

贾浅浅和她诗歌引发的舆论风暴

Jia Qianqian's Poetry Stirring up Social Media Storm in China

Translated by Usha Chandran

Adjunct Fellow, ICS and Assistant Professor,
Centre for Chinese and South East Asian Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University
ushachen75@gmail.com



Image: Jia Qianqian: Stirring up social media storm in China
Source: chongwutan.com

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Author: 岳怀让 Yuè Huáiràng (Published in Chinese on 2021-02-03)

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Background and Summary

Well known writer Jia Pingwa's daughter Jia Qianqian, who is known as a poet and is an Associate Professor, North Western University (Xi'an), recently became popular on the internet for posting her poems, mainly, *Lang Lang* and *My Mother*. She was heavily trolled by the netizens for the use of words like, "shit" and "urine" in her poems. Several social media opinion platforms and media commentaries questioned her skill as a poet and accused her of winning favours in terms of literary awards and honours owing to her father's powerful position. The article first brings out all possible angles of reactions to Jia Qianqian's 'pee poetry', namely of netizens, commentaries as well as literary figures. Then, it goes on to take a rational view and analyses the poet's earlier poetic creations and reviews of her work by renowned figures in literary circle. The article mentions Jia Pingwa's message to his daughter and also brings out her exclusive views on her own creativity. Unlike on social media, the literary circle is defending Jia Qianqian, and the article provides an overview on their reasons to do so.

As the daughter of Jia Pingwa, vice chairman of China Writers Association, Jia Qianqian, who is known as a "poet" in the "literary world", would have never expected

that she would actually be "viral" overnight for writing a few poems.

On January 28, *We Chat* public account "Free Literary Discussion" published an article written by the critic Tang Xiaolin; 'Jia Qianqian's popularity highlights the chaos in the world of poetry', it acted like tossing a stone stirring thousands of waves. The article criticised Jia Qianqian's poetry to be "enter button (key) branch of writing" and "dirty disgusting garbage text", it also opined that Jia Qianqian's poems do not deserve the honour bestowed upon them, and that the admiration she received was more owing to her father - Jia Pingwa, Vice Chairman of Chinese Writers Association, Chairman of Shanxi Writers Association.

Jia Qianqian is an Associate Professor at the Literature Department, North West University, who guides Masters students and she also serves as the Executive Deputy Curator of Jia Pingwa Literary Museum. In the poem written by Jia Qianqian there are several controversial sections, such as the use of indecent words like "shit" and "urine". The controversy about Jia Qianqian swept the Internet at once.

What were the poems Jia Qianqian wrote? Let's have a look at two of them: *Lang Lang* and *My Mother*.

Lang Lang: Qingqing shouted/my sister shat in the bed/as we ran away/Lang Lang was calm as a cucumber/clenching a piece of shit in hand/got off the bed just like the return of a king.

My Mother: She said: In the morning take them outside to play/one of them need to pee/s/he peed on the door of someone's office...

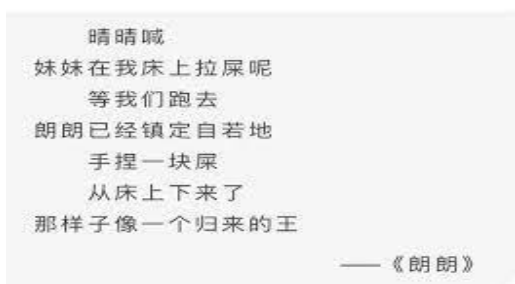


Image: Jia Qianqian's poem 'Lang Lang' (朗朗)

Source: adquan.com

“The world of poetry inside China has not been so lively for a long time.” While talking about Jia Qianqian's popularity, some commentators believed that, from “vernacular” to “nonsense” to “vulgarity”, the technical threshold of creativity in poetry seem to be stooping lower and lower. What is more embarrassing is that the style seems to have gone all the way down, to the extent that it is unbearable to look squarely at it.

The entry of “shit” and “urine” into poetry, which even led to a touch off commentary from Xinhua News Agency which said; A

few poems by a poetess invited criticism for embedding several Chinese characters with “尸 (*shi*, corpse) radical”¹ to describe “yellow and white things” in the poem. The critical opinion may not cover the whole story, and the controversial piece was perhaps written for fun. However, the basic principles of literary creation must still be followed - entertainment and innovation can be bold attempts; but just to become popular, poetry cannot offend elegance.



Image: Famous Chinese writer Jia Pingwa and daughter 'poet' Jia Qianqian

Source: daydaynews.cc

“Critical opinion may not cover the whole story and the controversial piece was perhaps written for fun”, this comment by Xinhua News Agency is exactly the reason why many people in literary circles are defending Jia Qianqian. So what is the quality of Jia Qianqian's poems? We may as well take a look at the views of literary world. In fact, Jia Qianqian has published several poetry anthologies in the recent years, and many people in the literary and

¹Translators note: The Chinese characters for both "shit" “屎” and "urine" “尿” carry 尸 (*shi*, corpse) radicle. The Xinhua commentary uses this indirect way of expression, so as to avoid use of the words "shit" “屎” and "urine" “尿”.

poetry circles have written promotional and introductory articles for her poetry anthologies, this gives us a glimpse of how her poems are evaluated in the industry.

Jia Pingwa once sent a message to his daughter: Be a good person first, then a poet.

Let's take a look at Jia Qianqian's father who is the Vice Chairman of the Chinese Writers Association, Jia Pingwa's evaluation of the poetess daughter. When his daughter's first collection of poetry was published Jia Pingwa wrote a long letter. In the letter, he expressed: "Qianqian is going to be a known poet with her first published collection of poems. However, due to other engagements I couldn't be there to congratulate her. So I wrote a few words. What I want to say is, now that a seedling has sprouted, it is bound to grow towards the wind; it will grow as tall as it can grow. Don't be too eager to head out. If the wheat is only half a foot high and it sets off that spike would only be as small as the head of a fly. Be a good person, live your life well, and only then you will be a poet."

It can be seen from Jia Pingwa's letter that although he is full of expectations for his daughter to "be a known poet", after going through the turmoil in literary world, he still

points out, "Be a good person, live your life well, and only then you will be a poet"

With the exception of Jia Pingwa, her father, most of the other figures in literary circles have expressed positive attitude towards Jia Qianqian's poems.

In January 2020, Jia Qianqian's collection of poems "The Inland Lake in the Coconut" was published. On March 4, **Guangming Daily** in its 14th edition published an article by Li Jingze, the Vice Chairman of the Chinese Writers Association titled, 'Using words to establish a connection between oneself and the world — Collection of poems-The Inland Lake in the Coconut.'



Image: Author Li Jingze strongly criticized Jia's 'pee' poetry
Source: dfwlshy.com

Li Jingze commented in the article: "Qianqian's words and sentences are good, I doubt, several times her poems are triggered and driven by a certain sentence, or since there is such a sentence, she was compelled

to write such a poem, or just because a flower bloomed and a bird sang, she has or lost her land.”

It can be seen that Jia Qianqian's poems have received appraisal of Li Jingze in terms of words and sentences. So is Jia Qianqian qualified as a poet?

Li Jingze wrote in the article: "Qianqian has obviously been fully prepared to become a poet. She is familiar with those foreign poets - the gods of modern poetry, and she is familiar with the tradition of Chinese classical poetry - in her tone she carries instinctive antiquity. At the same time, Qianqian is extremely familiar with the prevailing lyrical style and rhetorical tone of Chinese poetry. Sometimes I even feel that Qianqian harbours a kind of childlike pride to prove that style and tone are so easy, they are like a piece of cake for her."

The same is the case in *The Inland Lake in the Coconut*. Du Yanglin, a member of the Chinese Writers Association, published an article last year in October, in an online journal in Sichuan, to introduce Qianqian's work; 'Let Individual Experience Become the Home for Human Emotions - Commentary on Jia Qianqian's Poetry Collection *The Inland Lake in Coconut*'.

Du Yanglin believes: "A 'natural' poet must be unconstrained and roam freely in the world of poetry. In some sense, Jia Qianqian is a poetess who 'hides a wild horse in her heart'. Even in the poetry collection *The Inland Lake in the Coconut* one can witness several times that she is "picking the horse to enter the poetry".



Image: Contemporary female Chinese poets Jia Qianqian and Yu Xiuhua are turning upside down the world of poetry

Source: xw.qq.com

To describe Jia Qianqian with words like "poetess who 'hides a wild horse in her heart'" shows that Du Yanglin respects her quite a lot. The article also read: "Jia Qianqian's identity as a poet is 'amateur', and her main profession known to all is a professor at the Department of Literature. She has an exceptionally sharp perspective on teaching and educating people, which is usually hard to achieve. Spreading the poetic flavour available everywhere in life... Jia Qianqian is a poetess who retains her innocence. In her eyes, the world is very interesting. She seems to have a unique 'telescope', through its particular lens she can look past everything that could be

included in poetry which is unique and original in itself."

This commentary is actually worth pondering. It not only points out that Jia Qianqian's identity as a poet is as an "amateur", but also points out the special characteristics of her poems that, "everything can be put into poetry." Based on this inference, the Chinese character with "尸 (shi corpse) radical" depicting "yellow and white things", is also just an expression of the poet "retaining her innocence".

Let's take a look at how Jia Qianqian's colleagues at Northwestern University evaluate her poems.

Chen Xiaohui, Professor and doctoral supervisor of Northwest University published an article in "Literary Criticism" last year titled, 'Breakthrough and Return of the Era of Diversity and Confusion - Theory of Jia Qianqian's Poetry'. At the beginning of the article, he wrote: "Confucius once divided people into 'those who are born with knowledge' and 'those who attain knowledge by learning.' John Stewart Mill further divides poets into 'natural' poets and 'trained' poets. Perhaps Jia Qianqian belongs to the 'born with knowledge' category, and is destined to be a 'natural' poet. When she debuted, she was like a light lark, passionately and recklessly chanting

thoughts about nature and the human world with a tactful and resonant voice. She came out with three sets of poetry collections in succession; "The Hundredth Night" (2017), "Walking Sea" (2019), and "Inland Lake in Coconut" (2020), not only did they stand out in the Shaanxi literary world, which has always been known for novels, they received accolades across the country."



Image: Yu Xiuhua: a woman, a farmer and a poet. Despite suffering from cerebral palsy she has written over 2000 poems. She became famous overnight with her poem "Crossing half of China to sleep with you."

Source: en.hubei.gov.cn

Jia Qianqian: destined to be a 'natural' poet. One may say her colleague Chen Xiaohui's evaluation of the poet Jia Qianqian is not at all bad. He also mentioned in the article: "Looking at her creative trajectory, Qianqian has already completely transformed, and is moving towards the awareness of creating poetry."

There are even more fierce defenses put up by poetic critics. For example, Peng Min, the champion of the "Chinese Poetry Conference" and the Deputy Director of the editorial department of the "Poetry

Magazine" of Chinese Writers Association, in his We Chat official account, Peng Min Sensen, put out an article on February 3rd; 'Jia Pingwa's Daughter being trolled is trending: After all who is immoral?' in which he says, "The criticism and humiliation of Jia Qianqian is actually a most commonly seen 'magic' with 'limited view' and 'oversimplification'. It does not seem to distort anything, nor does it provide false information, nonetheless it clearly deceives the public and stigmatise a poet of standard level."

Peng Min cited Lu Xun and Mo Yan's poems as examples: "among those who create for long periods of time, is there anyone who would only produce fine work in their entire life and not write a few mediocre and awful poems, or create for fun?"

Jia Qianqian had once discussed about her poems: the language strives to be pure and beautiful.

It seems that, unlike online reviews which are of the opinion that use of words such as "shit" and "urine" is indecent in a poem, the literary circle still gives out a positive attitude towards Jia Qianqian's poems as a whole. However, this attitude has also been interpreted by some public opinion as a favour bestowed upon her for being "Jia

Pingwa's daughter." So how does Jia Qianqian herself look at it?

In fact, Jia Qianqian elaborated on these issues in details in an interview published on the We Chat account of the Shaanxi Youth Literature Association, "Green Literature", in April 2019. Jia Qianqian confessed: "My poems are relatively short in length, in its language I strive to be pure and beautiful, I seek to form my personal touch with eye-catching images, vivid metaphors and create poetic mood."



Image: Lu Xun (1881-1936)

Source: en.shisu.edu.com

Jia Qianqian said that some experts have opined, "Those sentences are the sentences of the people of her age, they are the sentences of this era." Of course, they are perhaps flattering words, but I will try to live up to it. There is no existence of the so-called "success model" that can be replicated. Every learner of poetry can establish their own creative characteristics only by positioning oneself. The momentum of writing only comes from nature and life itself.



Image: Mo Yan after winning Nobel Prize in Literature

Source: news.cgtn.com

"Art never comes out of thin air, and creativity is not in your everyday drawer." In Jia Qianqian's view, first, whether one can vividly use language is not the most important thing, what is most important is whether one takes the universal values of human civilization as one's spiritual support; second, don't let yourself hide behind the fence of knowledge and logic, and don't use language to sell logic and dogma; third, writing reflects the poet's emotion, personality, the ability to perceive and their intuition, writing must allow "feelings" to break out through language, so as to realise the author's own aesthetic appeal. Fourth, writing is not something that can be done without considering the circumstances. It must be pursued with a kind of openness and must carry a romantic mood which transcends culture. It should be able to raise daily experience to a metaphysical level.

Speaking of her series of work "Miss Z", Jia Qianqian said that these poems are a sort of poetic expressions on daily life. "I strive to simply make a brief and comprehensive

description of the personality, naturally revealing the glorious part of human nature, and also attempt to break through the limitations of language. In these poetic narratives, I wish to touch the truth of existence by creating a facsimile of the soul and mind, and thus also providing a possibility to form my personal textual style. Can it become a "quasi original creation"? My text will naturally present psychological, temperamental and cultural information, and strive to create a rich and complex symbol, thus reflecting the inheritance and choice of the soul. I think this way one can be clear and it's easy for people to resonate with it. At the same time it is light and pure realism, in fact, it is much easier this way to lead the readers to understand the essence of life and existence along with me. The "Miss Z" series is more and more enjoyable — I think. What I want is clarity, naturality, and meaning, and let the pursuit for metaphysics hide behind it. Undoubtedly my own shadow flashes inside it too, my own story, my own spiritual path. This is my unique writing practice, so it may hold a particular value."

In this 2019 interview, Jia Qianqian, while talking about managing time between writing and work, said that there is no conflict between the two.



Image: A flyer popped up on a blog making fun of the father-daughter duo “Han Hero with Real Han Daughter”

Source: youtube.com

She said that since she became a university teacher, she has been engrossed in teaching and literary research. From Xi'an University of Architecture and Technology to Northwest University, on the one hand she is engaged in teaching, and on the other hand she continues to engage in academic research in the field of literature. She strives to integrate into the creative consciousness of the new era with a sincere and hardworking attitude. In 2017, she led the selection and publication of "Selected prose collection by Jia Pingwa". In February 2018, she published a monograph in a national level journal "Literary Criticism".

"In this fickle and excitable era, I would like to submerge myself in research. Ever since I started serving as the Vice President of the Shaanxi Youth Literature Association, I work and provide suggestions; I am exploring all kinds of fresh practices. It is just for the association I work in an orderly and efficient way and do whatever I can

within my power. In just a few years after I became a student of the 32nd Advanced Research Class in Lu Xun Literature Institute, I created good work and won a few honours, which only means I took the first step to realise my dreams", said Jia Qianqian.

Public Opinion: Children belonging to literary family should not write on "Urine"

Although there is strong support from the literary world, public opinion however do not seem to buy it. The article "Poems of Jia Pingwa's Daughter, Who will pick up the Stinky Feet" in "China News Weekly" on February 2 mentioned, "in fact, the discussion among netizens is not on the poem itself, but more on Jia Qianqian's identity of being the "second generation of a literary figure".



Image: On May 28, well-known literary critic Li Xing said “attacks on Jia Qianqian are in fact directed at her father Jia Pingwa”

Source: yishuoyh.com

In 2017, on Father’s Day, We Chat public account of People’s Literature Publishing

House, "Contemporary", published an article; 'Jia Qianqian: My Father Jia Pingwa'. In the article Jia Qianqian wrote, "I have always admired my father ever since I was a child, except that I did not read his books and the articles he wrote." "If I am lucky enough to research on my father's books in the future, everyone must believe that it would be the fruits of our joint research".

However, in Jia Qianqian's recent academic achievements, there are many papers related to Jia Pingwa, such as 'The Speech and Meaning of Life—On Jia Pingwa's Calligraphic Creations', 'A Study on Jia Pingwa's Paintings from the Perspective of Literature', 'The Dual-variations of History and Literature - Jia Pingwa's Narrative Style', 'A Letter to my Father', 'Selected Essays of Jia Pingwa', 'Research on the Spiritual Relevance of Jia Pingwa's Writing and Literature' etc.

The above-mentioned article in China News Weekly commented that: from the "second generation of officials" to the "second generation of the rich" and then to the "second generation of the stars", the public has seen it all, but when the "second generation of literary figures" reaches heights, people would still hesitate for a moment, after all as compared to wealth, literary talent is obviously more a test of

ability and talent. As regards Jia Qianqian, the inherent concept is of the belief that, children from a scholarly family should not write such indecent poems on "Urine".

A well-known Chinese poet interviewed by a reporter from Xin'an Evening News is of the opinion that although her father Jia Pingwa has brought her a lot of "benefits", her literary work has been widely distributed and she also participated in the Youth Poetry Club, "however we do not deny that Jia Qianqian has something intrinsic in her, since all said and done, some poems, essays and prose written by her are actually good."

This poet opined, "For an author, especially young authors I personally think that they rely on support. One cannot be completely negated just based on one part or two or three poems. I think this may have an unfavourable impact on the growth of young authors and it may be detrimental to the world of Chinese poetry. We cannot stifle them. This is perhaps what we should all along persist on. We must be vigilant, and stay alert and maintain rational analysis towards a few "second generation of literary figures", poets who shot up to fame. Due to some issues in their practice of poetry or in their process of experiments with poetry, we should not beat them to death. I don't think that is fair. I feel as for Jia Qianqian's issue, it is my personal opinion that we cannot

totally repudiate her just because of a few poems, nor can we totally deny her poems just because she has her powerful father in the literary world, because she can't choose her own father. We must still base (our judgment) on her individual literary creations itself."

[Series editor: Hemant Adlakha]

The views expressed here are those of the original author and not necessarily of the translator or of the Institute of Chinese Studies

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INSTITUTE OF CHINESE STUDIES
B-371 (3rd floor), Chittaranjan Park,
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