture & Society* 34 (7), (2012a): 864 –879.

Sun, Wanning. "Poetry of Labor and (Dis)articulation of Class: China's worker-poets and the cultural politics of boundaries", *Journal of Contemporary China*, 21 (78), (2012b): 993-1010.

Sun, Wanning. "'Northern Girls': Cultural Politics of Agency and South China's Migrant Literature", Asian Studies Review, 38 (2), (2014a): 168-185.

Sun, Wanning. *Subaltern China: Rural Migrants, Media, and Cultural Practices.* Blue Ridge Summit: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2014b.

Van Crevel, Maghiel. *Unofficial Poetry Journals from the People's Republic of China: A Research Note and an Annotated Bibliography.* Modern Chinese Literature and Culture Resource Center Publication, 2007.

Van Crevel, Maghiel. *Chinese Poetry in Times of Mind, Mayhem and Money*. Leiden: Brill, 2008.

Van Crevel, Maghiel. 2017a. Review of Qin Xiaoyu (ed) and Eleanor Goodman (transl), *Iron Moon: An Anthology of Chinese Migrant Worker Poetry*, Buffalo: White Pine Press, 2016 and Qin Xiaoyu and Wu Feiyue (dir), *Iron Moon*, Shanghai: MeDoc/Eternity, 2015, for *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture*. MCLC Resource Center. http://u.osu.edu/mclc/book-reviews/vancrevel4/, 2017a. Accessed 1 August 2017.

Van Crevel, Maghiel. "The Cultural Translation of Battlers Poetry (Dagong shige)", *Journal of Modern Literature in Chinese*, 14(2)-15(1), (2017b): 245-286.

Van Crevel, Maghiel. “Walk on the Wild Side: Snapshots of the Chinese Poetry Scene”. Modern Chinese Literature and Culture Resource Center, 2017c.

Wang Jingjing 王晶晶. “Chen Nianxi, Hei’an dixia “zha” chu shige” 陈年喜，黑暗地下“炸”出诗歌 (Chen Nianxi, “Exploding” Poems from the Underground Darkness), *Huanqiu Renwu* 环球人物 (Global People) 2016, (8). Access: http://paper.people.com.cn/hqrw/html/2016-03/26/content_1669936.htm (Retrieved 1 January 2018).

Wang Wanbing’s blog. “Guangdong Qingnian Chanye Gongren Zuojia Xiehui” 广东省青年产业工人作家协会 (Guangdong Province Young Industrial Workers Association) June 1, 2012. Retrieved from: http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:kAc2zmLGgkcJ:blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_754501a801016k3x.html+&cd=4&hl=lt&ct=clnk&gl=lt [Accessed August 2, 2018].

Wang Zheng 汪政 & Xiao Hua 晓华. “Xinshiji: Fanwenxue yu Xin geju” 新世纪: 泛文学与新格局 (New Era: Pan-Literature and new patterns), Dongyue Tribune, 32(4), (2011): 14-17.

Wright, Kimberly. *Poetry as Dissensus: Migrant Worker Poets in Postsocialist China*, 2017, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses.

Wu Ji 吴季，Zhongguo gongren shige de bainian cangsang 中国工人诗歌的百年沧桑 (Twists and turns in 100 Years of China’s workers’ poetry). Unpublished manuscript, 2015.

Xu Qiang 徐强. “Xing xing zhi huo, keyi liaoyuan“– cong minkan *Dagong Shiren* kan dagong shige ji dagong shige de fazhan” 星星之火，可以燎原——从民刊《打工诗人》看打工诗歌及打工文化的发展 (The Fire of Stars, can start a prairie fire – From grassroots publication *Dagong Poet* to dagong poetry and the development of dagong culture), in Yang Honghai 杨宏海. *Dagong Wenxue Zonghengtan* 打工工文文学纵横谈 (The overview of labor’s literary phenomenon). Beijing: Shehui Kexue Wenxian Chubanshe, 2009.

Xu Qiang 许强, Luo Deyuan 罗德远, Chen Zhongcun 陈忠村, eds. 2008 Zhongguo Dagong Shige Jingxuan 《2008 中国打工诗歌精选》 (The Best of Chinese Dagong Poetry, 2008). Shanghai: Shanghai Wenyi Chubanshe 上海: 上海文艺出版社, 2009.

Yang Honghai 杨宏海, ed. *Dagong Wenxue Beiwanglu* 打工文学的备忘录 (The Memorandum of Dagong Literature). Beijing: Shehui Kexue Wenxian Chubanshe, 2007.

Yang Honghai 杨宏海. Wo yu Shenzhen Wenhua: Yige ren yu Yizuo Chenghshi de Wenhua shi《我与深圳文化: 一个人与一座城市的文化史》 (Shenzhen and I: One Man and the Cultural History of a City), two volumes. Guangzhou: Huacheng Chubanshe 广州: 花城出版社, 2011.

Zeng Yi 曾毅. *Zhongguo Dangdai Wenxue zhong de "Mingong" Xushi* 中国当代文学中的"民工"叙事 ("Migrant Workers" Narrative in Contemporary Chinese Literature), PhD diss. (Jilin University, 2012).

Zhang, Nana. "Performing identities: women in rural-urban migration in contemporary China", *Geoforum*, 54, (2014):17-27.

Zhang, Qinghua. "Regional Variations in Aesthetics and Ideology in Contemporary Chinese Poetry", *Front. Lit. Stud. China*, 5(2), (2011): 219–233.

Zhao, Yuezhi. "Chinese Modernity, Media, and Democracy: An Interview with Lu Xinyu", *Global Media and* Communication 6(1), (2010): 5-32.