CHAPTER FOUR

EXILE:
YANG LIAN, WANG JIAXIN AND BEI DAO

Exile and its manifestations in literature are of all times and places. Examples from Chinese literary history include the archetypal exile-cum-poet Qu Yuan, banished to the countryside of Chu in antiquity, and large-scale wartime migration from the mainland to Taiwan in the 1940s. For the People’s Republic of China, the government’s crackdown on the 1989 Protest Movement dramatically heightened the relevance of literatures of exile (流亡) and related categories such as banishment, diaspora, and wandering or drifting overseas through foreign lands (放逐、流放; 流散、离散; 漂流、漂泊; 海外、异乡), with a prominent role for poets.¹

When the tanks rolled into Tiananmen Square, Yang Lian (1955), one of the authors studied below, had been away from China for almost a year, on visits to Australia and New Zealand. Bei Dao (1949), who features most prominently in this chapter, was in Germany on what should have been a longish trip taking him to a conference in the United States followed by several months in Northwest Europe. Duoduo’s story is comparable to Yang’s and Bei Dao’s, although he left China after June Fourth, on one of the last planes out of Beijing before the airport was shut down under martial law. His departure on what turned out to be a momentous day in modern Chinese history had been arranged months earlier, following invitations to the Rotterdam Poetry International festival and a conference at the London School of Oriental and African Studies. He had planned to travel in Europe afterward, for a few months at the most. As Yang, Bei Dao and Duoduo joined in the international outrage over violence in the

¹ Images of Qu Yuan as embodying dissent and eccentricity and hence exile in the broadest sense, inclined if not bound to express itself in literature, remain influential to this day; Schneider 1980, Leys 1978: xix, Yeh 1991a: ch 2, 1996a and 2005. In addition to the material used in the present chapter, scholarship and other writing on exiled poets from the PRC includes Lee (Gregory) 1993b, Li Xia 1999, Hawkes 2007, Huang Yibing 2007a and 2007b, and Porter 2007.
Figure 4.1. Yang Lian, 2004 (photograph by Song Zuifa)