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## **From transparency to artificiality : modern chinese poetry from Taiwan after 1949**

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FROM TRANSPARENCY TO ARTIFICIALITY:  
MODERN CHINESE POETRY FROM TAIWAN  
AFTER 1949

Silvia Marijnissen



**FROM TRANSPARENCY TO ARTIFICIALITY:  
MODERN CHINESE POETRY FROM TAIWAN  
AFTER 1949**

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## Introduction

In the Western world, Chinese literature is commonly associated with literature written in the People's Republic of China (PRC), the big Chinese mainland, and only secondarily with literature written in Taiwan, the island where Chiang Kai-shek led his Nationalist party in 1949 to continue the Republic of China. Ever since, literature has been written in Taiwan using the Chinese language and authors have continued Chinese literary traditions in sometimes very different ways than in the PRC.

From a literary point of view, it is remarkable that Western critics have for many years tended to overlook Taiwan literature, as its authors enjoyed more freedom for literary experiments than mainland writers under Maoism, although censorship existed in Taiwan also. No doubt, their primary focus on China – not only in literature but also in other disciplines – is largely due to the difference in country size and the more spectacular political events in the PRC, such as the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution under Mao Zedong or the 'socialist market economy' reforms under Deng Xiaoping et al. That writers in Taiwan have meanwhile been creating their own literature, independently from events in China, was more or less ignored.

From the 1970s onward literature from Taiwan has slowly been getting somewhat more widespread in the West, through translations and scholarly work. The present study hopes to contribute to that in researching one specific development in modern Chinese poetry from Taiwan after 1949: that is, in the poetry written in the standard Chinese called *guoyu*, the language which was implemented by the Nationalist party in 1950. In the last two decades poetry in Taiwan has been written in other languages, i.e. Minnan and Hakka, which are the two languages that were spoken by the earlier ancestors who immigrated from the Southern Fujian and Guangdong provinces between the late sixteenth and nineteenth century. Of these two Minnan is the more common language, spoken by some seventy percent of the population. This thesis will deal with poetry written in *guoyu* only, because that poetry forms the lion's share; I will refer to it as *Taiwan poetry*, since Minnan is usually referred to as Taiwanese.



Although critics and scholars like Michelle Yeh, Dominic Cheung, Julia Lin, Ye Weilian (aka Yip Wai-lim), Lloyd Haft and Lisa Lai-ming Wong have written in English on modern poetry from Taiwan, the material is still rather sparse and mainly scattered over articles and introductions in anthologies, and fully fledged literary histories on poetry do not exist.<sup>1</sup> One center that deserves special mention is the Ruhr-Universität Bochum in Germany. In the early 1980s its Department of Chinese Language and Literature started to do research into literature from Taiwan, with an emphasis on prose, under the leadership of professor Helmut Martin, and after his death in 1999 the Research Unit on Taiwanese Culture and Literature was established.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, since 1996 the University of California at Santa Barbara has published the semi-annual *Taiwan Literature: English Translation Series*, edited by Kuo-ch'ing Tu and Robert Backus, which carries English translations of articles and literature by Taiwan writers and scholars, including poetry.<sup>3</sup>

In Taiwan itself Chinese language criticism and research on both its domestic prose and poetry are less scarce. According to Kuo-ch'ing Tu, in his foreword to the second issue of *Taiwan Literature*, this material can be divided into two main orientations:

1. Taiwan Literature is part of, or tributary to, Chinese literature, and the development of Taiwan literature is viewed within the frame of Chinese literature as a whole;
2. Taiwan literature has a distinct identity with its own historical origins and unique tradition, and is not tributary to Chinese literature.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Michelle Yeh has written by far the most; her introduction to *Frontier Taiwan: An Anthology of Modern Chinese Poetry* (2001) offers the most extensive overview of developments in modern Taiwan poetry, including the years before 1949. Other important studies or anthologies with introductions are: Julia Lin: *Essays on Contemporary Chinese poetry* (1985), Lisa Lai-ming Wong: *Framings of Cultural Identities: Modern Poetry in Post-Colonial Taiwan with Yang Mu as a Case Study* (1999), Ye Weilian: *Modern Chinese Poetry: Twenty Poets from the Republic of China 1955 1965* (1970), Dominic Cheung: *The Isle Full of Noises. Modern Chinese Poetry from Taiwan* (1987) and Lloyd Haft: *Zhou Mengdie's Poetry of Consciousness* (2006).

<sup>2</sup> [Http://www.ruhr-uni-bochum.de/slc/taiwan.html](http://www.ruhr-uni-bochum.de/slc/taiwan.html).

<sup>3</sup> More has been written on prose; some important publications are: Jeannette L. Faurot (1980), *Chinese Fiction from Taiwan – Critical Perspectives*; Sung-sheng Yvonne Chang (1993) *Modernism and the Nativist Resistance: Contemporary Chinese Fiction from Taiwan & Literary Culture in Taiwan* & (2004) *Literary Culture in Taiwan: Martial Law to Market Law*; David Der-wei Wang (2006), *Writing Taiwan : a New Literary History*.

<sup>4</sup> Kuo-ch'ing Tu 1997: xiii.

Personally I see a connection between modern Taiwan literature and classical Chinese literature, and I will sometimes point to such relations in the following, which would put me in the first category. I certainly do not want to limit myself to the second view, which seems to me more preoccupied with the political issue of national identity than with literature itself. Nevertheless, given Taiwan's growing isolation from China since 1895, I believe that the country and its literature have had their specific characteristics and developments ever since and to that extent deserve to be studied in themselves. This thesis will not go into the relation between the two contemporary poetries from Taiwan and China. Kuo-ch'ing Tu further writes that 'the study of Taiwan literature should have a vision beyond Taiwan and China'.<sup>5</sup> I agree that Taiwan literature should first and foremost be appreciated as modern literature per se, and not reduced to a regional product that happens to have poetic form.

Taiwan abounds in material on its literature, in the form of books, articles and short essays on all kinds of subjects, but few substantial literary histories in book form have been written, and even fewer are devoted to poetry only.<sup>6</sup> In an extensive article called 'The History of Taiwanese Literature: Towards Cultural-Political Identity. Views from Taiwan, China, Japan and the West' Helmut Martin has made an extensive inventory of these materials, providing helpful comment. He remarks that 'writers of literary histories are as a rule so-called *bentu*-critics' – *bentu*, 'native soil', referring to critics in Kuo-ch'ing Tu's second orientation – who stress unique Taiwanese identity, tend to concentrate on social aspects and avoid making judgments of literary works in terms of excellence.<sup>7</sup> According to Martin, these authors 'have worked in haste or under very unfavorable conditions'.<sup>8</sup> As a result the 'histories have remained superficially descriptive and uncritical, tending to be compilations of "second-hand knowledge" (Fokkema). The historians of HTL [Histories of Taiwan Literature] at times lack vision, they have failed to establish a convincing evaluative scheme as a basis for their judgment'.<sup>9</sup>

Martin utters severe criticism here, and his verdict raises the important question what a literary history should be. Its objective appears simple enough: to give

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<sup>5</sup> Kuo-ch'ing Tu 1997: xiv.

<sup>6</sup> I only know of one, *History of Taiwan Poetry* (台灣詩史) by Liao Xuelan, published in 1989.

<sup>7</sup> Helmut Martin 1996b: 39.

<sup>8</sup> Helmut Martin 1996b: 37.

<sup>9</sup> Helmut Martin 1996b: 43.

a survey of the developments in a particular literature, including supra-individual movements and literary debates as well as critical appraisal of the works of prominent individual authors. But all historians inevitably bring their own, particular background. Thus, Taiwan literary historians tend to stress the Taiwanese identity, those from the PRC are inclined to describe and judge Taiwan poetry from *their* point of view, and Martin's disapproval itself illustrates the subjectivity that is always involved. From his criticism of the social tendencies in the nativist histories it is clear that he refuses to judge literature on the basis of Taiwanese identity and social aspects only and rather wants to judge upon literary-aesthetic quality. Somewhat polemically one might say that this also reflects the difference in view between Chinese and Western traditions. Because of the emphasis of the Confucian Classics on language as 'an adequate manifestation of inner life and the social world around the writer', leading to a tight relationship between poetry and the educational system for government officials, classical Chinese poetry has always had a strong social and political commitment, and commentaries on it have reflected this.<sup>10</sup> Western poetry has contrarily always stressed the fact that a poem (derived from the greek *poiêma*) is something made, it is an object of the author that can be willfully controlled; and poems are viewed as objects unto themselves, regardless of their extrinsic value.<sup>11</sup>

Aesthetic quality is also my point of departure in this thesis, which is not a comprehensive historical survey but does have a historical approach. Social factors such as the writers' historical or biographical background are not my primary concern, but where necessary I will make excursions into social or other circumstances that have affected modern poetry. As other studies have paid adequate attention to external literary influences such as problems of identity and nationalism, politics, (post)-colonialism, market forces, gender studies and feminism and so on, I intend to let poetry as primarily the art of language form the center of this research, that is: attention to the literary qualities of the text is fundamental to my approach, especially in the second to fourth chapters. After all, what can be said about poetry if the works themselves are not thoroughly read, with close attention to individual words, syntax, order and structure of the poem? In a sense, my work

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<sup>10</sup> Stephen Owen 1992: 9.

<sup>11</sup> Stephen Owen 1992: 27.

can thus be called *close reading*, but I will keep my eyes open to anything coming from outside the text that may help toward a better-founded interpretation. Or one might simply call this a kind of *slow reading*, in Nietzsche's words, meaning 'to read slowly, deeply, looking cautiously before and aft, with reservations, with doors left open, with delicate eyes and fingers...' <sup>12</sup>

Another notion that underlies many of the existing articles, studies and anthologies published in Taiwan is that of the 'decade' or of the 'generation'; these terms are used so widely that they seem to have become the most logical, even objective terms, and few people seem to be aware of their implications. In her essay *Traditions of the New or: Must We Be Modern?* Susan Sontag problematizes the use of these time units, calling them more or less arbitrary. As she observes, in the past periodization used to be based on the ruler or ruling house of a country. Such a division, following the rise and fall of a ruler seems to be 'the least problematic way of denoting one's time', simply because a change of ruler or ruling house often has consequences for society at large, such as its jurisdiction, economy, language, and so on. <sup>13</sup> Histories in China also used to follow, until the fall of the last empire, the dynasties and their emperors, and so did literary history: we speak of Tang *shi*-poetry, of *ci*-poetry of the Song, of Ming-novels, of Taiwan literature under the Japanese occupation and so on. But Taiwan literature after 1949 is usually discussed in periods of decades. <sup>14</sup>

The extensive compilation *On the History of Modern Poetry from Taiwan: Records of the Symposium on the History of Modern Poetry from Taiwan* (台灣現代詩使論: 台灣現代詩史研討會實錄, 1996), edited by the Wenxun journal board and counting more than seven hundred pages, is a good example. The book has two parts, the first with nearly six hundred pages clearly outweighing the second with only a bit more than a hundred. The second part is structured on a more thematic basis, given by the topic of specific panels. <sup>15</sup> The first part is of interest

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<sup>12</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche 1887: 17.

<sup>13</sup> Susan Sontag 1990: 13

<sup>14</sup> An exception is for example Ye Shidao, *History of Taiwanese Literature* (台灣文學史綱, 1987), the first book of its kind, which divides Taiwan's literary history into the classical period (influenced by Chinese classics), the Japanese occupation period and the postwar period.

<sup>15</sup> These are: problems concerning historical material of the New Poetry; observing the history of the New Poetry and the writings of the history of the New Poetry; poetry societies and poetry journals; the nature and function of poetry anthologies; Taiwan, Hong Kong, the mainland and the

here, because it shows a periodization divided into the Japanese occupation era, which runs from 1895 to 1945, followed by the 1950s, the 1960s, the 1970s, the 1980s and the 1990s (leaving out the five years between 1945 and 1950!). A period characterized by its political ruler is thus presented on a par with rather short, equally divided periods that first of all have numerical value. Such a division can be explained by the desire to focus on more contemporary poetry especially and to make a practical division.

So the 1950s are often characterized by *anti-communist* (反共) poetry, to which the internationally oriented *modernist* or *surrealist* (現代主義 or 超現實主義) poetry of the 1960 was opposed; the 1970s again reacted to the 1960s and constitute the era of so-called *nativism* (鄉土文學), emphasizing national identity in clear, straightforward poems; and that national character is again gradually superseded in the 1980s when *pluralism* (多元主義) became the keyword. To this one can easily object that poetic developments do not, of course, restrict themselves to decades; and even if one can nicely indicate the heyday of a particular movement, there usually is a certain preliminary period, and after its blossoming the movement usually also keeps exerting influence. Besides, oppositional movements are not the only possible development; a movement can also be a reinforcement of a former movement, as for example in European literature naturalism can be seen as a continuation and intensification of realism (with attention for ordinary life and precise observation as a common feature).

Sontag's critique is more fundamental. She traces the origins of the use of the term 'decade' (in the West). In the 1960s it replaced the then more commonly used 'generation', which itself supplanted the 'century'—a term that was only used from the end of the eighteenth century onward. Modernization, with its advancing technological innovations and rapid changes, caused the need for an ever smaller time unit. Both the 'generation' and 'decade' concepts are thus typical of modernity, of modern consciousness, in which eclecticism and self-consciousness occupy a central place. Sontag sees a close relation between the notions of decade or generation and the question 'how people look upon themselves' in their actions and

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oversees areas: the spatial distribution of modern poetry written in Chinese; problems concerning future developments of the New Poetry.

how they witness their own modern life that is full of danger and change. According to Sontag the 'decade'

implies passivity. The suggestion is that one is formed by, or suffers from, what is going on, or rather, by what the consciousness industry marks as what is going on: trends, tendencies, fashions, illusions – in short: styles.[...] By speaking in decades about one's time, every positive meaning is removed from the notion of change. Change becomes arbitrary, like fashion.<sup>16</sup>

Classifications based on generations – arranging people and their work on the basis of their year of birth in a time span of some twenty years, which is somewhat problematic because there are no strict borderlines – have similar implications, according to Sontag. Like each decade, each generation is presupposed to have its own new movement. And like the decade, the generation implies avant-garde thinking: the new ones are perceived as wanting to oppose and distinguish themselves from the older ones, and preferably to outdo them. Yet, in contrast to the notion of decade, the generation concept implies *activity*, because identity is easily linked to a specific experience in which one has participated. In Taiwan, a generation division indeed has some logic to it, as the early 1970s see the first publications of poets who have no conscious memories of the Japanese occupation or of life in China.

Some anthologies have been based upon the generation idea: Lin Yaode and Jian Zhengzhen, for example, compiled the *Comprehensive Anthology of Taiwan Poets of the New Era* (台灣新時代詩人大系, 1990), and Bai Ling edited *Twenty Years of Taiwan Literature 1978-1998, 1: Twenty New Poets* (台灣文學二十年集 1978-1998 (一): 新詩二十家, 1998). While the two anthologies more or less seem to cover the same generation, their list of poets differs, not only because of different views on quality, but also because they have marked the generation differently. Thus, the first includes only poets born after 1949, excluding Li Minyong and Luo Qing, whose work is included in the second anthology.<sup>17</sup> Both anthologies also exclude poetry by prominent poets such as Shang Qin, Luo Fu or Yang Mu, who were already writing in the 1950s and 1960s and have continued to be of influ-

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<sup>16</sup> Susan Sontag 1990: 42.

<sup>17</sup> It is possible of course that these poets would also not have been included with an earlier time demarcation.

ence. This is all the more striking in the case of Bai Ling's anthology, because Luo Qing also published half of his poetic work (three volumes) before the period that Bai Ling specifies.<sup>18</sup> The *Comprehensive Anthology of Contemporary Chinese Literature in Taiwan, 1970-1989. Vol 1: Poetry* (中華現代文學大系[一]:詩卷), edited by Zhang Mo and others, published in 1989, differs in this respect. It also specifies a period but comprises all work that was published in that period, including older poets like Zhou Mengdie, Luo Men, Yang Lingye and others. Remarkably, Zhang Mo is himself one of the older generation of poets, and Bai Ling, Lin Yaode and Jian Zhengzhen belong to the younger one.

What the terms generation and decade, and also century, have in common, according to Sontag, is that they all initially expressed the idea of change as progress – which is something that is absent in the original division of periods according to ruler. After a while this implication of progress usually shifts somewhat into the background, but it is certainly present in Taiwan criticism. Ji Xian for example – the ‘pope’ of Taiwan poetry, so-called because of his immense contributions to the field in the 1950s and 1960s<sup>19</sup> – saw the developments in the 1950s and 1960s as a necessary stage in the transition from the early modern poetry of the 1920s and 1930s to the standard of international modern poetry.<sup>20</sup> Luo Qing wrote: ‘From the time that *New Youth* (新青年) started publishing until now [the 1970s], new literature has, through many trials and hardships, experienced half a century of training. In these fifty years *baihua* poetry has sprouted, taken root and made itself vigorous and has thus gradually prepared the basis for its bloom.’<sup>21</sup> And others have made similar remarks. In general, changes are frequently conceived of as improvement, sometimes treating the poetry written hitherto as a kind of lamentable mistake which was fortunately rectified. Such thinking frequently causes people to stick closely, and uncritically, to the newest trends in the country or in other, allegedly leading countries or cultural regions. The word ‘modern’, later superseded by ‘postmodern’ or ‘postcolonial’, then becomes a kind

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<sup>18</sup> Luo Qing's *Ways of Eating Watermelon* (吃西瓜的方法), probably Luo Qing's best known volume, dates from 1972. The other two, *The Gallant Knights of Cathay* (神洲豪俠傳) and *Catching Thieves* (捉賊集), are from 1975 and 1977.

<sup>19</sup> Julia Lin 1985: 12.

<sup>20</sup> Ji Xian 1958B: 4-11.

<sup>21</sup> Luo Qing 1976: 121.

of magic touchstone, to which everything and everyone is compared.<sup>22</sup> The decade anthologies – appearing as a future ‘guideline’ even long before the decades in question have passed – are excellent examples of this, like the numerous single-year anthologies which have appeared in the last decades.<sup>23</sup> These practices suggest that poets and critics are preoccupied with being new and progressive, which may be related to a longing for national and international recognition. With the exception of a few books and writers, Taiwan poetry never seems to have had a large reading public, not in its own country and abroad it is more or less non-existent.<sup>24</sup>

Some books abstain from such avant-garde thinking that emphasizes the latest and newest trends. For example, Zhang Mo’s and Zhang Hanliang’s *Anthology of Ten Major Contemporary Chinese Poets* (中國當代十大詩人選集, 1977) focuses on quality by representing only ten poets with their major work. Also Chi Pangyuan’s *An Anthology of Contemporary Chinese Literature: Poetry* (中國現代文學選集: 詩, 1973) seems more critical and balanced in its choice, as does Zhang Cuo’s *Isle Full of Noises* (千曲之島, 1987), which does show a slight preference for the younger generation, but without excluding the older one.<sup>25</sup> Yang Mu and Zheng Shusen on the other hand compiled a comprehensive anthology in 1989, *Anthology of Modern Chinese poetry* (現代中國詩選, Hong Fan, 1989) of almost a hundred poets. Their selection includes many mainland poets from before 1949, and for the first time also some poets from the mainland after 1949 are introduced, such as Duoduo and Bei Dao; they thus stress the historical continuity and unity between Taiwan and the mainland. Also quite refreshing is the *Tianxia Poetry Anthology 1923-1999* (天下詩選集1923-1999), edited by Ya Xian (together with

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<sup>22</sup> Another consequence of thinking in terms of decades, generations or centuries is to compare equal periods of different countries on rather thin grounds. Meng Fan, for example, analyzes, compares and defines the end of twentieth century Taiwan poetry with Europe’s fin de siècle poetry in the nineteenth century (Meng 1999).

<sup>23</sup> The *Poetry Anthology of the 1960s* (六十年代詩選) was published in 1961 and the *Poetry Anthology of the 1970s* (七十年代詩選) published in 1969 (both were edited by Zhang Mo and others). However, the *Poetry Anthology of the 1990s* (九十年代詩選) edited by Xin Yu, Bai Ling and Jiao Tong, was published in 2001; this book also does not seem intended as a ‘guideline’, with seventy-one poets it rather wants to present a bit of all.

<sup>24</sup> As far as international recognition is concerned, already in the 1960s the poets started translating Taiwan poetry: in 1961 Yu Guangzhong published the first English translation (*New Chinese Poetry*); followed in 1962 in French by Patricia Guillermaz and again an English one in the American magazine *Trace* by Ye Weilian 1964 (Cf. Zhang Mo 1992).

<sup>25</sup> Both also have an English counterpart, published 1975 and 1986 respectively.



Zhang Mo and Xiao Xiao), which is less an introduction to the best poets from Taiwan but instead an introduction to the main subject matter and is subsequently arranged by themes.

In comparison to most Taiwan material the Western language material (mainly in English) hardly ever deals with the notions of decade or generation. The fifty poets of the principal anthology *Frontier Taiwan: An Anthology of Modern Chinese Poetry*, compiled by Michelle Yeh (aka Xi Mi) and N.G.D. Malmqvist (2001), represent Taiwan's most important poets who published in the twentieth century, including those under the Japanese occupation; all are arranged by birth date. Most other selections have a similar approach, but many start after 1949.<sup>26</sup> Studies on Taiwan poetry, in books and articles, are usually devoted to one poet only or to a specific topic, such as Lloyd Haft's *Zhou Mengdie's Poetry of Consciousness*, Lisa Lai-ming Wong's *Framings of Cultural Identities: Modern Poetry in Post-Colonial Taiwan with Yang Mu as a Case Study*, or Michelle Yeh's articles on Shang Qin, Xia Yu, prose poetry.<sup>27</sup>

With such thoughts in mind about the decade and generation concepts, I decided to take a more thematic approach in my research on Taiwan poetry in the Republican era. The first chapter, 'Oppositions: Poetical Debates from the 1950s to the 1980s' deals with the question how, why and for whom poetry should be written according to poets, critics and readers in Taiwan. As Michelle Yeh writes in *Frontier Taiwan*, the lack of identity for modern Chinese poetry, as distinct from classical poetry, is a problem it has had to cope with ever since the Literary Revolution of 1917.<sup>28</sup> Modern poets 'seek to define its essence and art [...], its readership [...], and its purpose [...] from many new angles.'<sup>29</sup> While the same is probably true for many modern poets from all over the world, the question may

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<sup>26</sup>Cf. Yip Wai-lim's *Modern Chinese Poetry: Twenty Poets from the Republic of Taiwan, 1955-1965* (University of Iowa, 1970), Angela Jung-Palandri and Robert Bertholf's *Modern Verse from Taiwan* (University of California Press, 1972), Nancy Ing's *Summer Glory: A collection of Contemporary Chinese Poetry* (Chinese Materials Center, 1982). *Phönixbaum: Moderne taiwanesische Lyric* (by Tienchi Martin-Liao and Ricarda Daberkow, Projekt Verlag, 2000). *Le ciel en fuite : Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie chinoise* (by Chantal Chen-Andro et Martine Vallette-Hémery, Circé, 2004). In 2005 a bilingual edition was *Sailing to Formosa: A Poetic Companion to Taiwan* (University of Washington Press, 2005), edited by Michelle Yeh, N.G.D. Malmqvist and Xu Huizhi, which is based on themes.

<sup>27</sup> "Variant Keys" and "Omni Vision": A Study of Shang Qin', 'The Feminist Poetic of Xia Yu', 'From Surrealism to Nature Poetics: A Study of Prose Poetry from Taiwan.'. See also note 1.

<sup>28</sup> Michelle Yeh 2001: 5.

<sup>29</sup> Michelle Yeh 2001: 5.

have been of more importance to Chinese and Taiwanese poets, because of the enormous transition that Chinese poets had made from classical to modern poetry. The debates in Taiwan show the diverse stands that poets and critics have taken in the question of the position and function of poetry.

The first chapter shows how views on poetry have oscillated between several oppositions from the 1950s to the 1980s, summed up by Yeh as: ‘modernity and tradition, cosmopolitanism and nativism, and the individual and the collective’.<sup>30</sup> These diverse oppositions are all strongly interrelated and even though they may be, as Yeh points out, ‘false dichotomies’, they ‘underscore many debates’ and ‘provide an apt analytical framework’.<sup>31</sup> The relation of poetry to reality on the one hand and to imagination and aesthetics on the other, as well as the ‘identity’ of poetry and the lack of readers’ interest in modern poetry are important issues in this. Poetry in Taiwan moves between dichotomies, sometimes inclining more to one side and subsequently to the other, but as we will see both sides of the oppositions are constantly present.

In the following three chapters I look more closely at poetry itself, and especially at what has been called the modernist trend in poetry (the more experimental side), to see how poetry has actually been written. The general idea underlying the larger part of these chapters is a shift from what I call *transparency to artificiality*, the last being represented by (parts of) the work of poets such as Luo Qing, Chen Li, Xia Yu, Lin Yaode, Luo Zhicheng, Jiao Tong, Chen Kehua, or Hong Hong, poets that have mostly emerged in the 1980s or later. Chapters two to four, with the common subtitle ‘The Poem as Construct’, focus on that shift in the poetry of the last two to three decades of the twentieth century, with regard to language and form – the two important, determining poetic features of poetry that changed dramatically in the twentieth century when classical poetry was gradually replaced by modern poetry. First, I will elaborate on how the approach to language, basically a prose style, shifted from a focus on imagery to a focus on the substance of the language itself. In chapter three the serial form as a new structuring form will be studied. Chapter four deals with other types of form that can be seen in several kinds of ‘rewriting’. All of these explicitly mark the artificiality of the poems.

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<sup>30</sup> Michelle Yeh 2001: 5.

<sup>31</sup> Michelle Yeh 2001: 5-6.

I believe the notion of artificiality that is central to chapters two to four represents a major shift across the past several decades of modern Chinese poetry from Taiwan: this poetry no longer revolves around ‘meaning’ and ‘truth’, and the act of *making* poetry and the materiality of the language gain the upper hand. As such this poetry clearly ties in with larger literary contexts than the Taiwanese history and reality in which it was written.

So as not to let the poetry itself out of sight in chapter one, which deals more with poetical debate than with actual poetry, I start each section with a poem. These poems illustrate my argument in that specific section, but they are not necessarily representative of the whole oeuvre of the poet.

An index of the characters for Chinese names (including birth years) can be found at the back, as well as a list of the originals of all poems quoted (in order of occurrence).

The Chinese characters of titles and significant terms are always given at first mention, except for titles whose first mention occurs in the notes. The same goes for publication dates of articles and books, and composition dates of individual poems (if mentioned by the author).

Unless otherwise indicated, translations are mine.

## Chapter 1

### Oppositions:

### Poetical Debates from the 1950s to the 1980s

#### CHINA AND JAPAN: TAIWAN BEFORE 1949

##### MIXED EMOTIONS, II

The gods carved out our world from shapeless chaos  
And made our great globe rotate in a circle,  
But not even Lishou, who invented our numbers,  
Could calculate how many aeons have passed since that time.  
Two sage-kings of antiquity created our writing,  
Five thousand years before I came into this world,  
But when men of later centuries examine my works,  
They will think *I* was born in remotest antiquity!

Foolish Chinese scholars all worship the ancients  
And spend their lives studying stacks of mouldy paper.  
Expressions not found in the Confucian classics  
Are too risqué for them to use in their poems.  
Rubbish that the ancients dumped in a trashbin,  
Makes the mouths of these scholars drool with saliva.  
By instinct they plagiarize and pilfer the ancients,  
And accuse original authors of heinous crimes.  
All men were created from the same yellow earth,  
So why are *we* ignorant, and the ancients so wise?  
With every moment the present becomes past,  
Then where, after all, does antiquity begin?

I open my glass window to let in more light  
And burn sticks of incense in my tall censer.  
On my left side I set out an inkstone from Duanxi;  
On my right is displayed Tang-dynasty paper.  
I intend to write in my very own language  
and refuse to be limited by ancient fashions.  
Even if I use the current slang of our age  
To compose the poems I intend to publish,  
People who live five thousand years from now  
Will be utterly astounded by their hoary antiquity!

– By Huang Zunxian, translation by J.D. Schmidt et al.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> J.D. Schmidt et al. (1994: 224-5).

Starting at the end of the nineteenth century, society in the Chinese mainland gradually became the scene of radical changes: China's development and position in the world, that is, the dominance of China by foreign powers, i.e. England, America, France, Germany and Japan, led to a massive dissatisfaction among the people with the country's age-old tradition. Many were anxious for reform and frequently looked to the West and Japan for new ideas in all possible fields, including Western literature, leading to what is called the Literary Revolution.<sup>33</sup>

The Literary Revolution is usually tied to the year 1917, when the first articles to promote the creation of New Literature (新文學) and New Poetry (新詩) written by Hu Shi (1891-1962), the 'father of New Poetry', and Chen Duxiu were published in the journal *New Youth* (新青年). Its implications can be said to have been two-fold: linguistic and formal. The first meant the acquisition of or habituation to the new written language; people had to learn to write the vernacular, *baihua* (白話) – something not to be underestimated, as the highly valued classical language, *wenyan* (文言), had been used for ages in both official documents and literature. The late Qing poet Huang Zunxian (1848-1905) expressed himself on the topic in a series of poems called 'Mixed Emotions' (雜感).<sup>34</sup> Huang here makes a case for writing in the vernacular, and during the Literary Revolution his line 'I intend to write in my very own language', literally 'my hand writes my mouth' (我手寫我口), became the 'guideline' for writing poetry in the vernacular. Yet, in practice it was not that simple to switch one's written language, especially in poetry, as is demonstrated for example by the fact that long after 1917, some people in Taiwan, where

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<sup>33</sup> The Literary Revolution has to be viewed within this turbulent era (from the end of the nineteenth century onward) and the May Fourth Movement, so called after a large demonstration that broke out on May 4, 1919 in Beijing. Students and pupils then started protesting the concessions to the foreign powers, and to Japan in particular, which China had been forced to accept at the peace negotiations in Versailles. The demonstrations quickly swept through the country and the movement had an enormous impact. As my main concern is the research of poetry from Taiwan after 1949, I here only give a brief summary of the period. For more information on the May Fourth Movement in general see for example *The Chinese Enlightenment: Intellectuals and the Legacy of the May Fourth Movement of 1919* by Vera Schwarcz (1986); for more specific information on literary developments: Bonnie S. McDougall's *The Introduction of Western Literary Theories into Modern China, 1919-1925* (1971), Marián Gálik's *The Genesis of Modern Chinese Literary Criticism (1917-1930)* (1980), *A Selective Guide to Chinese Literature, 1900-1949, vol. 3: The Poem* edited by Lloyd Haft (1989). Concerning the New Poetry from 1919 to 1949, one can consult for example: Julia Lin, *Modern Chinese Poetry: An Introduction* (1972); Kai-yu Hsu, *Twentieth Century Chinese Poetry – An Anthology* (1963); Michelle Yeh, *Modern Chinese Poetry – Theory and Practice since 1917* (1991); Michel Hockx, *A Snowy Morning: Eight Chinese Poets on the Road to Modernity* (1994); Lloyd Haft, *Pien Chih-lin: A Study in Modern Chinese Poetry* (1983).

<sup>34</sup> This title could also be translated as 'Random Thoughts'.

similar discussions were held, still sometimes expressed their doubts about poetry written in the vernacular – even as late as the 1970s.<sup>35</sup> Besides, even Huang's own poem is a case in point, as its traditional five-syllable lines are still far from twentieth century *baihua*.

The second implication of the Literary Revolution refers to the drastic changes in poetic forms and structures, as poets were searching for new ways to express themselves. This was intricately related to the writing in the vernacular, for it was the inevitable consequence of using a different language; for example, *baihua* is largely polysyllabic and *wenyan* largely monosyllabic. But the advocates of New Poetry also utterly opposed to the classical forms, because their prescriptions prevented a poet, according to them, from freely expressing his personal feelings and thoughts. While classical poetry is said to be represented by the well-known phrase *shi yan zhi* 詩言志, translated by Stephen Owen as 'the poem articulates what is on the mind intently', in the mind of the modern poets the prescriptions of classical forms forced a writer to sacrifice everything in order to achieve rhetorical perfection, as can be illustrated by a notorious anecdote in Zhou Zuoren's memoirs.<sup>36</sup> It tells that he overheard how his brother Lu Xun's lessons in parallelism obliged him to write 'green grass' (綠草) instead of 'bluish parasol tree' (青桐) – the first conforming to the rhetorical principles, the second to the reality in front of his eyes. Needless to say, the reformers preferred the last, and refused to sacrifice 'reality' and 'truth' to rhetoric. Form was no longer considered principal and Hu Shi called for a 'great liberalization of poetic form' (詩體大解放). The so-called 'open form' made its advent, and those who were looking for new ways of writing let themselves to a considerable extent be inspired by Western poetics. As language and form are two essential factors that distinguish the New Poetry from the old, they will be the focus of the next chapters.

The 1920s through the 1930s saw the rise of many new poets. They had often been abroad for a while and started experimenting with new ideas and new techniques in language and form. Writers such as Li Jinfa (1900-1976), Dai Wangshu (1905-1950), Mu Mutian (1900-1971) and Wang Duqing (1898-1940), for example, took to French symbolists such as Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Rimbaud or Verlaine

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<sup>35</sup> See also chapter two.

<sup>36</sup> Stephen Owen 1992: 27.

and are now even referred to as Chinese symbolists. During some years the Western concept of ‘art for art’s sake’ and a strong emphasis on individual expression was in vogue, whereas classical literature had rather centered on the relation between the *I* and society. Such individualism faded in the 1930s, with the ongoing struggle between the Communists and the Nationalists and the war with Japan at hand. The view that literature has to serve society found more and more support, giving rise to such poetry as that of the later Guo Moruo (1892-1978), Ai Qing (1910-1996) and Tian Jian (1916-1985), which was dedicated to the revolutionary cause. After 1949 this trend was continued in communist China: under the supervision of Mao the published literature was until the end of the 1970s mostly socialist-realist and politically-engaged literature, yet an important underground scene existed as well.<sup>37</sup>

The situation in Taiwan before 1949 was different, due to the Japanese occupation (1895-1945), but there are some parallels. Literature was also reassessed in Taiwan, but new trends were introduced by China on the one hand and Japan on the other. Taiwan’s intellectuals until the mid 1930s had contact with mainland China, where some went to study, and they were acquainted with the course of literary events and with the writing of New Poetry on the mainland. Zhang Wojun (1902-1955), who had studied in Beijing, introduced literary discussions and works from the May Fourth Movement; and Yang Yunping translated poetry of Rabindranath Tagore, whose work was much favored in the mainland and in Japan. On the other hand Japanese culture was slowly pervading Taiwan, whether one liked it or not, and people could also broaden their view through Japan, which was at the time in many respects more advanced than China and had already brought forth many translations of Western books, including literature. Through these the members of the poetry society with the French name *Le Moulin* (風車) for example – with Yang Chichang as a key figure – became intrigued by modern Western poetic movements, especially French surrealism and symbolism.

In Taiwan also the writing of New Literature and New Poetry was debated, but the issue of which language to write was more complex. The oppressor favored poetry in Japanese, which was the only language schoolchildren learned to write,

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<sup>37</sup> Maghiel van Crevel 1996: chapter two.

or in classical Chinese, which was considered very prestigious in Japan. Many poets who had started out in the old Chinese tradition continued in that way; in 1935 there were at least 184 poetry societies, whose members nearly all wrote in the classical style.<sup>38</sup> Papers and journals often wrote classical Chinese as well, or a mixture of *baihua* and *wenyan*; the *Central Daily* (中央日報), for example, was still writing the old language in 1938.<sup>39</sup> But other people, following the May Fourth movement on the mainland, like Zhang Wojun, Shi Wenqi or Yang Yunping, had been writing in *baihua*. In 1923 a vernacular movement was initiated by Huang Chengcong and Huang Chaoqin, including literary journals and newspapers in *baihua*, such as *Literature and Art* (文藝) and the *Taiwanese People's Journal* (台灣民報), in which Zhang Wojun introduced Hu Shi's ideas.<sup>40</sup> Publications in Taiwanese, i.e. the Minnan dialect, appeared also: between 1931 and 1935 books of poetry appeared by Xu Yushu, Yang Hua, Su Weixiong, Yang Shouyu and Yang Shaomin.<sup>41</sup> These last publications might be a direct result of a debate that was held on the subject in 1931: does writing the vernacular mean writing mainland *baihua* or the Taiwanese Minnan? Should *Taiwanese* not be the new written language as writing the vernacular means writing the language you speak?

First, in august 1930, Huang Shihui had published an article in *Five Men's Review* (五人報), 'Why Not Promote Native Literature' (怎不提唱鄉土文學), in which he advocated 'writing literature (文), poetry, novels and ballads in Taiwanese to depict Taiwanese things.'<sup>42</sup> When Guo Qiusheng published a second article on the topic in *Taiwan News* (台灣新聞) in July 1931, concurring with Huang Shihui's point of view, a debate followed between those advocating colloquial Taiwanese and those advocating colloquial Chinese, which lasted almost a year. The

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<sup>38</sup> Eduard Broeks 1985: 5.

<sup>39</sup> Xia Ji'an 1957: 9.

<sup>40</sup> Michelle Yeh 2001: 13-4.

<sup>41</sup> Yang Ziqiao 1996: 79-90.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Yang Ziqiao 1996: 79-80. Earlier, three articles had been published in the *Taiwan People's Journal* concerning the origin, use and preservation of the Taiwanese language in general: in October 1924 Lian Wenqing wrote 'The Social Nature of Language' (言語之社會的性質) and 'The Future Taiwanese language' (將來的台灣語); and in October 1929 Lian Yatang, who for years had made a study of Taiwanese, wrote 'The Responsibility of Organizing Taiwanese' (台語整理之責任). Both of these authors were however not directly concerned with literature – perhaps the articles had best be seen as an incitement to resist Japan, as Yang Ziqiao suggests – and their call to accept Taiwanese as the one and only language of the people from Taiwan did not draw immediate attention.



pro-Taiwanese simply felt that ‘since literature wants to represent the people that live on this plot of soil, it surely follows that it would be done in Taiwanese, uniting what the mouth speaks with what the pen writes.’<sup>43</sup> The adversaries, on the other hand, held the opinion that this would cause a chaos since several dialects were spoken in Taiwan; there was no standard Minnan and Hakka was spoken as well. They identified with Zhang Wojun’s reasoning to ‘replace *wenyan* literature with *baihua* literature, and to adapt Taiwanese and integrate it into Chinese’.<sup>44</sup> An additional problem in this may have been that many Taiwanese did not feel related to contemporary mainland China, which had been ruled by the Manchurian Qing dynasty from 1644 to 1911; they felt (and many still do) that their collective cultural identity was given by the Ming (1368-1644), the dynasty under which their ancestors had in the seventeenth century left the mainland for Taiwan.<sup>45</sup> Writer Wu Zhuoliu confirms this view in his *Fig Tree* (無花果): ‘The China of the Manchus was not their motherland. They did not recognize Manchu authority and rose up against them in endless rebellion, earning a reputation as ungovernable savages. Their “motherland” was the China of the Ming – a country of Chinese like themselves.’<sup>46</sup>

This controversy about which vernacular to use marks the first debate on Taiwanese identity, and Huang Shihui’s article is nowadays regarded as the beginning of the first nativist Movement (1930-1932) in Taiwan literature. The debate was partly a reaction to Japanese colonization: promoting Taiwanese was a manifestation of Taiwanese identity and showed resistance to the Japanese colonizers – as was true for the advocates of the Chinese vernacular and for the many poetry societies writing in classical Chinese. Both vernacular poetries also had strong social inclinations and were mainly realistic.<sup>47</sup> The call for poetry in Taiwanese was soon accompanied by a call for a literature that engaged with the daily life of the Taiwanese people; the poetry written in *baihua* was also firmly rooted in social circumstances and political events, but it was not restricted to the situation in Taiwan. Zhang Wojun’s elegy, for example, written in honor of Sun Yatsen at

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<sup>43</sup> Lin Ruiming 1993: 85.

<sup>44</sup> Yang Ziqiao 1996: 81. He mentions Liao Hanchen, Lin Kefu, Zhu Dianren as adversaries.

<sup>45</sup> Ming loyalist Zheng Chenggong (Koxinga) and his 25,000 men conquered the island from the Dutch and wanted to continue their resistance to the Qing dynasty from there. Another wave of immigrants in the seventeenth century was due to enormous food shortages in Fujian province.

<sup>46</sup> Wu Zhuoliu 2002: 3.

<sup>47</sup> Chen Ming-tai 1995: 94.

Sun's death in 1925, recounts the sadness felt at this loss:

Oh! Once the great star has fallen,  
The East Asian universe suddenly darkens;  
Our most respected great man,  
Did you forever leave us on March 12, at 9:30 in the morning?  
Forty million citizens are wearing sad faces because of your death;  
When the news came to this island,  
Everyone was desperate and full of sorrow, as if each had lost his own soul;  
Looking West, to the mainland,  
They shed tears.  
[...]

– Translation by Dominic Cheung<sup>48</sup>

Such overt lines can be found in both vernacular groups, an indication that their views on poetry itself perhaps did not differ all that much: poetry was for both a means of expressing, more or less directly, emotions and thoughts concerning public life – simultaneously showing impeccable morality. Many poems assume a kind of social responsibility, as if in an attempt to show people how to feel or behave. Such a clearly engaged attitude toward poetry is something that recurs regularly after 1949, as we will see, and may perhaps be retraced to the classical poetry written by the traditional Confucianist scholar-official who had clear social responsibilities and duties towards the emperor, his parents, the community and so on. An official had to be a competent poet and much classical poetry had a moral, educational or political function; to write poetry purely for what might in modern discourse count as its intrinsic literary qualities was not very common. Yet, it remains difficult to draw such conclusions, as on the one hand, socially engaged literature is a thing of all times and places, and on the other hand, classical Chinese poetry surely cannot be reduced to the Confucian line only.<sup>49</sup>

Just as mainland China in the 1920s and 1930s had poets like Wen Yiduo, Xu Zhimo or Dai Wangshu who refrained from such realistic writing with social or political commitments, Taiwan also had poets who acted similarly: the work of the members of Le Moulin, a poetry society founded by four Taiwanese and three Japanese poets, does not show such an overtly engaged character.<sup>50</sup> But their so-

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<sup>48</sup> Original Zhang Cuo 1987: 3; translation Dominic Cheung 1987: 2.

<sup>49</sup> Taoist and Buddhist poets rather seek liberation from those social responsibilities.

<sup>50</sup> Ch'en Ming-tai 1995: 95.

cial-realist contemporaries called their poetry ‘decadent and perverse’.<sup>51</sup> Nowadays their most well-known poet is Yang Chichang, who studied five years in Japan and wrote his poetry in Japanese. Others were Lin Yongxiu, and Weng Nao. They published their poetry in the journal *Le Moulin*, which was bilingual, in Chinese and in Japanese – as if they refused to interfere with politics, both in their poetic matter and in language. In interviews in the 1980s, Yang mentions however that the reality of the Japanese occupation made him flee into the world of imagination, that political reasons made him turn to surrealism, as he figured that ‘only a literature for literature’s sake could evade the diabolic clutches of the Japanese police’ and ‘there are many techniques and methods of literary creation, but realism was sure to invite a cruel incarceration of letters by the Japanese.’<sup>52</sup>

It goes beyond the scope of this thesis to go into detail on this and the many other points of interest of Taiwan poetry during the Japanese occupation. For that I refer to the publications that have appeared on the topic since the end of the 1970s.<sup>53</sup> Here it suffices to observe that all writing in Taiwanese and *baihua* came abruptly to a standstill in 1937 when the Second World War began and Japanese became the only language allowed. Some poets then stopped writing, some continued during the war without publishing, and others such as Wu Yongfu, Zhang Dongfang, Long Yingzong, Wu Yingtao and Lin Hengtai continued their work in the Japanese language. After the war (15 August 1945) years of chaos followed, and things became even more complicated when the new Guomindang Government on 8 August 1950 officially prohibited the use of Japanese, destroying all books and journals in that language, and implemented the Chinese called *guoyu*, based on northern Chinese – a language that many Taiwanese had never learned. The debate on which language to use in literature was thus suddenly ‘settled’ quite unexpectedly, silencing many Taiwanese who had been writing in Japanese or in Taiwanese.

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<sup>51</sup> Joyce C.H. Liu 2006: 96.

<sup>52</sup> Ch’en Ming-tai 1995: 100.

<sup>53</sup> For example: Liang Jingfeng, *Selected Historical Archives: New Taiwanese Literature Under Japanese Occupation*, 4: *poetry* (文獻資料選集: 日據下台灣新文學, 4: 詩選集), general editor Li Nanheng, Taipei: Mingtan Publishing, 1979; Chen Shaoting, *A Brief History of the New Literature Movement in Taiwan* (台灣新文學運動簡史), Taipei: Lianjing Publishing, 1977.

## NOSTALGIA: POETRY OR POLITICS?

### AN ACACIA LEAF

This is the most beautiful leaf in the world,  
the most precious, the most valuable,  
still also the most distressing, the most heartbreaking:  
a grayish yellow acacia leaf, delicate and dry.

Was it from south or north of the Yangtze,  
from which city, which garden was it taken?  
It was pressed into an old book of poetry  
and does not show the slightest damage after all those years.

The acacia leaf floating down like the wings of a cicada  
turns out to hold some soil of my homeland.  
O homeland, what year, what month, what day  
can you let me return to your bosom again  
to enjoy the world's happiest season  
permeated with a faint fragrance of blooming acacias?

– Ji Xian<sup>54</sup>

In 1954 Ji Xian, Taiwan's so-called 'pope' of modern poetry, wrote the above lyric 'An Acacia Leaf' (一片槐樹葉). At that time exile and longing for the homeland were quite common themes.<sup>55</sup> Several years had passed since the Nationalists withdrew from mainland China to Taiwan; the Guomindang government in Taiwan had more and more tightened its grip, and it had been a hard time for both the original Taiwan population and the refugees. The former, by far outnumbering the latter, were suddenly, after fifty years of Japanese colonization, confronted with a completely different government and policy, in which they were quickly disillusioned because of many injustices. And the stream of immigrants who arrived on the island in 1949 and had spent a large part of their lives on the mainland suddenly found themselves alone in a strange country; at the time of the 'great crossing' they frequently had had to leave wife, children and other relatives behind, and all contact with the mainland (including family) was prohibited. These early days were quite dramatic, with a growing gap between the two 'communities': high inflation, shortages of daily necessities, unequal treatment and unjust

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<sup>54</sup> Ji Xian, in Chi Pang-yuan 1983: 23.

<sup>55</sup> See for example Sung-sheng Yvonne Chang 2004; Tienchi Martin-Iiao et al. 2000: 384; Chi Pang-yuan 1985: 47.

appropriation of the personal property of the original Taiwanese by the undisciplined mainland troops and officials, unchecked profiteering and so on angered Taiwan's natives. The tension finally resulted in the February 28 Incident in 1947. The immediate cause was the arrest in Taipei of an elderly woman for selling untaxed cigarettes and the death of a bystander who was shot in the commotion. Severe riots quickly spread across the island between the original Taiwanese and the mainlanders, in which many people were killed. The governor of the day responded with the arrest and execution of thousands of people. In 1947 martial law was imposed – it would only be lifted in 1987 and strong oppression remained a fact for some twenty years, making the 1950s and 1960s known as the period of 'White Terror'.

During those years the government officially propagated the view that the Nationalists would soon re-conquer the mainland. As novelist Bai Xianyong writes, the slogan 'Fight Communism, recover our land' (反共復國) was seen 'anywhere, from the railway station to the labels on rice wine bottles, one can say there was no place where it was not.'<sup>56</sup> That practice aroused on the one hand a feeling of transience among the mainlanders in Taiwan and on the other hand it alienated the native Taiwanese population that had never visited China. But as years went by and the Nationalists' temporary stay became permanent, the *two shores* (兩岸) became a fact of life, making it an important issue to cope with. Exile, nostalgia, the homeland and separation from beloved ones became salient themes in the 1950s, when, due to government policy and the language problem, most of the more prominent poets were originally from mainland China, such as Yang Lingye, Ji Xian, Luo Men, Rongzi, Zhou Mengdie, Zheng Chouyu, Guan Guan, Luo Fu, Shang Qin, Ya Xian, Yu Guangzhong (aka Yü Kwang-chung) and so on.

A Western reader nowadays may find Ji Xian's 'An Acacia Leaf' a bit banal, as the yearning for one's native land is described in a rather conventional way: homeland China is referred to by the country's largest river, the Yangtze; the lyrical *I* wants to return to the bosom of China, which is a cliché comparison of the native land with one's mother; and the precious, delicate leaf, which arouses the emotion, is a relic from the mainland and even has some native soil on it. The aca-

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<sup>56</sup> Bai Xianyong 1995: 108.

cia tree does, however, provide an extra dimension, because the Chinese word for ‘acacia’, *huai* 槐, sounds similar to that for ‘to long for’ or ‘to cherish’ 懷. Many others poets are like Ji Xian very overt in their nostalgia for China, like Lin Huanzhang in ‘China, China’ (中國. 中國<sup>57</sup>; others write in a more detached way although they mention China explicitly, for instance Shang Qin in his ‘Native place’ (籍貫, 1957).<sup>58</sup> Yet others follow the same pattern as Ji Xian’s, in having an object, a sound, a smell remind the lyrical *I* of one’s home region. Xia Jing’s ‘Drip from the Eaves’ (簷滴) for example:

There is a language  
superior to local accent,  
that makes you cry when you hear it.  
To leave this world  
and return to that other.

Home is a –  
place that makes  
your nose weepy  
when you hear a drip from the eaves.<sup>59</sup>

Xia Jing’s poem is also a more general expression of nostalgia for the homeland, as is Yang Huan’s ‘Home Thoughts’ (鄉愁); the object of their nostalgia is not made specific.<sup>60</sup> This is also the case for Zheng Chouyu’s ‘Letter From Outside the Mountains’ (山外書, 1952), which provides a perspective of resignation:

You need not worry because of me,  
I am in the mountains

The clouds coming from the sea  
say that the silence of the sea is too deep.  
The wind coming from the sea  
says that the laughter of the sea is too vast.

I come from the sea.  
Mountains are solidified waves.  
(I don’t believe news from the sea anymore.)  
The yearning for home  
no longer surges in me.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Chi Pang-yuan 1983: 313.

<sup>58</sup> Shang Qin 1988B: 9.

<sup>59</sup> Chi Pang-yuan 1983: 66.

<sup>60</sup> Yang Huan’s poem, see Chi Pang-yuan 1983: 151.

<sup>61</sup> Zheng Chouyu 1999: 57.

Instead of a surrender to nostalgia we here find resistance to it. The sea can be read as a symbol of the unstable homeland ('I come from the sea') and the *I* is now in the mountains, symbolizing the opposite.<sup>62</sup> Yet the verse line 'Mountains are solidified waves' might point to the affinity or similarity between sea and mountains, and indicates a reconciliation with the given situation, which the last line confirms: 'The longing for home / no longer surges in me'; and it can also explain the first line, why 'you need not worry because of me'.

A whole group of writers felt banned from their home region, and their longing was perhaps constantly nourished by the emphasis of the government upon the eventual return to China, as Sung-sheng Yvonne Chang suggests.<sup>63</sup> Still, the theme of nostalgia and longing for one's hometown is quite common and widespread among writers away from home, and it is surely not restricted to this period only. Numerous examples can be found in classical Chinese poetry, often with similar patterns of an object evoking nostalgia; think for example of Li Bai's 'Jade flute' in his famous 'Spring Night in Lo-yang – Hearing a Flute' (春夜洛城聞笛).<sup>64</sup> Also in later years, when the Nationalists had long since settled in Taiwan, the 'exile' and 'nostalgia' poems still occur, although the 'two shores' then do not necessarily concern China and Taiwan any more; Yang Mu's 'Message in a bottle' (瓶中稿, 1974), for instance, was written at Westport and describes a longing for his hometown Hualian,<sup>65</sup> and Yu Guangzhong's 'Nostalgia' (鄉愁, 1972) was written while he spent some time in Hong Kong:

When I was young,  
Nostalgia was a tiny stamp,  
Me on this side,  
Mother on the other side.

When I grew up,  
Nostalgia was a narrow boat ticket,  
Me on this side,  
Bride on the other side.

But later on,

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<sup>62</sup> Other readings are also possible of course.

<sup>63</sup> Sung-sheng Yvonne Chang 2004.

<sup>64</sup> Li Bai 1997: 830, translation Watson 1984: 210

<sup>65</sup> Yang Mu 1978:467.

Nostalgia was a low, low grave,  
Me on the outside,  
Mother on the inside.

And at present,  
Nostalgia becomes a shallow strait,  
Me on this side,  
Mainland on the other side.

– Translation by Yu Guangzhong<sup>66</sup>

What connects many of these poems, even with many of their classical predecessors, is their sense of reality; whether they reveal the object of their longing or not, they contain a definite, concrete nostalgia for home. They are frequently realistic, direct responses to the concrete circumstances in which the poets were living, far away from home. This is different in the poetry of Zhou Mengdie, whose work has a philosophical, Buddhist basis. In the words of Lloyd Haft: ‘When Zhou Mengdie refers, as he often does, to *bi an* or “the Other Shore,” he cannot help seeming to refer to the Mainland which he, like so many of his generation, has been exiled from. Yet many centuries before anyone had heard of any such thing as the “Taiwan Strait,” Buddhist masters were teaching that man’s illusory incarnate life was This Shore, as contrasted with the Other Shore of the realm or state of salvation.’<sup>67</sup> ‘On the ferry’ (擺渡船上) from Zhou’s second album *To Retrieve the Soul* (還魂草, 1965) may serve as an example:

Boat – carrying the many, many shoes,  
carrying the many, many  
three-cornered dreams  
facing each other and facing away.

Rolling, rolling – in the deeps,  
flowing, flowing – in the unseen:  
man on the boat, boat on the water,  
water on Endlessness,  
Endlessness is, Endlessness is upon  
my pleasures and pains,  
born in a moment  
and gone in a moment.

Is it the water that’s going,  
carrying the boat and me? Or am I going,

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<sup>66</sup> Original Yu Guangzhong, 1992: 216; translation Yu Guangzhong 1992: 74.

<sup>67</sup> Lloyd Haft 2006: 85.



carrying boat and water?

Dusk fascinates.

Einstein's smile is a mystery, comfortless.

– Translation by Lloyd Haft<sup>68</sup>

In his study *Zhou Mengdie's Poetry of Consciousness* Haft shows that there are three levels on which to read the theme of 'two shores' in Zhou's poetry: '(1) emotional separation from a beloved person across a "gulf" of whatever kind, (2) factual separation from a person or persons across the Taiwan Strait, and (3) the inherent metaphysical separation of the illusory or "small" ego from the larger state of enlightenment or timelessness.'<sup>69</sup> It is this last higher level of abstraction that distinguishes Zhou's poem from the other examples above and that gives it more depth.

These few examples on this one subject, which everybody approaches differently, give a good idea of the poetic diversity, also in the first decades, with Zhou's philosophical approach being far removed from the realist one by Ji Xian at the beginning of this chapter. But there is another important characteristic that sets 'An Acacia Leaf' apart from Zhou and the other examples: its political implications, given by the two lines towards the end: 'O homeland, [when] can you let me return to your bosom again'. Ji Xian has not written 'when will I return to you again?' or 'When will you let me return', but when '*will you be able* to let me return', 才能讓我再回到你的懷抱裏. The first option, 'when will I return to you again', would be most neutral and simply indicate that it is not clear when the *I* will return, without providing any reasons for it. The second possibility, 'when will you let me return', would stress the fact that the native land does not allow the *I* to return, implying banishment. The actual version, lastly, suggests that the land is hampered by something and has not yet reached the right conditions to let him return. It expresses that 'something is rotten in the state of China'. One plausible reading, prompted by the context and time of writing, is that this has to be communism.

By means of this implicit sneer at communism, the poem joins in the anti-communist discourse that was propagated all over by the Nationalist government

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<sup>68</sup> Original Zhou Mengdie 2000: 26-7; translation Lloyd Haft 2006: 89.

<sup>69</sup> Lloyd Haft 2006: 88.

in the 1950s and 1960s – also in literature. Soon after their withdrawal to Taiwan the Nationalists actively started stimulating such and other literary expressions, i.e. anti-communist and nationalistic. For that purpose, two organizations were established. First, in April 1950, the Chinese Literature and Art Awards Committee (中華文藝獎金委員會) was founded, led by Zhang Daofan, who had earlier been a spokesman for the Nationalists' literary policy during the 1940s. The committee 'used and rewarded all kinds of literary and artistic creations that combined an artistic and combat nature.'<sup>70</sup> Literature thus was seen as a means to enhance the national consciousness, and reinforce anti-communist-and-resist-Russia sentiments. Also people in the military service were actively encouraged to become writers.<sup>71</sup>

One month later the Chinese Literature and Art Association (中華文藝協會) was set up by Zhang Daofan and Chen Jiying, which united all the writers in the country, encouraged literary and artistic creation and developed the literary and artistic movement 'love the country'.<sup>72</sup> Its many affiliated writers organized poetry readings and regularly held symposia on the techniques and direction of the New Poetry.<sup>73</sup> The Association's commitment to the Nationalist policy was clear; the activities were sometimes held in the auditorium of the headquarters of the Party on Nanyang Street, and they promoted the Party's standpoint. Thus, 1952, for example, saw a poetry evening, including recitations and music (the Association advocated sung poetry), at which a kind of poetic group session (組詩) was initiated in which the participating five poets (i.e. Wang Lan, Song Ying, Zhong Lei, Ji Xian and Qin Zihao) joined in the making, on the spot, of a work of 408 lines on the subject 'Long live the Republic of China'.<sup>74</sup> Similarly, in 1955 the Association asked the poets Fang Si, Shangguan Yu, Song Ying, Ji Xian, Qin Zihao, Zhong Lei, Deng Yuping and Luo Men to organize a 'discussion on combat literature and art, to emphasize how the combat spirit of the New Poetry can be brought into full

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<sup>70</sup> Shangguan Yu 1984: 27

<sup>71</sup> Bai Qiu 1992: 99.

<sup>72</sup> Shangguan Yu 1984: 38.

<sup>73</sup> A chronological list of all activities organized (and other main events) can be found in Zhang Mo (1996), section 'Main Events in Forty Years of Modern Taiwan Poetry 1951-1991' (台灣現代詩四十年大事簡編) in his *Catalogue of Modern Poetry from Taiwan 1949-1995* (台灣現代詩編目 1949-1995): 183-221.

<sup>74</sup> Zhang Mo 1992: 185. For more on 'grouped poetry' (組詩), see chapter 3 'Serial Forms'.

play.’<sup>75</sup> The Chinese Youth Writing Association (中國青年寫作協會, August 1953) and the Chinese Women’s Writing Association (中國婦女寫作協會, May 1955) are two other organizations that came into being for similar purposes.<sup>76</sup> Apart from these interferences, the government also prohibited books written before 1949, from both mainland China and Taiwan, at least those written by communist oriented writers. The work of nationalist Hu Shi was allowed and promoted though, and hand copied works of writers like He Qifang, Dai Wangshu and Ai Qing were also available.<sup>77</sup> Still, through these government measures and with the few papers of the time being mostly state-controlled and broadcasting censored, the Nationalist party was sure, to some extent, to indoctrinate the works and lives of writers, or rather, of its subjects in general. As a consequence, most poets were from the mainland, and writers of Taiwanese origin, already impeded by the language, were hardly visible in public life in the 1950s – especially with the February 28 Incident still fresh in mind.

Within the ranks of these government-sponsored organizations a lot of anti-communist poetry was written, by writers like Shangguan Yu (who wrote most of it, according to himself), Ge Xianning, Zhong Lei, Mo Ren, Ji Xian, Yang Huan, Li Sha, Zhong Dingwen, Ye Ni and Peng Bangzhen.<sup>78</sup> These poets had all been active as poets in the mainland, and many of them are now nearly forgotten. But also someone like Ya Xian, renowned for his so-called avant-garde poetry which is to this day an example for many, won several official, government sponsored prizes.<sup>79</sup> Yet, such ‘government-pleasing’ poems may at the time have had a somewhat different status than we might now be inclined to attach to them. With the exception of a few, people did not always write such poems in full conviction of the Party’s policy, but simply because it did not do them any harm and it could win them very high monetary awards – money that was quite welcome in those

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<sup>75</sup> Zhang Mo 1992: 187.

<sup>76</sup> Michelle Yeh 2001: 22.

<sup>77</sup> According to Yeh their influence was limited (Michelle Yeh 1998: 156).

<sup>78</sup> Shangguan Yu 1984: 27.

<sup>79</sup> In 1955 Ya Xian’s ‘Torch, oh, Torch’ 火把,火把呀 won the first prize in the category ‘poetry’ of the ‘Literature and Arts Prize’, which was sponsored by the military; in 1956 his ‘Winter’s Fury’ 冬天的憤怒 was second in the Literature and Arts Prize, and was later that year the winner in an army competition for poetry; and in 1957 the 3,000-line poem ‘Suite of Blood Stains’ 血花曲 became the winner of the Prize for Literary and Artistic Creation of the Ministry of National Defence (Cf. chronology of the Ya Xian item in *Anthology of Ten Important Contemporary Chinese Poets*, 1977: 262-7).

times.<sup>80</sup> And besides the small reimbursement that every participant could expect, such evenings were probably appreciated as a form of socialization. That the writers themselves did not consider these poems of high artistic value is clear from the fact that many of them are not included in their poetry books.

While some of the mainland writers may have actively helped promote anti-communism, many other poets, as Michelle Yeh points out, 'sought to create an alternative discourse', producing works that contrasted 'sharply with the mainstream discourse promoted by the Nationalist government, [...], in challenging the anticommunist ethos of the time and in engaging in the avant-garde.'<sup>81</sup> This is the so-called modernist trend, which is much indebted to Western literature and art. But a combination of anti-communism *and* modernism is seen as well. Ji Xian, for one, made no secret of his anti-communist preferences, both in poetical work and in essays on poetry. He wrote, for example, in a preface: 'I need not deny nor feel humble about it: a kind of patriotic anti-communist emotion has always directed my poetic works. It was so when I was on the mainland; and after I came to Taiwan, it has become even more intense.'<sup>82</sup> Yet, he also was one of the most active advocates of modern poetry, writing in a proclamation in 1956, on which I will dwell later: 'we are Modernists who comprise the spirit and elements from all schools that have newly risen since Baudelaire'. Notably, poets who wished to refrain from the government-sponsored nationalistic literature embarked upon the modernist line that had begun earlier in the beginning of the twentieth century, when 'for the first time in Chinese history, there is a conscious effort to delve into the core of poetry, to define it beyond rules and conventions'.<sup>83</sup>

In the mid 1950s the literary activities of the early days were accelerated, despite the pressure the Nationalist government put on the arts - or perhaps also partly *due* to that pressure, because these writers were undoubtedly much attracted by Western modernism, and the emphasis of the government on anti-communist and combat literature and the prohibition on literature from before 1949 *compelled* people to look beyond. Thus, while some still continued writing classical poetry, many poets took to foreign literature and again started exploring

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<sup>80</sup> The awards by the Chinese Literature and Art Awards Committee were conferred until 1957.

<sup>81</sup> Michelle Yeh 1992: xxxviii.

<sup>82</sup> Julia Lin 1985: 15.

<sup>83</sup> Michelle Yeh 1991: 23.

new, creative ways of writing, in which the experience of poets like Ji Xian and Qin Zihao, who had previously been writing on the mainland, certainly played a key role. Foreign literature, especially from America, England and France, was again actively translated and read, and as before the war, the diverse new theories, themes, techniques, imagery and so on gave rise to many debates. Through foreign ideas on 'pure poetry' (純詩) the poets could refrain from politics, and the government had no objections to that strong foreign interest, as long as there was no criticism of their own policy.<sup>84</sup> According to Sung-sheng Yvonne Chang the government even encouraged and promoted this dependence on American literature in particular and on 'pure literature' (純文學), which on the one hand provided a way to keep the leftist, communist, inheritance of the May 4th-movement at a distance, and on the other hand suited the government's political ties to and dependence on the United States.<sup>85</sup>

Because of the key role of the mainlanders and the heavy dependence on Western literature and arts, Taiwan poetry in the 1950s and 1960s can be seen as a resumption of the 1920s and 1930s. The May Fourth Movement is for most of the poets in that period the beginning of the New Poetry movement in which they participate, and many critics see a continuity between the two.<sup>86</sup> The discord between poetry in service of society and poetry as a more or less autonomous phenomenon also continues after 1950. It is also not without reason that poets and critics often refer to the ideas and poetics of Hu Shi, who as a Nationalist was not prohibited by the government, and his death (24 February 1962) is listed in Zhang Mo's survey of 'Important Events of Forty Years of Modern Taiwan Poetry' in his *Catalogue of Modern Poetry from Taiwan 1949-1995* (台灣現代詩編目 1949-1995). In language, too, one can speak of a continuation: these mainland poet wrote in a vernacular which both in grammar and in vocabulary was similar to the *baihua* used in the 'New Poetry' of the 1920s and 1930s – as Xia Ji'an (Hsia Chi-an) points out, going into the many problems or characteristics of *baihua*, such as the absence of a standard, the influence of foreign languages, especially English, the

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<sup>84</sup> It is often said that poets did utter their criticism, but in such guarded terms that the government officials did not see through it (Shang Qin, personal communication, January 17th, 2001).

<sup>85</sup> Sung-sheng Yvonne Chang 2004, chapters 3 & 4: 73-122.

<sup>86</sup> For example: Leo Ou-fan Lee 1980: 6-30.

mixed vocabulary of the old and new language and so on.<sup>87</sup> This thesis will not go into these items that concern language per se, but chapter two deals specifically with the poetic language in Taiwan poetry. Here I first turn to the debates on how to write poetry.

## DREAM OR DAWN: LYRICISM OR INTELLECTUALISM?

### VISITING

Night, dream-like vastness, dream-like gentleness  
Dream, night-like delicacy, night-like haziness  
I don't know whether it's in a dream, or in the night  
That I walk to an unknown place, eagerly trying to orientate

The rainy street is the splendor of the night  
The trees in the mist are the shadows of the night  
Through colorful designs of futurism  
They dissolve into an old, monotonous inkwash painting

Numerous shining windows stare at me, far far away,  
Like the glistening eyes of the wild cat hidden in the woods.  
The varnished paved road is the back of an alligator,  
All of a sudden I come walking over the back of an alligator.

The enclosed garden is a fathomless picture gallery  
At a loss I explore it, go deeper and deeper  
And halt in front of an unfamiliar small gate  
It's like I've been here before, because I'm sure you once waited here for me.

– Qin Zihao<sup>88</sup>

It has been said that the first poets in the 'alternative discourse' avoided social and political topics because of the oppressive situation, taking an inward road instead and exploring personal thoughts and feelings.<sup>89</sup> But of course they did not all travel the same path, which is noticeable both in poetry and in poetic debates, and in fact, from the beginning people discussed issues of aesthetics, reality, tradition, society, politics and so on. In search of form Yu Guangzhong and Xia Jing were for example in the very beginning continuing what is called *dried tofu* (豆腐乾) po-

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<sup>87</sup> Xia Ji'an 1957.

<sup>88</sup> Yang Mu & Zheng Shusen 1989: 252.

<sup>89</sup> Bai Xianyong 1995: 111.

etry, i.e. poems written in lines of equal length making rectangles that looked like dried tofu, which had been written earlier in the twentieth century.<sup>90</sup> Qin Zihao's 'Visiting' (造訪) from his second poetry volume *Sunflowers* (向日葵, 1955) bears some marks of this. The poem does not have a fully even shape, but does show a concern for a balanced form: eleven out of sixteen lines comprise twelve to fourteen characters and the remaining lines have eight, nine, ten, twelve or sixteen. The impression of regularity is also intensified through parallelisms and repetitions of words and sounds. Compared with Ji Xian's 'An Acacia Leaf', Qin's poem has a more gentle tone, reminiscent of some of Dai Wangshu's lyrics, like 'Rainy Alley' (雨巷) or 'Closed Garden' (深閉的園子).<sup>91</sup> While Ji's and Qin's poems are both lyrical in the sense that they appear to be a direct expression of the poet's thoughts and sentiments, Ji's overtly brings a personal, agitated mood across. Qin's poem has a more dreamlike ambiance, giving it a more intimate impression.

By and large this difference in intimacy can be considered as one of the distinctions between two important poetry societies, the Modernists and the Blue Stars. A third important society was the Epoch, and they all had their own journals: *Modernist Poetry* (現代詩), *Blue Stars Weekly* (藍星週刊), which after some four years changed into the less frequent *Blue Stars Poetry Pages* (藍星詩葉) and the *Epoch Poetry Quarterly* (創世紀詩刊). The first society, the Modernists, was established in February 1953 by Ji Xian, who remained its key figure throughout the years of publication. Counterbalance was given by the *Blue Star*, founded in March 1954 by Zhong Dingwen, Deng Yuping, Xia Jing, Yu Guangzhong and Qin Zihao – who was their main spokesman in the first years, later followed by Yu Guangzhong – and the *Epoch Poetry Quarterly*, established in October 1954 by three navy officers, Ya Xian, Luo Fu and Zhang Mo. The last one was only small in the early years of its existence and considered unimportant.<sup>92</sup> These three groups, which reigned over the poetry scene for some ten years starting from their founda-

<sup>90</sup> Bai Qiu 1992: 100 & Xiang Ming 1988: 89.

<sup>91</sup> Dai Wangshu 1993: 47 & 231.

<sup>92</sup> Bai Qiu 1992: 100, or Lin Hengtai 1996: 101. Xiao Xiao and Xiang Ming both mention three other poetry journals, which are generally not considered to be of much importance and soon disappeared from sight: *Seagull* (海鷗), founded in 1955 by Chen Jinbiao; *Flute of the South and the North* (南笛北笛), founded in April 1956 by Yang Lingye and Ye Ni; *Today's New Poetry* (今日新詩), founded in January 1957 by Shangguan Yu. All published less than twenty issues (Xiao Xiao 1996: 108 & Xiang Ming 1988: 96-7).

tion, were all headed by mainlanders and their members counted few people of Taiwanese origin – another proof of the discouragement of the latter group in these early years and the gap between the mainlanders and Taiwanese.<sup>93</sup>

*Modernist Poetry* thus was the first real journal for modern poetry in Taiwan after 1949 and as such it is quite a landmark. Until then, poetry could only be published in *New Poetry Weekly* (新詩週刊), a literary supplement of half a page to the *Independent Evening News* (自立晚報), which was edited by Ge Xianning, Zhong Dingwen, Ji Xian, Li Sha and Qin Zihao – again all immigrants from the mainland.<sup>94</sup> In the first year *Modernist Poetry*, published and edited by Ji Xian (there was no editing board), included work by very diverse authors, such as Fang Si, Zheng Chouyu, Rongzi, Yang Huan, Shang Qin (under his then penname Luo Ma), Shangguan Yu, Xin Yu, Lin Leng, Li Sha, Lin Hengtai, Ya Xuan, Zhou Mengdie, and many others whose names have now largely been forgotten. Later, when the journals *Blue Stars* and *Epoch* were established, the same poets published in them as well. Typical Blue Stars members in the 1950s are poets such as Yu Guangzhong, Yang Mu (under his then pen-name Ye Shan), Zheng Chouyu, Xiong Hong, Rongzi, Luo Men, Xiang Ming and Huang Yong. The Epoch group consisted in the beginning mainly of navy personnel with the three founders as the main representatives. Of the three journals, *Modernist Poetry* played the leading role, according to Michelle Yeh, because it changed ‘the poetry scene – through creative work, theoretical discourse, and related activities – and exerted a profound influence on contemporary and later poets.’<sup>95</sup> Translations of important Western poets contributed to this as well.

In February 1956 the foundation of the Modernist School (Xiandai pai) was officially announced in the thirteenth issue of *Modernist Poetry*, and an appeal was made to join the school. For that purpose initiator Ji Xian provided six tenets that were to constitute the school’s poetics.<sup>96</sup> The essentials:

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<sup>93</sup> The Modernist included three: Wu Yingtao, Bai Qiu and Lin Hengtai.

<sup>94</sup> The first edition of this literary supplement appeared 5 November 1951; it stopped after 94 issues on 14 August 1953, supposedly out of paper shortage. The first three started the supplement, the last two joined after the first issue (Xiang Ming 1988: 84-5).

<sup>95</sup> Michelle Yeh 2001: 24.

<sup>96</sup> There was an assistance committee of nine people: Ye Ni, Zheng Chouyu, Luo Xing, Yang Yunda, Lin Leng, Xiao Ying, Ji Hong, Lin Hengtai and Ji Xian (Xiao Xiao 1996: 109).



1. We are a Modernists group who further develop the spirit and elements from all poetry schools that have newly risen since Baudelaire and discard what is not useful. [...]
2. We believe that New Poetry is a horizontal transplantation (橫的移植), not a vertical inheritance (縱的繼承). This is our general opinion, our basic point of departure in both theory and practice. [...]
3. We explore the new continent of poetry, develop the virgin land of poetry. We express new content, create new forms, discover new means, and invent new techniques. [...]
4. We emphasize intellect (知性). [...] A main feature of modernism is to resist romanticism. To emphasize intellect and to exclude the expression of feelings (情緒之告白). What use is it to rely solely on unrestrained emotions? [...] Composedness (冷靜), objectivity (客觀), profundity (深入) make use of a high degree of reasoning (理智) to engage in abstruse expression. A New Poem must have a solid and beautiful construction, the writer of a New Poem must be an outstanding engineer. [...]
5. We pursue purity of poetry. [...]
6. We love the country, are anti-communist and advocate freedom and democracy.<sup>97</sup>

According to Ji Xian the second revolution of New Poetry had now begun; the first had of course taken place in the 1920s and 1930s.

The proclamation has often been cited in articles – even forty years afterwards in the 1990s critics still turn back to it. At the time of publication, however, the text did not immediately give rise to a heated debate. Within the Modernist School itself no discussion whatsoever was started. In response to the official founding of the Modernist School, eighty-three poets joined – a number which in the next issue had increased to one hundred and two and later reached its peak with one hundred and fifteen members.<sup>98</sup> Still, it is not clear to what extent this large membership actually had anything to do with what is said in the proclamation. According to both Luo Fu and Yang Mu its influence was superficial, and many poets did not fully realize what characteristics and style the Modernists advocated.<sup>99</sup> In the year and a half following Ji Xian's proclamation, a few articles were indeed published about modern poetry but none of them referred to Ji Xian.<sup>100</sup> Only in August 1957 did Qin Zihao publish a long piece 'Where is New Poetry Going?' (新詩向何處去?) in which he reacted partly to Ji Xian's proclamation. In it he provided six 'correct principles of the current direction of new poetry'. In short they state:

<sup>97</sup> Ji Xian 1956B: 4 (*Modernist Poetry* 13).

<sup>98</sup> Xiao Xiao 1996: 109.

<sup>99</sup> Luo Fu 1972: 55; Yang Mu 1984: 205. Shang Qin, for example, admits to have been much influenced by Ji Xian himself, but not specifically by the six tenets (personal communication).

<sup>100</sup> Xiao Xiao 1996: 112.

1. Poetry is rooted in human life. It should not comply with an 'art for art' approach, nor should poetry serve human life. Its meaning is more philosophical and lies in the observation of life itself in all its forms, and in the expression of the whole realm of human life. It nourishes and illuminates mankind;
2. Poets should not only write for their personal pleasure and write in obscure and chaotic imagery. They have to be considerate of the reader and make the reader enter the spiritual world of the poet. One should strive for a balance between the wishes of reader and poet;
3. Poetry is in essence about purity, richness, authenticity, and carries the main existence of the author (有作者之主旨存在). It is a living thing: from a realization or awareness towards life, which is the embryonic motive for the author, it grows to be a living product of blood and flesh through the thoughts and feelings of the author;
4. One has to search for the ideological root in poetry. Poetry has to have a philosophical background and in an indirect, unconscious way pursue universal truth;
5. New expressions can be found in precision. Only when poetry is precise can it reach the highest attainments of profoundness (精微), compactness (嚴密), deepness (深沉), implicitness (含蓄) and vividness (鮮活);
6. Style is not an imitation of something, of Western literature, but is a personal, unique creation.<sup>101</sup>

A debate arose, the first since the Nationalists had arrived, and the two points of view uttered by Ji and Qin are usually seen as representative for the Modernist School and the *Blue Star*, even though many of the Blue Stars members at the time felt indignant about Qin's assumed *coup d'état* and disagreements followed.<sup>102</sup> The outlook of the societies was often just the personal view of (one of) the founders – of which Ji Xian is the most distinct example – but poets frequently published, as noted, in several journals.

Looking back to Ji Xian's six tenets after about half a century, it is especially striking how much they remind one of the New Poetry movement of the 1920s and 1930s, in which Ji Xian had actively taken part, both as a poet and an editor.<sup>103</sup> Even the name *Xiandai shi*, or *Modernist Poetry*, which was later added to the title page, seems a continuation of the poetry journal with the nearly similar name,

<sup>101</sup> Qin Zihao 1957: 130-138.

<sup>102</sup> The piece was published in the *Leo special of the Blue Star Poetry Selection* (藍星詩選獅子星座號), which Qin published after his replacement by Yu Guangzhong as the editor of the *Blue Star*. (Xiao Xiao 1996: 110).

<sup>103</sup> Ji Xian published poems under the name of Lu Yishi, in among others the famous *Les Contemporains* (現代), of which he was an editor together with Dai Wangshu in its last year and a half; he also founded several short-lived journals and societies: in 1934: the poetry journal *Vulcano* (火山, one man journal); in 1935: the journal *This Year's Literature and Art* (今年文藝, together with Du Heng); *Sparkling Literature and Art Society* (星火文藝社, with Du Heng); in 1936: *New Poetry Monthly* (新詩, together with Xu Chi and Dai Wangshu); Picking Flowers Poetry Society (採花詩社). (Cf. Zhang Mo & Zhang Hanliang 1977: 11-2)

*Xiandai*, which carried the French equivalent, *Les Contemporains*.<sup>104</sup> The brief ‘guidelines’ are confined to *new*, *Western based*, *intellectual* and *pure* – leaving aside the last ‘patriotic’ tenet, which rather seems lip service to government policy. In the first tenet, ‘all schools since Baudelaire’, Ji highlights a poetry that is modern, excluding all classical literature, both from China and the West. From the second tenet about the ‘horizontal transplantation’ it is clear that ‘modern’ for Ji here means learning from modern *Western* literature. But not at all costs, as the first tenet also says: one has to be critical, to develop what is useful and discard what is not.<sup>105</sup> In this sense Qin Zihao’s reaction that ‘the poets doubt whether the complete glorification of Western poetic schools can be merged with the unique Chinese society’ seems a bit blown out of proportion.<sup>106</sup> Besides, his many references to foreign writings indicate that he himself is not averse to Western literature either. Neither Ji nor Qin propose an uncritical imitation.

Ji’s second tenet indeed sounds rather rigid and rigorous, and it is one of the issues that in later years is discussed over and over, reproaching Ji Xian and *Modernist Poetry* for the ‘horizontal transplantation’, which was interpreted as being too dependent on Western literature and producing ‘non-Chinese’ poetry. Qin Zihao remarked on this: ‘If everything is horizontally transplanted, where do we plant our roots?’<sup>107</sup> Different though the ideas of the two poets may be, they both have a predilection for foreign literature and display an organic approach to New Poetry – ‘transplantation’ and ‘roots’ – befitting the Chinese character for ‘new’, *xin*, which consists of a standing tree next to an axe. Ji Xian’s idea of ‘new’ is one of rashness and revolution: he cuts the tree and starts afresh with a whole new tree. Qin Zihao, who also advocated ‘New Poetry’ and had cooperated with Ji Xian in several journals, seems to be more thoughtful: once you cut a tree, new

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<sup>104</sup> Bai Qiu claims that Ji Xian’s poetic theories are nothing more than a refurbished version of Dai Wangshu’s and *Les Contemporains*’ theories (1972: 47). Ji himself makes a distinction between former and later modernism (前現代派 and 後現代派): the first was the movement of free verse, i.e. the revolution of the form of poetry, which took place in the 1920s and 1930s; the second was the movement of modernist poetry, i.e. the revolution of the nature of poetry, for which the time had now come (*Modernist Poetry* 22: 1).

<sup>105</sup> In the six tenets modernism comprises, according to Ji, nineteenth and twentieth century symbolism, cubism, surrealism, dadaism, new sentimentalism, American imagism and all contemporary pure poetry movements in Europe and America. But in fact, for Ji only the first three were important, and only partly; Ji rejected for example surrealist ‘automatic writing’ which emphasized the subconscious and lacked intellect and reason (*Modernist Poetry* 21: 5).

<sup>106</sup> Qin Zihao 1957: 127.

<sup>107</sup> Qin Zihao 1957: 128.

branches start growing on top of the old, same roots.

The dispute between the two touches upon the core of modern Chinese poetry and preoccupied many authors in the twentieth century: How to write New Poetry? How does it relate to classical literature? What should it look like? How does classical literature relate to a New Poetry that explicitly wants to break away from tradition? How much foreign influence can poetry take and still be ‘Chinese’? Given the context of the time, when a lot was still being written in classical Chinese and in the dried tofu style, Ji Xian’s challenging point of view should probably best be seen as one by somebody who is fed up with the poetry of the time and wants to force a breakthrough, to lift poetry to a new and higher level. In issue 19 of *Modernist Poetry* he writes that the horizontal transplant is only temporary; as soon as Chinese poetry had caught up with international modernism the pupil could surpass the master.<sup>108</sup> Ji is thus eager to express his commitment to the New Poetry, he is eager to explore new, contemporary things – as tenet three specifically mentions – and therefore emphasizes a complete break with tradition. In the thirteenth tenet also Ji Xian’s call was above all one of being ‘new’, modern in the sense of ‘contemporary’, in the sense of replacing traditional *wenyan* poetry with something that forms the core, the essence of poetry – even though he does not specify what that essence is. Earlier in 1951, in the explanation that accompanied the first issue of *New Poetry Weekly*, Ji had explicitly written:

Our poems are not slogans, nor are they folk songs and even less pseudo-new poems that sell old Western stuff as being new, or poetic verses written in *baihua* which are in essence old. We consciously strive for the new. But the new of New Poetry is certainly not just doing something new in order to be different. Regarding the Chinese poetic tradition we simultaneously adopt a cautious attitude of rejection and carrying on. We have to explore the principles of what makes New Poetry.<sup>109</sup>

But whereas Ji here still remains rather vague as to what New Poetry should look like, he does make an effort in the six tenets to describe his ideas.

Ji Xian’s call for the pursuit of purity of poetry in the fifth tenet was probably prompted by Western poetry, in combination with, as remarked before, government indoctrination. Writing ‘pure poetry’ simultaneously may also have been a means of being ‘new’, as it stands for another break with classical poetry. Appar-

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<sup>108</sup> Ji Xian, *Modernist Poetry* 19, 1957: 3-4.

<sup>109</sup> Ji Xian 1956A: 53.

ently, it is the intrinsic characteristics of poetry that count, but Ji does not really elaborate much on the topic; he simply stresses that poetry has to be purified and refined, and everything that is ‘non-poetic’ (非詩的) has to be discarded: ‘Even each character has to be purely ‘poetic’ and not ‘prosaic’ (散文的). Not prosaic is here the only explanation he gives of pure poetry.<sup>110</sup>

The third point to which Qin Zihao reacted heatedly concerned Ji Xian’s fourth tenet, the call for intellect, one more issue that continued to be discussed and contested in later years. Three more Blue Star poets were involved in this: Luo Men, Huang Yong and Yu Guangzhong?<sup>111</sup> Qin wrote: ‘Expressing emotions (抒情, often translated as ‘lyricism’ or ‘lyrical’) is an important element to bring about beauty. The argument to ban emotions is an extreme idea that has come about under the advocacy of Western poetry which puts reason (理性) before sentiment (情感).’<sup>112</sup> But Ji Xian had not actually said in so many words that he wants to ban emotions, and he attaches special significance to intellect, 知性, not reason, 理性. In issue 21 of *Modernist Poetry* both Ji Xian and Lin Hengtai explain that they do not want to expel emotions from poetry but want to get rid of lyrical expression as a doctrine (抒情主義). In other words, Ji is not asking for a completely rational approach toward poetry, but rather for a certain wisdom or deeper understanding, which is again comprehensible in the light of the overly sentimental poems that had been written before the Second World War – think of romanticism or New Sentimentalism.<sup>113</sup> It is not without reason that Ji, in the tenet, explicitly wants modernism to resist romanticism. Also, in the third issue of *Modernist Poetry* Ji Xian had already advised young poets not to take the writing of poetry too light-heartedly and to hurry to publish their first trial efforts, but to take some time to reflect. Thus, again considering the context, Ji’s call for intellect should rather be

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<sup>110</sup> As we will see in chapter 2, Ji later demands that all poetry must be written in the ‘prosaic’ language.

<sup>111</sup> Huang Yong, ‘From Modernism to New Modernism’ (從現代主義到新現代主義), Luo Men ‘On Rationality and Lyricism in Poetry’ (論詩的理性與抒情), both were published in *Blue Star Poetry Anthology: Constellation of the Swan* (藍星詩選天鵝星座號), October 1957; Yu Guangzhong, ‘Two Contradictions’ (兩點矛盾) in *Blue Star Weekly* 207, 208, 1958. (Xiao Xiao 1996: 112).

<sup>112</sup> Qin Zihao 1957: 129.

<sup>113</sup> The same tendency existed in fiction; Sung-sheng Yvonne Chang writes that the 1950s were characterized by ‘middlebrow romance, touched up with uncomplicated loathing for Communism. *Fukan* [journal supplements] and literary magazines were filled with popular stories of the sort, especially personal reminiscences and lyrical sentimentalism.’ (2004: 69)

interpreted as a plea for channeling and controlling the spontaneous flow of emotions through the mind, for a poetry that blends emotion and intellectual ingenuity and that is less concerned with plainly expressing feelings than with analyzing them. Still, statements such as Lin Hengtai's, approved by Ji Xian, that the Modernists are against poetry that is more than 60% emotions and advocate intellectual poetry that is less than 40% emotions sound rather severe and absurd.<sup>114</sup>

Thinking back to 'An Acacia Leaf', one can hardly imagine that Ji Xian would want to fully reject emotions, as that poem surely is a clear expression of emotion. It is not hard to believe him when he writes in 1967 that 'An Acacia Leaf' is one of the poems that are very dear to him, because they 'are true and sincere utterances from the depths of my heart'.<sup>115</sup> Neither is Qin Zihao's 'Visiting' a heavily emotional or sentimental poem. Its calm tone sort of lulls the reader into the dream-like world of the poem. Immediately in the first sentence that world is presented as blurred, a 'dream-like night' or a 'night-like dream', which nearly come to be one and the same thing. The world presented, with a tinge of mystery to it, is not an unpleasant one – despite the fact that more threatening things such as a wild cat and an alligator's back are mentioned to describe the windows and the road – and the place that the *I* is visiting is unknown to him yet familiar. In contrast to 'An Acacia Leaf', the *I* in Qin's poem lets himself be carried away by what he sees, expressing his feeling of being at a loss, and in that sense the poem shows a general exaltation of emotion and the senses over reason and intellect. Ji Xian is very overt and shows a directness of language; he expresses his emotion in the first stanza and then turns to reflect on the past and the future. The difference that we see here in the degree of lyricism and intellect accounts for the difference in intimacy that was mentioned earlier. 'An Acacia Leaf' remains more distant for the reader, because of Ji's directness and overt emotion, while the dreamy indirectness in 'Visiting' gives rise to a certain intimacy.

In later years a difference between lyricism and intellectualism is made every now and then in somewhat different forms. During the first nativist literature debate, which I will deal with later, Yip Wai-lim makes an effort to reread and redefine the old phrase 詩言志, 'the poem articulates what is on the mind intently' in

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<sup>114</sup> Lin Hengtai *Modernist Poetry* 21: 1 (195?).

<sup>115</sup> Cited by Julia Lin 1985: 15.

his article ‘The Growth of Order’ (秩序的生長, 1972).<sup>116</sup> Yip does not use the same words, lyricism and intellectualism, nor does he mention Ji Xian or Qin Zihao, yet he ‘argues that the meaning of *chih* (志) is in the heart/mind (心). To him, the heart/mind should be defined as “the activities of consciousness as a whole” which is used as a leading element to guide speech or words. The intent is “the reactions felt in our heart/mind as a whole in face of objects and events of the world.”’<sup>117</sup> He proposes a direct expression of the awareness of feelings and thoughts, and makes consciousness ‘the unbridled primal force that directs the writing of poetry by which he justifies a dismissal of rationality, and together with it, morality, didacticism and *tao*-bearing function from the definition of poetry.’<sup>118</sup> Lisa Lai-ming Wong points to two peculiarities in Yip’s argumentation. For his reading Yip first chooses the graphic component of ‘intent’, 志, instead of ‘discipline’ 寺. And secondly, of intent 志, he foregrounds the bottom part ‘heart’ 心, which is graphically absent in the ideogram of poetry, 詩. In emphasizing ‘equilibrium and totality in a true, spontaneous treatment of objects and events felt by the consciousness’ Yip comes close to Qin Zihao’s lyricism, which represents one trend of modernist poetry.<sup>119</sup> But Yip’s analysis and redefinition did not draw a lot of attention.

Jian Zhengzhen explicitly makes a distinction between lyricism and intellectualism in his introduction to the *Comprehensive Anthology of Taiwan Poets from the New Era*. He divides New Poetry from Taiwan into these two main categories, calling the first generation of poets of the 1950s and 1960s more lyrical, which he simultaneously links to the *I* (自我); the second generation that starts writing in the beginning of the 1970s is more ‘intellectual’, which he connects to ‘they’ (他人).<sup>120</sup> According to him, the first generation poets rather sees poetry as a means of expressing themselves and their personal thoughts and feelings, whereas the second generation is more at a distance; they write about individual life which is not necessarily their personal life. Although they are, like their predecessors, con-

<sup>116</sup> Cf. Lisa Lai-Ming Wong 1999: 116-8.

<sup>117</sup> Lisa Lai-Ming Wong 1999: 118.

<sup>118</sup> Lisa Lai-Ming Wong 1999: 118.

<sup>119</sup> Lisa Lai-Ming Wong (1999: 118. Where Yip suppresses the upper part, shi 士, of intent, Chen Fangming one year later does the opposite, and ‘mindlessly takes 士 as “intellectuals” and from that premise, elaborates on intellectuals’ mission and responsibility in writing poetry’ thus again foregrounding the standard, classical view of poetry (p. 118).

<sup>120</sup> Jian Zhengzhen 1990: 5-7.

cerned with the reality they perceive around them, they do not seek to know a truth, as the more lyrical modernists do; they are rather occupied by a ‘dialogue with language’, which they see as an ‘autonomous, living’ thing.<sup>121</sup> Jian does not refer to the Ji Xian-Qin Zihao debate on lyricism and intellectualism, but the way he discusses the two, attributing a more intellectual approach to the work of the second generation, seems a somewhat sophisticated version of Ji Xian’s early appeal for more intellect in poetry: the second generation would show less direct personal expression and more reason, both in their subject matter and in their application of the poetic language itself, without fully abolishing the emotive or the unconscious. This division Jian makes between lyrical and intellectual comes close to the development I describe in the following three chapters, in terms of transparency and radical artifice, but before turning to this I will first elaborate a bit more on the further poetical discussions and developments after the Ji Xian and Qin Zihao-debate, in the 1960s and 1970s.

## THE BEAUTIFUL IN THE UGLY : FOREIGN INFLUENCES

### ABYSS

*I exist, that is all, and I find it nauseating.*  
– Jean-Paul Sartre

Children often lose their way in the thatch of your hair  
The first spring torrent is concealed behind the desolate pupils of your eyes  
A part of time calls out. The body launches the night’s festivities  
By the poisonous light of the moon, on a delta of blood  
Souls rise up like serpents and strike at that haggard forehead  
Suspended on the cross.

This is absurd — in Spain  
No one will give him even a crumb from the crummiest wedding cake!  
And we mourn everything. We spend all morning just to touch the hem of his  
gown.  
Later his name is written on the wind, on a flag.  
Later he tosses the leftovers of his life  
To us

Go look, go play at being sad, go smell the decay of time

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<sup>121</sup> Jian Zhengzhen (1990): 8 & 9 respectively.



We are too lazy ever to know ourselves  
Work, stroll, salute the crooks, smile and become immortal.  
How they cling to maxims!  
This is the face of day; open sores moan; skirts conceal a myriad germs  
The metropolis, Libra's scales, a paper moon telephone pole language  
(Today's official notices are pasted over yesterday's)  
The cold blooded sun shivers constantly  
In the pale abyss wedged  
Between two nights.

Time, cat-faced time,  
Time, stuck fast to the wrist, time that sends flag signals.  
On a night when rats weep, those who were murdered are murdered again  
They knot grass from graves into ties, they chew the Lord's Prayer stuck between  
their teeth  
No skull can really ascend to a place among the stars  
To bathe his crown of thorns in resplendent blood  
In the thirteenth month, the fifth season of the year, when Heaven appears  
below.

And we erect a monument to the moths attracted to last year's lamps. We live  
We cook wheat in wire mesh. We live.  
Through the sad rhymes of the billboards, through the filthy shadows of  
concrete  
Through the soul released from the ribcage  
Hallelujah! We live. Walk, cough, argue  
Shamelessly take up space on the earth.  
Nothing is dying at the moment  
Today's clouds are plagiarizing yesterday's.

In March I hear the cherries shout.  
Countless wagging tongues bring about the fall of spring. And green flies nibble  
her  
face  
Her calves flash from the chi-p'ao slits, which are longing for some people to  
read  
her,  
To enter her to labor inside her body. Nothing is certain  
Other than this and death. Existence is the wind, the noise on the threshing  
ground  
Existence is the outpouring of a whole summer's desire for ladies  
Who love to be tickled

Beds are sinking everywhere in the night. A feverish light  
Sounds like footfalls on broken glass. A kind of farm implement forced to till  
blindly.  
A translation of peach-colored flesh, a frightful language composed of  
Kisses; the first meeting of blood and blood, a flame, a kind of fatigue!  
A vigorous shove that shunts her aside  
At night, beds are sinking everywhere in Naples.

A woman sits at the end of my shadow. She weeps  
As an infant is buried amid mock strawberries and saxifrage...  
The following day we again go to watch the clouds, laugh, and sip plum juice

On the dance floor, we dance away what little dignity remains.  
Hallelujah! I'm still alive. My shoulders still carry my head  
Carry existence and nonexistence  
Carry a face that wears trousers

No one knows who is next; perhaps the church mouse, perhaps the color of the  
sky.  
We said goodbye ages ago to that long-hated umbilical cord.  
Kisses hang suspended on the lips, religion is imprinted on the face,  
We saunter, each with his own coffin lid on his back!  
And you are the wind, a bird, the color of the sky, a river with no mouth.  
You are the standing ashes of the dead, unburied Death.

No one has plucked us from off the earth. Look at life with both eyes shut.  
Jesus, don't you hear the dark wood murmuring in his brain?  
Some are knocking under the sugar beet field, others under the myrtle...  
When faces change color like chameleons, how can the torrent  
Capture the reflections? When their eyes are glued to the  
Darkest pages of history!

And you are nothing;  
You aren't the type who would break their canes over the face of the age  
Or dance with the morning light tangled around their heads  
In this city without shoulders, your book will be pulped for paper on the third  
day.  
You wash you face with night, and duel with shadows  
You consume your inheritance, the bride's trousseau, the weak shouts of the  
dead  
You come out of your room and go back in again, rubbing your hands  
You are nothing.

How can you strengthen the legs of a flea?  
Inject music into the throat, force the blind to drink up all the rays of light!  
Sow seeds in the palm of a hand, squeeze moonlight from between the breasts  
– you are part of the nights that are stacked against you and spin-ning round  
you  
Beautiful and alluring, the lovely women are yours  
A flower, a jug of wine, abed of teases, and a date.

This is the abyss –between the pillows and the bedding –pale as a funeral  
couplet  
These are girls with young faces, this is a window, this is a mirror, this is a small  
compact.  
This is a smile, this is blood, these are silk ribbons waiting to be disentangled  
That night, Mary's image on the wall vacated the frame, she had fled  
In search of the River Lethe to wash the shameful things she had heard from her  
ears  
But this is an old tale, like a rotating shadow lantern; senses, senses, senses!  
In the morning I hawk the sins in my basket on the streets  
The sun jams its awns into my eyes.  
Hallelujah! I'm still alive.

Work, stroll, salute the crooks, smile and become immortal.  
Exist for the sake of existence, watch the clouds for the sake of watching them

Shamelessly take up space on the earth.  
A sleigh stops on the banks of the Congo  
No one knows how it managed to slide so far  
A sleigh no one knows stops there.

– Ya Xian, translation by John Balcom<sup>122</sup>

‘Abyss’ (深渊), which with its 98 lines was one of the first long poems of that time, was written by Ya Xian in May 1959, only some five years after the poems by Ji Xian and Qin Zihao discussed in the previous chapter, but it is far removed from them. ‘Abyss’ is more fragmented, a manifestation of modernity, perhaps, which no longer sees the world as a coherent, cognizable whole. The poem is characterized by the quick succession of imagery and episodes, and has no compelling plot; themes develop along associations and the many actions, which speak for themselves and are not burdened with explications or analyzes of feelings or thoughts. The poem is not realistic, in the sense that some associations and imagery are quite absurd but also in that there are no clear social or psychological contexts that explain or discuss human action. At the time of publication it was a provoking poem, arousing complicated existential questions – What is life worth? Where does it lead? Does it lead anywhere? The poem and most of Ya Xian’s work, which he published between the mid 1950s and the end of the 1960s only, had an enormous impact on the poetry scene and is to this day considered of great importance and widely read.

Ya Xian himself said about ‘Abyss’ that he ‘attempted to achieve the inclusiveness and profundities of Eliot’s “The Waste Land” and “The Hollow Men” but failed because of his inadequate techniques and superficial perceptions.’<sup>123</sup> In subject matter Ya Xian’s poem indeed shares some characteristics with Eliot’s ‘The Waste Land’, as Julia Lin claims.<sup>124</sup> Both of them reflect the fragmented experience of the twentieth century sensibility, depicting the hopelessness of unscrupulous city life. But compared to ‘The Waste Land’ Lin finds ‘Abyss’ to have

a far more assertive and defiant attitude toward existence – this despite the preoccupation of the poem with the negative aspects of life. One senses [Ya Xian’s] conviction of the necessity of existing and continuing regardless of the decay and suffer-

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<sup>122</sup> Ya Xian 1998: 239-47; John Balcom 2006: 3-8.

<sup>123</sup> Julia Lin 1985: 47.

<sup>124</sup> Julia Lin 1985: 47.

ing that surround mankind. This stoicism is hinted at in the epigraph and amply developed in the text.<sup>125</sup>

Lin understands the poem as an expression of ‘the indomitable will to live, regardless of the perpetual presence of pain’<sup>126</sup>; I would say that it is, on the contrary, quite sardonic and I do not necessarily see a will to live.

‘Abyss’ abounds with so-called negative images, associated with pain, death, darkness, dirtiness. Lin regards the activities of ‘we’, ‘you’ or ‘I’ as positive affirmations of existence. I believe they simply show plain daily life: their enumeration reflects a certain emptiness of life, consisting of an ongoing succession of all kinds of things. Sex seems to provide the only distraction in this and remains one of the few things to hold on to – as is said explicitly in stanza six ‘nothing is certain / other than this and death’ – but stanzas 6, 7, 8, 12 and 13, focusing on sex, are also described in mainly negative images. Neither do the exclamations ‘Hallelujah! I’m still alive’, or ‘Hallelujah. We live’ and the references to Christianity express joy or thanks. They are only cynical in this specific context: we are still alive despite everything that surrounds us – should we be happy about that? Life rather seems a matter of living, ‘exist for the sake of existence’ (l. 94), there are no goals or aspirations. The fact that in the fifth stanza ‘We live’ is first followed by negative images and then by ‘Walk, cough, argue, / Shamelessly take up space on the earth’ indicates that there is nothing special about living. Also, the title word ‘abyss’ indicates the hopelessness of the situation. As a metaphor for life, just like ‘The Waste Land’, an abyss is not a positive image, and even implies a frightening or threatening situation. The two occurrences of the word in the poem reinforce this negative outlook. The first, in the third stanza, is an abyss of daytime with a cold-blooded, shivering sun; the second, in the thirteenth stanza, is one of night, ‘between the pillows and the bedding’, and linked to an obituary couplet. Both times the abyss is described as ‘pale’ (苍白), a word indicating in Chinese ‘ill-looking’ or ‘unhealthiness’, thus stressing once more the ‘corruptness’ of life. These two ‘abysses’ thus recapitulate the main point of focus of the poem: the vile, daily life is hopeless and so is night with its carnal pleasures. One more last indication of the overwhelming negative attitude can be seen in the sleigh in the last stanza which has

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<sup>125</sup> Julia Lin 1985: 47.

<sup>126</sup> Julia Lin 1985: 50.

slid a long way without anybody knowing how, but has now come to a standstill – just like life.

I therefore do not believe that the poem expresses ‘an indomitable will to live’.<sup>127</sup> It rather displays an acceptance of life as it is, and that also better fits the existentialist ideas of Sartre, which could be recapitulated as: ‘to exist is simply to be there’ (exister, c’est être là, simplement).<sup>128</sup> Lin’s suggestion was probably inspired by the motto of the poem, a line by Sartre, which reads in Chinese: ‘我要生存,除此無他;同時我發現了他的不快. Lin translates this (somewhat similarly to Michelle Yeh) as: ‘I want to exist, nothing but this; at the same time I am aware of the misery of existence’, which probably is the most obvious way to read and understand the Chinese.<sup>129</sup> Yet, to remain in line with Sartre and the poem, the line could also be understood as John Balcom does in his translation: ‘I exist, that is all’ or as ‘I have to live, there is nothing else’. Sartre’s *Nausea* (La Nausée, 1938) contains a phrase which could serve as the original for Ya Xian’s motto in the way Balcom translates it: ‘J’existe, c’est tout.’<sup>130</sup> Yet, in the French that phrase is not followed by the second part of the motto.<sup>131</sup>

On the other hand Ya Xian’s ‘Abyss’ also fundamentally differs from Sartre’s theories. In ‘Abyss’ Ya Xian clearly shows his concern with society and man’s being, as he does in many of his poems, for example his famous poem ‘Salt’. He shares that concern with Sartre and many others, but Sartre, though he too dreads nothingness, still finds an essence of man’s being in his liberty, in his freedom of choice. In *Existentialism is a humanism* (L’Existentialisme est un humanisme, 1946) he wrote that this freedom is a tool in man’s duty of self-determination. Sartre’s existentialism demands that man exceed the limitations set by his environment and death by acts of conscious decision. Therefore Sartre frequently describes, in his fiction and plays, men’s lack of faith in human nature in order to

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<sup>127</sup> Neither does it seem to express that ‘society’s perverted insolence and hypocrisy, the idleness and decay of human nature are like an abyss difficult to surmount’ as Gu Jitang says (1989: 278). The poem is not dealing with the fact that these societal problems are hard to overcome; there are not even suggestions in the text that it is possible to overcome the emptiness of life, or that one should try to do so.

<sup>128</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre 1938: 187.

<sup>129</sup> Michelle Yeh translates: ‘I want to live, nothing else. At the same time I’ve discovered discontent.’ (Malmqvist & Yeh 2001: 202)

<sup>130</sup> Jean Paul Sartre 1938: 153.

<sup>131</sup> When asked about it, Ya Xian replied that he has long since forgotten where the motto comes from.

show that things go wrong when men refuse to take their responsibility. It seems to me that Ya Xian's approach is in this sense more gratuitous; such a personal responsibility to take control is missing in his 'Abyss', as it is also missing in, for example, his 'Afternoon in a Bar' (酒吧的午後, 1958), which expresses a similar emptiness by describing people aimlessly killing time in a bar.<sup>132</sup> Its last two lines especially, 'Certainly, tomorrow afternoon, / *Our shoes will take us* again to this place' (my italics), point to external factors that cannot be reversed – as if self-determination is impossible.

Reading 'Abyss' one can hardly avoid the impression that Ya Xian's existential pessimism also aimed at some scandalizing effect.<sup>133</sup> The poem fully breaks with traditional ideas of poetry as an elevated form of art with lofty ideals. In Taiwan nothing of the sort had been published and understanding of Western literature and theories, which clearly had been of influence, was not yet very profound and widespread. With regard to translations of fiction Leo Ou-fan Lee points to the fact that even though the introduction of foreign literature was impressive, the translators (who were often students) had no systematic training in Western literature, that their command of English was 'barely sufficient' to translate, that authors were not given full justice as they were only represented by short stories, and that many editors were 'not capable of making independent judgments apart from parroting Western scholarly opinions' – things that are certainly true for poetry also.<sup>134</sup> 'Abyss' thus must also have shocked people, in a somewhat similar way as the early French symbolists did in Europe, like Baudelaire, who in his own time was often rebuked for obscenity and blasphemy. In Baudelaire's concept of beauty something ugly can also be turned into something beautiful, as explained in the two last stanzas from 'Hymn to Beauty' (Hymne à la beauté):

What difference, then, *from heaven or from hell,*

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<sup>132</sup> Ya Xian 1998: 85.

<sup>133</sup> In this he also differs from Sartre, who wrote: 'It seems that [...] people eager for scandal and movements address oneself to this philosophy [i.e. existentialism], which can, by the way, provide them nothing in this regard; in reality, it is the doctrine that is the least scandalous, the most austere; it is strictly confined to technicians and philosophers.' (Il semble que, [...], les gens avides de scandale et de mouvement s'adressent à cette philosophie [l'existentialisme], qui ne peut d'ailleurs rien leur apporter dans ce domaine; en réalité, c'est la doctrine la moins scandaleuse, la plus austère; elle est strictement destinée aux techniciens et philosophes.' in *L'Existentialisme est un humanisme*, 1946: 25-26).

<sup>134</sup> Xiao Xiao 1996: 110 & Leo Ou-fan Lee 1980: 14.

O Beauty, monstrous in simplicity?  
If eye, smile, step can open me the way  
To find unknown, sublime infinity?

*Angel or siren, spirit, I don't care,*  
As long as velvet eyes and perfumed head  
And glimmering motions, o my queen, can make  
The world less dreadful, and the time less dead.

[Que tu viennes *du ciel ou de l'enfer*, qu'importe,  
Ô Beauté! monstre énorme, effrayant, ingénu!  
Si ton oeil, ton souris, ton pied, m'ouvrent la porte  
D'un Infini que j'aime et n'ai jamais connu?

*De Satan ou de Dieu, qu'importe? Ange ou Sirène,*  
Qu'importe, si tu rends, – fée aux yeux de velours,  
Rythme, parfum, lueur, ô mon unique reine! –  
L'univers moins hideux et les instants moins lourds?]<sup>135</sup>

As long as Beauty opens the door to an 'Infini', Baudelaire does not care whether it comes from heaven or hell. Baudelaire is, with the symbolists, a 'poète-voyant', a seer 'endowed with the power to see behind and beyond the objects of the real world to the essences concealed in the ideal world.'<sup>136</sup> While 'Abyss' incorporates some 'ugly' sides of life as well, such an ideal world is absent and the poem remains more matter of fact. It sticks to concrete elements of life; the references to Christianity also apply to concrete figures, objects or events. Yet compared to, for example, Qin Zihao's quiet dream, which was already far removed from traditional poetry, the world of Ya Xian's 'Abyss' may at the time have shocked people and even seemed a nightmare to some. Just as Li Jinfa in the 1920s had done, Ya Xian incorporates elements in his poetry that in readers accustomed to traditional poetry must have roused strong feelings. Certain animals, such as rats or cockroaches or cadavers, bloody wounds, decayed things, pain, anger and death, had never been treated in this way and in such a tone. Such negativism and ugly elements were not used to create the 'beautiful' thing that a poem was supposed to be; poetry was not meant to shock. Obviously Ya Xian is in this poem experimenting and mixing ideas about Chinese morality, Christianity, existentialist ideas, European symbolism, surrealism and so on. Especially the latter inspired at that time some members of the Epoch, of which Ya Xian was one of the founders.

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<sup>135</sup> Translation by James McGowan in Baudelaire 1993: 45; original Baudelaire 1857: 28, v. 21-28. My italics.

<sup>136</sup> Charles Chadwick 1971:3.

Towards the end of the 1950s the Epoch had completely outgrown their former views upon poetry and slowly changed from a rather small and unimportant society into one of the country's most influential – one that continued to publish, with some hitches, until now. In those first six, seven years they advocated the following view (published in their first issue, October 1954):

1. To determine the national trend of New Poetry and to launch the contemporary current of New Poetry.
2. To establish an ironclad poetry camp and to avoid by all means mutual accusations and the creation of factions.
3. To assist young poets and thoroughly eliminate the pernicious influence of red, yellow and grey (赤黃灰色) [i.e. communism, pornography and crime].<sup>137</sup>

But in the essay 'Our View on Establishing a New Model for National Poetry' (建立新民族詩型之芻議) in the fifth issue (March 1956), two more statements were added to these first three, in which especially the first statement can be viewed as a first slight change of the Epoch's attitude, showing a gradual shift to a deeper concern for the art of poetry; it had to be :

1. Artistic – not a purely rational explanation, nor a straightforward presentation of pure emotions, but an expression through images. Imagery is most important, artistic conception the highest (主張形象第一, 意境至上).
2. With a Chinese flavor and an Eastern taste – using the specific nature of the Chinese script to express the particular inclinations of the people's life in the East.<sup>138</sup>

The two statements could be a reaction to Ji Xian, but this is unsure as his proclamation was published only one month before this Epoch issue. Yet, the first statement does relate to the idea of intellect and lyricism, which are both to be shunned in their extremities, according to the Epoch. Imagery is explicitly emphasized as the key element of poetry.<sup>139</sup> The second statement could implicitly be referring to Ji Xian's 'horizontal transplantation'; it is closely tied to identity and nationality problems, about which intense discussions were again to follow in later years.

In April 1959, a month after the Modernist School was temporarily disbanded because of financial problems, the Epoch really changed course: they

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<sup>137</sup> Xiang Ming 1988: 95-6.

<sup>138</sup> Xiang Ming 1988: 96.

<sup>139</sup> See also chapter 2.



withdrew the ‘New Model for National Poetry’ and it was decided to open up vision and to emphasize cosmopolitanism, surrealism, originality and purity in poetry.<sup>140</sup> Gradually, probably under the influence of western literature, imagery became more and more important. The Epoch started publishing many translations of Western poetry, such as Charles Baudelaire, Paul Valéry, Rainer Maria Rilke, T.S. Eliot, Sir Stephen Spender, St. John Perse, Paul Verlaine, and Dylan Thomas – some of whom had been in the picture in the 1930s and 1940s and in Ji Xian’s *Modernist Poetry*. The work of earlier modern poets, such as Li Jinfa and Dai Wangshu, was also promoted.<sup>141</sup> Gradually more and more French surrealists, such as André Breton, Paul Éluard, Louis Aragon, Jules Supervielle, Philippe Soupault, or David Emery Gascoyne (a British poet deeply influenced by French surrealism) were also translated into Chinese.<sup>142</sup>

The Epoch’s change of attitude towards poetry and their numerous introductions of Western poetry lead both Lin Hengtai and Xiang Ming to suggest that the Epoch was gradually taking over the former role of the Modernist School; indeed a lot of poets who had been members of the Modernist School turned to the Epoch, or published in both.<sup>143</sup> And many now famous poems by among others Shang Qin (under his then pen-name Luo Ma), Luo Fu, Ya Xian, Lin Hengtai, Ji Xian, Ye Shan, Zhou Mengdie and Yu Guangzhong, who were not all necessarily Epoch members, were first published in *Epoch*; other regular contributors were Bai Qiu, Ye Weilian, Xin Yu, Yang Lingye, and Guan Guan.<sup>144</sup> But while it is true that the Epoch from 1959 onwards grew in size, despite the fact that its poetry became more difficult and cosmopolitan, it is perhaps a bit exaggerated to say that the Epoch was taking over the role of the Modernist School. The Modernists did gradually move into the background when Ji Xian stood down in February 1962 and an editing board took over his role, until *Modernist Poetry* finally ceased publication in February 1964, but between 1961 and 1963 the *Epoch* also only appeared once a year.<sup>145</sup> And in the end the two societies did not differ so much in their poetics. The Modernists, i.e. Ji Xian, advocated using the ‘best’ of modernism, but focused

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<sup>140</sup> Xiang Ming 1988: 96.

<sup>141</sup> Leo Ou-fan Lee 1980: 11.

<sup>142</sup> Michelle Yeh 1998: 161.

<sup>143</sup> Lin Hengtai 1996: 101; Xiang Ming 1988: 96.

<sup>144</sup> Xiang Ming 1988: 96.

<sup>145</sup> Michelle Yeh 2001: 28.

much on certain aspects of symbolism and surrealism, such as the subconscious; and Epoch poet Luo Fu, one of the main representatives, was for a while particularly associated with French surrealism and Freud's theories on the subconscious and dream. In fact, both encouraged the use of the subconscious as a source of inspiration, which had, however, to be channeled through the mind.<sup>146</sup>

Yet, Ji Xian was not dubbed a surrealist, whereas Luo Fu was, despite his own denial of being one. The introductions on surrealism which Luo Fu wrote in the 1960s, leading to a lot of misunderstanding about his personal work, are probably one of the reasons why his work was called surrealist, but later research again concluded he is not a surrealist.<sup>147</sup> Whether he actually was one or not is not the main point of interest here, because it does not exclude the possibility that Luo Fu, just as Ya Xian and Shang Qin for example, uses some techniques of the French movement, especially in the way he employs imagery, as we will see in detail in the next chapter. What is interesting is how poets integrated foreign techniques and ideas – to which many felt attracted – into their own poetry and tradition. While the opinion on the desired degree of Western influence differed among these poets, as we have seen, no one denied or refused it. Still, some readers who did not belong to the modern poetry scene felt that the modern poets went too far in Westernizing, modernizing, individualizing poetry – which, in short, they saw as obscuring poetry and alienating it from the reader. At times fervent discussion took place between these two sides, starting in 1959.

## **MAKE WAR NOT LOVE: READERS' EXPECTATIONS**

### **WILD GEESE**

We are still living, we still have to fly  
In the boundless sky  
The horizon, receding in the distance, keeps luring us  
Living, ceaselessly chasing  
It feels close, but when we look up it is still far away

The sky is still the sky where our ancestors flew

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<sup>146</sup> Ji Xian 1958B: 5-8; Luo Fu 1967: 94.

<sup>147</sup> For example: Chang Han-liang 1985.

Vast and empty like a changeless exhortation  
We still beat the wind just like the wings of our ancestors  
And continue a will trapped in a uncompleted nightmare

Between the black earth and  
The bottomless deep blue sky  
The prospect is only a horizon  
Luring us  
Slowly we will die in our chase, die just like  
the setting sun imperceptibly turns cold. We still have to fly,  
continue hovering in boundlessness, lonely as a leaf in the wind

While the cold, dark clouds  
Watch us coldly

– Bai Qiu<sup>148</sup>

The main theme of ‘Wild Geese’ (雁, 1966), written by Bai Qiu, is similar to the one in Ya Xian’s ‘Abyss’: obviously, the geese are symbolic for human beings who cannot but pursue their lives (‘still living, we still have to fly’ 我們仍然活著。仍然要飛行). But while both poems stress the futility of life, ‘Wild Geese’ has a more positive outlook, as the ‘receding horizon’ that humans are ceaselessly chasing without ever reaching it, is described as ‘enticing’, ‘luring’ (引逗). Even though it is ‘only a horizon’, it is the process of development that counts, ensuring that life remains a challenge for human beings, and as such it differs from ‘Abyss’. Structurally the two poems do not have much in common. The short, well balanced ‘Wild Geese’ is completely constructed upon the one image of geese flying in the sky towards the horizon. The first stanza presents this image and the other stanzas expand upon it: the ancestors are connected through the ‘sky’ and the ‘wings’ that ‘beat the wind’, dying is compared with the evening sun that turns cold, and ‘dark clouds’ exist only in the sky. As we have seen, the long ‘Abyss’ is on the contrary much more complex because of its many, often unusual, images from very diverse realms and therefore demands more from readers.

For an average reader at the time ‘Wild geese’ was probably easier than ‘Abyss’, because it is relatively simple in structure and also because its images are more in keeping with the Chinese tradition – the wild geese, the horizon, the boundless blue sky, the setting sun, the lonely leaf and the clouds are all well-

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<sup>148</sup> Bai Qiu 1971: 141.

known elements in classical poetry.<sup>149</sup> And accessibility had been at stake in a debate, long before 'Wild Geese' was published in *Epoch*. In 1959 Ji Xian and Qin Zihao, who took turns in expounding on New Poetry in *Free Youth* (自由青年), entered into discussion with Su Xuelin, who earlier on the mainland had published on poetry. In June Su published a piece called 'Li Jinfa, Initiator of the New Poetry's Symbolist Movement' (新詩壇象徵派創始者李金髮), which focused on the shortcomings of Li Jinfa's poetry and symbolism.<sup>150</sup> In 1933 she had written a considerably less negative piece, 'On Li Jinfa's poetry' (論李金髮的詩), in which she argued that Li was not a really great writer, but that his poetry was of major significance for the development of Chinese New Poetry.<sup>151</sup> In the 1959 essay Su however argued that Li Jinfa and symbolism had brought New Poetry to a deadlock, because it was incomprehensible. Li had introduced poetry that defied grammar, was deliberately vague, invited manifold interpretations, avoided clarity and precision and wanted to stimulate reader involvement by leaving out verse lines. The result was a poetry that only poets could understand. Both Ji Xian and Qin Zihao reacted in defense of Li Jinfa, symbolism and Taiwan poetry, rejecting the idea that Taiwan poetry was but a remnant or transplantation of symbolism, describing Taiwan poetry as 'creations that had undergone numerous new influences and were open-minded syntheses'.<sup>152</sup> But Su and Men Waihan, who continued her point of view when Su stopped because of illness, maintained that poets have to make concessions to the reader, which both Ji and Qin refuse; they believe that it is up to the reader to make an effort to understand the poet.

In 1959-60 another debate followed, on the same matter but with different participants. The debate was triggered by the publication in the *Central Daily* of a series of four pieces under the title 'Chatting about New Poetry' (新詩閒話) by Yan Xi, a man of letters and columnist in Taipei. Yan Xi directly attacked the poetry of the time: he was disturbed about its 'nihilistic and obscure' quality and like Su Xuelin held French symbolism responsible for the incomprehensibility of New Poetry. 'Poetry must be understandable and not be a drunkard's somniloquy', writes

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<sup>149</sup> Bai Qiu's imagery is not always in keeping with the Chinese tradition, he is known as a poet who 'concentrates on the urban aspects of the nativist experience.' (Balcom 1997: 1)

<sup>150</sup> Su Xuelin 1959: 6-7

<sup>151</sup> Su Xuelin 1933: 347-352.

<sup>152</sup> Qin Zihao, in Xiang Ming 1988: 92.

Yan Xi.<sup>153</sup> Amply citing from classical Chinese poetry he emphasizes a return to tradition, stressing meter and rhyme, pleading for song-like poetry, and advocates the popularization of the arts (藝術大眾化).

Yu Guangzhong, one of the poets who were heavily attacked by Yan Xi, was the first in a line of mostly Blue Star poets to respond vehemently, and he was also the most active contributor to the debate, writing four pieces in total. He goes into the different questions raised by Yan Xi and defends New Poetry as a link in a broad modern art movement and more than just an adherent of symbolism, like Qin Zihao had done in discussion with Su Xuelin. For Yu the transition from classical poetry via the New Poetry in the May Fourth Movement to contemporary New Poetry in Taiwan is an inevitable historical development (not unlike Ji Xian), which simultaneously proves to him that New Poetry, while it is a reaction against classical poetry, is not completely cut loose from it.<sup>154</sup> Many others including Bai Qiu, Zhang Mo, Xia Jing, Ye Shan and Ji Xian defended New Poetry, producing in total some thirty articles.<sup>155</sup> Qin Zihao also participated again, emphasizing that creativity is the only measure for poetry. Still, Yan Xi held his ground and objected, like Su Xuelin, that the poets did not take their responsibility and completely laid the blame for the incomprehensibility of their New Poetry to the intelligence (智力) of the readers.

What the debate indirectly made clear is that the poetry scene was turned in upon itself, and the societies' main function was socialization: they provided a platform to meet each other, to discuss poetry and develop ideas and theories. With discussions on intellect and lyricism and experimentation with different techniques such as astonishing imagery, poetry was flourishing among the poets themselves. But it largely remained an in-crowd affair and the poetry journals run by the societies, which published the poetry and discussions, were not widely distributed. Now a debate was held in a general journal, and confronted with opinions from outside the poetry scene, which in itself was seen as a positive development, the poets who had differed of opinion in the former discussion appeared nearly to close their ranks: thus, Qin Zihao, who in discussion with Ji Xian had pointed to the importance of the Chinese tradition and had stressed to not overes-

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<sup>153</sup> Yan Xi 23-11-1959.

<sup>154</sup> Yu Guangzhong Jan. 1960: 4-5.

<sup>155</sup> For a survey of all the participants, see Xiao Xiao 1996: 118.

timate the importance of Western poetry, now fervently defended French symbolism.

Both parties, inside and outside the scene, were concerned about the direction modern poetry was taking, but whereas the poets, despite some disagreements, were convinced that they were on the right track, Su Xuelin and Yan Xi questioned New Poetry itself. As Xia Jing rightly commented, a main cause was probably that readers were not yet accustomed to the different approaches of classical and modern poetry.<sup>156</sup> The aesthetics that underlies poetry, the foundation for the poetic techniques, had changed, from what Lotman calls an aesthetics of identity to an aesthetics of opposition.<sup>157</sup> The first applies to classical poetry, which proceeds from models that have been passed down through the centuries, with the poets striving for creativity and variation within the scope of imitation. New Poetry on the other hand, under the influence of Western literature, more and more inclined to opposition: to break with the expected patterns and one's predecessors, and search for 'complete' originality. Yet paradoxically, that shift in itself is again an act of imitation, not of the Chinese tradition this time, but a foreign one.

Given that drastic shift it is quite understandable that readers like Su Xuelin and Yan Xi lacked understanding for the New Poetry and opposed Western influence. New Poetry had been written for some forty years but it remained marginal, while people continued to be very familiar with classical poetry, which was more widely read and had more standing. At schools, reading and writing classical poetry was encouraged and New Poetry was not included in literary teaching; the first two modern poems were included in a national middle school textbook of Chinese literature only in 1968.<sup>158</sup> On the average modern poetry is nowadays still not highly valued – leading to jokes that Taiwan has more poets than readers. This of course holds for many other countries too, but there poetry as such is often not highly regarded or widely read, while there is a sharp distinction in Taiwan between the valuation of classical and modern poetry. In his 'Wild Geese', Bai Qiu writes 'The sky is still the sky where our ancestors flew / [...] / We still beat the wind just like the wings of our ancestors,' which is true for the poets also, but the

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<sup>156</sup> Xia Jing 1960.

<sup>157</sup> Lotman 1977: 117.

<sup>158</sup> Michelle Yeh 2001: 23.

paradigm of poetry was changed into one that was apparently more difficult for readers to grasp.

In 1972-3 the validation of New Poetry was again at stake when a new important debate was triggered on similar grounds by two outsiders as well, leading to the nativist movement in poetry. One was John Kwan Terry (Guan Jieming), a professor of English in Singapore, who was partly of Chinese descent but raised in Spanish without any knowledge of Chinese, and the other was Tang Wenbiao, a mathematician in Taiwan; both had, like Su Xuelin and Yan Xi, quite different expectations from poetry.<sup>159</sup> Acting independently the two differed in argumentation and interpretation. Terry, basing his views and arguments mainly on Yip Wai-lim's English anthology, especially agitated against the cosmopolitanism of New Poetry: with the exception of some like Zhou Mengdie and Yu Guangzhong he felt that most contemporary poets, such as Luo Fu, Ye Weilian, Bai Qiu and Shang Qin, were not recognizable as Chinese poets; they were too Americanized and out of touch with the Chinese literary tradition as embodied by Du Fu and Li Bai.<sup>160</sup>

Tang, on the other hand, illustrated his criticism exactly with Yu and Zhou, and with Ye Shan. More belligerent in tone, he especially fulminated that the New Poetry from Taiwan and Hong Kong did not have a social function, it was a poetry of escapism (逃避現實), which was visible in 'individual escapism' (個人的逃避), 'uselessness escapism' (非作用的逃避), "ideological" escapism' ('思想'的逃避), 'stylistic escapism' (文子的逃避), 'lyrical escapism' (抒情的逃避), and in 'collective escapism' (集體的逃避). While Su and Yan had earlier put the blame on Western

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<sup>159</sup> John Kwan Terry published three articles under the name of Guan Jieming: 'The Dilemma of Modern Chinese Poets' (中國現代詩人的困境 in 中國時報人間副刊 [China Times, World Supplement], 28-29 February) and 'The Dreamland of Modern Chinese Poetry' (中國現代詩的幻境 in 中國時報人間副刊 [[China Times, World Supplement], September 10-11) and 'Once more on "modern poetry"' (在談"中國現代詩" in 龍族詩刊 [Dragon's Poetry]: 9 (august): 55-63) (respectively Guan Jieming 1972A, 1972B, 1973). He expressed the same ideas in English in 'Modernism and Tradition in Some Recent Chinese Verse' (John Kwan Terry 1972).

Tang Wenbiao contributed three important articles: 'What Time, What Place, What People? On Traditional and Modernist Poetry' (甚麼時代甚麼地方甚麼人: 論傳統詩與現代詩 in 龍族評論專號 [The Dragons Criticism Special Issue], July); 'The Fall of Poetry: A Historical Evaluation of Modern Poetry in Taiwan and Hong Kong' (詩的沒落: 台港新詩的歷史批判 in 文季 [Literature Quarterly], August), and 'Modern Poetry in a Deadlock' (僵斃的現代詩 in 中外文學 [Chinese and Foreign Literature] 2:3, August) (Tang Wenbiao 1973 A, B & C).

Gao Shangqin is sometimes mentioned as a third contributor in the initial phase, with his 'Exploring and Looking Back: Preface to the *Dragon's Special on Criticism*' (談索與回顧: 寫在"龍族評論專號"前面, July) (Gao Shangqin 1973).

<sup>160</sup> Guan Jieming 1972B.

symbolism, Tang saw this escapism as a process that had started in the Six Dynasties (about 220-580 CE), 'a dark period in China', which made intellectuals turn in upon themselves and withdraw from public life. In short, Chinese poetry since the Six Dynasties was elitist, apart from the New Poetry from the May Fourth Movement which had tried to reverse this process.<sup>161</sup> Thus, when Tang talks about the Chinese tradition, he only refers to its beginnings, to the *Book of Songs* (詩經) and the *Songs of the South* (楚辭), which had risen from among the people and society – as literature should, according to him. About the *Dragons* poetry journal for example, which had just been launched in March 1971, Tang writes: 'it declares that tradition has a large influence in this journal. What is the reason for that? Who is plunging them time and again into the dead tradition, who teaches them to use the language of the old tradition, to imitate the old thinking of tradition, to immerse themselves in composing old New Poetry?'<sup>162</sup>

But despite different emphases, Guan and Tang on the whole voiced somewhat similar points of view, which can be recapitulated as follows: the New Poetry of the 1950s and 1960s (1) neglected Chinese tradition; (2) was written in an obscure and incomprehensible language; and (3) did not reflect the daily reality of the common Taiwan people, but focused on private individual lives. As a result poetry had become a marginal phenomenon, removed from the 'common world', from the man in the street, because contemporary poets were too self-centered, as Guan Jieming illustrates with his characterization of Luo Fu's book *Death in a Stone Cell* (石室之死亡, 1965):

Luo Fu's poetry often reads like a script that page after page, line after line has written down the blurring experiences one gets after taking a hallucinogenic drug, which brings people into a state of unconsciousness [...]. But taking drugs has three other characteristics: (1) everybody thinks it is an abominable thing, which one should not do according to certain intellectual circles; (2) it is very egotistic behavior, because, whether it is a shot or a pill, it is a self-chosen evil practice; (3) although they clearly understand that the personal awareness of order and the ability to control one's thinking and feeling are all disturbed by the drugs, the drug users still selfishly pursue them.<sup>163</sup>

For Guan and Tang, New Taiwan Poetry inclined to personal and social disintegra-

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<sup>161</sup> Tang Wenbiao 1973B: 50-51.

<sup>162</sup> Tang Wenbiao 1973A: 96.

<sup>163</sup> Guan Jieming 1972B.



tion, and lacked the social responsibility to educate the people and change society – a negligence that the ‘real’ Chinese tradition had never known.

The articles caused quite a stir among the modern poets who had been establishing themselves from the 1950s onward, and for many of whom poetry was their lives’ passion. Reactions surged, asking for ‘the right to write the way they want, just as readers have the right to dislike the way the poets write.’<sup>164</sup> Guan’s and Tang’s views were called narrow-minded, and yet, while refuting them, the reactions sometimes seemed to end in a strange defense, saying that New Poetry did have, at least partly, the features that Guan and Tang demanded. Yu Guangzhong, for example, pointed out that Du Fu was not that easy to read either, that a reading tradition of his poetry had had to grow through the ages, and that his work was not socially realistic nor of importance for ‘contemporary politics or military affairs’; in short, Du Fu’s poetry cannot change society, but its value lies ‘in language and culture, in the testimony of the period, the recollection of the people and the exploration of the meaning of life.’<sup>165</sup> For Yu, the same line of reasoning goes for New Poetry. However, by saying that poetry is ‘a testimony of the period and a recollection of the people’ Yu does partly agree with Tang and Guan: he affirms that poetry has social value, in the sense of being a reflection of peoples’ lives in a particular time at a particular place, though Yu’s idea of ‘reflection of people’s life’ probably is a different one. Yan Yuanshu writes that New Poetry encompasses life in its entirety, including everything that pertains to individual life as well, such as personal emotions and the subconscious; public life, on which Tang and Guan focus, is only a small part of human existence.<sup>166</sup> Luo Fu, on the other hand distances himself from the more social aspect by asking ‘purity’ for poetry.<sup>167</sup>

Most reactions were also eager to stress that New Poetry was still definitely

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<sup>164</sup> Yu Guangzhong 1973B: 129 (originally published in 中外文學 [Chung Wai Literary Monthly] 2:5 [Oct]). Other reactions include:

Yan Yuanshu 1973, ‘The Works of Tang Wenbiao’(唐文標事件, originally published in 中外文學 [Chung Wai Literary Monthly] 2: 5 [Oct].)

Li Peiling 1974, ‘What does Yu Guangzhong actually say?’ (余光中到底說甚麼? in 中外文學 [Chung Wai Literary Monthly] 2:8 [January])

Furthermore, in June 1974 both Chung Wai Literary Monthly 3:1 (中外文學) and the Epoch (no. 37) published special issues on the topic.

<sup>165</sup> Yu Guangzhong 1973B: 127.

<sup>166</sup> Yan Yuanshu 1973.

<sup>167</sup> Luo Fu 1974.

Chinese, as Luo Fu argued by way of comparison: just like Chinese babies who have drunk foreign milk remain Chinese babies, Chinese poets who have been ‘fed’ with Western literature, remain Chinese writers’.<sup>168</sup> That a simple definition of the ‘real Chinese tradition’ or the ‘Chinese spirit’ is of course not easily given, as the difference of opinion between Guan and Tang already makes clear, did not really seem a big issue. Nor did the fact that such references to the tradition, closely tied to identity questions, frequently mean an ‘invention of tradition’, as Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger showed, which they take

to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past.... However, insofar as there is such reference to a historic past, the peculiarity of ‘invented’ traditions is that the continuity with it is largely fictitious. In short, they are responses to novel situations which take the form of reference to old situations, or which establish their own past by quasi-obligatory repetition.<sup>169</sup>

In ‘From Chinese Modern Poetry to Modern Chinese Poetry’, written in 1976, C.H. Wang (aka Yang Mu), also speaks of the ‘Chinese quality of poetry’ and emphasizes the ‘Chinese substance and take its modern appearance as secondary’, without being really specific about what should be understood by this quality and substance.<sup>170</sup> Instead he refers to the *Book of Songs*, the *Songs of the South* and Tang and Song poetry, and stresses that ‘this is the time for us to return to the solemn, quiet, and rich world that is always there, the classics, for rejuvenation.’<sup>171</sup> Diverse as these works may be, their common ‘Chinese’ features are apparently clear enough for him. Luo Qing, for example, is also dedicated to the Chinese tradition, especially literature, calligraphy and painting. He admires the whole Chinese tradition as it was passed down through the ages, without defining it, and sees his work in line of that tradition. What sets Yang, Luo and others apart from nativists like Guan and Tang is that the latter refuse all foreignness, where the former implicitly accept the fact that times change and that they quite naturally receive foreign influences, just like poets, and people in general, have always done.

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<sup>168</sup> Luo Fu 1974: 7.

<sup>169</sup> Eric Hobsbawm & Terrence Ranger 1983: 2.

<sup>170</sup> C.H. Wang 1977: xx.

<sup>171</sup> C.H. Wang 1977: xxi.

Although Yang and Luo also refer to *the* tradition, they accept that it is not something fixed. It is as if they, consciously or unconsciously, understand that tradition often means an 'invention of tradition', meaning that 'what is perceived as tradition is very likely not the same as what Taiwan was like at any particular time in the past, much less an unchanging ancient heritage of a changeless and ageless China.'<sup>172</sup> In searching for a cultural identity in Taiwan poetry, Guan and Tang forgot that, as Lisa Lai-Ming Wong shows, 'identity is not an essence to be discovered, but a presence to be imagined.'<sup>173</sup> For Yang and Luo the problem of a Chinese tradition that 'makes' the cultural identity does not really exist, simply because working within the whole of that ever changing tradition is a given for them as born-Chinese or Taiwanese who have grown up in Chinese surroundings. Contrarily, a forced return to or imitation of any specific type of classical poetry would mean a dead poetry; only by developing, adapting and changing can Chinese literature live on and continue tradition.

While the nativist debate was much concerned with the search for a personal cultural identity for poetry (the reason why it is called 'nativist'), it seems to me, when analyzing the different elements in the debate, that in general the elder poets, the ones under attack, especially opposed the idea of a popular poetry to educate the people, which would require a simple and straightforward language. Objections to the idea itself that poetry had to be Chinese and should reflect reality were not that persistent; in this the poets simply held different interpretations of the poems, and different opinions of what *Chinese* and *reality* meant – a difference that might partly be explained by different backgrounds and experiences. For the nativists *Chinese* and *reality* meant being directly concerned with the life of the common people in Taiwan, for the older the generation it was more all-embracing. In an interview in 1984, Yang Mu more or less claims that the difference between the poetry of the 1960s and the nativist poetry of the 1970s is in fact not as big as one is inclined to think; both groups of poets were concerned with social circumstances. The poets of the 1960 according to him wrote about

problems that were bothering themselves and their compatriots, such as their expression of nostalgia and their criticism of social circumstances. Of course, the cri-

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<sup>172</sup> Steven Harrell & Huang Chün-chieh 1994: 2.

<sup>173</sup> Lisa Lai-Ming Wong 1999: 20.

tique [the poets of the 1960s] had against the social circumstances surrounding them differed from the one expressed by contemporary nativist poetry. The most important reason for that is however not that they were not versed (會) in the way of writing of contemporary nativist poetry, but that they were not able (能) to write this way; the restrictions that were given by the conditions of the social circumstances in the 1960s made those poets express their criticism indirectly, in an implicit, allegoric way.<sup>174</sup>

According to Yang Mu the close relation between literature and the people's life at a certain place and time is thus firmly grounded in the Taiwan literary scene – something with which I agree in essence, even though he may carry it a bit too far: his contention also implies that the first generation of poets were completely *governed* by the severe social circumstances, or to put it differently, that they would have written in the same lucid way as the nativist poets, had their situation been different – which is something at least some of the poets implicitly contested with demands such as ‘the right to write the way they want.’<sup>175</sup> In the end, the divergence of opinions may have hinged on how the notions *Chineseness* and *reality* were defined, but the disparity was intensified by the way the notions appeared in literary writing, either ‘lucidly’ or ‘obscurely’.

Gradually the idea settled that the way poetry had been written hitherto had led to a so-called ‘high’ art for a limited few, instead of a popular art that everybody could appreciate – it is not without reason that Tang’s essays are diatribes against ‘scholars’ (士大夫), the ‘aristocrats’ (貴族), ‘intellectuals’ (知識份子) and so on. According to Guan, Tang and others poetry had to be brought back to the people, in all ways: in language, subject matter, sense of reality, identity and so on. The gap between what some readers expected from poetry and what some poets wrote had simply become too large. Let me illustrate this with some later criticism by Chen Guying on the poetry of Yu Guangzhong. This is Yu’s poem ‘Double Bed’ (雙人床, 1966):

Let the war be waged outside the double bed  
Lying on your long, long slope  
I hear how stray bullets, like whizzing fireflies  
Fly by your head and mine  
Fly by my beard and your hair  
Let the coups and revolutions cry out on all sides

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<sup>174</sup> Yang Mu 1984: 203.

<sup>175</sup> Yu Guangzhong 1973B: 129.

At least love is on our side  
 At least we are safe till dawn  
 When there is nothing left to lean on  
 I lean upon your supple slope  
 Tonight, even when mountains collapse or the earth quakes  
 The most will fall into your low basin  
 Let banners and bugles rise in the highlands  
 At least the six-foot rhythm are ours  
 At least before sunrise you are completely mine  
 Still satiny, still soft, still boiling hot  
 A pure and delicate craziness  
 Let night and death on the borders of darkness  
 Launch the thousandth besieged city of eternity  
 Only we dive sharply in a spiral, heaven is below  
 Entangled in the beautiful whirlpool of your limbs

– Yu Guangzhong<sup>176</sup>

Yu Guangzhong wrote this poem in December 1966, long before the nativist debate of 1972-4. Eleven years later in November 1977, at the time of a nationwide debate on nativist literature – this time stressing the home-ground of Taiwan (so-called *bentu*-literature, 本土) instead of the big China (so-called *xiangtu* literature, 鄉土) – philosopher Chen Guying voiced his harsh reaction in *China Magazine* (中華雜誌 172) in his article ‘Criticizing Yu Guangzhong’s Decadent Consciousness and Eroticism’ (評余光中的頹廢意識與色情主義).<sup>177</sup> According to Chen the poems of Yu in general deal with the wrong subjects, use the wrong imagery, are written in a forced and incomprehensible language that is divorced from the daily spoken language, and befoul the people’s language, and what is more, they ‘befoul the souls of our youngsters.’<sup>178</sup> What enrages Chen is the egotistic attitude Yu assumes in this poem:

A war for days on end, but the ‘poet’ is quietly in the privacy of his bed, thinking only of a moment of sexual pleasure, even if a revolution or a coup d’état is happening in the surroundings, which has nothing to do with ‘me’. This gives people the feeling that the life of the poet consists of nothing but sex. He may very well take pride in his talents in writing, but from the directions his contemplations take in these poems can be seen what role he assigns to major events; a situation that involves the death of millions of people is of no concern to him.<sup>179</sup>

<sup>176</sup> Yu Guangzhong 1981: 226-7.

<sup>177</sup> Chen’s reaction may have been provoked by Yu Guangzhong’s essay ‘Here Comes the Wolf (狼來了, 1977), see the next section of this chapter.

<sup>178</sup> Chen Guying 1977: 379.

<sup>179</sup> Chen Guying 1977: 395-6.

The poem is structured upon the contrast between war and love, a frequent combination in literature. What makes Chen irate is that the *I* in the poem straightforwardly avows to be glad to be making love in stead of waging war, providing explicit references to sexual intercourse: ‘even when mountains collapse or the earth quakes / The most will fall into your low basin’ (v. 11-2) or ‘Only we dive sharply in a spiral, heaven is below / Entangled in the beautiful whirlpool of your limbs’ (v. 20-1). Yet, what Chen may have overlooked ten years after the publication of the poem was that war was hanging in the air everywhere at the time of writing: Taiwan itself was on bad terms with China and on the international level the Vietnam War was rapidly escalating, leading to numerous worldwide peace demonstrations with the popular slogan ‘Make Love Not War’.<sup>180</sup> Yu’s ‘Double Bed’ probably refers to this slogan, and instead of being a simple celebration of love, or sex, points to one of life’s fundamental absurdities: while there may be a war somewhere, people still go on and have to go on with their daily lives, whether selling harvest at the market or making love, only the latter – creating life instead of destroying it – makes the contrast sharper and harsher. In February 1967, Yu wrote a second, related poem, ‘If far away there is a war’ (如果遠方有戰爭), which confirms this view by explicitly asking how to deal with the discrepancy between such different lives:

If far away there is a war – should I cover my ears  
 Or should I sit straight up and listen ashamed?  
 Should I cover my nose, or deeply inhale  
 The stench of burning? Should my ears  
 Listen to your gasping of love or listen how grenades  
 Propagate truth? [...]  
 [...]. If  
 We are in bed, and they are in the field  
 Sowing peace on barbed wire  
 Should I be terrified, or should I rejoice  
 Rejoice that I am making love, not fighting hand-to-hand  
 that I hold your nakedness in my arms, not the enemy  
 [...]

– Yu Guangzhong<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> Thanks to Lucien van Valen for reminding me.

<sup>181</sup> Yu Guangzhong 1981: 228-30.

In my opinion Yu Guangzhong tries to provoke the reader to think about such dilemmas of human existence for himself, but Chen Guying and other readers perhaps prefer poems that explicitly confirm an opinion that they believe to be morally right – poems that express a point of view with which they can identify. Comparing ‘Double Bed’ to other famous examples on war and war-related subjects written in the 1960s, like Luo Men’s ‘Fort McKinley’ (麥堅利堡, 1961) or ‘Shrapnel, Tron’s Broken Leg’ (彈片. TRON的斷腿, 1965) for example, is quite revealing.<sup>182</sup> Luo Men’s ‘Fort McKinley’, written after a visit to the Philippines, is about the American Cemetery and Memorial in Manila, where 70,000 white crosses on a slope commemorate the American soldiers who died in the Second World War in the Pacific Ocean Region. Apart from explaining this in a footnote Luo Men deals with the subject matter in a rather plain, unimaginative way, mainly associating upon the awful yet commonplace idea that so many men, who died in a terrible war, lie buried far away from their home. ‘Shrapnel, Tron’s Broken Leg’ also provides a predictable view upon the subject matter, with compassion but without much surprise or stimulus for the reader to reflect upon personally. Yet, where Yu Guangzhong is scorned by Chen Guying, Luo Men was awarded several literary prizes for the poem and in 1967 even received a gold medal from President Marcos of the Philippines.<sup>183</sup>

Another point in case is Luo Fu’s book *Poems of Beyond* (外外集, 1967), also dealing with war. These poems were not so much criticized for their lack of morality, but mainly because of their so-called obscurity in language. Yu’s poetic language was still comparatively straightforward, but in Luo Fu’s case many readers understood too little of the language or of this poetry’s possible message, leaving them in doubt as to how to appreciate them, morally. Either way, readers’ rejection of both was probably largely due to unfamiliarity with the language, with the contrasting images, with the point of view, with the way of treatment. Using Russian Formalist terms, one could say that many early authors of New Poetry were pursuing a course of defamiliarization: changing and enlarging subject matter and structuring that matter in unconventional forms, language and imagery. The readers on the other hand had difficulties in fitting that strangeness into a known con-

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<sup>182</sup> Luo Men 1984: 47 & 91.

<sup>183</sup> Julia Lin 1985: 63.

text; the further the poems were estranged from readers' expectations in language, subject matter, imagery, morality and so on, the harsher the criticism becomes.

An additional problem is that the potential readers and writers of modern poetry are more diverse than those of classical poetry. Contrary to Guan Jieming's assertion that 'poetic excellence [in Chinese literary tradition] is, to a much larger extent [than in the West], decided by the integrity of judgment of the common reader, by assimilation by the sensitive, intelligent, "concerned" person uncorrupted with literary prejudices and the dogmatism of learning'<sup>184</sup>, Chinese classical poetry had always been a matter of the educated elite. The people who traditionally wrote and read poetry all had a more or less similar background, through their education, formation, profession and religion, but in the second half of the twentieth century society had changed dramatically and nearly everybody in Taiwan could read and write, which caused a certain alienation between author and reader: because of the different backgrounds readers sometimes less easily understand the poem at hand. In short, unfamiliarity of the reader with the text existed on many fronts, and the more the idea of opposition and of confrontation came to replace identity, the more difficult poetry became for its readers.

## **ART AND LIFE: POPULARIZATION**

### **DAD'S LUNCHBOX**

Every morning, Dad got up before the sun  
He took his lunchbox and  
Rode his old bike to the stream bed  
To haul gravel

Every night I wondered  
What was in Dad's lunchbox  
Every morning my brother and I ate our fill of stuffed buns and soy milk  
Dad surely had an egg in his lunchbox  
Otherwise, how could he haul gravel

One morning when it was still dark  
I got up and tiptoed to the kitchen  
There was no egg in Dad's lunchbox

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<sup>184</sup> Guan Jieming 1972C: 199.



Just sweet-potato rice, and pickled radish

– Xiang Yang, translation by John Balcom<sup>185</sup>

A first step towards a kind of popularization of poetry, in the sense of it being in keeping with readers' expectations (whether consciously or unconsciously), was in fact already made in 1960 and 1964, long before the nativist debate. In those years Yu Guangzhong published two books of poetry which paid explicit attention to the Chinese tradition: *Sirius* (天狼星) and *Associations of the Lotus* (蓮的聯想). The first, which was at the time of publication the longest poem ever written in Taiwan, was heavily denounced by Luo Fu as a too clear-cut poem, expressing a traditional spirit with modern techniques; upon which Yu Guangzhong explained some of his motives and sneered that Luo Fu 'worships modern art and casts tradition aside' and he advised Luo Fu 'to return to China'.<sup>186</sup> As one of the leading poets of the Blue Stars, which in discussion with Ji Xian had always emphasized tradition, Yu's new emphasis on tradition is not really surprising. In 1959-60, upon his return to Taiwan after a year of study in the USA., Yu had expressed his views in several articles in the *Literary Star* (文星雜誌). In 'New Poetry and Tradition' (新詩與傳統) for example, he affirmed his respect for the very diverse traditional Chinese culture, which should be part of New Poetry.<sup>187</sup> *Sirius* and especially *Associations of the Lotus* are important books, as they clearly manifest themselves as a continuum of Chinese literature and are the first modern poetry books to become very popular and sell well. Partly due to that success New Poetry became less isolated, and students from high schools, vocational training and universities became interested in it.

1962 also saw the foundation of a new poetry society, the Vineyard (葡萄園), simultaneously founding a journal of the same name, which opposed the Modernists, Epoch and Blue Star in practice. The poets of the *Vineyard* have, according to Wen Xiaocun, roughly always put three basic principles into practice, defined by them as 'healthy' (健康), 'clear-cut' (明朗) and with 'Chinese concepts' or 'Chinese

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<sup>185</sup> Xiang Yang 1985:9-10; John Balcom 1992: 67.

<sup>186</sup> Li Ruiteng 1996: 270-1. Yu Guangzhong, who later adjusted his ideas, rewrote the piece in 1976, partly based upon Luo Fu's comment.

<sup>187</sup> In the same article Yu Guangzhong points to the fact that Chinese literature and culture is very diverse and had received much foreign influence through the ages; *the* Chinese identity therefore does not exist.

style' (中國的觀念 or 中國風格).<sup>188</sup> 'Healthiness' relates to the subject matter of poetry which had, according to the *Vineyard* point of view, first been polluted by political consciousness and later by 'the so-called avant-garde' movement, which was the result of a 'blind "horizontal transplantation" and imitation of Western poetry; the extreme individualist foul thinking of nihilism, decadence, Dadaism and sexual pleasures had permeated the Taiwan poetry scene under the flag of modernism, surrealism and art-for-art's-sake.'<sup>189</sup> In 1978 Wen Xiaocun writes the following:

For someone who wants to cultivate himself it is enough to be capable of carefree expressing one's feelings. But a poet who possesses love for his country and a sensibility of his time must get out of the circle of his small I and enter realistic society, experience the life of the large I, sing praise to truth and justice, denounce hypocrisy and evil, utter a lion's roar, and be a firm rock in midstream.<sup>190</sup>

The poet must do so in a clear, comprehensible way, instead of the obscure way that had brought modern poetry to this 'dead end street'.<sup>191</sup> The Chinese element had to be visible in poetry by showing the character of Chinese – not Taiwanese – culture and thought which had absorbed a modern scientific spirit. The position that the *Vineyard* takes thus does not really differ much from the criticism we have seen above. 'Healthy' poetry is morally and politically 'right', so as to 'educate' the people, and so-called artistic qualities are of less importance – standpoints in which the *Vineyard* in fact does not differ much from Marxism or Maoism. With the establishment of the *Vineyard*, which has published its journal quarterly ever since its foundation, poetry in service of society now had its own platform – even though it was 'only a weak voice in the 1960s'<sup>192</sup>, and their nationalistic, simplistic approach has never really brought forth poets whose work is interesting from an artistic, creative point of view. Still, the *Vineyard* is of importance as the dichotomy 'art for art's sake', which did not claim any moral justification, and 'art for life's sake', which was firmly rooted in society, had now taken shape. Common as that distinction may be – Western literature can also be described as oscillating between the two – Taiwan poetry debates revolve around

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<sup>188</sup> Wen Xiaocun 1978: 108-113.

<sup>189</sup> Wen Xiaocun 1978: 109.

<sup>190</sup> Wen Xiaocun 1978: 110.

<sup>191</sup> Wen Xiaocun 1978: 110.

<sup>192</sup> Xiang Yang 1986: 50.

this opposition, bringing others with it: individuality and collectivity, modernity and tradition, modernism and realism, cosmopolitanism and nativism, obscurity and clarity, high art and low art, form and subject matter.

In March 1964, a month after the final shutdown of *Modernist Poetry* and a year before *Blue Star* would stop publishing, the Bamboo Hat (笠詩社) was founded by Bai Qiu en Lin Hengtai, in protest against the elitism of the *Epoch*.<sup>193</sup> Both Bai and Lin had been members of the Modernist School before joining (after Ji Xian's withdrawal) the *Epoch*, along with several other poets who now joined the Bamboo Hat. Bai Qiu recalls:

The reason why we withdrew was that the *Epoch* writers who continued the experimental modern poetry of the Modernist School, under the influence of Ye Weilian and Li Yinghao, inclined one after another to surrealism and pure poetry, which we felt to be inferior; their poetry became difficult to understand and even impossible to understand – that is what poetry with so-called surrealist unconscious writing techniques led to in Taiwan.<sup>194</sup>

From the beginning the Bamboo Hat also consisted solely of so-called *bentu* or 'native soil' poets – writers who were originally from Taiwan – like Wu Yingtao, Lin Hengtai, Jin Lian, who had written in Japanese before the war and had now made the shift to the *baihua* Chinese imposed by the Nationalists, and Bai Qiu, Huang Hesheng, Zhao Tianyi and Du Guoqing, who made their *début* after the war.<sup>195</sup> This led Li Minyong to remark that the foundation of the Bamboo Hat is a landmark in the history of modern Taiwan poetry not only because an independent society for Taiwanese writers was now established, but because it shows that at least some of them had surmounted the language barrier and the February 28 Incident.<sup>196</sup> In his view the *Bamboo Hat* is the awakening of the Taiwanese soul.<sup>197</sup>

Still, the Bamboo Hat poets originally did not emphasize their identity in their poetry; they did not explicitly emphasize 'Taiwaneseness' in the way that the Vineyard emphasized 'Chineseness'. Their name does suggest attachment to Taiwanese or Asian life instead of Western, and to rural instead of city life.<sup>198</sup> But for

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<sup>193</sup> Both were later resumed in the 1970s and 1980s by other editors.

<sup>194</sup> Bai Qiu 1992: 102.

<sup>195</sup> Li Minyong 1992: 106.

<sup>196</sup> Li Minyong 1992: 107.

<sup>197</sup> Li Minyong 1992: 111.

<sup>198</sup> The name contrasts with a popular literary monthly *Crown*, founded in February 1954 (Michelle Yeh 2001: 29).

them it was poetry as art that counted, as is clear for example from the fact that Lin Hengtai and Bai Qiu were among the first in the 1960s to experiment with concrete poetry, following Western examples like Guillaume Apollinaire and Filippo Tommaso Marinetti. Members also continued publishing in other journals like the *Epoch* (where Bai Qiu's 'Wild Geese' was first published); and at its fifth anniversary the Bamboo Hat awarded a prize to Zhou Mengdie for his volume *To Retrieve the Soul* – not a writer who is easily identified with 'Taiwanese-ness'.<sup>199</sup> With a growing membership the Bamboo Hat soon took a major lead on the poetry scene, more or less assuming the former role of the Modernist School: they advocated so-called 'pure' poetry, emphasized the 'intellect', encouraged Western and Japanese poetry by publishing many translations and introductions of foreign authors, and gave room to literary criticism. Poets like Lin Hengtai, Bai Qiu and Wu Yingtao were aware of the difficulty of much New Poetry for many readers, but they were against popularization and were unwilling to adapt their work, defending poetry as an experiment with language.<sup>200</sup> Yet, their poetry never was as hermetic as some *Epoch* poems. 'Wild Geese' (p. 39) may serve as an example. Only gradually, with the ongoing nativist tendencies in the 1970s, did Taiwanese identity become an important focus in the work of Bamboo Hat poets; and in the 1980s social realism with ideological purposes became more important than artistry, imagination or cosmopolitan ideas. Literature was then highly politicized, not only in the *Bamboo Hat*, using poetry as a means to confirm one's identity as a nation and represent the people.

But before the Bamboo Hat started doing so and even before Guan and Tang published their first articles, a couple of new poetry journals were initiated by younger poets who were still relatively unknown in the poetry world. In 1971 first the *Dragons* (龍族) were called into being in March, then *Mainstream* (主流) in July and *Tempest* (暴風雨) in September, followed by others in the years after: *Lamp Worship* (拜燈, January 1972), *Wind Lantern* (風燈, June 1972), *Earth* (大地, September 1972), *Back Waves* (後浪, September 1972), *Poets* (詩人, November 1974), *Grassroots* (草根, May 1975), *Sirius* (天狼星, August 1975), *Great Ocean* (大海洋, November 1975), *Green Land* (綠地, December 1975), *Sunlight* (陽光, De-

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<sup>199</sup> Zhang Mo 1992: 195.

<sup>200</sup> Michelle Yeh 2001: 32.

cember 1979) and others.<sup>201</sup> Many of these small journals were established by university students and short-lived. The journals, in which young poets like Chen Fangming, Lin Huanzhang, Xiang Yang, Xiao Xiao, Qiao Lin, Luo Qing, Su Shaolian, Zhang Cuo, Chen Li, Zhang Xianghua, Li Nan, Du Ye and many others could manifest themselves, published poetry and poetical views.

The views of these ‘new’ poets formed a departure from their immediate predecessors of the 1950s en 1960s. Generally one can say that the young poets – although each poet and journal placed some different emphases of course – more or less agreed with Guan and Tang: a more straightforward and thus a language comprehensible to all was needed, as well as more focus on the life of the people in Taiwan and more attention to the indigenous tradition, whether Chinese or Taiwanese, so that poetry would be more recognizable for the people as ‘their’ poetry. The focus on a specific Taiwanese identity is something that arose only during the second nativist debate of 1977-79, which concerned the whole of literature and was more focused on Taiwan (本土) than on China. A kind of popularization of poetry was the result: poetry had to be brought down from the ivory tower and given to the people.

‘Dad’s Lunchbox’ (阿爹的飯包, 1976) by Xiang Yang, from his volume *Songs of the Earth* (土地的歌, 1985), at the beginning of this chapter shows some of the techniques of how that was done. It has a simple narrative, told from the naive point of view of a child<sup>202</sup>; it deals with the life of common people, i.e. the poverty of a hard-working laborer; it shows impeccable morality; and it has a lucid language, with many repetitions. The poem was written in Hakka, something that most poets did not do, although the number of people writing in non-standard language has been steadily rising ever since. At the time the poem drew a lot of attention, because it was uncommon and risky: government control was gradually somewhat loosening, but people writing in Hakka were easily accused of separatism.<sup>203</sup> Besides, there was no standard written form of Hakka and many words had no written equivalent, which made people rather arbitrarily choose a fitting

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<sup>201</sup> The list is not complete. See Zhang Mo 1992: 139-154 for all poetry journals from 1951-1991.

<sup>202</sup> There might be a relation to children’s poetry that emerges at this time as well.

<sup>203</sup> John Balcom 1992.

character from Mandarin or combine characters with romanization.<sup>204</sup> In this respect Xiang Yang's poems of the time rank as a milestone in Taiwan poetry and 'Dad's Lunchbox' has become quite famous.

Apparently, in the early 1970s the time was ripe for a change and for widespread discussions on the topics that had been brought up ever since the foundation of the Modernists. The critical articles by Guan Jieming and Tang Wenbiao nicely fitted into that trend; two of their articles were also published in the *Dragons* poetry journal, whose special issue in the summer of 1973 forms an essential part of the nativist debate. One of the reasons why these changes and debates occurred on a large scale at this time is probably that at the beginning of the 1970s, the first generation of young people who had not consciously experienced the February 28 Incident and who had no recollections at all of mainland China nor of the Japanese colonization had now become old enough to raise their voice. But the changes on a national level are equally important: government policies changed and the economic modernizations made more and more progress. Taiwan's economy has been rising steadily since the 1950s and although its big boost only starts at the end of the 1970s, already at the end of the 1960s the living standard had risen considerably and the fulfilment of most people's vital necessities was ensured. As a consequence people had more time and money to spend, for example on publishing or buying literature; they started focusing on different things than subsistence. At the same time, the peak of the White Terror period had passed and from the 1970s on the authoritarian regime slowly became less severe. The February 28 Museum shows that from that time on, people gradually start daring to voice some criticism of the government; they still get arrested for it, but before that time no one dared to raise their voice. In short, times were changing and people started to feel more secure about life.

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<sup>204</sup> For this reason poetry books in Taiwanese then often had a glossary in the back. Only after 1987, when martial law was lifted, did dictionaries for Taiwanese started to be compiled (John Balcom 1992). Activities in poetry written in Hakka and other minority languages then started to increase – together with the demand for Taiwan's independence. In 1990 for example *An Anthology of Six Taiwanese Poets* (台語詩六家選) was published by Zheng Liangwei, which includes only writings in Taiwanese, and in 1991 Lin Zongyuan, who himself started writing poetry in Taiwanese in the 1970s, established the Potato Poetry Society, with the first journal in Taiwanese, including nearly fifty people (John Balcom 1992: 71). Taiwanese and nativist literature are not the same, as the latter can be written in either Chinese or in one of the dialects, but they do have similar topics, such as 'traditional family relationships and the hardships faced by rural laborers', which from the 1980s onwards is augmented with politics (John Balcom 1992: 67).

The focus on the nation and culture in poetry may very well also have been influenced by international affairs, which changed drastically during the 1970s. Although the United States only established formal diplomatic relations with China in January 1979, the USA's restrictions on trade and travel to China were eased as early as 1969-71. At the same time the USA also started exploring alternatives to opposing Peking's representation in the United Nations. Meanwhile, a number of countries severed diplomatic relations with Taipei; in 1971 Taiwan was ousted from the United Nations and the People's Republic seated. A year later president Nixon visited Peking, after which in 1973 the USA established quasi-diplomatic relations with the People's Republic. The new America-China diplomacy came as a devastating setback, because Taiwan had heavily depended on America since 1949. Internationally, the country was now gradually sinking into isolation, and the gradual severing of all international relations certainly gave rise to nationalist feelings. Such conditions provided the perfect breeding ground for the nativist ideas.

The nativists contested nearly everything that modern poetry written hitherto stood for, but they did not, as far as I know, raise questions about the status and value of poetry itself, meaning that the concept of poetry was still held in high esteem. The nativist Movement essentially wanted to make that most elevated form of written art accessible to everybody, and for that purpose, poetry was literally brought down to the people. In this it forms the exact opposite of the Western avant-garde movement of the 1920s, which, according to Peter Bürger, also sought to bring poetry and art down from its pedestal and also reacted against the elitist position that art and poetry held at the time

Whereas medieval and Renaissance art [...] was subject to "collective performance" and "collective reception," the bourgeois art of the post-Enlightenment was largely produced by isolated individuals for other isolated individuals. Divorced from the "praxis of life", it became increasingly autonomous and elitist, culminating in the Aestheticism of the late nineteenth century. It is this autonomy, this institutionalization of capitalist art as "unassociated with the life praxis of men [sic]" that Dada and Surrealism challenged.<sup>205</sup>

As a consequence, the avant-gardists started questioning the concept and role of art. But Marcel Duchamp did exactly the reverse of what the nativists did:

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<sup>205</sup> Quoted in Marjorie Perloff 1991: 5.

his ready-mades elevated mass-produced objects out of normal everyday life into an 'art' context and he was unconcerned with imitating reality in any way; his provocative experiments were a constant effort to break every rule of the artistic tradition. The whole European avant-garde movement in fact remained elitist – in spite of its ideals. The hardcore nativist poets, on the other hand, rather withdrew poetry from its art context and wanted to conform poetry to the normal, daily life of the lower class people: farmers, factory workers, small shopkeepers. And they typically wrote poems from the perspective of oppressed, 'minor' characters. Turning it into a kind of proletarian literature, some of the advocates of nativism seemed to forget that poetry is a form of art, as Yan Yuanshu says: 'Tang Wenbiao is looking from society to literature, not from literature to society.'<sup>206</sup> Michelle Yeh remarks that the notion that 'literature that did not go through the medium of art was social criticism, propaganda, slogans, but was just not literature' was hardly taken into consideration.<sup>207</sup>

For someone who appreciates poetry first of all as a form of art, the value of the nativism debate should perhaps be sought not so much in the poetry written in an immediate response to the debate, but in the broader, long-term influence. Yang Mu, who in his 'To Criticize Modern Chinese Poetry' of 1976 had lashed out at Guan Jieming and Tang Wenbiao for the way they had uttered their criticism, says in an interview in 1984 that the whole nativist debate had been of enormous influence, because it pulled poetry out of its incrowd scene, i.e. the small specialist world of poets acting as their own critics and university professors and columnists mocking poetry.<sup>208</sup> Perhaps that is in the end one of the debate's most important contributions.

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<sup>206</sup> Yan Yuanshu 1973: 121.

<sup>207</sup> Xi Mi 1998: 76.

<sup>208</sup> Yang Mu 1984: 205.



## VINEYARD AND ON TIME POETRY: TAIWAN'S MELTING POT

### DON'T READ THIS

—an experiment

...please don't read this piece! The contents are thin, without rhyme or reason, full of empty promises, clumsy and absurd: You should heed my warnings. Put it down right now, you've got more important things to do. Truthfully all truth in this world is truly already in front of you, there is already nothing to say about it all. What I discuss someone else has already actually done: what I don't discuss someone else has thought of, this is the reality of the situation, heed my warning, don't read any further; there are only black graphite squiggles below, and empty white space. Do not under any circumstances read any further. If you go on, you will hate yourself for it, you will be shortchanged, you will certainly get nothing in return. But, my God, look at you, you still won't listen, what a pain you are, you self-righteous son of a bitch, you arrogant slob, you jerk, you idiot, you don't understand how things are, you won't change your pigheaded ways, you... should know, should know that you have utterly misused your time here, just as you and I, and all the people in the past have mis

used their lives, utterly misused them utterly....

— Luo Qing, translation by Joseph R. Allen<sup>209</sup>

After the nativist debate of the early 1970s, some of the earlier poets started to write less hermetically, like Luo Fu, for example, who had been personally and directly accused, although his new work remained far from lucid. Still, on the work of others such as Yang Mu, Zheng Chouyu, Zhou Mengdie or Shang Qin, the debate seems to have had less direct influence, and they continued to write as they had always done, along the line of their personal developments. Soon younger poets arrived on the scene who saw the problems of radically social-realist writing; they were more lenient and kept an eye open for the art of poetry. The poetry groups that arose in the mid 1970s started combining the practice of the first decades and the ideas put forth in the nativist debate. These younger poets, the Grass Roots for example, try to seek a balance in the dichotomies with which poetry was confronted; they accepted that poetry can simultaneously be concerned with both individual and public life, with Western modernism and Chinese tradition, obscurity and clarity and so on. As Luo Qing, one of the founders of the Grass Roots, wrote in their declaration:

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<sup>209</sup> Luo Qing 1975: 67; Joseph R. Allen 1993: 233.

[...]

2. Poetry is many-sided, and so is life. We do not think that poetry must criticize life, but firmly believe that poetry must vividly reflect life, and thus vividly reflect our people. We have to create our work while breathing with the pulse of our time, but only works that belong to the individual emotions of pleasure, anger, sorrow and joy truly move people or have temperament and interest; we accept this with pleasure and do not reject it.

3. We understand that popularizing and professionalizing poetry is both one and two things at the same time. The boundary between them must be determined in the light of the direction taken by the treatment of the material and the artistic procedures. As we see it, both have their own expression, which must be balanced. Only if the works can be, in all possible ways, exquisite in skill and can be profoundly sincere in content, then we are optimistic about them, whether these works appear “difficult” or “easy” on the outside. We think poets have the responsibility to unveil the “inner life” of all people, not only of intellectuals. Inwardness can be revealed by exposing inner feelings, but also by outwardness or other angles or points of view. The road and material are broad enough.

4. We respect the past but are not infatuated by it. We are cautious about the future but confident. We embrace our tradition but do not reject the West. Excessive embracing and rejection are both abnormalities. [...] <sup>210</sup>

The above poem ‘Don’t read this’ (請別看) by Luo Qing (from *The Gallant Knights of Cathay*, 神州豪俠傳, 1975) is just one example of the many possible reactions in this new trend. As if it wants to leave the earlier debate behind, it is not at all concerned with the problems of individual versus collective, cosmopolitan versus traditional and western versus Chinese – although nativists would probably point that out as a deficiency. Yet, the poem is obviously in line with popularization: it is lucid in language and accessible to everybody, and its provoking, playful tone tries to appeal to a large public – even though the topic and form may have caused some readers to wonder how this could be called poetry. In its provoking, playful tone, the poem clearly differs from most of the poetry of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s which rather inclines to an overall serious approach. Where lucidity and accessibility are important in the work of many younger poets, provoking humor and irony is not that common in most youngsters’ poetry of the time. By way of its humorous spirit Luo Qing’s poem challenges the existing approaches toward poetry and explicitly questions the status of poetry, in subject matter as well as in language and in form – which is not exactly what the nativists had advocated. Others who have later developed a different yet analogous approach include Chen Li, Lin Yaode, Jiao Tong, Xia Yu, or Hong Hong, who have written poems that

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<sup>210</sup> Luo Qing 1976: 131.

mock the common idea of poetry as something precious, unique, authentic and with high aspirations, either by way of their contents, such as Chen Li's 'Poet's Day' (詩人節, 1975, from *In front of the Temple* [廟前], 1975), Xia Yu's 'Dumbo I' (歹徒甲, ) and 'Poet's Day' (詩人節, both 1982, from *Memoranda* [備忘錄], 1986), or by writing poetry that verges on something else, such as Jiao Tong's *Complete Recipe Book for Strengthening Masculinity* (完全壯陽食譜, 1999).<sup>211</sup>

While these poets from about the mid-1970s onward were more or less giving a new direction to the modernist poetry propagated by Ji Xian and others, the nativist trend was simultaneously getting a firmer footing in all genres of literature. In the summer of 1977 Yu Guangzhong wrote a short essay in *Unitas* (聯合報), entitled 'The Wolf Is Here' (狼來了), in which he accused the nativists of being leftists, criticizing both Taiwan's nativist literature (鄉土文學) and mainland China's 'workers', peasants' and soldiers' literature' (工農兵文學) in one go.<sup>212</sup> Yu's somewhat emotional view ignited all sorts of reciprocations, causing nationwide polemical writings about literature and politics. On the whole the debate resembled the earlier nativist poetry debate, with one main difference: the perspective of a 'Chinese reality' in 1973-74 had gradually shifted to a 'Taiwanese reality' in 1977-1979, and now the term *bentu* 本土, *native soil*, slowly came in vogue. This trend grew with the demand for a democratic and independent Taiwan, under the gradually less restrictive atmosphere and the influence of the national and international events referred to earlier. The demand for an independent Taiwan finally culminated in the so-called Formosa Incident of December 10, 1979 (美麗島事件, also known as the Kaohsiung Incident). Opposition politicians and Formosa Magazine had organized a demonstration that day to commemorate Human Rights Day, but the demonstration turned into a bloody riot leading to the arrest and death of a number of people. As the public opinion in general more and more 'demanded' a distinct Taiwanese identity distinct from a Chinese one, critical responses and comments on contemporary domestic politics or other national events became important subject matter in the 1980s literature. This was also visible in poetry – even though the involvement of poets was marginal in this sec-

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<sup>211</sup> Chen Li 1997: 36; Xia Yu 1986: 82 & 75 ; Jiao Tong 1999.

<sup>212</sup> This article may have provoked the critical essay by Chen Guying on Yu Guangzhong's work, as seen in chapter 5.

ond nativist debate. Taiwan's history also came to be explicitly dealt with, including now not only the Chinese origin, but also the occupation by the Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, and Japanese, and somewhat later also the indigenous people of Austronesian origin who nowadays make up less than 2 percent of the total population. For the first time poets of Austronesian origin started publishing (in Chinese), such as Walis Noka and Mo Naneng. During the 1970s and in the 1980s Taiwan seemed to arrive in a kind of postcolonial process, in an effort to establish a collective consciousness and social cohesion for all its people. For the complex identity problems that are involved in this I refer to Lisa Lai-ming Wong's *Frankings of Cultural Identities: Modern Poetry in Post-Colonial Taiwan with Yang Mu as a Case Study*, in which she deals with the subject extensively.

As a result of the strong social-realist tendency with a clear Taiwanese identity some people started to write less, or differently in the 1980s; Chen Li, for example, hardly wrote anything between 1980-1988 because of the personal dilemma's he felt himself to be in.<sup>213</sup> When after ten years he finally published his third book *Rainstorm* 暴雨, he had thoroughly changed his style, writing a plainer language, and dealt with typically Taiwanese issues in a number of poems, displaying his compassion in a national drama in a poem like 'The Last Wang Muqi' (最後的王木七, 1980), his pride of his native region in 'Taroko Gorge, 1989' (太魯閣, 一九八九) or his criticism to the nationalist policy in 'Autocracy' (獨裁, 1989).<sup>214</sup> In 'Green Onions' (蔥, 1989) he turns Taiwan's colonial history into a positive experience, and in later years he starts representing the 'native', examining Taiwan's history and identity by including the indigenous people also, as in his two poems 'On the Island' (在島上, from *Cat in the Mirror* [貓對鏡], 1999 and *The Well-Tempered Clavier of Agony and Freedom* [苦惱與自由的平均律], 2004).<sup>215</sup> His work is again a clear example of 'inventing tradition', creating an image of Taiwan as a lively melting pot.

In the 1980s and 1990s that lively melting pot of the Taiwanese society became more and more globalized, including many elements that are known from

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<sup>213</sup> Chen Li 2001, interview.

<sup>214</sup> Chen Li 1997: 221, 212 and 178. The poem 'The last Wang Muqi' was written on the occasion of a great calamity in the Yong'an coal mine in which thirty four people died.

<sup>215</sup> Chen Li 1997: 191. Chen Li 1999: 189; Chen Li 2004: 65.

Western societies also: industrialism and large metropolises with their accompanying lifestyles set the scene, such as feminism, economic independence, unmarried mothers, financial stock markets, nightlife and amusement, gradual democratization (under the regime of Chiang Ching-kuo), and especially the immense surge of media, with internet and the television bringing images from all over the world into everybody's living room. Taiwan's relations with mainland China also slowly loosened up, allowing Taiwanese for the first time after many years to travel to China, to return to their birthplace and meet with relatives. At the end of the 1980s literature from China was also published in Taiwan (China was quicker in publishing literature from Taiwan). At the same time, the number of poets drastically decreased and those who did write divided their time between poetry, prose, essays, criticism, journalism, drama and song-writing.<sup>216</sup> Opportunities for getting work published had diminished also; in the 1980s and 1990s there were fewer poetry societies with literary journals and newspaper supplements, and the few that existed were often short-lived.<sup>217</sup> That may however have changed with the rise of internet publication, a topic that is beyond the scope of this discussion.

It is partly because of these social changes as reflected in literature that critics generally characterize poetry from the end of the 1980s onward as 'pluralism' (多元主義)<sup>218</sup>, which has become something of a cliché. Indeed, there is no one obvious mainstream, but thinking back to the various nostalgia poems, the anti-communist writings, the modernist poems, the differences of opinion in lyricism and intellectualism, the discussions on song-like qualities in poetry, and the differences in form, ranging from very short to extremely long poems, free forms, the 'dried tofu'-style, concrete poetry or prose poetry and whatnot, one cannot but conclude that there never was a mainstream, nor has poetry been developing in a progressive sense. This is something Lloyd Haft has also remarked of the modern Chinese poetry written before the Second World War:

It is probably more useful to admit that there simply is no "main" line, nor even a "main" (in the sense of accepted by consensus) corpus. In other words, there is really no such single, well-defined entity as "modern Chinese poetry". What we call

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<sup>216</sup> Bai Ling 1991. In total only two dozens of people regularly published poetry, while at times this had been 200 to 400 (Bai Ling 1991: 294).

<sup>217</sup> He Shengfen 1986.

<sup>218</sup> For example: Michelle Yeh 2001; Meng Fan 1991 ('multi-faceted quality of poetic creation'); Zhang Mo 1991; Bai Ling 1991.

“modern Chinese poetry”, or New Poetry, or *baihua* poetry, is really a generic term for a wide variety of literary forms and styles which differ so greatly in their technical, thematic and intentional premises as to seem at times almost separate art forms.<sup>219</sup>

The same is true, I think, for Taiwan poetry, and the only thing one can perhaps say is that the pluralism has become more pronounced. The biggest change probably was that poets and readers gradually came to have all kinds of varying backgrounds, thereby changing the status of poetry and opening the way to its popularization. As a result, the range of subject matter and forms has continued to grow, from poems in the form of a diary (such as Lin Yu’s ‘Bachelor’s Diary’ [單身日記]) to poems with real cooking recipes added with a dose of sex (Jiao Tong), lyrical poems (Yang Mu), modern city life poems (Xia Yu and others), and poems inspired by Buddhism (Chen Kehua and Xu Huizhi). Remarkably, many poets still also continue to keep in step with the times and daily events. The number of poems written on such important events, such as the lifting of martial law in 1987, the 1989 Tian’anmen Square massacre in Beijing or the earthquake in Nantou in 1999, shows that social engagement is still present in both realist and non-realist poetry.<sup>220</sup> It is this large variety of poetry in Taiwan that keeps it lively and interesting.

The atmosphere of pluralism in which ‘anything goes’ has perhaps also arisen because the debating climate seems to have somewhat subsided; no influential, vehement debates like the ones we have seen have occurred afterwards. But that does not mean that the familiar polarizations are now left behind. Oppositions like tradition versus modernity, Chineseness versus internationalism or nativism versus globalization will probably, implicitly, continue to exist as long as such diverse journals like the *Vineyard* and the newly founded *On Time Poetry* (現在詩, founded by Xia Yu in 2002) continue to publish. One can hardly imagine the conservative *Vineyard* poets publishing in the trendy *On Time Poetry*, which publishes the newest of the newest, or vice versa. The context of the polarizations may however have changed. Tradition, Chineseness, Taiwaneseanness or nativism have in earlier years given rise to identity problems that are typical for many postcolo-

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<sup>219</sup> Lloyd Haft 1989: 6.

<sup>220</sup> For poems on the Nantou earthquake see for example the volume *Sad September Songs* [九月悲歌], 2000.

nial literatures, for example from South America as well. In the 1990s and afterwards the real quest for identity seems to have subsided, but the trend of globalization may well ensure that people continue to emphasize their culture and tradition, especially in such a relatively small country as Taiwan. Varying trends and oppositional opinions, with cultural identity on the one hand and the effacement of it on the other, is a characteristic of modern democratic societies, one that extends to poetry also.

The other polarizations that are connected to these – like collectivity and individuality, clarity and obscurity, popularization and marginalization, high art and low art – were probably never typical for Taiwan, or postcolonial countries, only: they have just as well given rise to debates in Western literatures and are perhaps inherent to modern literature and art. But these controversies, too, seem to have been pushed into the background in Taiwan since the 1980s, and all forms of literature appear to have found a place alongside each other. Still, even though the polarizations come less to the fore, are less debated, the discrepancy between the two trends remains; criticism on Xia Yu's *Friction: Indescribable* (摩擦:無以名狀, 1995) for example, calling her poetry too individualistic, too difficult and accusing it of destroying the Chinese language,<sup>221</sup> reveals that many people still think along the lines of those polarizations.

In the next chapters I will especially focus on the development of one side of the polarization – the modernist or postmodernist side – in which the work of Xia Yu, among others, is extensively dealt with.

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<sup>221</sup> Zhang Beiwen 2002: 68.

## Chapter 2

### A Changing Attitude to Poetic Language: The Poem as Construct (i)

In the second half of the twentieth century, long after Huang Zunxian's famous line 'My hand writes my mouth' and the Literary Revolution, one might perhaps think that writing in *baihua* had gradually become a simple fact of life, especially because nearly all poetry was being written in the vernacular. Yet people in Taiwan from both inside and outside the literary scene, like Bai Qiu, Yan Xi, Xia Ji'an, Ye Weilian, still sometimes expressed their doubts about poetry written in the vernacular – even as late as the 1970s. Bai Qiu, for example, writes in the epilogue to his third book of poetry, *Sky Symbol* (天空象徵, 1969):

Undoubtedly, *baihua* is not mature. It has only reached the stage of expressing meaning, but it lacks nimbleness. Often when we engage in creating poetry, we suffer from its sauntering gait. Hu Shi has handed us this immature language, and although it has made our brains somewhat clearer, it has not made us more profound or more nimble.

At least, our poetic language no longer has the capacity, economy and nimbleness that traditional old poetry had. We have to face the weaknesses in our contemporary language.

But history cannot be reversed; there is no way we can return to our former language. Our present language is the basis; we have to sharpen our tools anew and again achieve the excellence of our former language.

Only after we have improved our language are we able to improve our poetry.<sup>222</sup>

Bai Qiu first and foremost calls the language itself into question, not language per se, but *baihua* Chinese: modern poetry is weak because of the deficiency of its language.

As language is the medium of poetry and has undergone such big changes I will now explore how some leading poets have employed it since 1950: what constitutes their poetic language? What are the reasons why Bai Qiu and others call the vernacular language of the New Poetry a poor one? And how has poetic language developed? Central concepts in this are imagery and prosification. In *Mod-*

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<sup>222</sup> Bai Qiu 1971: 87-8.



*ern Chinese Poetry* Michelle Yeh has shown that the mainstay of modern poetry in mainland China and Taiwan is imagery, which Yeh regards as an effect of the strong influence of Western movements such as symbolism, imagism, modernism, surrealism and futurism. Obviously, imagery had always been part of classical poetry as well, but in modern poetry the approach to imagery changes and its application increases.<sup>223</sup> In modern Taiwan poetry as well, the image has been very dominant – it is the focusing and determining component of much poetry.

No doubt Western influences have been of immense importance, but one might still view this dominance of imagery in the light of another, internal development: the prosification of poetry. The transition from classical poetry written in regular verse to New Poetry written in free verse was accompanied by a shift to a relatively prose-like language and I believe that part of the reason for the intensification and increase of imagery is to be sought in this shift. In the following I will argue that this basis of poetic language remains more or less the same until the end of the 1980s and early 1990s, when a fundamental change takes place in the work of several poets.

## POETRY IN PROSE

In his foreword to one of his later books, *Hidden Titles* (陰題詩, 1993), Luo Fu writes:

With regard to sentence composition and the form of language I have always liked to do some experiments that others did not want to do, did not dare to or did not think worthwhile. This demand originally was a self-consciousness that I have had towards the creation of poetry since many years: I believe that the creation of poetry is mainly related to demolishing and rebuilding language, because poets who are not able to self-consciously pursue originality in language just habitually follow and study the prevailing customs in contemporary literature and yield to ideological demands, they even compromise to the taste of the general reader and submerge in cliché's, poetry then in the end falls to degeneration.<sup>224</sup>

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<sup>223</sup> Michelle Yeh 1991: 56-88.

<sup>224</sup> Luo Fu 1993C: 3.

Luo Fu emphasizes the importance of personal language exploration in poetry, considering experimentation and re-creation of language to be inherent in poetry of quality. In modern poetry such an ideal is hardly exceptional: most poets would probably say that they want to differ from other authors' writings and want to find their specific, individual voice. This is probably no different for the majority of modern Taiwan poets, who, according to Yeh, excel in 'continuing explorations of the medium of poetry – language – whether symbolist, modernist, surrealist, realist, or postmodernist'.<sup>225</sup> At the same time, many people, including poets like Luo Fu, Shang Qin, Ji Xian, Bei Ling, Luo Qing, have said that prose language (散文), has become *the* instrument of expression in New Poetry in Taiwan.<sup>226</sup> But how is the idea of creative, original language fused with that of prose-like language, which to the contrary is often regarded as the ordinary form of written language, both in English and in Chinese?

First of all we need to know what is understood by prose. In English there is, as Lloyd Haft remarks, a widespread tendency to define the term negatively, in opposition to verse: 'prose, whatever exactly it is, is what it is by virtue of what it is not'.<sup>227</sup> Prose is the ordinary, the unmarked form of writing, lacking everything that characterizes verse, such as metre, rhyme, etc. In Taiwan Ji Xian was an important figure in the encouragement of writing New Poetry in prose, and he elaborated on the subject in several essays, such as 'On Prose-Style Poetry' (談散文詩) and 'On Narrative Poetry' (談敘述詩).<sup>228</sup> Just as in English, Ji defines prose negatively by saying it is not verse. He opposes prose, 散文 *sanwen*, on the one hand to poetry, 詩 *shi*, and on the other to 'verse' or 'rhymed composition' (韻文).<sup>229</sup> The first opposition is a matter of genres and has to do with 'intrinsic literary quality' (文學內在的質) but Ji does not explain *how* prose and poetry differ. The second opposition, between prose and verse, is a matter of 'extrinsic literary form' (文學外在的形), a matter of style. What distinguishes them is that verse has patterns (格律

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<sup>225</sup> Michelle Yeh 2001: 42.

<sup>226</sup> Ji Xian 1954, 1956; Luo Fu 1972: 70-1; Shang Qin, personal communication 17-1-2001; Bei Ling (2001), Luo Qing prefers to call New Poetry *baihua shi*, and sees prose and spoken language as its basis (1978: 11).

<sup>227</sup> Lloyd Haft 2000: 1.

<sup>228</sup> Ji Xian 1954 & 1956.

<sup>229</sup> Ji Xian 1954: 41.

), and rhyme (押韻), yet not necessarily in a regular way, and prose does not.<sup>230</sup> Both have their own musical qualities.

Looking at western literature Ji was convinced that modern poetry had to be written in prose, saying that this was now the ‘age of prose’ – meaning that all Western literature, be it drama, novels, poetry, or other genres, is now written in prose, while these used to be in verse.<sup>231</sup> Ji also specifically made the distinction between a song and a poem. Given his preoccupation with Western poetry, Ji may have been influenced in his focus on the prose-style in poetry by Charles Baudelaire or T.S. Eliot, who recommended the cultivation of the rhythmical effects of prose. In any case, considering the fact that prose is generally perceived as the more ordinary form of language, the idea very well fits in with the foundation of the New Poetry movement, ‘to write the way you speak’; prose approaches spoken language far more than verse does. Ji called this kind of poetry 散文詩 *sanwenshi* – here best translated as ‘prose-style poetry’, in distinction to the English term ‘prose poem’, for which the same Chinese word is used. Ji’s definition of *sanwenshi* means to write poetry in prose-style, without metre, rhyme or patterns whatsoever. Whether stanzas (節) and sentences were divided into verse lines or not was irrelevant to him. In this, he differs from common Western definitions of prose poetry. In the West the prose poem is considered a specific genre of poetry, which virtually may employ all the devices of verse poetry, except for the line break. The English term prose poetry is thus strictly limited to texts like Baudelaire’s *Spleen de Paris* (*Petits poèmes en prose*). In regulated verse Ji Xian had no interest whatsoever, as the fixed number of syllables or beats, strict rhyme schemes and tonal patterns were the opposite of prose-style poetry. And in free verse (自由詩), Ji sees a combination of the two, using either irregular verse or a combination of verse and prose. Ji’s definition of free verse thus also differs from Western ones, which are often based on having irregular verse lines – regardless of occasional rhyme and metre, although naturalness of speech originally forms the basis.

Ji’s definitions of both prose-style poetry and free verse are thus based on the language of which the poem consists, not on typography. His poem ‘Flies’ (蒼蠅),

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<sup>230</sup> Ji Xian 1954: 40.

<sup>231</sup> Ji Xian 1954: 40.

in free verse according to Western standards, is an example by Ji to illustrate his idea of a 'prose-style poem'. In Chinese it has no metre or rhyme, yet there are line divisions:

When the flies come flying in through the open window,  
my eyes become an unhappy patroller.  
'Nasty little black monsters!  
The ugliest of all ugliness!'  
I understand very well that my heavy cursing is in vain,  
and while I grudge against the God that created them,  
they start singing a hymn in unison.<sup>232</sup>

If we abandon Ji Xian's description of a prose-style poem as a text that lacks something, namely rhythm and rhyme, could we perhaps try to describe what features it *does* have, in Ji's view, as opposed to verse? Characteristic of the language is that it is continuous and not concise, meaning that grammatically speaking it is made of complete and regular sentences that have clear beginnings and endings. Phrases and sentences are explicitly connected through the use of conjunctions and grammatical particles. In other words, the language is characterized by syntactic relations, defined as 'the arrangement of words (in their appropriate forms) by which their connexion and relation in a sentence are shown' (*OED*). The opposite of this is parataxis – i.e. 'the placing of propositions or clauses one after another, without indicating by connecting words the relation (of co-ordination or subordination) between them' (*OED*) – which hardly plays a role in 'Flies'.

However, when we characterize it as such, by syntactic relations, *sanwen* is nearly put on a par with *baihua*, the vernacular language. Of course it is possible to write a *baihua* that is paratactic and thus not *sanwen*, but when modern authors or literary critics examine and define *baihua* in relation to *wenyan*, one of the features that come up is that *baihua*, by virtue of its clear employment of syntax, is a relatively 'analytical' language: apart from having a distinct, polysyllabic vocabulary, it makes frequent use of personal pronouns, conjunctions, aspect and so on.<sup>233</sup> *Baihua* is thus said to be a more explicit, discursive language in contrast to *wenyan* which is concise and elliptic. The latter is therefore seen as inherently more multi-interpretable. From this point of view *sanwen* is thus nearly the same

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<sup>232</sup> Ji Xian 1954: 49.

<sup>233</sup> For example Luo Qing 1978: 11; Julia Lin 1972: 7; Ye Weilian 1970: xvii.

as *baihua*, and as New Poetry is identified with *baihua*, it is not very surprising that it is largely characterized by syntactic arrangements of the language. New Poetry is also regularly referred to as *baihua* poetry. Similarly, classical poetry, written in *wenyan* and verse, becomes equated with the opposite of *sanwen* and inclines to parataxis.

Obviously, the contrast is not absolute: *wenyan* and *wenyan* poetry are less disjunctive than some like to claim; neither are *baihua* and *baihua* poetry completely determined by syntactic relations. Yet, in the light of the history of *baihua* writing, the equation between *baihua* and prose on the one hand and *wenyan* and verse on the other has some logic. A historical survey is beyond the scope of the present study, but simplifying somewhat one may say that roughly from the Ming dynasty onward poetry is written in *wenyan* and prose in a sort of *baihua*.<sup>234</sup> The distinction between spoken and written language emerged in the fourth and third centuries BCE; in the Western Han dynasty (206 BCE-48 CE) a separate written language had developed, after which the two gradually drifted further apart. From the second century onward, texts have existed that were supposedly written in the vernacular of the time. Early translations of Buddhist texts, for example, were often in *baihua*, due to the translators' inadequate knowledge of *wenyan*, and testimonials, anecdotes or sayings were deliberately written in the vernacular, as it was considered important to know the exact utterance. Poetry was written in *wenyan*, with elements from the vernacular inserted, in contrast to classical Chinese prose which was never much influenced by the vernacular until the Yuan dynasty (1260-1368). Then, stories, plays, novels and novellas (話本) were increasingly written in the vernacular – which took flight in the sixteenth century with historical romances such as the *Story of the Water Margin* (水滸傳), the *Journey to the West* (西遊記) and the *Jin ping mei* (金瓶梅). In many later novels and novellas, prose and *baihua* more or less coincided: a simplified *wenyan* with vernacular elements inserted. Prose thus more and more tended toward *baihua* and poetry basically remained *wenyan*.<sup>235</sup>

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<sup>234</sup> See the chapters 21-23 on the novel and novella in Idema & Haft 1997: 198-230. Hybrid forms also occur like the *aria*, the so-called *qu* (曲), which are popular songs that developed during the twelfth century and are in between spoken language and *wenyan* (Wilt Idema & Lloyd Haft 1997: 156).

<sup>235</sup> See also Jaroslav Průšek 1980: 38-43.

If many perceived a historically grown connection between writing in *baihua* and writing in prose as ‘natural’, it is quite logical that the New Poetry, which demanded to be written in the vernacular, gradually assumed a prose-style as well, especially when the early formal experiments had somewhat subsided and free verse more or less became the standard. But that same historic context may also have given rise to the language problem for some: poetry and prose language were incompatible in more traditional views. The debates discussed in the preceding chapter are closely related to this problem. Whereas advocates of classical poetry such as Yan Xi called for song-like verse in 1959, in 1957 Xia Ji’an had even gone one step further. Like Bai Qiu in 1969, he explicitly expressed his doubts about the suitability of using the vernacular in poetry and argued that the vernacular lacks ‘beauty’:

If *baihua* only has practical value, if *baihua* is only of use for universal education, the achievements of *baihua* are then not only very limited, but will have the possibility of becoming more vulgar day by day. If *baihua* cannot be changed into a ‘literary language’, then in the end we cannot respect *baihua*. [...] When we write poetry nowadays, it is to test if *baihua* can ‘take the heavy responsibility’, if *baihua* can become a language of ‘beauty’. If it cannot, *baihua* will have proven to be an inferior language, but since it is the writing tool for everybody, the future of Chinese culture will then be very worrisome.<sup>236</sup>

The tenor of this passage is quite dramatic, but one has to keep in mind that *baihua* was a relatively recent medium. Even though *baihua* had become the official language in China in 1922 and had spread rapidly ever since, that did not mean that *wenyan*, not to mention *wenyan poetry*, was not written anymore. Besides, Japanese colonization had made the situation in Taiwan even more complex. Nevertheless, Xia’s passage clearly shows that his doubts about *baihua* only concern poetry; he does believe it is adequate for practical purposes. Perhaps he was thus not so much worried about *baihua* itself, but chiefly about the relatively analytic, syntactic nature of much New Poetry in Taiwan; perhaps he in fact valued prose-style in poetry less than verse – in contrast to Ji Xian.

If so, he was not the only one to have doubts. For how to recognize poetry when it no longer distinguishes itself from other writings through its language and form, when the language is no longer marked? The question what poetry actually

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<sup>236</sup> Xia Ji’an 1957: 13-4

is, a much debated topic as we have seen, came all the more to the foreground. Poetry and poetic language were traditionally the most elevated form of art, as it was in many countries, and the difference of appreciation between poetry and prose was related to the one between high and trivial literature. As Lloyd Haft rightly points out, without specifically focusing on Chinese literature, prose ‘is often almost automatically assimilated [...] to “a dull, commonplace or wearisome discourse or piece of writing.” In other words, what is supposedly unmarked in form is too often unreflectingly written off as thereby lackluster in content’.<sup>237</sup> The same association probably prevailed in Chinese. Was it in fact not the fusion of prose and verse, of trivial and high art that bothered Xia and others?

Some were very straightforward in their rejection, like Yan Xi who writes: ‘Prose written in separate lines is not poetry’.<sup>238</sup> Ye Weilian is also quite overt, inclining to Xia Ji’an’s view. He speaks of the ‘weaknesses of *baihua*’ in the New Poetry – i.e. *baihua* poets tend to use more personal pronouns, time-indicators, many enjambments and analytical elements – that have to be overcome, and the fact that he, just like Xia, reserves the term ‘literary language’ for *wenyan* is significant.<sup>239</sup> Ye elaborates (between parentheses) that ‘these weaknesses can easily be overcome since the new medium, if manipulated suitably – as some of us have done – can give the same performance as the literary Chinese without incurring any distortion of the language’.<sup>240</sup> The purport of his argument is typical: in the end, Ye is confident that good poetry can be and has been written in *baihua*, if only the language is ‘manipulated’ in the right way, without distorting it. By ‘manipulated suitably’ he apparently means poetry that is characterized by parataxis, after the example of classical poetry. Luo Fu, on the other hand, makes a more unconscious association of prose with *commonplace* in a brief comment on two sample sentences by Guan Guan and Yang Mu. He notices that their sentence structure is *prose-like* and that they include certain *images* which are not commonly put together, but which produce new aesthetic relations because of their

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<sup>237</sup> Lloyd Haft 2000: 1.

<sup>238</sup> Yan Xi 1959 January 20.

<sup>239</sup> Ye Weilian 1970: xvii.

<sup>240</sup> Ye Weilian 1970: xvii

organic-like arrangement. One surmises that he is actually saying: *despite* the prose-like sentences, this poetry is still worth reading because of its imagery.<sup>241</sup>

Despite a certain aversion to the prose-style language in poetry, it became the most influential style in Taiwan, as most critics and poets probably agree. But the transition from writing verse to prose-style was far-reaching and asked for a different approach. As Eliot once argued: 'When the comforting echo of rhyme is removed, success or failure in the choice of words, in the sentence structure, in the order is at once more apparent. Rhyme removed, the poet is at once held up to the standards of prose'.<sup>242</sup> Writing a 'prose-style poem' is, in Eliot's opinion, harder than writing verse. But which of the two is more complicated to write is not the issue; the quotation serves to emphasize that the two kinds of poetry require a completely different way of writing. How then have Taiwan poets dealt with that?

## TENSION

Poets have all kinds of poetic devices at their disposal to create a personal poetic language. Repetition, neologisms, rhythm, rhyme, colloquial or archaic language, juxtaposition, inversion, imagery, and so on provide unusual, inventive or surprising effects, and as such create a certain 'language tension'. This term was widely used in twentieth-century literary criticism in the West, especially by the New Critics, and the term has been used by some Taiwan poets as well, by Luo Fu for instance, who speaks about *yuyan de zhangli* 語言的張力.<sup>243</sup> Derived from Latin *tendere*, meaning 'to stretch', tension denotes the action of stretching or the condition of being stretched. According to *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* the term is generally used 'to refer to elements of opposition, resistance, strain and antinomy that may appear in a poem'. Such interactions between

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<sup>241</sup> Luo Fu 1972: 71.

<sup>242</sup> Timothy Steele 1990: 94.

<sup>243</sup> Luo Fu, translating 張力 *zhangli* with 'intensity', regards the production of new aesthetic relations as an important feature of tension. He does not go into detail, but merely distinguishes tension from a dense writing style (which does not necessarily involve new aesthetic relations), and says that it is achieved by suggestiveness, which he believes constitutes the difference between prose and poetry (Luo Fu 1972: 70-1).



opposing or conflicting forces play with readers' expectations, they stimulate the reader and direct the reader's attention.

As this concept of tension is fundamentally a Western one, based on dualistic thinking, it might seem less appropriate for Chinese poetry. Stephen Owen and Pauline Yu, among others, have shown how traditional Chinese poetry is distinctly different from Western poetry, due to a Chinese monistic worldview that is characterized by affinity between things, not their distinction or opposition. They argue that traditional Chinese imagery distinguished itself by harmony and correspondence, whereas Western metaphor is based on tension, on similarity within dissimilarity.<sup>244</sup> Or to put it differently, harking back to Lotman's terminology, Chinese classical poetry inclines to an aesthetics of identity whereas Western poetry rather inclines to opposition. The Chinese poet was, according to Yu, 'affirming equivalences and not creating or asserting them, he was not "teaching" something new in the way his Western counterpart is presumed to be doing, nor creating a purely fictional realm on the model of some divine creator. He was expected to offer the reader, rather, the pleasure of recognizing the unstated affinities which both took for granted'.<sup>245</sup> This difference between tension and harmony in imagery reflects the more fundamental one to which I referred earlier, the one between what a poem etymologically is, in the West and in China: *poem*, derived from *poiêma*, is a 'thing made or created'; 詩 *shi*, consisting of the components *yan*, 言, and *zhi*, 志, 'articulates' (言) 'what is on the mind intently' (志).<sup>246</sup> Both Yu and Owen point to the important consequence this has with regard to the writer's control over a text: a *poem* is the 'object of its maker's will; it is not the person himself but rather something he has "made"', whereas on the other hand the crafting by the poet is not essential to what a *shi* is: it is 'not the "object" of its writer; it is the writer, the outside of an inside'.<sup>247</sup> That concept, Owen remarks, continued for two and a half millennia. However, as we know, things changed drastically in the beginning of the twentieth century, under the influence of foreign movements and theories. The emphasis on the personal, creative process of writing poetry referred

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<sup>244</sup> Stephen Owen 1992; Pauline Yu 1987.

<sup>245</sup> Pauline Yu 1987: 201

<sup>246</sup> Stephen Owen 1992: 27. 志 is actually 寺 but is interpreted as 志 by Owen and others. Others base their arguments on the actual 寺 *sì* component.

<sup>247</sup> Stephen Owen 1992: 27.

to at the beginning of this chapter is one of the proofs that the traditional distinction between a Chinese and a Western poem has become blurred. I therefore believe it is justified to use the concept of tension.

For the analyzes in this chapter, I propose to make a rough distinction between lexical and syntactic tension. The first, lexical tension, arises from the interplay between words that are semantically incongruous. Imagery is the prevailing form of this kind: metaphor, metonymy etc. place elements that are commonly regarded as non-corresponding together in a semantic relation.<sup>248</sup> My definition of imagery and image here is thus in the first instance based on linguistic analysis and is only in the second place concerned with concrete, visual pictures – another frequent usage of the word. However, the two are related and do frequently coincide – something many, the Surrealists for example, explicitly strove for. The second category, syntactic tension, occurs when an element appears to be incompatible within a sentence from the point of view of its syntactic function. One can think for instance of functional conversion, in which a word is adapted to a new grammatical function without changing its form, or of tortuous sentence structures created by juxtapositions, inversions, or paratactic relations.

Prose-style poetry, characterized as it is by clear syntactic relations, will logically have less tension at the syntactic level. It is thus very likely that poets who write in the prose-style, yet are anxious to create a personal language, turn to lexical tension as one of the obvious means left to ‘mark’ their poetic language; imagery offers them good prospects. As noted earlier, in her *Modern Chinese Poetry* Michelle Yeh has already convincingly pointed to the dominance of imagery in the Western style, emphasizing the exaltation of metaphor and the disjunctive juxtaposition of images – a result of the reliance on Western literature to renew poetry.<sup>249</sup> Without denying this I would suggest that this dominance, in modern Taiwan poetry, can simultaneously be placed within an intrinsic development to a predominantly prose-style poetry. In the following I will examine some examples in the light of prose-style writing with lexical and syntactic tension; experiments in the latter category only turn up, as we will see, toward the end of the twentieth century.

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<sup>248</sup> This includes dead or unoriginal imagery, which initially had the same function. Neologism also falls in this category: the interplay between two or more words than creates a new word.

<sup>249</sup> Yeh 1991: 58.

## LEXICAL TENSION

Luo Fu is an important figure in respect of imagery, as is clearly illustrated by the epithet ‘Master of imagery’ often given to him.<sup>250</sup> His poetry is commonly associated with dense figurative language – the reason why some severely criticized him – but that reputation is usually particularly related to his earlier writings, such as *Death in a Stone Cell*, *Poems of Beyond* and *Mystic Songs*. Mainland critic Shen Qi argues that Luo Fu’s poetry is represented by on the one hand the color *red* or the term *diabolic* and on the other by the color *white* or *meditation, contemplation*. Red dominates the early period and white the latter, yet both are present throughout his work. Summarizing, Shen Qi says that the diabolic poetry is characterized by dense, shocking images, represented by ‘blood, fire, light, wine, rainbow, sun, pomegranates, opium’; the meditative poetry is dominated by ‘white imagery’ related to ‘snow, smoke, rain, moon, mist, wind, ashes, froth, cicada slough’.<sup>251</sup> In the ‘white spirit’ poetry Shen reads a way of rebuilding harmony between human beings and the natural world, something the ‘red period’ would lack, and says the concern with common, daily life in the later period enriches and calms down the earlier spiritual desolation, thus giving meaning to existence.<sup>252</sup>

The red nature is clearly visible in the first poem from *Death in a Stone Cell*:

Simply by chance I raised my eyes toward the neighboring trench; I was stunned<sup>253</sup>  
At dawn, that man rebelled against death with his naked body  
Allowed a black tributary to roar through his veins  
I was stunned, my eyes swept over the stone wall  
Gouging out two channels of blood on its surface

My face spreads like a tree, a tree grown in fire  
All is still, behind eyelids only the pupils move  
Move in a direction most people fear to mention  
And I am a bitter pear tree, cut down  
On my annual rings you can still hear wind and cicadas

– translation by John Balcom<sup>254</sup>

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<sup>250</sup> Luo Fu 2000: 16.

<sup>251</sup> Shen Qi, in Luo 2000: 10.

<sup>252</sup> Shen Qi, in Luo 2000: 13-4.

<sup>253</sup> I have replaced John Balcom’s ‘tunnel’ with ‘trench’: 甬道 refers to a passage with walls on both sides without a covering on top. Balcom translates the book title as *Death of a Stone Cell*.

<sup>254</sup> Luo Fu 1988: 29; translation in Michelle Yeh & N.G.D. Malmqvist 2001: 120.

The poem inclines to syntaxis rather than parataxis; it has hardly any language tension at the syntactic level: the verse lines are clear, regular sentences, which are connected by conjunctions (such as 便,即,而,確) and by contractions of the subject (in lines 2/3, 4/5, and 7/8). Reading the poem is to flow from one 'red' image to the next, such as the black tributary that roars through veins or the face that spreads like a tree, and to subside in an atmosphere of destruction, fear and hauntedness. The reader will try to comprehend that imagery and find out what ground underlies the so-called tenor and vehicles, respectively the underlying concept, object, or person to which the metaphor refers and the image that is used to represent the actual thing or its action. What underlies for example the image of the eyes, sight (目光) that 'sweep over the stone wall' and 'gouge out two channels of blood'? The 'eyes' are the tenor, which are represented by the transferred meanings of the vehicles 'sweeping' and 'gouging'. The first is a metaphor that can be understood as describing the movement of casting a glance over the wall. The second is metonymical: based on the expression *a sharp eye* (目光敏銳) one can imagine the eyes as being a sharp instrument able to carve.

The poem starts quietly in the first line without any figure of speech. After that nearly each line depicts a new image in which elements of the human body are contrasted with frightening or shocking things. The second line introduces the metonymy of a naked body that rebels against death; rebelling, an action of will, is transferred to a concrete naked body, and through the rebelling the body is contrasted with *death*. In a similar way, *veins* are connected to a *black tributary* (l. 3), *eyes* with a *stone wall* (l. 4) and with *channels of blood* (l. 5), *face* with *fire* (l. 6) and *pupils* (l. 7) with a *fearful* direction (l. 8). Through the imagery, the body parts are subjected to destruction, terror and death, thus showing the vulnerability of the human body. Only the last two lines are exceptional in this because, on the one hand, no direct physical elements are mentioned in either of them (although there is an *I* who is described as a cut-down tree), and on the other hand, the last line offers a glimmer of hope.

Of course, not all poetry leaning heavily on the use of imagery is necessarily constructed in the same way or leads to similar difficulties. The early work of Chen Li, who started writing in the 1970s is also much dominated by the power of imagery. His fairy-like 'Animal Lullaby' (動物搖籃曲, 1980), the title poem from his

second book (1980), is exemplary in this: it is an accumulation of predominantly animal images that can be taken to symbolize certain humans, situations, moods and so on. On the whole Chen Li's images are more gentle, less disturbing than Luo Fu's example. The following poem, 'Cloudburst' (暴雨, 1978) from the book *Animal Lullaby*, is just like Luo Fu's about an alarmed or agitated *I*, but is much less shocking:

Cruel as the bats of last night  
flapping, giant wings suddenly invade  
the aluminum doors and windows of defenseless sleep  
mercilessly press a bad omen on the corner of the mouth of midday:  
a piercing shriek –  
makes you notice that liquefied and stiffened time is everywhere  
a maze of narrow tracks  
the fear of getting lost becomes wet sooner than the ground:

I want my world smaller than a candy tin  
tougher than crystal-glass<sup>255</sup>

Chen's sentences are syntactically regular as well. But Chen's poem makes the connections between the sentences and phrases even more explicit than Luo's: lines one to three form one sentence, to which line four is coordinate, sharing the same subject; lines 5 to 7 also form one sentence, with line 7, the 'maze of narrow tracks', forming the second part of the object clause of 'notice'; somewhat similarly, line 10 continues upon the first part of line 9; and lines 4 and 8 both end with a colon, thus opening up to the next line.

Obviously, tension is again created by the imagery, and also in this Chen's poem offers more to hold on to, by way of adjectives and adverbs that are the motive, or the so-called ground of the image, which facilitates comprehension. Tension for example arises in the 'wings' that invade 'sleep'. In these first lines several images are combined: 'sleep' is a metonymy of the *I* of the poem (mentioned only in line 9) who is at rest; the wings are a synecdoche – a *pars pro toto* – for the bats and simultaneously a metaphor for the 'cloudburst', which is a metaphor itself for something intruding upon the *I*. 'Cruel as the bats' provides the ground for the metaphor of the 'wings' for the 'storm', which immediately emphasizes the unpleasantness of what happens; and second, in Chinese the 'flapping' (拍打, l. 2)

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<sup>255</sup> Chen Li 1997: 124.

points to the similarity in the movement of the flapping wings and a storm that beats against the window. What the wings invade is 'sleep', which is depicted as a house with windows and doors (l. 3), and again an adjective clarifies this 'sleep', as 'defenseless' stresses the aspect of helplessness and innocence. In a similar way the ground for the tension between 'world' (l. 9) on the one hand and 'candy tin' (l. 9) and 'crystal-glass' (l. 10) on the other, is given in the comparatives 'smaller' and 'tougher'. The 'fear of getting lost' (l. 8) is metonymically clarified by way of the 'maze of narrow tracks' provided in the previous line (l. 7) and the word 'wet' (l. 8) links the fear and the storm in an original way: cold sweat and rain wet the *I* and the ground. Other metonymical shifts: the shriek (l. 5) can be related to the mouth (l. 4); the 'melted and stiffened time' (l. 6) to 'midday' (l. 4).

To sum up, Chen Li's poem contains as much imagery as Luo's, and both writers clearly try to create surprising and refreshing combinations. Yet, the difference is palpable. This is not just a result of the kind of images, but even more important is the way in which the images are used. Luo's poem is less explicit in providing the link between the tenor and the vehicle, but simply juxtaposes them, whereas Chen's is inclined to provide explicating adverbs or adjectives. As a result Luo's imagery is more unexpected. Even though it is sometimes possible to 'explain' these images through traditional Chinese symbolism – cicadas for example, are associated with immortality and resurrection as well as happiness and eternal youth – such explanations are not given in the poem. The difference is perhaps traceable to French surrealism, the movement of the image *par excellence* to which Luo Fu was, as we have seen, attracted for a while.

One of the main objectives of the surrealists, who established themselves as a movement in 1926 with a manifesto by André Breton, the godfather of the movement, was a kind of de-rusting of words and images; these were to be freed from their traditional syntactic relationships and associations, leading to dislocations of space and time. Magritte's paintings of a man with a bird cage as a torso or a mirror reflecting the back side of the man looking into that mirror are famous examples that defy common logic. By providing astonishing, upsetting images the surrealists hoped to reach complete freedom. As Louis Aragon said in 1926 during his surrealist period:

The vice called Surrealism is the unruly and irrational use of the stupefying image, or rather of the uncontrolled provocation of the image for the sake of the provocation itself and for the sake of the unpredictable dislocations and metamorphoses that this provocation entails in the realm of representation; for each image each time forces you to reconsider the whole universe.<sup>256</sup>

For the surrealists the image was created by uniting two remote realities, as in Paul Éluard's famous line 'The earth is blue like an orange' (La terre est bleue comme une orange), in which the colors are incompatible but the spherical shape provides a motive.<sup>257</sup> Jacques Prévert's 'An old man in gold with a watch in mourning' (Un vieillard en or avec une montre en deuil; from 'Parade' [Cortège]) also has a clear ground (a watch in gold and man in mourning), in contrast to Louis Aragon's 'the salsify of reproaches, the rutabaga of you see, the turnip of endless reasons' (le salsifis des reproches, le rutabaga des voyez-vous, le navet des raisons sans fin; from *Essay on Style* [Traité du style]).<sup>258</sup> The further apart and precise the two realities that are brought together in an image, the stronger the image will be, according to the surrealists, and the more emotional power and poetical reality it will hold. But opinions differed upon how that had to be accomplished. Whereas Pierre Reverdy first emphasized the supremacy of the mind, André Breton soon demanded that the image escaped reason. According to him and others it was rationalism that had led Europe to the destruction of World War I, and they subsequently leaned heavily on the realm of the unconscious – drawing on theories adapted from Sigmund Freud. For them images had to be arbitrarily and mysteriously dictated, and their works are fantastic realities, showing a recognizable but distant world, in which dream and fantasy join the familiar rational world in an *absolute reality* (la réalité absolue).<sup>259</sup> In order to effectuate this Breton invented the technique of so-called automatic writing, through which images are formed by exploring the realm of the subconscious, dream, instinct, madness and free association.<sup>260</sup>

Luo Fu did not advocate automatic writing and his work shows strong control over the material, defying the surrealist idea of complete freedom of the mind. Yet, it is striking that his first book *Soul River* (靈河, 1957), with poems like

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<sup>256</sup> Jean-Paul Clébert 1996: 314.

<sup>257</sup> Paul Éluard in Marie-Louise Astre 1982: 426-427.

<sup>258</sup> Jacques Prévert 1949: 273; Louis Aragon 1928: 213.

<sup>259</sup> André Breton 1924: 24

<sup>260</sup> Jean-Paul Clébert 1996: 314.

‘Pomegranate Tree’ (石榴樹, 1955), ‘Stormy Sunset’ (風雨之夕, 1955), or ‘Projection’ (投影, 1956), lacks the disordering effects that characterize Luo’s poetry of the 1960s and early 1970s.<sup>261</sup> In those later years Luo is one of the few poets in Taiwan, together with for example Ya Xian, Shang Qin and Guan Guan, to pursue stupefaction through a bold combination of things from remote realms. ‘Language is just a pile of dirty laundry’ (from ‘Death in a Stone Cell, no. 2’, 1965), ‘Three bitter pines follow the traffic signs / and roll right to my feet’ (from ‘Following the sound of the rain into the mountains, but seeing no rain’ [隨雨聲入山而不見雨], 1970), or ‘Light at midnight / is a brooklet / that has never worn clothes’ (from ‘Reading a letter at midnight’ [子夜讀信], 1973) are just a few of the many compelling examples (from his album *Mystic Songs* [魔歌], 1974).<sup>262</sup>

Some influence of surrealism can also be detected in Ya Xian’s ‘Abyss’, discussed in the previous chapter: the ‘venomous moonlight’ (st 1, l. 4) seems the verbal equivalent of a Giorgio de Chirico or a Paul Delvaux, in which unnaturally sharp contrasts of bright light and sinister shadows lend an aura of poignant but vaguely threatening mystery to the scene; and imagery from ‘Abyss’ like ‘Children often lose their way in your hair’ (l. 1), ‘Time with a cat’s face’ (st.4, l. 1), ‘a face wearing a pair of trousers’ (st. 8, l. 7), ‘faces change color like chameleons’ (st. 10, v. 4) are easily visualized as surrealistic paintings by René Magritte or Salvador Dalí and also combine elements from remote realms. Elsewhere Ya Xian seems to hint at surrealist poetry as well; the first line of his ‘Paris’ (巴黎), for example, which reads ‘The soft velvet slipper between your lips / treads on my eyes’, seems to hint at Paul Éluard’s famous ‘The Amorous’ (L’Amoureuse) with the line ‘She is on top of my eye lids’ (Elle est debout sur mes paupières).<sup>263</sup>

Shang Qin has, like Luo Fu, explicitly been associated with surrealism, and indeed examples like ‘The Anthill’ (螞蟻巢, 1957), where ‘splinters of air’ are ‘cut by the men’s knife-edged trouser creases’ and ‘shavings of air’ are ‘planed off by women’s mouths’ remind one of surrealist poetry.<sup>264</sup> Michelle Yeh – without wanting ‘to dub Shang Qin a Surrealist’ – holds that ‘his poetry shares the thrust of the

<sup>261</sup> Respectively Luo Fu 1988: 13, 14, 23.

<sup>262</sup> Respectively Luo Fu 1988: 30, 70, 108.

<sup>263</sup> Ya Xian 1998: 114; Paul Éluard in Marie-Louise Astre 1982: 426.

<sup>264</sup> Shang Qin 1988B: 25.



best of Surrealist works'.<sup>265</sup> But while it is true, as Yeh says, that Shang Qin defies looking at things in a decisive or settled way, one can hardly call this a distinguishing criterion for surrealism; many modern artists who are in no way related to surrealism aspire to challenge the conventional. The French surrealists wanted to enlarge reality by introducing and integrating the supernatural into it; their *absolute reality* takes 'absolute' to mean 'in its totality': a reality that was not restricted to the limited knowledge man has of it. Shang Qin himself is well aware of that when he says that people 'misunderstand the word Surrealism, thinking that "sur" refers to dissociation [from reality]. But I think "sur" means "super"; therefore, to be surreal is to be more real, including the senses of sight and hearing and consciousness'.<sup>266</sup> That definition approaches the surrealist idea of la *réalité absolue*, and Shang Qin regularly shows a predilection for integrating the unreal with the real. However, the reversals that Yeh rightly notices in Shang Qin's poetry 'of the hierarchy of the real and unreal' and of the 'opposition between reality and dream, day and night, adults (or "people") and children, humans and animals' are still in line with man's knowledge.<sup>267</sup> By reversing commonly made divisions, his work affirms them as much as it negates them; notably, his work sometimes shows dualistic thinking, something the surrealists wanted to break with as well. Often, Shang Qin's poems follow the inherent logic of metaphoric or metonymic relations, which seems less typical of surrealist imagery. In 'Electric Lock' (電鎖, 1987) for example, the headlights of a car project the silhouette of the protagonist on the iron gate of his house.<sup>268</sup> Next, he 'inserts the key into his heart', thus fusing body and silhouette, heart and lock. The second stanza continues upon that equation: 'Then I turned the key in my heart with a click, pulled out the delicate piece of metal, pushed the gate open, and strode in. Soon I got used to the darkness inside.' Thus, opening the door and going in is the same as entering the heart or the body; or going home is the same as returning to oneself. Subsequently the 'darkness inside' is not only the darkness inside the house, but also the darkness inside the man.

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<sup>265</sup> Michelle Yeh 1996: 364-5.

<sup>266</sup> Michelle Yeh 1996: 365.

<sup>267</sup> Michelle Yeh 1996: 347.

<sup>268</sup> Shang Qin 1988A: 12.

To return to the examples by Luo Fu and Chen Li, we can ascertain that despite the difference in their way of employing imagery, their poems evidently have in common that they are above all characterized by prose-style language which derives tension from imagery. As far as the imagery itself is concerned, one can remark that the contribution of surrealism and other Western literature can be found in the shift from harmony and correspondence to similarity within dissimilarity, without necessarily leading to surrealist writing.<sup>269</sup> As such both of them are exemplary not only of the books they were published in, but of the whole period they were written in. Much of the work of poets writing in the 1950s and 1960s, like Guan Guan, Ya Xian, Ji Xian, Zhang Mo, Luo Men, Xiang Ming, Bai Qiu, Lin Leng, Xiong Hong and many others, shows a basically similar attitude towards poetic language: more importance is attached to lexical tension, created by imagery, than to syntactic tension.

The vehement discussions of the nativist movement of 1972-3 did not, I would argue, change this tendency: the poetic language remained basically prose-like with imagery accounting for tension. The next poem 'Rice Straw' (稻草, 1972) by the leading nativist poet Wu Sheng (from *Soil* [泥土], 1979), may serve as an example:

In a dry wind  
 Sheaths of rice straw tremble  
 In an abandoned field

On an afternoon that is cool  
 Not for lack of warm sunlight  
 The old people of my village wither away  
 In crumbling courtyards

And finally, who remembers  
 That the old people of my village  
 Like a sheath of rice straw  
 Once sprouted, flowered, and bore fruit

From sprout to sheath of rice straw  
 Is the chronicle of life for everyone in my village.

– translation by John Balcom<sup>270</sup>

<sup>269</sup> Cf. Michelle Yeh 1991, chapter 3: 56-88.

<sup>270</sup> Wu Sheng 1979: 141; translation in Michelle Yeh & N.G.D. Malmqvist 2001: 286.

The focus of this poem, written in a prose-style language, is the comparison of the farmers' or village peoples' life to rice straw, a comparison of two elements that are easily in accordance. That comparison is stretched out all over the poem, and indeed structures it. The first two stanzas start with juxtaposing the two main elements: first the rice straw is described and then the old people. The third stanza then turns that juxtaposition into an explicit comparison, describing the old people directly in terms of rice straw, after which it is concluded that the fate of rice straw is the fate of all. The way in which 'Rice Straw' is concentrated on one image is also very simple compared to the rich and diverse imagery in Luo Fu's 'Death in a Stone Cell' or Chen Li's 'Cloudburst'.<sup>271</sup> In general one may say that there is less tension, simply because the imagery is less intense: there is one main image that it is treated extensively. In short, the effect of imagery is less defamiliarizing. This is typical of the nativist poetry and it remained influential in the 1980s, causing poetry in general to show less lexical tension.

To be sure, the tendency to concentrate on one main image was not restricted to the nativism movement, but was perceptible in the 1950s and 1960s also; the nativists seemed to develop it to this extreme. But before them some of Bai Qiu's poems are prime examples focusing upon one main image, such as 'Arm Chair' (original title in English), 'Trees' (樹), 'Wild Geese', 'Sky' (天空), 'Moth' (蛾).<sup>272</sup> In contrast to Wu Sheng, however, Bai Qiu skillfully exploits the main metaphor (often given in the title) to create more imagery in the same line of thought. It was a way of writing that attracted others as well, as poems by diverse so-called experimental poets such as Qin Zihao, Luo Men, Yu Guangzhong, show; one main metaphor or symbol then 'dictates' or structures the rest of the imagery, without being too restrictive either. In the 1980s, even the work of Luo Fu, who as we have seen was famous for his diverging imagery, becomes more organized in that way, in poems such as 'Because of the wind' (因為風的緣故, 1981), 'The Cricket's Song' (蟋蟀之歌, 1985) or 'Mailing Shoes' (寄鞋, 1987).<sup>273</sup> This probably only confirms how influential the broad nativist discussions had been – resulting generally in less lexical tension.

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<sup>271</sup> In *Dustless Mirror* (無塵的鏡子) Zhang Mo makes a similar distinction, between a single image and, abundant images (1981: 46).

<sup>272</sup> Respectively Bai Qiu 1971: 79; 119; 141; 163; 174.

<sup>273</sup> Respectively Luo Fu 1988: 214; 285; 309.

Before continuing to another aspect of prose-like poetry, fluidity and the use of verse lines, I will now first turn to syntactic tension. Insight into this may help deepen our understanding of the strong trend toward prose-style poetry.

## SYNTACTIC TENSION

A clear exception to this prose-style writing is the poetry of Zheng Chouyu (1933–), which shows some syntactic tension.<sup>274</sup> His poetry of the 1950s and 1960s became widely read in admiration of the carefree wanderer's spirit (浪子) and its elegant, song-like rhythm and language, which reminded some readers of the *ci*-poetry of the Song dynasty.<sup>275</sup> In his refined expression of modern sentiments readers seem to recognize a modern form of classical poetry; it is not for no reason that Yang Mu calls him the 'Chinese poet of China' (中國的中國詩人).<sup>276</sup> Zheng gained this reputation mainly from his first four books of poetry, which, collected in his *Collected Poems of Zheng Chouyu* (鄭愁予詩集), have been printed many times.<sup>277</sup> After a period of silence, he resumed writing around 1975 and published a new volume in 1980, but his later writings have been less well received. His early work comprises many well-known poems, such as 'Sailor's knife' (水手刀, 1954), 'Slave Girls outside the Window' (窗外的女奴, 1958), 'Border Inn' (邊界酒店, 1965), 'Mistress' (情婦, 1957).<sup>278</sup> The most cited one may well be 'Mistake' (錯誤, 1954) from his first book, of which the penultimate line is a very famous one in modern Taiwan poetry circles:

I pass through the South of the Yangzi  
The face awaiting in the season blooms and withers like a lotus

If the east wind does not come, the willow catkins of March do not flutter  
Your heart is like the lonesome little town  
Just like the cobblestone streets near nightfall

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<sup>274</sup> Shen Qi also mentions his exceptional position in this regard (1996: 250).

<sup>275</sup> Wolfgang Kubin 1990; Wai-leung Wong 1979.

<sup>276</sup> Yang Mu in Zheng Chouyu 1997: 11.

<sup>277</sup> Since its publication by Hong Fan in 1979 the book has been reprinted at least 60 times.

<sup>278</sup> Respectively Zheng Chouyu 1999: 98; 169; 241; 165.

If the footsteps do not sound, the bed curtains of March are not lifted  
Your heart is a little window tightly shut

My clattering hooves are a beautiful mistake  
I am not a homecoming man, I am a passing visitor...

As the musicality of the poem is highly praised I here also give the Chinese original, with transcription:

我打江南走過	Wo da / Jiangnan / zouguo
那等在季節裏的容顏如蓮的開落	Nei deng zai / jijie li de / rongyan ru / lianhua
	de / kailuo

東風不來，三月的柳絮不飛	Dongfeng /bu lai, /san yue de /liuxu /bu fei
你的心如小小的寂寞的城	Ni de xin ru /xiaoxiao de /jimo de /cheng
恰若青石的街道向晚	Qia ruo /qing shi de /jiedao /xiang wan
摐音不響，三月的春帷不揭	Qiongyin /bu xiang, /san yue de /chunwei /bu jie
你底心是小小的窗扉緊掩	Ni de xin shi /xiaoxiao de /chuangfei /jinyan

我達達的馬蹄是美麗的錯誤	Wo dada de /mati shi /meili de /cuowu
我不是歸人，是個過客.....	Wo bu shi /guiren, /shi ge guoke... <sup>279</sup>

Obviously, the poem leans heavily on imagery. It plays upon the cliché of a young woman ‘in bloom’, and all its aspects are unfolded by way of metaphors and comparisons – one in each line, except for the first. Most of the poem is devoted to sketching the girl’s situation: she is the face of line two that in her patient waiting blooms and withers, and the second stanza is fully devoted to her ‘imprisonment’, likening her respectively to willow catkins, a little town, cobblestone streets, the bed curtains and a tightly shut window.<sup>280</sup> All these images imply that the prime of her life goes by with her waiting and being lonely. Only in the last two lines do we revert to the *I* of the first line, the man in the poem, through the metonymy of the ‘clattering hooves’. In imagery and theme the poem has much in common with the so-called *ci*-poetry from the Song dynasty, in which women in waiting frequently symbolized the repudiation of an official by the emperor. But the perspective has been changed drastically, from that of a woman to that of a wandering man.

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<sup>279</sup> Zheng Chouyu 1999: 123.

<sup>280</sup> ‘Willow catkin’, *liuxu* (柳絮) in Chinese, is a homonym for ‘feelings, emotions’. This is another form of lexical tension: the meaning of words with the same pronunciation but written differently resounds in the text and exists alongside the meaning of the actual characters. It is comparable to, for example, the eating of ‘fish’ around New Year, which, through the similarity in pronunciation, symbolizes ‘richness’ or ‘abundance’ in the year to come.

Zheng's language is decisively *baihua* in nature, giving an impression of orality: it is a relatively simple language, in an irregular but very rhythmic free verse with some rhyme, assonance and alliteration (such as *zouguo* [走過] and *kailuo* [開落] in lines 1 and 2, or *dada de mati* [達達的馬蹄], repeating the -a and the -d/-t sound in line 8). The musical effects people admire so much are also achieved through the strong cadence that is created by the division into lines of four or five feet (except for the first and last line which have three feet), which mostly consist of two-character compounds.<sup>281</sup> Yang Mu furthermore remarks that the inversion of the fifth line is also mainly for the sake of rhythm.<sup>282</sup> It would syntactically be more usual if 'near nightfall', *xiangwan* (向晚) were more in front: *qiaruo xiangwan de qingshi jiedao* (恰若向晚的青石的街道).<sup>283</sup> Another example related to the importance of cadence is the fourth line: 'town', *cheng* (城), is preceded by the two adjectives *xiaoxiao de* (小小的) and *jimo de* (寂寞的) where a more concise expression such as *jimo de xiao cheng* (寂寞的小城) would have been possible as well. But then the four and five feet regularity would have been interrupted. In a personal and free way, Zheng's poem thus pays as much attention to sound and rhythm as was required in classical poetry, yet not in any rigid or strict way; on the contrary, it gives an impression of ease and spontaneity, and in that sense rather reminds one of Xu Zhimo or Wen Yiduo. In a different way, a few other Taiwan poets also show much attention to sound and rhythm, without conforming to a strict scheme. Yu Guangzhong, for example, explicitly emphasizes that he is 'keenly aware of the role played by sound patterns, rhyming, ping-ze [static and dynamic tone] and so on.'<sup>284</sup> Yang Mu's poetry, too, gives the impression of natural but rhythmic fluency.

What is interesting in view of the present research is that this verse goes hand in hand with paratactic sentence arrangement. In 'Mistake', the verse lines each consist of independent and conventionally grammatical sentences – just like in the earlier examples. But Zheng has not made the syntactic relations between

<sup>281</sup> De (的, a connective), ru (如 like) and shi (是 to be) are unstressed syllables that vanish into the forceful two-characters rhythm.

<sup>282</sup> Yang Mu in Zheng Chouyu 1997: 15.

<sup>283</sup> The word order in the poem also seems to make the phrase more active: *xiang* 向 nearly assumes a verb-like function, as if the stones are going towards evening.

<sup>284</sup> K.C. Leung 1991: 444. Leung calls 'Ping-ze' the 'static and dynamic tone'. The standard terms for *ping* and *ze* are 'level and oblique'; they refer to tone contrasts in the Chinese language.

the sentences or parts of them fully explicit. The first two lines, for instance, which are asyndetic, can be read as ‘While I pass through [...] / the face [...] blooms and withers [...]’; the exact connection is not given through any syntactic indication. Similarly, there is a causal relation between the two near-parallel phrases of line 3 and line 6, which are without conjunctions. Literally line 3 reads: ‘The East wind does not come, the willow catkins of March do not flutter’. This could be a common and grammatically correct Chinese way of saying ‘*If* the east wind does not come, *then* the willow catkins of March do not flutter’, but it is remarkable considering the overall syntactic character of modern poetry; one additional character (for instance: *dongfeng yao bu lai* [東風要不來] in the first part of the sentence or *san yue de liuxu jiu / bian bu fei* [三月的柳絮就/便不飛] in the second part) would have made the connection at once explicit. Nor is there any syntactic indication of how the next line (4 and 7) connects to the previous one, and the last two lines are again simply juxtaposed.<sup>285</sup> To conclude, Zheng’s poem includes elements that are usually associated with classical poetry: imagery, rhythmic verse and paratactic arrangements – a clear contrast with the examples by Ji Xian, Luo Fu and Chen Li. This might account for the label of ‘Chineseness’ and the high appreciation of readers. And one may wonder to what extent that appreciation is another demonstration of an ingrained equalization of poetry with verse.

Elsewhere Zheng also employs a different syntactic tension. Especially his second book shows some language experimentation, such as grammatical adaptations which may be based on English, as in the example of ‘toward evening’.<sup>286</sup> Often quoted examples are the poems ‘The Man to the Right’ (右邊的人, 1961) and ‘Itinerary’ (旅程, 1965), in which a noun is suddenly employed as a verb, respectively: ‘it *autumns*, it *has been autumning* already for a long time’ (已秋了, 已秋得很久很久了), which also carries rhyme; and ‘I once husbanded    daddied’ (我曾夫過    父過).<sup>287</sup> These sporadic functional conversions, enabling brevity, do not quite convince Yang Mu, who disapproves of the *yang*, the harshness, that this way slides into Zheng’s poetry.<sup>288</sup> He perceives these elements as small disrupters

<sup>285</sup> In ‘Mistake’ only line five is clearly subordinate to line four.

<sup>286</sup> Yang Mu in Zheng Chouyu 1997: 13

<sup>287</sup> Zheng Chouyu 1999: 187 & 243.

<sup>288</sup> Yang Mu in Zheng Chouyu 1997: 40-1.

of the rhythmic fluency, of the *yin* nature he appreciates so much in Zheng's first book. Even though that probably tells us as much about Yang Mu's poetics as about Zheng's poetry, Yang's comment is interesting in the light of the debate on *wenyan*, *baihua*, and *sanwen*, as he remarks that these and other examples are 'elements of *wenyan* sentence structure' that have been 'injected into a traditional *baihua*', with which Yang probably refers to the monosyllabic nature, since functional conversions are not specifically restricted to *wenyan*.<sup>289</sup>

In a similar vein other poets have carried out different language experiments, but they employed it within an overall prose-style. Some, like Yang Lingye, for example, at times inserted *wenyan* phrases or expressions into their poems. Lloyd Haft has pointed to symmetry structures in some of Zhou Mengdie's poems<sup>290</sup>, which of course 'mark' his language, and Luo Qing has for example experimented with the language of martial art novels in *The Gallant Knights of Cathay* (神州豪俠傳, 1975).<sup>291</sup> The sporadic experiments with concrete forms in the 1960s by Bai Qiu, Lin Hengtai and others effected their language usage. Yet, despite such form and language experiments and despite the obvious diversity in the poetic language of Taiwan poets, a dominant style can be detected from the 1950s till the mid 1980s: a speech-based prose, mostly characterized by regular syntactic relations, complete sentences, a rhythm following natural breath pauses, and tension created mostly by imagery.

## FLUIDITY AND VERSE LINES

The example of Zheng's poetry illustrates that paratactic writing indeed occurs and that the use of images is, obviously, not confined to prose-style poetry. But

<sup>289</sup> Yang Mu in Zheng Chouyu 1997: 39.

<sup>290</sup> Lloyd Haft, 2006 chapter 1: 17-42.

<sup>291</sup> Cf. Lin Huanzhang who mentions Luo Qing's special use of language in comparison to that of his predecessors (1973: 115). Even in his first collection Luo Qing has a way of playing with word/character order. Every now and then he also likes to play with sound, as in 'Blankly slanting/slantedly leaning' (空空的斜著 / 斜斜的靠著) from 'The ladder' (梯子, 1982 in *Here come the UFOs* (不明飛行物來了1984), or 'Pants' belt belting pants / Flying in the wind's dance / The words dance in the wind (衣帶帶衣 / 在風中飛舞 / 在飛中舞字) from 'Not to Keep anything from you' (不瞞您說, 1976 in *Rice Paddy Songs* (水稻之歌) (translations by Joseph R. Allen 1993: 363 & 295).



from the end of the 1950s onward the prose-style prevailed and an apparent result of that is fluidity: the poetry *flows*, so to speak, the language faces forward. Where verse is characterized by interval and interruption, the prose-style shows continuity. Remarkably, the arrangement of the verse lines generally does not affect this fluidity. In the examples taken from the work of Luo Fu and Zheng Chouyu, sentences and verse lines more or less coincided, but in those taken from Chen Li's poetry they did not. Nevertheless, Chen's arrangement of sentences in shorter verse lines hardly interferes with the sense of syntactic fluidity, as the breaks are at natural pauses. Nor does it really affect the lexical tension in the poem; at best it enhances it.

Just as Chen Li has written poetry in which sentence and verse line coincide – the majority of the lines in 'Taroko Gorge, 1989' for example – Luo Fu has employed the opposite: sentences broken into verse lines. In fact, it probably is the more common way of writing for Luo as well. An example is his 'Gold Dragon Temple' (金龍禪寺, 1970), a very famous poem from the fifth collection *Mystic Songs*. Again lexical tension dominates the poem:

the evening bell  
is a small trail travelers take down the mountain  
ferns  
along steps of white stone  
chew their way all the way down

if this place were covered with snow

but all that's seen is  
a single startled cicada rising  
to light the lanterns  
one by one  
all over the mountain

– translation by John Balcom <sup>292</sup>

The imagery itself is clearly distinct from that in 'Death in a Stone Cell, 1', as it lacks the harsh images related to death and fear. The first two lines provide strong lexical tension by equating the 'evening bell' to 'a small trail'. The ground for this

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<sup>292</sup> Luo Fu 1988: 76; Translation in Michelle Yeh & N.G.D. Malmqvist 2001: 123. I have made two minor changes. For the sake of similarity with the original I have kept the second verse line together, which Balcom divided into three: 'is a small trail / travelers take / down the mountain'. I have also changed the fifth line which read in his translation: 'chews its way all the way down'.

metaphor is given by the tenor itself, for the images can be understood through the element ‘evening’: the bell announces the evening, making travelers aware that it is time to leave the mountain; the sound of the bell thus ‘guides’ the travelers down, as the path does.<sup>293</sup> The personification of the cicada in the last stanza is also based on this time reference as they start chirping when dusk falls and that is the time when the lanterns are lit. The relation between both tenors (bell and cicada) and vehicles (trail and light the lanterns) thus implies a metonymical shift and successive action. In a somewhat different way, the ground for the image ‘chew’ in lines three to five is given by the tenor also, because the Chinese word for the ferns, 羊齒植物, that ‘chew their way down’ consists of the characters ‘sheep-toothed plant’. In other words, lexical tension is created by focusing on the meaning of sheep’s teeth, thus invoking a reconsideration of the word for ‘ferns’.

Contrary to those in ‘Death in a Stone Cell, 1’, the sentences are now broken at more or less natural pauses, which are syntactically defined. ‘Gold Dragon Temple’ can be parsed as follows:

晚鐘	subject
是遊客下山的小路	copular predicate
羊齒植物	subject
沿著白色的石階	prepositional phrase
一路嚼了下去	adverbial phrase and predicate
如果此處降雪	conditional clause
而只見	conjunction, adverb and predicate
一隻驚起的灰蟬	direct object clause: subject
把山中的燈	direct object clause: object
一盞盞地的	direct object clause: adverbial phrase
點燃	direct object clause: predicate

There are four main clauses: lines one and two, lines three through five, line six, and lines seven through eleven. The last sentence has a syntactic connection to the previous part by way of 而, *er*; the others do not have such connections. All sentences of the poem are broken but complete and regular, except for the middle line of the poem, which paradoxically is broken in a different way: it is left unfinished.

<sup>293</sup> This is a classical allusion. Cf. for example Meng Haoran’s ‘Returning by Night to Lu-men Mountain’ (夜歸鹿門山歌), where the first line reads: ‘The bell rings at the mountain temple, daylight turns to dust’ (translation by Stephen Owen 1977: 420).

This so-called aposiopesis creates some tension at the syntactic level in a poem that is otherwise dominated by imagery. The phrasing of the remaining three sentences mainly serves to intensify the lexical tension.

It is in itself not particularly remarkable that ‘Gold Dragon Temple’ is written in enjambling free verse; free verse – defined as having short, irregular lines – has been *the* form of modern Chinese poetry in Taiwan, and enjambment is widely used as well. Originally the term *enjambment* refers to a syntactic overflow between stanzas, but nowadays it usually refers to run-on lines, with overflow between two or more lines – as seen in the examples by Chen and Luo – as opposed to end-stopped lines. The larger part of Taiwan poetry is written in such enjambments, dividing sentences at natural pauses into verse lines of smaller syntactic units, as a look at recent anthologies like *Poetry Anthology of the 1990s* (九十年代詩選) or *Twenty Years of Taiwan Literature 1978-1998, 1: Twenty New Poets* shows. Yet, even within this common type of enjambment, there is quite a variety in the way it is used. Whereas in ‘Gold Dragon Temple’ it serves to augment the lexical tension created by the imagery and enhances the charm of the poem, it is elsewhere frequently used in a rather straightforward way, with hardly any consequences for the way the poem is read. Compare, for example Li Minyong’s ‘Street-scape’ (街景, 1990), included in both anthologies:

The poets  
Are in the coffee bar on the corner  
Discussing the history of revolution

Occasionally  
Browsing through the evening paper  
They discuss current affairs while music plays

News of the many wars far away  
The progress of both the independence movement and the unification  
The world is stirred in a porcelain cup

Outside the glass window  
A pedestrian hastily walks by  
Tailing a stray dog<sup>294</sup>

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<sup>294</sup> Xin Yu et al. 2001: 26-7; Bai Ling 1998: 21-2.

Whereas the line division serves a clear purpose in Luo's example, it remains rather flat in Li's. Both poems begin with only the subject in the first verse line, one with 'The poets', the other with 'The evening bell', after which the sentence continues in the next. This way both create a somewhat expectant pause, but in Li's example the second line falls short of that expectation: 'The poets / Are in the coffee bar at the street corner / Discussing the history of revolution' is a regular sentence, holding hardly any tension at either the lexical or syntactic level. In Luo's, as was already observed, the delay of the following predicate to the next line does not in itself create any tension either, but it augments the existing lexical tension. The same is true for the remaining sentences of the poems. In short, both are written in syntactically regular sentences, in which line division and enjambment do not play an active part in creating tension of the lexical or syntactic kind. In this respect, they are typical of a large part of modern Taiwan poetry.

Another aspect that frequently increases the feeling of fluidity is the narrative character of many individual poems, which already existed of course, for example in some poems by Ya Xian, but with the rise of nativism in the 1970s it seems to become more popular. Of the younger generation Luo Qing, for example, has on occasion written highly narrative poetry in a rather straightforward, linear way, such as in 'Ant' (螞蟻) from *The Gallant Knights of Cathay*:

Out of a sea of people  
 An ant crawls toward you  
 You don't know whether to be happy or sad  
 Is he friend or foe?

He crawls over your shoes  
 And you discover that you are actually  
 Wearing battleships  
 Camouflaged, but real fortresses

He crawls over your knee  
 And you discover that your smooth, marble body  
 Is all dangerous terrain—  
 Your shoulders are drop-offs, your chest a vertical wall

The ant crawls up your neck  
 And you discover that he discovers a thatched hut  
 A rustic thatched hut  
 With a door, chimney, and windows

He crawls into your mouth

And out of your nostril, climbing into your eye  
And for the first time you discover that this ant is  
Huge, dinosaurianly huge

Finally the ant crawls into your brain  
In and out of your dreams  
Weaving for you all your unfinished fantasies  
And you discover that you are able to discover no more

– translation by Joseph R. Allen<sup>295</sup>

Each stanza consists of one continuing sentence, deriving tension from the main metaphor of the ant. By following this perspective some additional imagery is created in each stanza, such as the shoes as battleships, the body as a dangerous terrain, or the head as a thatched hut. The overall prosaic quality of the language is emphasized by the evident narrative of the adventurous ant and enhances the forward movement of the text. Because some sort of plot is incorporated, suspense is added to the language tension. This is something Luo Qing does regularly, especially in his collection *Catching Thieves* (捉賊記, 1977).

Now let me take a look at how fluidity and narrativity functions in poetry that is called *prose poem* in English – as prose and narrativity are generally easily associated. What happened to the prose poem in this prose-style environment? There are several poets in Taiwan who have written prose poems: Ya Xian has written a famous one, called ‘Salt’ (鹽, 1958)<sup>296</sup>; Ji Xian, Guan Guan and Du Ye have written several; Su Shaolian is quite known for them, but they have especially brought fame to Shang Qin.<sup>297</sup> Yet although Shang Qin is above all highly praised for his prose poetry, interestingly, he himself stresses he would not use the term *sanwen shi*, 散文詩, and prefers to say ‘using prose to write poetry’ (以散文寫詩) – a statement he borrowed from Ji Xian.<sup>298</sup> Like Ji Xian, Shang Qin judges the intrinsic quality of a piece of writing and not the extrinsic form. For example, he explicitly calls ‘Cough’ (咳嗽, 1980), ‘in lieu of a preface’ in his *Thinking with Feet* (用腳思想, 1988), a prose text and not verse, despite the fact that it is cut in verse lines, as follows:

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<sup>295</sup> Joseph R. Allen 1993: 241-3; Luo Qing 1975: 83-5.

<sup>296</sup> Ya Xian 1998: 63.

<sup>297</sup> On the subject of prose poetry in Taiwan see Michelle Yeh’s article ‘From Surrealism to Nature Poetics: A Study of Prose Poetry from Taiwan’ (2000: 119-56).

<sup>298</sup> Personal communication, Taipei, 17 January 2001. Ji Xian 1956A: 14

Sitting  
in a corner  
of  
a room  
of  
the library

holding back  
until  
someone drops a book  
(history!)  
on the ground

then finally  
I cough  
once<sup>299</sup>

What characterizes his prose? Two things are especially striking: the long sentences and the sparse but powerful imagery. ‘Giraffe’ (長頸鹿, 1959) is one of Shang Qin’s best-known examples:

After the young prison guard noticed that at the monthly physical check-up all the height increases of the prisoners took place in the neck, he reported to the warden: ‘Sir, the windows are too high!’ But the reply he received was: ‘No, they look up at Time.’

The kindhearted young guard didn’t know what Time looks like, nor its origin and whereabouts, so night after night he patrolled the zoo hesitantly and waited outside the giraffe pen.

– translation by Michelle Yeh<sup>300</sup>

In the poem the phrase ‘They look up at Time’ plays a key role. The utterance is in fact simply taken in a strictly realistic, rational way, defamiliarizing it at the same time: in the line of thought of the naive guard, who does not know what time is and therefore cannot understand the utterance of the warden, time becomes something tangible like a window. Lexical tension is created because the juxtaposition of two words belonging to different paradigms – window is a concrete, countable noun, ‘time’ an abstract, mass noun – forces an unfamiliar correspondence.

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<sup>299</sup> Shang Qin 1988: 8.

<sup>300</sup> Shang Qin 1988: 33; Michelle Yeh & N.G.D. Malmqvist 2001: 176

Frequently, Shang Qin's figurative language revolves around such a semantic transition: concrete and abstract, real and unreal are merged within the reality of the poem. In a rational and logical way words are liberated from their traditional semantic relationships and associations. As for the syntactic relations, the sentences more or less move along common lines, as can be seen in 'Giraffe' also. Long and winding as they may be, the sentences do have regular syntax, following the usual subject-verb-object order. The first sentence is at first sight somewhat complex because it is long and the main clause is delayed to the end: the subordinate clause 'After... neck' (那個 ... 之後) at the beginning of the sentence goes quite a long way before it becomes clear that actually 'he reported to the warden' is the main clause. This is somewhat misleading, but not in any sense ungrammatical, strange or incomprehensible. The rest of the poem is similar, with some delays in the second stanza through the side by side positioning of three parallel verb-object groups in the first main sentence and two parallel predicates in the co-ordinate sentence after the semicolon.

Yet, Michelle Yeh states that Shang Qin's poetry has convoluted syntax, thereby explicitly referring to 'Boundary' (界, 1958).<sup>301</sup> But examining its syntactic constructions, I find that they are comparable to the ones in 'Giraffe':

It is said there is a war off somewhere...

Here, in a street at daybreak, a patrol man is stopped in a place without any obstacles. Instantly he puts his hand behind his back, lowers his head and walks with measured steps; wants to explain, wants to find out: where is the 'boundary'; in this way he is sculpted by this one intention.

And witnessed by a street dog, is the boundary, woven by the stare of one who has got up early in the morning and washed, projecting an awareness of the tendency of the dream of last night, and its echo that turns from the glass hairs on the wall of bricks and cement.<sup>302</sup>

The first stanza does not provide any difficulties, nor does the second; the two implied subjects are clearly the patrol man. The difficulty of the second stanza lies not so much in following the syntactic structure, but in understanding the last part, 'in this way he is sculpted by this one intention', which is syntactically cor-

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<sup>301</sup> Michelle Yeh 1996: 333-4.

<sup>302</sup> Shang Qin 1988: 37.

rect, but rendered more difficult by the passive construction. An active version ‘this intention makes a statue of him’ would more directly point to the man’s frozen attitude. Similarly, a fluent reading of the last stanza, one long sentence divided by three commas, is also somewhat impeded by its two passive constructions, ‘witnessed by the dog’ (爲...所..., wei... suo) and ‘woven by the stare [...] and its echo’ (由... 所..., you... suo...) – of which especially the second is more complicated, mainly because the element 所 *suo* occurs twice. The first *suo* is somewhat misleading, as it is not the one that makes the passive construction. Furthermore, the first comma, which serves to emphasize ‘boundary’ (一條界) may obscure the fact that ‘witnessed by a street dog’ (爲一之野狗所目睹) is adjective to ‘boundary’. There is, however, a clear main structure: ‘a boundary is woven by the stare and its echo’ (一條街由目光與回聲所織成), in which the rest are adjective phrases.

To conclude, there is no syntactic tension: the poems include some constructions that slow down reading, but stick to a clear and regular syntax. Yet, Shang Qin’s prose style differs a lot from other Taiwan poets’ in that he is one of the few to really take the writing of prose-style poetry as his point of departure: he exploits its possibilities to the full by prolonging the sentences and having them ‘turned forward’ in the extreme. In doing so Shang Qin actually defies the fluidity that characterizes so much of the other poetry that is written in verse, and straightforward narrativity is seldom used. Evidently, he deliberately tries to draw attention to the language itself, in both a lexical and syntactic way; he seeks the limits, but does not cross them.

In Xia Yu’s poetry, in the next section, it is the syntactic structures themselves that are at stake.

## ANOTHER FORM OF PROSE

Xia Yu has risen to prominence from the end of the 1980s onwards: her first two books of poetry *Memoranda* and *Ventriloquy* (腹語術, 1991) were praised sky-high both inside and outside the poetry scene. Her third book *Friction: Indescrib-*



able, however, was taken to task by many for destroying the Chinese language.<sup>303</sup> As do many other poets, Xia Yu takes prose language as the starting point of her poetry, but her work arguably still marks a different stage. Whereas Shang Qin's extended sentences slow down the process of reading, Xia Yu's frequently create ambiguity: the sentences interlock with one another, making it impossible to tell where one sentence ends and another begins. The characteristic idea of prose as a forward-facing text or an ongoing flow is given a new meaning here: syntactic relations are pushed to such an extreme that it creates tension because parts of the sentences are no longer compatible. The following poem, 'Written for Others' (寫給別人), from *Salsa* (Original title in English, 1999), may serve to illustrate how Xia Yu handles this:

I write on the palm of his hand intricately<sup>304</sup>  
 so that it seduces him and then I still write it wrong  
 rub it and write it again stroke by stroke  
 I draw line by line and rubbing it I draw him  
 into a pictographic raft I  
 let the air out of the raft we sink  
 into the lake I say I love you  
 without roots and without nest  
 I love you I love you slowing  
 the pace till the very slowest so slow till  
 we hear gear-turning  
 sounds slippingly on our bodies  
 a beam of light that is the movie picture  
 only invented by someone to darken  
 the room to teach us  
 to make love slowly in the slowest motion  
 I love you slowly  
 dissolving into coarse-grains I love you  
 till we turn and are infinitely  
 split up and dissected o I love you  
 I love you  
 we become strangers to ourselves  
 so that there can be people who think  
 they have seen through us<sup>305</sup>

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<sup>303</sup> Personal communication, April 2001 and Zhang Beiwen 2002: 68. Nevertheless, in April 2001 *Friction: Indescribable* had sold 3000 copies. And all of Xia Yu's collections sell well – far more than the average sale of a collection of poetry: *Memoranda* flourishes in the form of photocopies (Xia Yu herself refused to make a reprint after the first 500 copies); in April 2001 *Ventriloquy* had sold 4000 and *Salsa* 7000 copies.

<sup>304</sup> It is common practice in Taiwan and China to 'write' with a finger in the palm of the hand to demonstrate which character one is talking about.

<sup>305</sup> Xia Yu 1999: 90.

This poem about a protagonist seducing someone and making love might also be regarded as a poem on the writing of poetry. The image of seducing someone by writing ‘on the palm of his hand’ is comparable to Xia Yu’s writing: like a seducer, a poem should hold a temptation in some way or other and lure the reader into it. Especially the first five lines can be read as a description of *how* this is done: ‘I write on the palm of his hand intricately / so that it seduces him and then I write it wrong too / rub it and write it again [...] I draw him / into a pictographic raft’. Although it can by no means be said that Xia Yu writes her poetry ‘wrong’, the syntactic structures force readers to ‘write’ the sentences themselves during the reading process, correcting or adjusting along the way. The incongruity between verse lines and sentences is crucial in this. Frequently the verse lines are structured in such a way that the sentence seems to stop at the end but then turns out to actually go beyond the verse line to the next, changing its meaning. Every new verse line may give a twist to the whole, but one can seldom conclude in the end that one has found the one and only way of reading. Ambiguity remains, and by way of such intricacy the reader is lured into Xia Yu’s ‘pictographic raft’ – or scared off. The language thus keeps the reader alert in quite a different way than any of the examples above.

A closer look at the Chinese original of the lines 9 to 15 shows how exactly the ambiguity works:

我愛你我愛你把速度  
放慢到最慢慢到乃  
聽見齒輪滑動旋轉  
的聲音在我們身上  
一束筒狀的光是誰  
發明的電影只是爲了讓屋子  
暗下來讓我們學會

Line 9 can be read in two ways: ‘I love you, I love you, [I] slow the pace’ (我愛你,我愛你,[我]把速度 / 放慢); or: ‘I love you, I love your slowing / the pace’ (我愛你,我愛你把速度 / 放慢). The repetition of ‘I love you’ in the first instance suggests reading ‘I love you’ twice, especially because it already occurred in line 7 as well. That reading would mean that the subject of *to slow down* is implied – which is common practice in classical and modern Chinese poetry, especially for an *I*. The

second version may perhaps read more smoothly, but is somewhat countered by the content: as the beginning of the poem has set the tone of the *I* being the active, leading person, one might want to continue that line of thought. Both versions are equally justifiable in the Chinese.

After ‘slowing’ there is a short pause, it is the first place where one could stop and have a complete sentence, but it continues: ‘slowing the pace to the very slowest’ (放慢到最慢), and even further, ‘so slow we hear gears turning slippingly’ (慢到乃 / 聽見齒輪滑動旋轉). Here at the end of the verse line, the sentence seems to conclude, only to continue in the next with ‘sounds’ (的聲音; literally ‘the sound of’). Transferring ‘the sound of’ 的聲音 to this next line instead of putting it directly after turning (旋轉) is meaningful as it urges the reader to read on with ‘on our bodies’ (在我們身上), creating the sentence ‘so slow that we hear the slipping sound of the revolving of the gears on our bodies’ – thus the sound is transferred to the bodies, making it physical. On the other hand, ‘a beam of light’ (一束筒狀的光) can also, and more easily from a logical-realistic point of view, be associated with ‘on our bodies’ (在我們身上), making the beam of light the thing that is on the bodies. Then again, the verse line beginning with ‘a beam of light’ also forms a syntactically perfect sentence with ‘is who’ (是誰): ‘the beam of light is who?’; or one is lured to the next line to form the sentence: ‘the beam of light’, alternatively combined with ‘which is on our bodies’, ‘is the movie picture that is invented by someone’ ([在我們身上] / 一束筒狀的光是誰 / 發明的電影). Or shall we read two coherences in ‘who has invented the tubular shaped light?’ (一束筒狀的光是誰 / 發明的) and ‘movies serve only to have the room darkened’ (發明的電影只是爲了讓屋子 / 暗下來讓)? Or what about making one long sentence: ‘the beam of light [that is on our bodies] is the movie picture invented by some one, which was only to have the room darkened’ (在我們身上 / 一束筒狀的光是誰 / 發明的電影只是爲了讓屋子 / 暗下來)?

Thus the poem goes on: one sentence may conceal another one and readers form and reform them as they read, shifting the meaning along. ‘Written for Others’ excels in creating syntactic tension through a skillful arrangement of language, calling the unity of the line into question, which is typical of *Salsa*. Many of

the poems in it evoke slightly contradictory feelings: there is a strong sense of an ongoing flow because of the continuations to the next line, yet that flow is time and again interrupted by the constant need for reconsidering how things fit together. The sparse use of punctuation is important in this. There are not many punctuation marks in the whole volume, nor in Xia Yu's earlier books, and many poems have none at all, as in 'Written For Others'. On the one hand this goes very well with the feeling of continuity: characters succeeding one after another without interruption, which is augmented in the original layout, done by Xia Yu herself, in which the characters are closely pressed together and nearly slip into each other. On the other hand the elliptic punctuation is simultaneously favorable to delaying the reading process and augments ambiguity. If there were a comma, for example, between 'sounds' (的聲音) and 'on' (在), one would quite 'naturally' link 'on our bodies' (在我們身上), to the next line 'a beam of light' (一束筒狀的光).

Punctuation was originally imported from European languages when the vernacular became accepted in China at the beginning of the twentieth century. Classical Chinese *wenyan* basically had no punctuation at all, and the reader had to 'trace' the beginning and ending of the sentence himself, although a restricted number of conventions and syntactic elements provided directions, and in poetry the sentences usually coincided with the 'verse line'.<sup>306</sup> Poetry was thus not presented in verse lines but these were recognizable by the regular number of characters, tonal patterns and so on. In modern Chinese, punctuation is generally used more loosely and differently than in Western languages; commas, for example, are frequently equal to a full stop in English or a comma is often inserted immediately after the subject of a sentence, which would be superfluous and incorrect in English. Most poets like Yu Guangzhong, Yang Mu, Zheng Chouyu, Xiong Hong, Ye Weilian, Luo Men, Rongzi, Chen Li, Luo Qing, Luo Fu, Luo Zhicheng, Hong Hong and so on, apply punctuation scarcely to moderately, using line-division instead to mark a pause in the sentence, and most of them do not add a full stop at the end of a verse line that coincides with a sentence. Whether the choice to use line-breaks to replace punctuation marks is a continuation of the classical Chinese practice or

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<sup>306</sup> Late classical Chinese uses some punctuation, although it is not the modern punctuation based on European languages that has been in use in Modern Chinese.

an imitation of Western poets like T.S. Eliot, who recommended it,<sup>307</sup> is of course hard to tell. But the opposite certainly occurs much less: only a few poets, like Ji Xian and Xia Jing, have many punctuation marks, wherever they judge necessary, including commas, semicolons and full stops at the end of each verse line.

In Taiwan poetry the scarcity of punctuation is actually hardly used to create ambiguity, and apart from a few exceptions it is usually quite evident at the end of a verse line whether the sentence continues or whether there is in fact an imaginary comma or full stop. Yang Mu's poetry, for example, does sometimes have some tension between sentence and verse line, and Chen Li's short poem 'In the afternoon, I am' (下午的時候,我在, 1975) is also a good example. In Chinese it begins with: 下午的時候,我在 / 大街 / 看天空洗他的許多眼睛, which could be rendered into English as 'In the afternoon, I am / in the street / looking at the sky washing its many eyes'. This is a full sentence in itself, but because of the way it is phrased, one also has to consider the meaning of the first line separate from the rest of the sentence. 'In the afternoon, I am' in the sense of 'I am there, I exist', thus stands alongside 'Afternoon, I am looking at the sky washing...', all the more since the poem ends with 'In the afternoon, I am', and that is also the title. Yet on the whole, one only occasionally comes across poems which show a technique similar to Xia Yu's to create ambiguity.

Basically, the ambiguous effects in which *Salsa* abounds are the result of enjambment, which is in it self, as seen above, not so remarkable. In contrast to those earlier examples, where enjambment at best emphasized lexical tension, it is a powerful, vital aspect in Xia Yu's poems. As a result, the poems emphatically enforce reader participation, much more than the work of any of the other writers. Intuitive though Xia Yu's poems may be in origin (as she stresses herself)<sup>308</sup>, her poems also emphasize that they are a construct not only on the part of the writer but also by the reader, which already begins with the material book, as the pages must be cut open before it can be read. It is a significant design, for it not only confirms an active contribution of the reader, but also makes a unique artifact of each copy of the book – just like each reading does.

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<sup>307</sup> A.C. Partridge 1976: 16.

<sup>308</sup> Personal communication, autumn 2005.

In his 1998 treatise ‘Avant-garde poetry’ (前衛詩) Jiao Tong states that to ‘enforce participation of the readers’ is one of the aims of the new ‘Avant-garde poetry’, which is often characterized by ‘language games’ and ‘form games’.<sup>309</sup> However, I see that increased reader participation rather as a concomitant result of something else: a radical change in the attitude toward poetic language and to poetry. In the 1950s through the 1970s language comes to the fore as a natural, transparent medium; even though it can and even has to be manipulated in poetry – for all poetry is after all constructed – it is still predominantly a means of expression and in the end it is the expression that counts. Conversely, in Xia Yu’s poetry from the end of the 1980s onwards, language comes to be more problematic and artificial; doubt is cast on its very capacity for expression. As a result the language demands attention for itself: language is materialized, as it were, and at times this becomes a topic in Xia Yu’s poetry too.

‘Vanished Images’ (失蹤的象, 1989) is a good example that helps us to clarify the issue at hand. The poem ‘rewrites’ a well-known passage of a commentary on the *Book of Changes* (易經), ‘Elucidation of the Image’ (明象), written by the philosopher Wang Bi, which has important implications for language theory.<sup>310</sup> It reads as follows:

What words clarify are images, get the images and forget the words; what images convey are ideas, get the idea and forget the images. Similarly, the rabbit snare is for catching rabbits; once you get the rabbit, you forget the snare. The fish trap is for catching fish; once you get the fish, you forget the trap. And thus, words are the snares for images, and images are the traps for ideas. Therefore, if you hold on to the words you will not get the images; if you hold on to the images you will not get the ideas. The images originate in the ideas but if you hold on to the images, then what you hold on to are not the images; the words originate in the images but if you hold on to the words, then what you hold on to are not the words. Therefore, forget the image to get the idea, forget the word to get the image. Get the idea by forgetting the image, get the image by forgetting the word. Hence, one establishes the image in order to give full expression to the ideas, and the image can be forgotten.<sup>311</sup>

<sup>309</sup> Jiao Tong 1998: 64. Another goal would be to ‘subvert typography’.

<sup>310</sup> Wang Bi (226-249) is especially known for his Laozi commentary.

<sup>311</sup> I have consulted the translations by Richard John Lynn (1994: 31-32) and Marie-Ina Bergeron (1986: 165-8) of this particular passage, as well as Stephen Owen’s translations (1992: 33) of a passage by Wang Bi just prior to this one and James Legge’s translation (1962II: 141) of a similar passage of the Zhuangzi.

Wang's passage expands upon two lines in the Zhuangzi, which read in Legge's translation: 'Fishing-stakes are employed to catch fish; but when the fish are got, the men forget the stakes. Snares are employed to catch hares, but when the hares are got, men forget the snares. Words are employed to convey ideas; but when the ideas are apprehended, men forget the words. Fain would I talk with such a man who has forgot the words!'<sup>312</sup> Wang Bi develops this into a triad of word (言), image (象) and idea or concept (意), in which image is used specifically in the meaning of a mental, visual picture. From his passage a language theory can be derived that is based on an organic relation between the three: ideas are immanent in the images, as 'a generalized image' emerges from an idea or concept; images are again immanent in the words, which are 'a stage in the processes of mind, "born from" the images of things'.<sup>313</sup> As Stephen Owen explains, this has important consequences for poetry and literature: 'When the poet observes the forms of the world around him, the infinite particularity of the physical world can be reduced to some essential minimum, into categorical "images," and thence, into categorical language. The poet and his readers can assume that those images are the natural embodiment of *yi*, the "conception" of how the world "is."'<sup>314</sup> Through the images, which poet and reader have in common, words are means to ideas or concepts. To grasp these is the ultimate goal, after which both words and images can, even must, be forgotten. Wang Bi's 'Elucidation of the Image' thus can be seen as the foundation of a 'transparent' language theory in which a more or less one-to-one correlation is assumed between word, image and idea.

In Taiwan poetry until the end of the 1980s, this correlation is still of importance, as is confirmed by Li Ruiteng who goes briefly into this. Li quotes another passage by Wang Bi, one just prior to the one above, to illustrate this correspondence, which he schematizes as follows: 'meaning  $\rightleftharpoons$  image  $\rightleftharpoons$  word'.<sup>315</sup> Subsequently, he quotes Yu Guangzhong: 'ideas that are in poets are told through images that are outside; on the basis of these images that are outside, readers try to return to the original idea that was in the poet'.<sup>316</sup> Even though he omits the 'word'

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<sup>312</sup> James Legge 1962II: 141.

<sup>313</sup> Stephen Owen 1992: 33.

<sup>314</sup> Stephen Owen 1992: 34.



<sup>315</sup> Li Ruiteng 1977: 117.



<sup>316</sup> Li Ruiteng 1977: 116.



part, Yu's view is clearly based on the same theory of a transparent language and conforms to the main point that the 'idea' is what it is all about, stressing the image as the mediator between poet and reader.



Xia Yu's 'rewriting' of Wang's commentary rejects the idea of a transparent language and its one-to-one relationship between words, images and ideas. Her version is as follows:



#### VANISHED IMAGES<sup>317</sup>



what words clarify are  , get  and forget the words





what  convey are ideas, get the idea and forget 

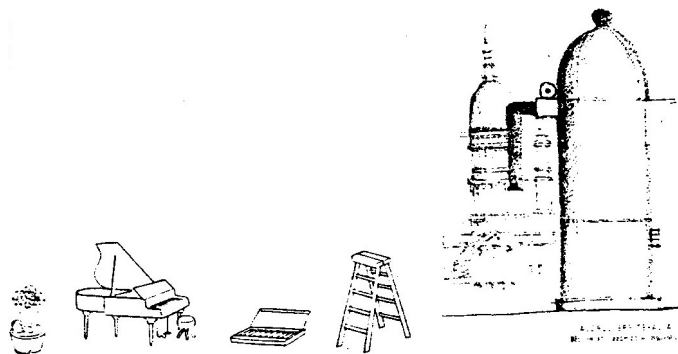
if you hold on to the words, you will not get   
if you hold on to  , you will not get the ideas

 originates in the ideas but if you hold on to 

then what you hold on to are not really  themselves;  
the words originate in  but if you hold on to the words  
then what you hold on to are not really the words themselves

therefore, forget  to get to the idea  
forget the word to get 

get the idea by forgetting  , get  by forgetting the words  
hence, one establishes  in order to give full expression to the ideas  
and  can be forgotten



Every time the character 象 *xiang*, image or symbol, occurs in the original text, Xia Yu inserts a real 'image', probably a picture from an early word processor's

<sup>317</sup> Xia Yu 1991: 54.



ClipArt gallery. She also cuts the passage into phrases in order to make it look like poems *ought* to look; furthermore she deletes the two lines about the fish and the hare.

With real pictures inserted into the passage, Xia Yu's poem complies with the suggestion given by the original commentary that images are preferable to words. They are closer to meaning than words are – so why not put the images in right away? But with the concrete pictures in the text the understanding of language is subverted. The paradoxical title at once reveals the problematic relation between word and image. It says the images have vanished, but the poem is full of concrete images; what has vanished is the character 象, 'image'. By the substitution for that invariable character of sixteen different images it is literally shown that 'categorical images' do not exist. An abstract level for *xiang* is denied; there are only concrete images for the word image. It is also actually impossible to read the poem aloud: how to 'read' the image? If you read the first one as 'cat', it is not an image any more, but a word again, open to diverse, concrete images. The poem makes the reader realize: what words clarify are a certain image, yet the reader may well get another image. When there is no inherent relation between words, images and ideas, the images behind the words and the ideas behind the images may change at all times. *The* idea does not exist and it thus becomes impossible to grasp it; there is only a range of potential ideas.

In a hilarious and extreme way Xia Yu's poem thus provides a new view of language to supplant the traditional one of language as a transparent medium. But the fact that the relation between word, image and idea is problematized does not mean that there are no ideas or no meaning at all. The poem only stresses the continuous metamorphosis of the images behind the words and of the ideas behind the images; meaning is constantly postponed. And what is left when the illusion of language as a means of expression has disappeared is the materiality of language. Through the years that materiality has been increasingly explored by Xia Yu, and in *Salsa*, one of the most interesting books of poetry that have appeared in recent years, this materialization reaches a new maturity. Language itself is now at stake, and more than in any of her previous books the focus is on the operation and formation of the Chinese language. It is not for no reason that she likes to emphasize that the Chinese language knows no rules at all; the syntactic explorations in Xia

Yu's poems stretch the language to its extremes in order to find its limits and essence: when does language cease to be language? As a result, Xia Yu's poetry manifests an emphatic attention to the language it is written in – the most extreme example of that is probably her poem 'Seance III' (降靈會 III, 1990) which consist entirely of self-invented characters.<sup>318</sup>

In her poetry, Xia Yu has moved far away from the poetry written in the 1950s through the 1970s, from the work of poets like Yu Guangzhong, who once said: 'Classical poets did very well without having recourse to certain things, [doing violence to] syntax, and so on. Besides, I have the prejudice that writing in broken phrases, in a highly irregular way, ruins my sense of beauty'.<sup>319</sup> Xia Yu's poetry is one example of poetry writing that emphasizes the materiality of language, perhaps the most prominent one; but similar ideas lie behind some of the poetry by for example Luo Zhicheng, Chen Kehua, Lin Yaode, Chen Li, Hong Hong and younger poets like Ye Mimi.

That the exploration of the operation and indeed the formation of language does not necessarily result in complex and sometimes even seemingly conflicting syntax structures can be seen in, for example, the work of Chen Li, especially in his seventh book of poetry, *The Edge of the Island* (島嶼邊緣, 1995). His focus on the typical qualities of Chinese characters in 'War Symphony' (戰爭交響曲, 1995) is by now probably the best-known.<sup>320</sup> The first square block of characters in it are all soldier, 兵 *bing*. In the second this is alternated with the characters 乒 *ping* and 乓 *pang*, which look like soldiers missing one leg and are onomatopoeia for gun shots; in the last few lines blank spaces are inserted, suggesting fallen soldiers. The characters in the last block, 丘 *qiu*, 'tomb,' look like soldiers without legs. All the aspects of Chinese characters, meaning, sound, and picture, are integrated into one elementary whole, creating a poem that would be impossible to make or translate in another language. And whereas Xia Yu's poems have complex syntactic structures, in 'War Symphony' all syntax is eliminated. In different ways, other poems in the same book also displays such a minimalistic way of writing, as in

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<sup>318</sup> This poem is the most obvious example showing resemblances between the poetry by Xia Yu and the work by mainland artist Xu Bing, who became especially known through his mixed media installation 'A Book from the Sky', 1987-91. Cf: [www.xubing.com](http://www.xubing.com).

<sup>319</sup> K.C. Leung 1991: 446.

<sup>320</sup> Chen Li: 1995 112.

‘Furniture Music’ (家具音樂, 1995), in which language is brought back to a few essentials:

I read on the chair  
I write on the desk  
I sleep on the floor  
I dream beside the closet

[...]

In the songs that I hear  
In the words that I say  
In the water that I drink  
In the silence that I leave<sup>321</sup>

With examples like these Chen Li’s poems are the exact opposite of Xia Yu’s, but notably, the two can be seen to emanate from a similar urge to hollow out language.

The American Language poet Charles Bernstein wrote about his colleague Ron Siliman, in ‘Stray Straws and Straw Men’: ‘Such poetry emphasizes its medium as being constructed, rule governed, everywhere circumscribed by grammar & syntax, chosen vocabulary: designed, manipulated, picked, programmed, organized, & so an artifice, artifactual – monadic, solipsistic, homemade, manufactured, mechanized & formulaic at some point: willful.’<sup>322</sup> Such a description is equally applicable to some of the poetry written in Taiwan from the end of the 1980s onward. By pointing to that resemblance I do not merely mean to suggest that some Taiwan poets have been particularly influenced by American Language poetry, but it is quite likely that knowledge of American and other Western poetry has played a role – just as in the case of the dominance of imagery. Yet, how exactly influence should be defined and determined remains a complex question, especially in the age of globalization when certain movements, circumstances, and life styles are perceived in countries all over the world.

Again, the correspondence should not keep us from looking at the internal literary scene and its developments. In the same way as prosification was, very likely, a condition for the domination of imagery, the so-called ‘natural look’ of

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<sup>321</sup> Chen Li: 1995: 156.

<sup>322</sup> Charles Bernstein 1984: 39.

much earlier poetry may have helped trigger, conversely, the more artificial features in Xia Yu's and Chen Li's poetry. Their publications in the 1990s can be understood as a resistance, perhaps unconscious, to the illusion of transparency and expression that was prevalent in Taiwan poetry; the flowing syntax – one of the keys to a 'natural' poetry, which of course is itself also a construct – may have led them to force open habitual language patterns, resulting in a poetry that questions its own status. Besides, the specific focus on the *Chinese* language ensures that their poems cannot simply be called 'imitations' of international trends. In a sense Ji Xian's quest for *intellect* is developed to a new height in this poetry: spontaneous emotions and intuition are channeled and blended with intellectual ingenuity, leaving lyricism far behind and emphasizing the poems as constructs.

The following chapters further elaborate this idea and will focus on how poets have gradually found different means to draw attention to the artificiality and materiality of poetry, especially in form.

## Chapter 3

### Serial Forms: The Poem As Construct (ii)

In<sup>323</sup> reading modern poetry from Taiwan after 1949, one regularly comes across the so-called ‘serial form,’ that is, a poetic work that is presented as a whole and that, at first glance, distinguishes itself by way of its layout: typically, a main title covering several seemingly independent parts headed by numbers or subheadings. Such forms are usually referred to as a *sequence* (also *series*, *suite*, and *cycle*) and find a Chinese equivalent in the term *zushi* 組詩. This is a special type of form that I believe becomes more common in the 1970s and that might contain a different answer to the question how to ‘mark’ one’s poetry as such, now that ‘prose’ had become the common language and all the former technical and formal elements that classical poetry prescribed had been abolished.

Serial forms are found both in classical and modern Chinese poetry, but the Chinese term *zushi*, literally meaning ‘grouped poetry,’ is a modern one, according to Joseph R. Allen in his unpublished manuscript *The Chinese Lyric Sequence*, which is mainly devoted to classical poetry. Allen suggests that the term is ‘derived from exposure to similar terms in Western literature’<sup>324</sup> and that it ‘offers some insight into the way the Chinese lyric sequence is to be read. It is more a web, rather than a string, of materials; more of a constellation than a chain’.<sup>325</sup> The English equivalents *sequence*, *series*, *suite*, or *cycle*, on the other hand, all imply a certain order, or, to quote Allen once more, they connote ‘a string of materials.’ Both the English and Chinese terms, however, have been used quite carelessly as they are applied to serial forms with a variety of underlying principles, regardless of the degree of coherence – a problem rarely discussed.<sup>326</sup>

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<sup>323</sup> This chapter has earlier been published in much the same form in *MCLC* (Marijnissen 2001). I thank the journal and its chief editor Kirk Denton for their permission to reprint. Part of the *MCLC* article also appeared in Chinese (Marijnissen 2003).

<sup>324</sup> Joseph R. Allen, manuscript 2000: page 227.

<sup>325</sup> Joseph R. Allen, manuscript 2000: ii. The term *zushi* is for example also used for a group session of several poets writing together on one topic, such as the one mentioned before on p. 30.

<sup>326</sup> Apart from Allen’s study I have not found any substantial material on Chinese serial forms. For some studies on the topic in Western literature, see Joseph M Conte 1991; Doranne Fenoaltea and

Poetic sequences, both in China and the West, are presented as wholes in books of poetry or anthologies, but they do not necessarily have to be read as integral units. The components do not always gain in meaning when read as parts of the sequence-as-a-whole, but sometimes have a rather independent status. In other words, the coherence of serial forms varies widely: their components may either be meaningful solely in relation to each other or be highly autonomous, and a range of possibilities lies between these poles. Crucial in the study of serial forms is how the various parts are related and how compelling their coherence is. Underlying principles that potentially connect the parts are numerous: formal features, thematic relations, narrative or other structural continuity, and so on. In considering the coherence of serial forms, an important question is the order of the components. One can distinguish, in this regard, between *categorical* and *sequential* relations, two structural modes that are not mutually exclusive and may appear together.

In the case of categorical relations, the arrangement of the parts is based on some kind of common feature. The differences between the components are of no importance for their positions within the group; no development is suggested and, accordingly, it would not matter if the parts were arranged differently, nor if one was omitted or another added. Still, reading the whole can lead to a better understanding of the individual parts. Obvious examples of this kind are serial forms based on formal resemblance, such as a group of sonnets; or those based on thematic relations, such as the so-called variations upon a theme, in which the components deal with the same topic from different points of view. An entire book of poetry, such as Luo Fu's *Hidden Titles*, can be classified among this type of serial forms, since all the poems in the book are written in acrostics: read in order, the first characters of each line form the title of the poem.

Sequential relations, on the other hand, imply a strict order. The constituent parts of such a sequence may be presented as autonomous entities, but in addition they show a narrative or some other form of structural continuity when read in the prescribed order. The components represent essential stages in the development of the sequence-as-a-whole. It follows that the segments cannot be shuffled

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David Lee Rubin 1991; Roland Greene 1991; Joachim Müller 1932; Helen Mustard 1946; M.L. Rosenthal and Sally Gall 1985; and Ronald Vroon 1989.

around and that it does matter if one is left out or added. In order to do full justice to the sequence, each part has to be read from its particular position in the series and in relation to the other parts, all of which form a whole. An obvious example of this kind is Petrarch's *Il Canzoniere* (The Songbook), whose *Sonnets for Laura* are readable as individual poems but together show different phases of love: happiness after the first encounter, doubt about Laura's love, certainty about her love, and lamentation and glorification after her death.

If we agree with Allen's understanding of the Chinese term *zushi* being 'more a web, rather than a string, of materials; more of a constellation than a chain,' it follows that the term would be more applicable to the first type, those based on categorical relations. That idea is confirmed by the Yu Guangzhong when he suggests that Luo Qing is indebted to Wallace Stevens, from whom he learned

how to handle a theme from different angles so as to explore possibilities of ramification and to superimpose an order of abstract beauty on reality. This technique of playing variations upon a theme, also derivable from music and painting, is most interesting in Lo Ch'ing's [Luo Qing] "Ways of Eating Watermelon" [吃西瓜的方法] and "A Synthetic Study of Persimmons" [柿子的綜合研究], while his "Holding a Broom in His Hand" [手拿掃把] is most reminiscent of Stevens's "The Man with the Blue Guitar" and "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird". For some time poets in Taiwan had been desperately aware of their narrowing thematic scope and of an urgent need to re-adjust the poets' attitude to their theme. The adoption of Stevens by Lo Ch'ing opened up a new vista for others to follow. Yeh Shan's [Ye Shan, Yang Mu] "The Twelve Terrestrial Branches Suite" [十二星象練習曲] and Lo Fu's [Luo Fu] "The Thirteen Peaks of Emaciated Unhappiness" [清苦十三峰], and a host of others indicate a general readiness for the conversion.<sup>327</sup>

What I find especially striking in this passage, with regard to the underlying principles of serial forms, is that Yu simply assumes that the works by Luo Qing and Wallace Stevens, and indirectly even those by Yang Mu and Luo Fu, are all 'variations upon a theme.' As such, Yu's remark reflects the fact that a *zushi* is indeed often understood as having some coherence on the basis of resemblance. As far as Luo Fu is concerned, this might be true. He himself says in a postscript:

The American poet Wallace Stevens once wrote "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird," the beginning and end of which echo each other; it is a coherent whole focusing throughout on a bird. My modest effort, however, tries to write about thirteen appearances and spirits of the mountains in thirteen styles, about thirteen se-

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<sup>327</sup> Yu Guangzhong 1974: 5.

crets of the mountains; every peak is isolated and can equally be read as a short poem.<sup>328</sup>

However, as I will show in the following, this view of ‘variations upon a theme’ is less adequate for Luo Qing’s ‘Six Ways of Eating Watermelon’ (吃西瓜的六種方法; the title poem of the book is *Ways of Eating Watermelon*) and Yang Mu’s ‘Etudes: Twelve Earthly Branches’ are more ‘sequential’ than ‘variations’ suggest.

Several statements about serial forms in Taiwan poetry can be derived from Yu’s passage, and they can serve as a point of departure here. Yu’s remark that Luo Qing ‘opened up a vista for others to follow’ implies that in following Wallace Stevens Luo was the first to use the technique of variations on a theme, a questionable assertion in view of the fact that he cites two other examples, one by Yang Mu and one by Luo Fu, both of which were written around the same time. Yang Mu’s was written in 1970, as was Luo Qing’s ‘Six Ways of Eating Watermelon’, while his ‘A Synthetic Study of Persimmons’ and ‘Holding a Broom in His Hand’ are dated 1971 and 1970, respectively. Also Luo Fu’s ‘Thirteen Peaks of Emaciated Unhappiness’ was written in 1970. Why is it then that Yu calls Luo Qing the innovator? It might be because of his so-called ‘adoption’ of Wallace Stevens, but Luo Fu also explicitly refers to Stevens as an inspiration.

Furthermore, it seems doubtful that the technique of variations upon a theme was new at all. Numerous serial forms had been written in Taiwan prior to 1970. To name a few examples: Zheng Chouyu’s ‘Clouds of Yan’ (燕雲集) written in 1967; even earlier, Yang Lingye’s ‘Sutra Leaves’ (貝葉, 1959); and Luo Fu’s volumes *Death in a Stone Cell* and *Poems of Beyond*, published in 1965 and 1967 respectively.<sup>329</sup> And classical Chinese poetry abounds in examples of serial forms. Leafing through anthologies, one comes across numerous serial forms, either arranged by the authors themselves or by editors, that show different degrees of coherence. Such sequences as Tao Yuanming’s ‘Twenty Poems After Drinking Wine’ (隱酒詩十二首), Han Yu’s ‘A Pond in a Jardinière’ (盆池五首), and Su Dongpo’s ‘Eastern Slope, Eight Poems’ (東坡八首, 并序) are obvious examples of variations

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<sup>328</sup> Luo Fu 1993B: 190.

<sup>329</sup> Zheng Chouyu 1979: 257-266; Yang Lingye in Zhang Mo 1977: 60-77.



upon a theme.<sup>330</sup> Others are more strongly integrated and show progression when read as a whole, such as Du Fu's 'Eight Autumn Meditations' (秋興八首) and Meng Jiao's 'Apricots Died Young, Nine Poems' (杏殤九首).<sup>331</sup> In *The Chinese Lyric Sequence*, Allen sheds light on some of the underlying structures of classical sequences.

The question thus arises: do these serial forms from Taiwan represent a continuation of an old tradition? What exactly is new in them, if they are not variations upon a theme? I will try to answer this question by studying some of these forms in detail: Yang Mu's 'Etudes: The Twelve Earthly Branches,' Luo Qing's 'Six Ways of Eating Watermelon,' and one written some ten years later, Xia Yu's 'Making Sentences' (造句). My analysis will revolve around the following sub-questions: How are the constituent parts related, what underlying structure may be discerned, and how compelling is the coherence between the components? We will see an interesting parallel with our findings of the previous chapter.

## YANG MU'S CLINAMEN

The first example under scrutiny is Yang Mu's award-winning 'Etudes: The Twelve Earthly Branches' (1970), published in his fourth book of poetry *Legends* (傳說, 1971) under the pen name Ye Shan. Yang, one of Taiwan's best-known poets, has written numerous serial forms throughout his career. All of them are in free verse; some have regular numbers of lines in stanzas, others do not (even in the 'Fourteen Sonnets' [十四十四行], where one would expect fourteen lines in each poem, some have thirteen or fifteen). Most of the components in these serial works are numbered, but a few have subheadings, e.g., 'Yin-Yang and the Five Elements' (陰陽五行). Others have both, such as 'Partridge Sky: Six Poems' (鷓鴣天六首). The

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<sup>330</sup> Tao Yuanming 1996: 221-251, translation James Robert Hightower 1970: 124-157; Han Yu 1980: 161, translation Watson 1984: 240-241; Su Dongpo 2000, translation Burton Watson 1994 89-92.

<sup>331</sup> Du Fu 1983: 296-304, translation Burton Watson 2002: 129-141; Meng Jiao 2002: 506-511, translation David Hinton 1996: 41-51.

importance of subheadings versus numbers will become clear in my discussion of 'Etudes,' quoted in full below:

### ***Etudes: The Twelve Earthly Branches***

#### **1. Rat**

Prostrate, we wait  
for midnight – shapeless midnight  
except for a bell chime  
coming like childhood  
from three streets away

Turn and pay homage to long-absent Aries  
Kneeling like a field sentry in the dark  
I advance northward  
Louisa, please face the earth god  
worship him the way I worship your sturdy shoulders

#### **2. Ox**

NNE<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>E Louisa  
fourth watch, chirping insects occupy the peninsula I just left  
Like Aldebaran, I search the wide open  
valley, a bamboo grove on the other side

Hunger burns on combat lines  
Fourth watch, the intermittent lights of vehicles  
quietly flash  
across your raised thighs

#### **3. Tiger**

Gemini daybreak. Listen  
to the earth's raging tears  
Listen, my crawling comrades  
unclean melons  
Listen, east-northeast and north  
exploding spring, incendiary shells, machine guns  
helicopters chopping up the morning fog. Listen  
Louisa, what does the Persian rug say to you?  
What does the Asian mud say to me?

#### **4. Hare**

Please face east when the Crab  
shows an array of autumn hues with its many-legged obscenity  
Versatile

My metamorphosis, Louisa, is incredible  
Patterns of wilderness embroidered on my clothes  
swallow baby girls like nightfall  
I slaughter, vomit, sob, sleep  
Versatile

Please repent with me toward the east

toward the hares of next spring  
running and leaping over streams and death's bedding  
Please testify with all the pleasures of your senses  
Versatile

### **5. Dragon**

Lion in the west (ESE<sub>3</sub>/4S)  
Dragon is the occasional East in legends. Now  
we can only define a constellation of ecstatic groans  
with complete nakedness

East southeast south, Louisa  
you who bleed profusely  
and suffer so much  
are my most allusive  
bitterest  
secondary star  
in the constellation of the Leech  
that I define

### **6. Snake**

Or leave me with your dew-drenched morning flowers

### **7. Horse**

Louisa, the wind's horse  
gallops along the shore  
provision was once a rotten shell  
I am a nameless water beast  
lying on my back all year long. Libra at noon  
in the western hemisphere, if I am overseas . . .  
In bed, cotton sways on the brimming plain  
Libra hangs over the corpse-floating river of lost dignity

I hold the distorted landscape  
with my groin. A new star rises from the south  
Can my hair and beard be heavier than a shell, Louisa?  
I love your smell as you kneel toward the south  
like a sunflower moving with time  
longing for an unusual curve, oh Louisa

### **8. Ram**

'T'll be your fullest winery'  
In the afternoon Capricorn sinks into  
the shadow of the continent. High like Taurus at fourth watch  
I suck and press the surging grapes

Surging grapes  
the harvest flute slants west  
Is Louisa still feeding doves on the porch?  
Slanting to the west, poisonous stars  
please cover me with her long hair

### **9-10. Monkey-Rooster**

Another dashing arrow

45 degrees oblique:  
the equestrian archer falls, embracing an armful of moonlight

Rise, rise, rise like the monkey, please  
I am a weeping tree by the river  
the hesitation of Capricorn  
The sun has set to the west

**11. Dog**

WNW<sub>3/4</sub>N  
Fill me with the water of the seven seas  
Din at first watch ambushes a square  
a drizzling rain falls on our rifles

**12. Boar**

Louisa, please hold me with all the tenderness of America  
accept me, a fish of wounded blood  
You too are a shining fish  
rotting in a polluted city. Louisa  
please come back to life in the olive grove  
and lie on your back for me. Second watch  
a dewy olive grove

We have forgotten so much  
A steamboat brings back my poisoned flag  
The eagle hovers like a vulture for latter-day carnage  
North northwest and west, Louisa  
you will scream  
when you find me dead upon my victorious return  
lying cold and stiff on your naked body.

– translation by Michelle Yeh and Lawrence R. Smith<sup>332</sup>

The constituent parts of ‘Etudes’ interact through imagery with clear sexual references throughout. They may be explicit, such as ‘the pleasure of your senses’ (no. 4), ‘a constellation of ecstatic groans / with complete nakedness’ (no. 5), and ‘please come back to life in the olive grove / please lie on your back for me’ (no. 12), but are usually more concealed. For this Yang employs two metaphors that are widespread in literature: war and landscape or nature. The latter is used to refer to the body, often the female body, as in ‘I search the wide open / valley, a bamboo grove on the other side’ (no. 2), ‘I hold the distorted landscape / with my groin’ (no. 7), ‘I suck and press the surging grapes’ (no. 8), etc.

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<sup>332</sup> Yang Mu 1978: 433; translation: Yang Mu 1998: 41. In part 8, I have twice substituted the word ‘grapes’ for ‘vines’ (葡萄 in Chinese).

The text is a response to the Vietnam War, says Yang himself.<sup>333</sup> The perspective is one of a soldier in the front lines but the war imagery is cleverly infused with eroticism. War images such as ‘field sentry’ (no. 1), ‘Hunger burns on combat lines’ (no. 2), ‘exploding spring, incendiary shells, machine guns / helicopters chopping up the morning fog’ (no. 3) can also be understood in the light of a more sexual context. Because of this and the other sexual references mentioned, Yang’s ‘Etudes’ might also be seen as a response to Yu Guangzhong’s earlier poem ‘Double Bed’, which also combines eroticism and war, or as another response to the ‘Make Love Not War’ slogan. But whereas in Yu’s poem eroticism is contrasted with the war raging outside the bed, Yang’s work not only contrasts the two but presents love-making as war. I will here focus on this view, as the war theme has often been discussed.

On a structural level, the work is held together by its subheadings, as well as by compass points, Western zodiac signs, and ‘watches’ (two-hour periods marked by the Twelve Earthly Branches and used to designate time in traditional China). The Branches were used to designate not only hours but days, months, and years. The twelve animals of the Chinese Zodiac symbolize the Branches and are supposed to exercise influence over their particular temporal period.

There is a discrepancy between the subheadings in the English translation and the Chinese original. In the translation, each part is numbered and named after the corresponding animal of the Chinese zodiac. As these subheadings are qualitative and attribute certain characteristics, ‘Etudes’ appears to be of the categorical kind. The components each give the impression of being a variation (an ‘etude’) on the main theme, a variation that is based on the symbolic animal ruling the zodiac sign. The work thus consists of several ‘etudes.’ In the Chinese text, on the other hand, these animals are not explicitly mentioned in the headings; in fact, only a few of them appear in the text. The subheadings are formed by the Twelve Earthly Branches themselves (i.e. 子, 丑, 寅, 卯, 辰, 巳, 午, 未, 申, 酉, 戌, 亥) a system of ordinal numbers. More important, however, is that the chronology of the Branches implies a strict reading order and a trajectory of development. After all, time and development are inextricably bound together: time denotes progression, and development takes place within time. The relation between the constituent

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<sup>333</sup> Personal communication, May 2001.

parts is therefore of the sequential kind. Of course, the animals in the translated titles contain references to time as well (because they symbolize the Branches), but more important is the fact that they characterize the specific period they dominate, whereas the Chinese titles emphasize the structural continuity of the whole piece, making it in fact one ‘etude.’ Following this line of thought, ‘Etude of the Twelve Earthly Branches’ would be a more appropriate translation of the title.

Based as it is on the Twelve Earthly Branches, Yang Mu’s work reminds one of classical sequences that follow the twelve months of the Chinese lunar calendar. As Allen puts it: ‘The seasonal and monthly progression offered Chinese poets their most programmatic form for the lyric sequence’.<sup>334</sup> Yang’s exercise of the Twelve Earthly Branches with their corresponding points on the compass and zodiac signs appears to be just as programmatic as the month-sequences. Allen further concludes that ‘While poets often embraced that easy progression . . . there was always a tendency to complicate the program with diversions and hesitations’<sup>335</sup>. One example Allen gives is that of Li He’s ‘Twelve Lyrics for Music on the Theme of the Twelve Months of the Year (together with an Intercalary Month) Composed While Taking the Examination in Henan fu’ (河南府試十二月樂詞並閏月), which deviates from the common seasonal imagery and readers’ expectations. This is interesting in light of the ‘Etudes,’ a thorough reading of which shows a complication of its programmatic form as well, one that is far more significant than those in classical poetry.

An examination of the corresponding Western zodiac signs, the points on the compass and the time references immediately draws attention to the Sixth Branch because it is the only section in the ‘Etudes’ in which these are not mentioned. The Sixth Branch thus assumes a special position. We could call this phenomenon *clinamen*, borrowing the term from the French OuLiPo (Ouvroir de la littérature potentielle), whose members gathered at this ‘Workshop for Potential Literature’ to discover new ways of creating literature and became most famous for their self-imposed rigorous formal constraints.<sup>336</sup> The *clinamen* can be defined as the one component that deviates from an otherwise regular system, thus drawing atten-

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<sup>334</sup> Joseph R. Allen 2000: 158.

<sup>335</sup> Joseph R. Allen 2000: 157.

<sup>336</sup> The OuLiPo was founded by Raymond Queneau and François Le Lionais in 1960. The members were mainly French and included poets, novelist, philosophers, mathematicians, and scientists.

tion to this one component and to the system. The famous novel *Life, a User's Manual* (La Vie mode d'emploi, 1978) by the OuLiPo writer George Perec, for example, is situated in a house with one hundred rooms, as many as the squares on a checkerboard, and the order in which the rooms are described follows the knight's move, without passing through any room twice. This procedure is, however, 'sabotaged,' as one room is left out – the room around which the whole novel revolves.

Given its irregularity within a regular system, the Sixth Branch in 'Etudes' might be assigned a similar role, the more so because other formal features stress its special status within the whole. Most conspicuous is the fact that the Sixth Branch is the only section that consists of just one line: 'Or leave me with your dew-drenched morning flowers,' and this line falls in the middle of the work: it is the fifty-first line in a total of one hundred. Furthermore, 'Etudes' contains eleven sections instead of the expected twelve because the Ninth and Tenth Branch are combined into one. Thus, in the number of parts, the Sixth Branch is the exact center. Lastly, from a grammatical point of view, the Sixth Branch stands out because the line begins with 'or' (huozhe), which suggests that this particular part is directly related to or dependent on something outside of it, in contrast to the other parts, which seem more independent of each other.

Naturally, this foregrounding gains in meaning if it is functional within the whole, and anyone familiar with astrology will have noticed that the only Western zodiac sign that is not mentioned is that of Virgo. The combination of the literal meaning of this zodiac sign, the meaning of the one line, the fact that the 'I' repeatedly addresses 'Louisa' and the erotic connotations throughout all point to the penetration of Louisa, or even her deflowering: 'Leave me your morning flowers'. The snake, the corresponding Chinese animal of the Sixth Branch, reinforces this reading, as it is, in Yang's early poetry, often associated with sexual desire or the phallus.<sup>337</sup>

This analysis still allows several readings of the work. One can look at each part as dealing with a different aspect of the theme of erotic love, but given the progression inherent in the use of the Twelve Earthly Branches, it seems more appropriate to regard it as a continuum describing the development of sexual activi-

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<sup>337</sup> Michelle Yeh 1998: xxi.

ties between the 'I' and Louisa, stage by stage.<sup>338</sup> Several images in the text underline this interpretation. Apparent war imagery in the beginning such as 'I advance northward' (no. 1), 'I search the wide open valley' (no. 2), and 'exploding spring' (no. 3) connote foreplay or a preliminary phase of sexual intercourse. And the final three lines can be read as the end of it: 'you will scream / when you find me dead upon my victorious return / lying cold and stiff on your naked body.'<sup>339</sup> Simultaneously, the Branches are a circular time system and may thus imply recurrence of events.

'Etudes' turns out to be a complex, integrated whole with an architecture that requires all components to be read in their given order, otherwise the clinamen cannot be noticed. In fact, its structure is so tight that the elements have little independence: despite the fact that they may at first seem to be relatively autonomous (e.g. with their own beginnings and endings), the clinamen, together with the imagery, denies them their autonomy. The Sixth Branch deviates so clearly in all possible ways from the others that it binds them together. Thus, a thorough reading reveals that 'Etudes' is a serial form in which the constituent parts are only meaningful in relation to each other. It is not a suite or a web of poems, but is in effect one poem, what one might call a *compound poem*.

Essential in the distinction between a suite and a compound poem is the degree of autonomy of the constituent parts. Ronald Vroon refers to this problem in his research on the suite in Slavic literature, for which he employs the useful notion of centripetal and centrifugal tendencies: 'If the former dominate over the latter, the result is a coalescence of texts to the point where they are no longer viewed as independently viable entities. If the latter dominate the fact of seriation is not likely to be ignored, but to be subverted'<sup>340</sup>. Following Vroon, I define a suite as a serial form in which the centripetal and centrifugal forces are in balance. When centrifugal forces dominate, the serial form is actually a group of independent poems. If the balance tips to the side of the centripetal forces, the serial form is one long compound poem, forming a hybrid between a suite and a poem. As for Yang

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<sup>338</sup> At the same time one can also point out some psychological development related to the effects of the war.

<sup>339</sup> Apart from sexual connotations there is of course also a direct association with death through war.

<sup>340</sup> Ronald Vroon 1989: 476



Mu's 'Etudes,' the centripetal tendencies in it are so dominant in view of the clinamen that the balance tips toward a compound poem.

But how does one decide whether or not these forces are in balance within a particular serial form? According to Vroon, this is a matter of interpretation; as it is the reader who relates the parts to each other, the relations and coherence within a work may vary from one reader to another. Thus, different Chinese critics of Luo Fu's *Death in a Stone Cell* refer to it with different terms, such as 'suite,' 'long poem,' or 'collection of poems,' as they emphasize different relations. But does the reader's interpretive influence extend all the way to the very structure of the poem?

Stanley Fish, for one, argues that it is. In his 'Interpreting the Variorium' he claims that formal units are not simply 'in' the text, waiting to be dug up, but always stem from an interpretative model. It is the interpretational act of the reader, who 'is always making sense,' that creates form:

What my principles direct me to 'see' are readers performing acts; the points at which I find (or to be more precise, declare) those acts to have been performed become (by a sleight of hand) demarcations in the text; those demarcations are then available for the designation 'formal features,' and as formal features they can be (illegitimately) assigned the responsibility for producing the interpretation which in fact produced them.<sup>341</sup>

Ultimately, when structure or other formal features also become subject to interpretation, critics seem to lose the only solid ground upon which to analyze poetry. According to Fish, however, 'the choice is never between objectivity and interpretation but between an interpretation that is unacknowledged as such and an interpretation that is at least aware of itself'.<sup>342</sup> The fact that interpretation in the end does not become a completely arbitrary, personal affair, is explained by Fish's introduction of 'interpretive communities,' of which readers are inevitably a part and which account for shared interpretive strategies resulting in similar interpretations.

I agree with Fish to a certain extent. Background and experience provide the larger context of the text and cause readers to pay attention to certain aspects and disregard others – including formal structures. However, if Fish's point that form

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<sup>341</sup> Stanley Fish 1980: 163.

<sup>342</sup> Stanley Fish 1980: 167.

is not inherent in the text is carried through, one must also conclude that no distinction can be made between any two texts whatsoever, between two different sequences by Yang Mu or between a sequence by Yang Mu and one, for example, by Meng Jiao. Yet this never constitutes a problem because the material form does make it possible to distinguish between different texts. I would therefore hold that the text is the form, which is in a way prior to any reading, but that formal characteristics are only activated by interpretation. Consequently, different structures may be attributed to a text as a result of different interpretive strategies.

When a poetic work is presented in a serial form, an invitation is, as Vroon puts it, extended ‘to the reader to explore the poetics of the device, to understand why a particular group of poems has been selected to constitute a set and why they have been arranged in a particular order.’<sup>343</sup> Vroon’s theory of interpretation, however, leans toward arbitrariness when he says that ‘even in the case of the most cohesive, tightly organized series [...] the reader always has the option of rejecting the invitation, for by its very nature the poetic series permits one to deal with any of its constituent poems apart from and without reference to the others’.<sup>344</sup> According to Vroon, readers are free to do whatever they like, whereas I would argue that readers are limited by, or focus on, the particular text or texts they are reading.

An example like that of the clinamen in Yang Mu’s ‘Etudes’ makes this quite clear. While various readings might generate various elements, the tight formal structure, once noticed, cannot simply be ignored, as Vroon claims; for an interpretation that involves more elements than others, or clarifies them in a better way, will be found more powerful, and hence more plausible and successful. The touchstone for different interpretations that are made is thus plausibility, which comes to substitute for ‘evidence’ or ‘truth.’<sup>345</sup> This also implies that different readings do not necessarily exclude each other.

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<sup>343</sup> Ronald Vroon 1989: 479–480.

<sup>344</sup> Ronald Vroon 1989: 479–480.

<sup>345</sup> Stanley Fish does say something of similar import: ‘In the end I both gave up generality and reclaimed it: I gave it up because I gave up the project of trying to identify the one true way of reading, but I reclaimed it because I claimed the right, along with everyone else, to argue for a way of reading, which, if it became accepted, would be, for a time at least, the true one. In short, I preserved generality by rhetorizing it’ (1980: 16).

## LUO QING, DU FU, AND WALLACE STEVENS

Luo Qing's first poetry collection is full of serial forms, but my second example, his 'Six Ways of Eating Watermelon,' is probably still his best-known work. I will analyze it with special attention to Yu Guangzhong's above-quoted remark on the 'newness' of Luo's technique within the context of contemporary poetry from Taiwan.<sup>346</sup> A comparison will be made to Wallace Stevens' 'Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird' as several critics have referred to the possible influence of Stevens, particularly with regard to the 'Watermelon.'<sup>347</sup>

### ***Six Ways of Eating Watermelon***<sup>348</sup>

#### ***The Fifth Way: Watermelon Consanguinity***

No one would mistake a watermelon for a meteorite  
Stars and watermelons, have nothing to do with each other  
But we cannot deny that earth is, a star of sorts  
Therefore it is hard to deny that watermelons and stars  
are consanguineous

Not only are watermelon and earth related  
as parents and children, they also have  
brotherly and sisterly feelings, feelings  
similar, to  
the moon's and the sun's, the sun's and ours, ours and the moon's

#### ***The Fourth Way: Watermelon Origins***

We live on the outside of the earth evidently  
and evidently they live in their melon interior  
We bustle about, thick-skinned  
we want to live on the outside, digest light into darkness  
to wrap ourselves, cold and warmth-craving

They sit motionless in lotus position, concentrated  
inside, moulding darkness into concrete, imperturbable zeal  
Always seeking self-strengthening, self-development  
But in the end we cannot avoid, being pushed into the earth  
And they sooner or later will, burst out of the watermelon

#### ***The Third Way: Watermelon Philosophy***

The history of watermelon philosophy  
is shorter than the earth's, longer than ours

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<sup>346</sup> Yu Guangzhong 1974: 5.

<sup>347</sup> See Yü Kwang-chung 1974: 3; Zhang Mo 1989, Foreword: 34; Joseph R. Allen 1986: 160.

<sup>348</sup> My translation includes commas at strange places. I have decided to follow the original's peculiar, conspicuous usage of commas. In the original, they occur even in the middle of the compound words 一，樣 (similar, to) in line nine of the fifth way and in 所有的，星，星 (all, the, stars) in line four of the second way.

Not looking at, listening to or saying what is improper, and not acting,  
the watermelons rule and  
are isolated from each other

Not envying ova, nor despising chicken's eggs  
neither oviparous, nor viviparous, the watermelon  
can understand the principle of surviving after death  
Consequently, the watermelon does not fear invasion, much less  
death

***The Second Way: Watermelon Territory***

If we smashed the watermelon  
it would be out of sheer, jealousy  
Smashing the watermelon is the same as shattering a round night  
the same as knocking down all, the, stars  
beating up the entire, universe

But the result would only make us more  
jealous, since this way  
the relation of meteorite and melon seed, the friendship of melon seed and universe  
would become even clearer, and thrust again  
more sharply, into our, territory

***The First Way: Let's Eat, Then Talk***<sup>349</sup>

As in Yang Mu's 'Etudes,' the 'Watermelons' has one main title and comprises several sections, each with its own title. But contrary to the previous example, in which the sections followed one another continuously, those in 'Watermelon' all begin on a new page (in its original 1972 publication, not in the extended reprint of 2002), thus asserting their relative independence as poems. Furthermore, in Yang's case, critics have not anthologized parts of the work with the inherent assumption that they are relatively independent poems. One may say that there is an unconscious inclination – unconscious since the question of inter-relatedness is never dealt with – to perceive it as an integrated whole. Individual parts of Luo's 'Watermelon,' however, have been anthologized (e.g., the Fifth Way), which is quite remarkable since in my view the full effect of the work is completely lost.<sup>350</sup> Besides, if the Fifth Way can be anthologized alone, does that mean that the First Way could be as well? But nothing has been written about how the work as a whole and the relations between the parts are perceived. And how

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<sup>349</sup> Luo Fu 1972: 186.

<sup>350</sup> See Zhang Hanliang 1979: 2: 279. Chen Qiyu (1983: 19) refers to the Fifth and Second Ways as if they were two separate poems, without explaining that they are part of a bigger whole.

are we to understand the discrepancy between the ‘six ways’ in the main title and the five that are presented in the work?

Luo Qing himself suggests in an interview that his reason for omitting the sixth way was to emphasize that there are endless ways of eating watermelon, not just six. By leaving one out, the poet makes readers think about other possible ways; it leaves room for them to develop something of their own.<sup>351</sup> Luo deliberately creates a space, an emptiness, in order to stress the impossibility of obtaining total coherence. Especially in serial forms, such a space is hard to ignore. Their headings give the parts the impression of autonomy, and each section develops a way of eating watermelon from a different point of view: blood ties, origins, philosophy, and territory. Their interrelations thus seem to be of the categorical kind, as the main title and subheadings denote variations on a theme. The missing Sixth Way might be interpreted as a technique of foregrounding these categorical relations, suggesting that since one variation has been left out, others may be added. However, this foregrounding procedure would not be noticed without reading the whole sequence; in effect, the missing Sixth Way might function as a *climax*, if it were not for the striking First Way, the second irregularity in the whole structure.

Each section has two stanzas of five lines, except the last, which consists of nothing but an exclamatory title. Indeed, this exceptionality leads to the assumption that the First Way is essential to the whole. Two considerations support this view: ‘first’ connotes best or most important, and the counting down from ‘six’ to ‘one’ evokes the start of a race or the launching of a space ship. As one counts down, the tension builds, with the final blast-off as the climax and the beginning of something momentous. Moreover, the subtitle of the First Way, ‘Let’s Eat, Then Talk’, is the only one that connects directly to the main title of the work as it explicitly deals with *eating* watermelon. It is precisely this direct link to the eating that is missing in the Fifth through the Second Way. They are all presented as ways of eating watermelon, but their subtitles (i.e. Watermelon Consanguinity, Origins, Philosophy, and Territory) have no explicit connection with eating watermelon, except perhaps a figurative one: eating watermelon becomes a way of looking at the watermelon from the point of view of consanguinity, origins, etc.

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<sup>351</sup> Silvia Marijnissen and Martin de Haan 1997: 95.

The humorous effects that are created by the missing Sixth Way and the First Way stand in contradistinction to the seriousness of the language. The comparison between watermelon and earth, apparently based only on the fact that both are round, is conscientiously pursued from the Fifth to the Second Way. When focusing on this comparison, a structure emerges that is reminiscent of the ‘opening, development, turnabout, closure’ (起, 成, 轉, 合) often attributed to the structure of the classical Chinese quatrain (絕句). The Fifth Way introduces the watermelon by talking about its blood relationship with earth and its parental and sibling relations. The second part elaborates on the relation between earth and watermelon by defining them in oppositional terms; a slight preference for the watermelon can be sensed, because the watermelon is associated with things usually felt to be positive: it is ‘moulding darkness into concrete, imperturbable zeal / Always seeking self-strengthening, self-development.’ Similarly, earth seems to have more negative associations: thick-skinned, cold and warmth-craving, digesting light (positive) into darkness (negative). The third part deals solely with the watermelon and asserts its superiority to earth. Consequently, the Second Way concludes that if ‘we’ – the earthlings – ‘smashed the watermelon, it would only be out of sheer, jealousy’ and would be of no use because it would only make the contrast between earth and watermelon clearer. Thus, the last part refers back to the first by reiterating that earth and watermelon undeniably belong together despite their differences. As such, the Second Way provides closure to the whole. The First Way does not continue the previous sections but gives a twist to the whole with its exhortation to eat before you talk.

This structural analysis gains in strength when seen in light of what Allen has done in *The Chinese Lyric Sequence* with Du Fu’s ‘Eight Autumn Meditations,’ the sequence that is printed on the cover of Luo Qing’s *Ways of Eating Watermelon*, suggesting some kind of relation with Luo’s sequence. Allen sees Du Fu’s sequence of eight poems as analogous to a *lüshi* (律詩), a regulated verse of eight lines of four couplets, with each couplet functioning in the poem’s ‘opening, development, turnabout, closure.’ Devoting a whole chapter to this sequence, Allen, following C. H. Wang, shows that it imitates ‘poem for line, the structuring principles of the

eight-line poem' and thus has a progressive structure.<sup>352</sup> Similarly, we can further analyze the structure of Luo's 'Watermelon' as follows: the first four Ways resemble the four couplets of a regulated verse, each stanza being comparable to a line that more or less develops a specific idea. The first stanza of the Fifth Way states that watermelons and stars are blood relations, the second elaborates further on the family tie between watermelons and earth. The first stanza of the Fourth Way mainly speaks of those living on the surface of earth; the second speaks of those living inside the watermelon. In the Third Way watermelons are described in terms of what they do not do; the second stanza elaborates upon what the watermelons are not and how their attitude gives them the wisdom of survival. Finally, the Second Way says that it is only jealousy that makes humans want to smash the watermelon; the last stanza ends with the assessment that smashing it would be no solution at all.

Even the parallelism required in the middle couplets of a *lüshi* is followed. The stanzas in the second section contain a thematic parallelism through the contrast between earth and watermelon; the third contains a parallel between what watermelons do and do not do. The same is true for the enjambment that often appears in the last couplet of a *lüshi*; Luo's 'Watermelons' seems to imitate it by making a direct link between the two stanzas with the words 'but the result.' Together all these structural elements indicate that sequential relations exist between the constituent parts and that centripetal elements outweigh centrifugal ones.

This analysis still allows for multiple interpretations, depending on how readers understand 'eating watermelon.' Making watermelon the theme of a poem is in itself quite remarkable. Melons, or the larger gourd family (瓠), have long been associated with either having many prosperous descendants or, in later times, with hermits and immortals.<sup>353</sup> In the poem, the central antithesis between watermelon and earth makes clear that watermelon is a world unto itself, and that life inside the watermelon is distinctly more favorable than human life on earth. The inhabitants of watermelons seem to have wisdom, improve themselves through meditation, and live a quiet, modest life according to Taoist and Confu-

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<sup>352</sup> Joseph R. Allen manuscript 2000: 166.

<sup>353</sup> Huang Yongwu 1992: 85.

cian principles. The description in the second stanza of the Fourth Way, especially, evokes associations with Taoist hermits, and the first stanza of the Third Way with Confucianism.<sup>354</sup> In contrast, the occupants of earth run restlessly, craving warmth; they are portrayed as having something to learn from watermelons. As such, watermelon symbolizes something ‘higher’ and more valuable.

In the Taoist creation myth, earth emerged from an egg or a gourd, which is depicted as ‘a complete world, mysterious and closed in upon itself’.<sup>355</sup> Since watermelon belongs to the same family as the gourd, it can be seen as the beginning of earth, or the realm of the ancestors, an idea that finds a response in the Fifth Way: watermelon and earth are related like parents to their children. Watermelon may also be associated with poetry, or with art in general. In *Modern Chinese Poetry: Theory and Practice since 1917*, Michelle Yeh shows that modern Chinese poets identify themselves and their poetry with the stars.<sup>356</sup> She sees Luo Qing’s watermelon as a way of ‘poking fun’ at this common practice, a reading substantiated by the Fifth Way, a line of which reads: ‘watermelons and stars are consanguineous.’ And one could combine the two interpretations by associating watermelon with classical poetry, and earth with modern poetry.

Whatever one thinks the watermelon symbolizes, the work as a whole conveys a message, presented as the moral of the story in the First Way: before you start talking, you should first eat the watermelon. In other words, you should first let it – poetry, art, tradition – sink in. The last two lines of the Fourth Way: ‘in the end we cannot avoid being pushed into the earth / And they sooner or later will burst out of their watermelon interior,’ make it clear that the bond between earth and watermelon is undeniable and that we, earthlings, cannot do without watermelon.<sup>357</sup> In other words, everyone has to find their own way of ‘eating water-

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<sup>354</sup> Luo Qing combines popular Confucian and Taoist sayings. The expression from the Confucian *Analects* (論語, Ch. 12, verse 1) is: ‘do not look at what is improper, do not listen to what is improper, do not speak when it is improper, do not act when it is improper’ (非禮勿視, 非禮勿聽, 非禮勿言, 非禮勿動). The last part, 勿動, is replaced by 勿爲 *wu wei*, suggesting but differing from the well-known Taoist homonymic concept of 無爲 *wuwei* ‘not acting’ or ‘to let things take their own course’ in using the imperative 勿, meaning ‘do not.’

<sup>355</sup> N.J. Girardot 1983: 25.

<sup>356</sup> Michelle Yeh 1991: 52.

<sup>357</sup> The work comes close to being a theoretical proclamation about the importance of the Chinese tradition, an item that was much discussed in the 1970s in Taiwan. ‘Watermelons’, then, makes a contribution to that discussion.



melon.’ Through the missing Sixth Way, the poet is saying that there isn’t just one way of doing that.

‘Watermelon’ is thus rather paradoxical: although it speaks against total coherence through the missing way, it creates coherence by following a strict classical scheme of composing poetry. There are two more indications that the antithesis of non-coherence versus total coherence is central to the poem. The title mentions six ways, and ‘six’ in Taoism is reminiscent of the Six Realms (六合) in the Zhuangzi, which refer to north, south, East, West, up, and down, i.e., to the whole universe. Moreover, as mentioned before, the cover of Luo’s poetry volume shows the text of Du Fu’s ‘Eight Autumn Meditations.’ This famous sequence consists of eight poems of eight lines each, a total of 64 lines, a reference to the Chinese archetype of order, the 64 hexagrams of the Book of Changes. The cover of Luo’s book thus suggests that this book may have a similarly strict and orderly design. But, again, ‘Six Ways of Eating Watermelon’ opposes both classical references to completeness and order.

Instead of linking Luo’s ‘Watermelon’ with Du Fu’s sequence or with classical poetry in general, critics have related it to Wallace Stevens, namely his famous ‘Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird’ (from *Harmonium*, 1923) because of the obvious similarities in the titles. Stevens’ poetry was popular at the time in Taiwan, and Luo Qing might well have been making a pun on Stevens’ title. But such a resemblance in titles does not, of course, necessarily imply any profound influences or similarities between the two works. ‘X ways to do something’ is a common expression that finds its way into other titles, for example novelist Willem Brakman’s *Five Ways to Wake up an Old Lady* (Vijf manieren om een oude dame te wekken; 1979) and popular musicians Simon and Garfunkel’s big hit ‘Fifty Ways to Leave Your Lover.’

It took more than twenty-five years before Stevens’ ‘Blackbirds’ ‘got any sort of extended attention and treatment,’ but since then much has been written about it.<sup>358</sup> I do not intend to go into Stevens’ work in depth; what matters for my purposes are the differences between it and Luo Qing’s poem, and I will point out four of them. First, Luo’s ‘Watermelon’ has a strict architecture, whereas Stevens’ sequence consists of thirteen short, irregular, seemingly independent parts. If there

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<sup>358</sup> Robert Ryf 1977: 93.

is a structural continuity in them, it is not as obvious as Luo's 'opening, development, turnabout, closure' in the four sections. Second, Luo's humorous twist in the First Way and the discrepancy between the title and the subheadings constitute important differences with Stevens' 'Thirteen Ways of Looking at Blackbirds,' which has exactly thirteen sections. Third, the blackbird is the only recurring image in Stevens' sequence; it is not explicitly compared to anything, whereas in Luo's the antithesis of watermelon and earth makes up the work. Last, Stevens' sequence consists of thirteen short, accurately sketched Imagist poems, whereas both Luo's watermelon and earth are treated quite logically and extensively. In conclusion, Luo's work is probably more tightly linked with Du Fu's sequence and other classical Chinese poetic forms than with Stevens.

As for the question of the 'newness' of Luo's 'Watermelon', raised by Yu Guangzhong, it seems justified to say that it lies perhaps not so much in the idea of an integrated serial form, nor, as Yu reasoned, in making variations upon a theme by adopting the technique of Wallace Stevens, but in its complex, modern adaptation of a classical compositional principle, incorporating both coherence and non-coherence, progression and variation, as well as in its humorous presentation. It was at the time of publication perhaps also striking in its resistance to total coherence (through the missing Sixth Way).

A more important aspect of both Luo's 'Watermelon' and Yang Mu's 'Etudes' – in which they differ from classical Chinese serial forms – is that they easily catch the eye: by way of a humorous subheading, a missing link, or other irregularities that function as a clinamen, both works emphatically draw attention to their own structure and to the fact that they are constructed. One might argue that serial forms are the form *par excellence* for doing so, precisely because of their layout and presentation: the material form, i.e. division into sections, invites the reader to explore the relations between the parts and the structure of the whole. What is interesting in 'Watermelon' and 'Etudes' is not only that the possibilities of the construct are fully exploited, but that the emphasis on the work as being an artificial construct is brought to an extreme. In that we can see a resemblance to the changed attitude that both Xia Yu's and Chen Li's work show in its poetic language.

## HOW XIA YU MAKES SENTENCES

Xia Yu's 'Making Sentences' from her first book *Memoranda* was written in 1983, more than ten years after the two examples discussed above. It appears to consist of rather loosely organized variations on the theme of 'Making Sentences'.

### ***making sentences***

#### ***cannot but***

cannot but  
leave a footprint  
modest and gentle  
on their  
still-wet  
cement  
heart

#### ***then***

then leave  
leaving behind these dirty words  
'I love you all'

#### ***and then***

queue up buy a ticket  
enter the hall    watch something movie-like  
and then eat

the witness says

#### ***each time***

each time at these moments  
I sense music resounding  
dismantling the metaphor in progress

and that twisty  
warm  
individualism

#### ***continue***

let the music continue to be performed  
affect three silent sunflowers  
under the dash  
between the gullet and the stomach

all the disintegrating starting points  
on the road from sorrow to oblivion

#### ***after . . . before***

thought after awakening  
before brushing teeth:

eternal  
the most heart-breaking word  
I ever heard

***the rest***

the rest are all knick-knacks  
scotch tape, cap of a pen  
strips of paper  
oblique lines  
nail clippers, toilet paper  
water dripping continuously  
from the edge of the umbrella  
dust  
voices  
love<sup>359</sup>

The main title 'Making Sentences' and the subheadings again suggest this is a sequence of the categorical kind. Each section is a sentence-building exercise, based on the term in the subheading, as in a language class. The sections appear to be autonomous entities, and it does not seem to matter if they are read independently, or if one is left out. For example, few elements are continued in the successive section, only the word 'music' in 'each time' and 'continue'. One might derive a common theme from the whole: the subversion of clichés about love. 'I love you' (plural 'you') becomes abuse, and 'eternal' is the 'most heartbreaking word.' These reversals of convention suggest that disappointment in love is central to the work and that all the sections are variations on the theme of broken love, even though not all constituent parts can be directly related to this theme. Furthermore, as with Luo Qing's 'Watermelon,' the layout of *Memoranda* accentuates the autonomy by beginning each section on a new page. The fact that Michelle Yeh includes only four of the seven sections in her anthology (the first, second, fourth, and sixth)<sup>360</sup>, and elsewhere refers to the parts as being separate items, without mentioning that they are part of a larger whole, may be seen as recognition of the dominance of centrifugal forces.<sup>361</sup>

The idea of sentence-building exercises in itself not only suggests relative autonomy for the sections, but also draws attention to the fact that the whole work is contrived, since language exercises are constructs designed to practice or test a skill. This is intensified through a sort of depersonalization in the first three parts,

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<sup>359</sup> Xia Yu 1986: 132.

<sup>360</sup> Michelle Yeh 1992: 227

<sup>361</sup> Michelle Yeh 1993: 39–40.

where it is not clear who the agents of the described acts are – a problem I will return to shortly. But a reading emphasizing the headings as structuring devices for an organized system puts things in a different perspective: a linear reading is possible as well.

Of particular interest is the title of the last section ‘the rest’ (其他). The ‘rest’ is used to refer to what remains, what is left over, or, at the end of a statement or list. It indicates that there are other items, events, or situations that could also be mentioned. Here the word can be read in its paradigmatic relation to the section, turning the listed knick-knacks into examples of ‘the rest’; but it can also easily be read in a syntagmatic relation to the other sections, making this one part stand for all other possible, similar assignments of ‘making sentences.’ In both cases, as the one thing that follows the others, ‘the rest’ implies a chronology and could thus indicate that the construction of the sequence amounts to more than an aggregate of exercises; it urges readers to read the whole in a linear way also. Indeed, the sections can be read as phases in a larger development, in which the headings are essential.

The last part is the key to such a linear reading. The things mentioned in it are examples of what is left behind; love is equated with scotch tape, toilet paper, nail clippers, etc., it is degraded to worthless knick-knacks. From a linear point of view, this must be the conclusion of a process described in the previous sections. The sixth part can be interpreted as pointing ahead to the final conclusion: there, the ‘I’ associates the word ‘eternal’ (as in ‘eternal love’ once believed in) with ‘heart-breaking’ grief. Although it is not directly clear if this ‘I’ is a man or a woman, it is not unwarranted to assume that the ‘I’ is female, since Xia Yu in her earlier work often played with clichés about traditional gender roles, with an emphasis on being a woman in heterosexual relationships.<sup>362</sup>

The other sections appear to fit such a chronology. The first part can be read as the beginning of the final disillusion with love: someone, presented as modest and gentle, ‘leaves a footprint’ on ‘their wet cement / heart’ – the actions of one person is stamped indelibly in the hearts of others, which then harden. Combining this with the assumption that the disillusioned ‘I’ at the end is a woman, it is most logical to assume that the persons on whose ‘wet / cement / heart’ a footprint is

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<sup>362</sup> Michelle Yeh 1994: 35.

left are two or more women, or even women in general. The 'protagonist' in the first three parts should not be understood as the female 'I' in parts four and six and is probably a man who through his actions causes two women grief, which finally results in their ranking love among worthless knick-knacks. The first part is then to be understood in a general sense: men cannot but hurt women.

The first two parts relate to each other through the word 'then.' Like 'the rest,' the heading 'then' functions in two ways: it is the trigger for that particular section, and it forms the grammatical connection to the previous. Accordingly, the second part describes what the man does after this 'act' described in the first. He assumes the appearance of caring, but the words he utters are 'I love you', with 'you' in the plural. Does he love two or more women at the same time? That may account for why, from the women's perspective, these words are said to be 'dirty words.' 'He' continues to be the subject in the third part: a witness saw him go to a movie and have food. The heading 'and then' implies that this is what 'he' does after he left her, meaning that he carries on with his routine life.

In the fourth part, the female 'I' is mentioned for the first time, a perspective carried through to the end. The title 'each time' shows that this is not the first time this has happened to the 'I,' or perhaps to others. Contrary to the usually positive connotations of music, the music she hears breaks something – a 'metaphor in progress.' A foreshadowing of acceptance, of letting go, is found in the fifth part, where the 'I' says 'let the music continue,' as if the 'I' has gradually grown accustomed to her broken heart and tries to forget it all. But the experience has changed her, as she now realizes how little love is worth.

Undoubtedly this is not the only possible reading of 'Making Sentences' in a linear way and others may well come to an interpretation that assumes that the 'I' in the second half of the poem is also the subject of the first half. But what interests me here is that this serial form, contrary to Yang Mu's and Luo Qing's can be read both as a variation upon one theme and as a linear sequence, in which the headings are important structural elements. In fact, one can probably safely say that in general subheadings are far more important than the relatively neutral use of numbers. Numbered serial forms rely on other devices. As for how their constituent parts may be related Lloyd Haft, in a chapter on sonnet sequences, points to '(1) reduplicated syllables or repeated lexemes; (2) obvious semantic continuity

between one poem and the next, as when a subject presented in one poem is commented on in a following one; (3) “modules” which recur, albeit at irregular intervals, so as to create the temporary impression or illusion of return to a rhythmic impulse characteristic of the earliest lines of the suite.’<sup>363</sup> These elements may be used in serial forms with subheadings as well, but the subheadings themselves already make the relations between the parts explicit. Simply because words bear meaning, they provide additional structuring and draw more attention to the whole work as a construct.

In two of the three serial forms studied here, the centripetal forces clearly outbalance the centrifugal. As the sections in Yang Mu’s ‘Etudes’ and Luo Qing’s ‘Six Ways of Eating Watermelon’ are much interrelated, they constitute, in the end, a unified poem, a ‘compound poem,’ rather than a suite (characterized by balance between the two sets of forces). Xia Yu’s text is somewhat different: ‘Making sentences’ can be read both as a suite of poems and as a compound poem; both readings do justice to the text and can exist alongside each other. What is, in my opinion, even more important is that the three serial forms explicitly draw attention to their constructed, artificial nature; by way of the clinamen (Yang Mu), the Sixth and First Way (Luo Qing), and the position of ‘the rest’ (Xia Yu). In all of them the use of subheadings plays an important role in this. In these eye-catching forms and structures that stress the artificiality of the poem, these specific serial forms can be seen to be related to the language experiments of Xia Yu and Chen Li – despite the apparent differences and the much earlier time of writing, some ten to twenty years.

As we have seen, poetic language in Taiwan poetry largely followed naturalness and spontaneity rather than artifice, and the same is true for form and structure. One can say in general that starting in the 1920s in mainland China and Taiwan, ‘freedom,’ identified as being more ‘natural,’ became the keyword in modern poetry or New Poetry: New Poetry was to be written in free verse in the modern vernacular and was not to be bound by any of the formal restrictions prescribed by classical poetry. This pursuit of free expression of the poet’s personal feelings and thoughts, which was continued in Taiwan after 1949, was hard to combine with a

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<sup>363</sup> Lloyd Haft 2000: 196.

more structurally organized approach to poetry writing. The writing of the tightly organized poetry analyzed above can thus be seen as a way to counter the widely accepted criterion of ‘naturalness’ and ‘freedom.’

Ever since New Poetry has been written, poets have been concerned with form and structure to counterbalance ‘freedom.’ But unlike the Crescent Poets in the 1920s who reacted against free verse by adopting non-Chinese poetic forms<sup>364</sup>, the three compound poems are not confined to any pre-fabricated form; they do not follow the same rules over and over. New structures are created in each work and are part of the creativity of the poets. As such, these ‘made things,’ a term I borrow from Marjorie Perloff, might be viewed as an outcome of a larger development within Chinese poetry, moving from rigid classical rules to the opposite, complete freedom in modern poetry, and on to a poetry combining the strengths of both in emphatic interaction with other national literatures and post-national globalization.<sup>365</sup>

If this is so, the question remains: why serial forms? An obvious reason is one pointed to earlier: by way of their form, their presentation in parts with sub-headings, these poetic works draw attention to their own constructedness. They explicitly invite the reader to ask how the components are related. But the next chapter will show that the development from transparency to artificiality reaches further than that, and extends to other forms as well.

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<sup>364</sup> Cf. Kai-yu Hsu 1963.

<sup>365</sup> Marjorie Perloff 1991: 27-8.



## Chapter 4

### Rewriting and Other Artificialities: The Poem as Construct (iii)

Especially<sup>366</sup> since the 1990s, much attention has been paid to form. Critics like Meng Fan, Lin Yaode, Liao Xianhao, Jiao Tong and Chen Yizhi have noticed that from the mid 1980s onwards poetic form has changed, it has been subjected to experiments. The formal features they demarcate – for as we have seen in the previous chapter, formal characteristics are not simply waiting in the text to be dug up, but are activated by interpretation – especially extend to the conspicuous outward shapes of the poems on the page. To name just a few examples: Xia Yu's 'Hoodlum III' (歹徒丙 1982, from *Memoranda*), which actually consists of a picture; Luo Zhicheng's 'Spring' (春天, 1988, from *The Book That Does Not Make a Sound When Thrown on the Ground* [擲地無聲書], 1989), nearly half of which consists of the character 叮 in a sort of jubilation on spring; Meng Fan's 'Dream in a Dream' (夢中之夢, 1991, from *S.L. and Sapphire Blue Sketches* [S.L.和寶藍色筆記], 1992), which is a rectangular-shaped continuous text without punctuation; Hong Hong's 'Hong Kong Trio' (香港三重奏, from *Remembering the Last Travel While Traveling* [在旅行中回憶上一次旅行, 1996]), of which the layout suggests sheet music; Luo Qing's 'Sunrise' (日出, from *Video Poetry* [錄影詩學], 1988), which ends with a seal of the characters for sunrise; Chen Li's 'Lessons in Ventriloquy' (腹語課, 1994, from *The Edge of the Island*), which in a kind of imitation of stammering first repeats the 'wu' sound through all kinds of different characters and repeats this in the second stanza with the 'e' sound.<sup>367</sup> In short, these critics are concerned with poetry that includes many visual and acoustic elements.

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<sup>366</sup> Parts of this chapter have earlier been published in Marijnissen, Silvia, 'Digesting Tradition - the Poetry of Luo Qing' in *The Chinese at play : festivals, games and leisure*, edited by Anders Hansson with Bonnie S. McDougall and Frances Weightman (2002), London: Kegan Paul.

<sup>367</sup> Xia Yu 1986: 86; Luo Zhicheng 1989: 98; Meng Fan 1992: 24-26; Hong Hong 1996: 174-9; Luo Qing 1988: 239; Chen li 1995: 108-9.

The experiments they refer to are clearly in step with the ones discussed in the previous two chapters: the poems rather stress artificiality than naturalness and, being no longer presented as ‘natural’, they reflect upon their own status. Yet, leafing through a number of poetry collections one must also acknowledge that visually and acoustically striking poems still remain marginal at the end of the twentieth century, as well as postmodern poetry in general, under which these poems are frequently subsumed.<sup>368</sup> And some other ways of stressing constructedness, such as Xu Huizhi’s inclusion of some hand-written, corrected versions in his book which also emphasize the process of writing, in the end do not really touch upon the work itself. In what follows I will elaborate upon the findings of the foregoing chapters, with a focus on poetic constructs which are not necessarily visually or acoustically marked, but are created through rewriting, quotation, procedural poetics and disunion. Before doing so, I will first briefly revisit the poetry of the ‘natural kind’.

## THE NATURAL CATEGORY

From the 1950s through 1970s many Taiwan poets, as argued above, wrote poetry in a prose-like language, which syntactically followed a more or less natural expression and was marked by imagery especially. Such writing also had consequences for the form, which conformed to similar ideas: poems were not marked by striking appearances but gave the impression of effortless ease, as if the form had spontaneously arisen in creating the poem. In a sense it is poetry that wants to make the reader forget that poetry always is constructed, on all fronts. But, as said before, ‘naturalness’ in poetry is an illusion of course, in form no less than in language: even the most non-emphatic open forms and free verses are still deliberate constructs by the author, of which the typography, the appearance of the text on the page, with its line breaks, stanzas etcetera, testify. Still, in the form of poetry one can, as in language, choose to hide or show one’s craft and manipulation.

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<sup>368</sup> Cf. also Michelle Yeh (aka Xi Mi) 1998.

With freedom and spontaneity as main characteristics in Taiwan poetry, there was an explosive increase in use of the open form, which had already started in the first half of the century and also continued in China, leading in later years to the widespread perception that modern Chinese and Taiwanese poetry is formless and according to some has no structure.<sup>369</sup> In the 1950's Ji Xian explicitly said that whereas the form determined the content in classical poetry, the age had now come in which 'the content determines the form'.<sup>370</sup> Form was, in practice, no longer determined in advance, but followed in the making of the poem. The experiments with so-called concrete forms that Lin Hengtai, Bai Qiu and Zhan Bing, for example, carried out in the early years, can also be viewed in this light. Even though they are striking in their outward appearance, these forms, frequently calligrammes in which the visual image duplicates the verbal one, such as a love poem in the form of a heart, are direct expressions of the poem's idea. Their outward form on the page is merely an illustration or a confirmation of what the words express. Bai Qiu's 'The Wanderer' (流浪者, from *Death of a Moth* [蛾之死], 1959) or in later years Luo Qing's 'Rising' (升, 1970 from *Here Come the UFO's*) and Chen Li's 'Sea Impression' (海的印象, 1974, from *In Front of the Temple*) are examples of these, but many of the poems in the 31st issue of the *Taiwan Poetry Quarterly* (台灣詩學, 2000) work in a similar way.<sup>371</sup> Such poems, which in fact are also only marginal contributions to the poetry scene, illustrate that poets have always been actively thinking about form, but they do not really emphasize the 'radical artifice' I am dealing with here.

Western ideas of organicism have probably been of influence in this process of the form complying with the contents, with the development of the material. As Michelle Yeh notes, organicism has had a 'profound impact' on twentieth century Chinese poetry due to the Crescent School's interest in organic theory and in the organic relationship between form and content.<sup>372</sup> In the view of Samuel Taylor

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<sup>369</sup> Luo Qing, for instance, holds that the lack of structure 'in Modern Chinese Poetry, which he attributes to a misunderstanding of Western poetics, is its most common malady' (quoted in Joseph R. Allen 1986: 157). Scholars like Michelle Yeh and Maghiel van Crevel have spoken of the formlessness in modern poetry in the past decades until the 1990s – though without calling this formlessness a malady (resp. 1991: 112 & 2004: 81).

<sup>370</sup> Ji Xian 1956A: 17-8.

<sup>371</sup> Bai Qiu 1971: 62-4; Luo Qing, see Joseph R. Allen 1993: 234-5; Chen Li 1997: 27; *Taiwan Poetry Quarterly* 31 (June 2000): 7-65.

<sup>372</sup> Michelle Yeh 1991: 90.

Coleridge, one of the advocates of organicism, form is 'innate; it shapes as it develops itself from within, and the fullness of its development is one and the same with the perfection of its outward form.'<sup>373</sup> In Taiwan poetry this has led, as shown in the previous chapters, to a substantial degree of naturalness: of the twin concepts of spontaneity on the one hand and technique and craft on the other (known in many cultural traditions), the first was favored. Spontaneity was feigned, and technical effort was hidden as much as possible.

Such ostensibly more natural ways of writing and expressing existed in classical poetry also; writing without showing the pains it may have taken is in accord with the foundations of classical Chinese poetry in the Buddhist and Taoist tradition. Early classical literary criticism as written by Lu Ji, Liu Xie, Wang Changling, or Sikong Tu, emphasizes the impression of naturalness in poetry.<sup>374</sup> This 'naturalness' is, however, not spontaneous; the poem is a deliberate construction but all manipulation is, as far as possible, disguised and the poem is presented as something that has more or less spontaneously arisen. As the poet-monk Jiaoran (fl. 760) wrote:

Someone has said: "In poetry one should not belabor one's thinking; if one belabors one's thinking, then one will lose the quality of naturalness." This is not so at all. Indeed, one must unravel one's thoughts amid difficulties, pluck what is marvelous from beyond phenomena, for soaring, animated verses, and describe obscure and mysterious ideas. For a rare pearl must be taken from the chin of a black dragon – how much more [difficult] is writing that penetrates the nether regions and embodies transformations? Yet what one values is that once the piece is finished, it has the appearance of effortlessness, as if it had been achieved with no thought at all.<sup>375</sup>

In spite of the poem 'Etudes: The Twelve Earthly Branches' in the previous chapter, much of the poetry by Yang Mu, whose work is a shining example for many in Taiwan, is exemplary of such a way of writing. In general, signs of deliberation are hidden behind an appearance of authenticity and spontaneity, especially in his earlier writings such as 'To Time' (給時間, 1964):

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<sup>373</sup> Quoted in Joseph M. Conte 1991: 27.

<sup>374</sup> Cf Pauline Yu's 'Critical Introduction' to her *The Poetry of Wang Wei* (1980), which mentions among others: Lu Ji, *Rhymeprose on Literature* (文賦); Liu Xie, *The Literary Mind: Dragon-Carvings* (文心調龍); Wang Changling, *Discussion of Literature and Meaning* (論文意); Sikong Tu, *The Twenty-Four Moods of Poetry* (二十四詩品).

<sup>375</sup> Pauline Yu 1980: 9.

Tell me, what is oblivion  
 what is total oblivion? Dead wood  
 covered by the decrepit moss of a dying universe  
 when fruits ripen and drip to dark earth  
 and summer becomes fall before they rot in murky shadow  
 when the abundance and crimson of two seasons  
 with slight pressure break free  
 suddenly turn to ashes and dust  
 when the blossom's fragrance sinks into grass like a falling star  
 stalactites drooping to touch ascending stalagmites  
 or when a stranger's footsteps pass  
 in a drizzle through red lacquered arches  
 and come to a stop at the fountain  
 solidifying into a hundred statues of nothingness—  
 that is oblivion, whose footstep leaves a ravine  
 between your eyebrows and mine  
 like a mountain grove without echo  
 embracing primeval anxiety  
 Tell me, what is memory  
 if you lose yourself in the sweetness of death?  
 What is memory if you blow out a lamp  
 and bury yourself in eternal darkness?

– translation by Lawrence R. Smith and Michelle Yeh<sup>376</sup>

Central themes in Yang Mu's oeuvre are time, loneliness, nostalgia, life, death, and love, the latter sometimes accompanied by a remarkable sensuality. The colonial history and the situation of Taiwan and of China also recur frequently. All these are heavy themes, which are rarely treated in a simplistic way; Yang's poems have a metaphysical bias, clearly characterized by a search for truth. Many of his poems, like 'To Time', breathe a feeling of seriousness, authenticity and originality that are reminiscent of romanticism. The lyrical appearance, lyrical in so far as it usually expresses a certain mood, feeling, thought or question that occupy a subjective I who tries to come to terms with an incomprehensible world, befits that authenticity and originality. But the lyrical style makes this poem, skilled though it is, in a sense also somewhat unambitious, as it fully concedes to the expectations of the time and perfects accepted ideas on poetry: it is written in an elegant free-verse with short, irregular prose-like lines, broken at places where the sentence has a natural pause, which draw no explicit attention to certain formal elements but flow unobtrusively from one image to the next. The result is a seemingly authentic contemplative expression.

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<sup>376</sup> Yang Mu 1978: 306; Yang Mu 1998: 22.

That does not mean that 'To Time' is a spontaneous outburst of feelings or that Yang is not very consciously concerned with the making of the poem, in its language, form and structure. Yang's poetry in general rarely is a fully spontaneous creation, as the many learned allusions to or rewritings of classical Chinese and of Western literature illustrate. His 'Etudes: The Twelve Earthly Branches' has already shown the contrary. Nor is the *I* necessarily identifiable with Yang Mu himself. His poetry usually transcends the arbitrariness of the personal, displaying a more abstract level where the particular and the general are smoothly blended. Personal references, as for example those to Taiwan, which regularly occur in his poetry, are in that sense hardly more than a sign of Yang Mu's emotional alliance to the island or to his subject matter. As Yang writes in his epilogue 'Poetry is Made for People' (詩爲人而作) to the book *Someone* (有人, 1986): 'I do not believe that poetry is the reflection of a strong stimulus. Poetic ideas must calmly subside, slowly ferment, be distilled and refined.'<sup>377</sup>

One is, however, not struck by that studied and deliberate quality, but rather by an overall impression of ease, especially in a relatively uncomplicated poem like 'To Time', which has a simple, basic structure – contrary to the Etudes. Eighteen lines describe oblivion in all kinds of nature images before it is juxtaposed to memory in the last four lines, raising the question of their difference and resemblance. There are no erudite references to classical Chinese and Western poetry, nor is there much unconventional diction and grammar, as occur in Yang Mu's later poetry which is much more complex.<sup>378</sup> The repetitions of some words or phrases – i.e. 'when', 'if', 'Tell me, what is oblivion', with its variation 'What is total oblivion', and its contrary 'Tell me, what is memory' – reinforce the impression of an unintentional, spontaneous and genuine contemplation. The familiar bipolarity and the overall 'authentic' appearance, together with the calm nature imagery, can provide a feeling of comfort when reading the poem, even though all images, symbolizing both oblivion and memory, are of a negative kind: dead wood, decrepit moss, dying universe, ashes and dust, darkness and so on.

In writing this poem, Yang Mu probably has attended to every possible aspect, but the end result is a poem that reads naturally and casually, and is not ex-

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<sup>377</sup> Yang Mu 1995: 525.

<sup>378</sup> Yang Mu 1998: Introduction.

plicitly marked by its artificiality, and in that sense it is an example of the natural category. The whole style of the poem contrasts sharply with for example much of the poetry by Lin Yaode (1962-1996), of whom Yang writes in 'Poetry and the Structure of Poetry' (詩與詩的結構) that his poetry often looks forced because of the strong structure.<sup>379</sup> Yang there remarks that he feels that the best lyrical poetry is written in an unintentional process, when the words appear to have come of their own accord. A strong structure may help prevent a poem from collapsing, but a crack in an otherwise meticulous structure will bring the reader even closer to the poem.<sup>380</sup> In Yang's poem one can clearly see a balance between the deliberate and the unintentional, and in that sense it remains close to classical Taoist and Buddhist poetry.

That Yang Mu does not think much of Lin Yaode's poetry may not come as a surprise, as it is the direct opposite of Yang's. Lin's work leans to Luo Qing's, Chen Kehua's or Chen Li's, whose work has in common that it does not stand out by lyricism but by the constructed nature of poetry instead. Their poetry is also, contrary to Yang Mu's, firmly grounded in contemporary civilization with its modern technology and communication, in a world that is increasingly ruled by the idea that it is human-made and that everything, including nature, can be controlled. The work of these poets explicitly question the validity of former and contemporary poetic conventions, sometimes with the help of technological inventions or media developments. While part of their work is still written in the 'natural look', it is gradually superseded by different ideas and by different, often more eye- and ear-catching forms and structures.

This kind of poetry, deviating from the more 'natural' way, seems gradually to have obtained a firmer footing in Taiwan poetry. The poetry of the 1990s displaying visual and acoustic elements, which the aforesaid critics have mentioned, is only a part of this. Other examples may be less visually and acoustically striking but display a similar fundamental approach toward artifice: drawing explicit attention to their constructedness. And whereas the 'natural' poetry rather inclines to seriousness, irony and playfulness frequently play an important role in this 'radically artificial' poetry, as we will see in the following.

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<sup>379</sup> Yang Mu 2001: 117.

<sup>380</sup> Yang Mu 2001: 119.

## REWRITING AND QUOTATION

It need not be argued here that rewriting and intertextuality are things of all times and places. Classical Chinese poetry, too, abounds in imitations of and allusions to poems that are held in high regard, in order to express one's reverence for a particular text or point of view, to express one's personal opinion upon a topic, or perhaps in an effort to measure up to a predecessor. Still, starting around the 1980s one comes across poems in which rewriting comes to play a different role – which had earlier also been noticed in the West. In the second half of the twentieth century Western literature and criticism have paid much attention to rewriting in its broadest sense, including imitation, parody, adaptation, variation, burlesque and so on. Parody, not defined as a nostalgic imitation of past models, but, in the words of Linda Hutcheon, as 'a stylistic confrontation, a modern recoding which establishes difference at the heart of similarity', is one of its most widespread modes.<sup>381</sup> Especially in postmodern, structuralist and poststructuralist circles rewriting has been viewed as an important means of composition – but rewriting is certainly not limited to those circles. What is different about this rewriting in the latter half of the twentieth century, in comparison with the intertextuality that literature has always known?

Matei Calinescu, who has written a lot about the topic, writes in a short article that rewriting in the second half of the twentieth century 'would involve a reference of some structural significance (as opposed to a mere mention or passing allusion) to one or more texts or, if we want to underline the connection, *intertexts*'.<sup>382</sup> Frequently the writer recasts a work and puts it in a different setting, in a seriocomic register, in such a way that the work can be read seriously and comically at the same time.<sup>383</sup> The background he sketches for this rewriting is related to what I have called the 'materialization of language', as discussed in chapter 2. When the relation between word, image and idea has been problematized and is no longer viewed as 'natural', when doubt is cast on the capacity of language as a means of expression, and it is viewed instead as arbitrary and opaque dense, it also becomes impossible to describe, reflect or search for reality through language.

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<sup>381</sup> Linda Hutcheon 1985: 8.

<sup>382</sup> Matei Calinescu 1997: 243.

<sup>383</sup> Cf. Matei Calinescu 1997: 246.



Reality then, as Calinescu remarks, becomes an effect of language but no longer exists in itself. The distinction between language and reality, fiction and fact, thought and action' then becomes blurred, and 'under such circumstances, [...], being caught in an infinite textual maze, they [authors] have no choice but to re-write'.<sup>384</sup> For Calinescu the background for rewriting is then 'best described by the notion of "text", by the view that the world, and not only the literary work, can be seen as text.'<sup>385</sup>

Other postmodern critics, however, object to that conclusion of such an infinite textuality. Hutcheon, for example, holds in *The Politics of Postmodernism* that postmodern literature resists totalizing solutions and questions all claims to an ultimate truth. In her opinion this literature wants to expose and play with the contradictions present in societies and to question traditional assumptions of artistic texts, such as the originality, the coherence and self-determinability of a text, the 'naturalness' of meaning, and the belief that history and reality can be known.<sup>386</sup> Despite the many differences, critics of rewriting and postmodernism do seem to agree upon some main characteristics, which *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* describes. It mentions seven premises for intertextuality in the structuralist and poststructuralist age, some of which we are already familiar with and will see again in this chapter: (1) 'Language is not a transparent medium of thought or a tool in the service of communication'; (2) 'Texts are fragments, without closure or resolution.' (3) As a result 'no writer can ever be in control of the meaning of the text.' (4) 'Meaning is supplanted by the notion of "signification" [...] Poststructuralism thus discards the humanistic version of human beings as creators of meaning, and proposes them instead as creatures (effects) of language.' (5) Criticism is no longer an ancillary activity, but is now considered part of the poem, creative of its meaning or signification.' (6) 'Disciplinary boundaries are erased.' (7) Poststructuralist criticism defies the rules of reason and identity and suggests instead the idea of contradiction.<sup>387</sup>

I do not intend to draw up a full inventory here of all the rewriting and of postmodern features in Taiwan poetry – since there are, as Gérard Genette for ex-

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<sup>384</sup> Matei Calinescu 1997: 245.

<sup>385</sup> Matei Calinescu 1997: 244-5.

<sup>386</sup> Linda Hutcheon: 1989.

<sup>387</sup> 1993 edition: 621 (Intertextuality).

ample shows with his typology in *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree* (Palimpsestes: La Littérature au second degré, 1982), many different kinds of re-writing. Instead I will focus on a few typical examples that are preoccupied with postmodern rewriting. Characteristic of most rewriting, from the West or Taiwan, is an overall seriocomic treatment of the original text, with a critical ironic distance, expressing at once respect, criticism and humor. A very simple example is Xu Huizhi's 'White Snake Speaks' (白蛇說), which recasts the popular legend of the White Snake:

Please entwine me  
While I'm shedding my skin  
Let me sense your pain  
The insane joy in the pain  
Supple as if without bones

Love does not need to enter completely  
I will rub your whole body  
With saliva  
In this holy night  
The saliva that I have spit with all my might  
Will be your new bright and transparent clothes

And afterwards, Xiaoqing, we return to the mountains  
To the mountains to cultivate love and passion  
The admiring sighs of mutual regards  
The ecstasy of touching  
Make Fahai continue reciting his sutras  
Let the weak-kneed Xu Xian forever exorcise under the Thunder Peak Pagoda<sup>388</sup>

The legend of the White Snake exists in many versions – it indeed has been rewritten a lot – but in its most elementary form Xu Xian is a poor herbal medicine shopkeeper, who marries a beautiful rich woman dressed in white; she has a female servant dressed in green (Xiaoqing in the poem means Little Green one). After their marriage the women help him set up a flourishing medicine shop. But the women are in fact snake spirits, both with magical powers. After some events Lady White Snake reveals her true identity to Xu Xian, who stays with her anyway, but after she has given birth to a son, the monk Fahai, determined to fight the spirits, imprisons the two women under the Thunder Peak Pagoda. Whereas in the legend the women do no harm to Xu Xian, he does nothing, in most versions, to have his wife released, although in some he professes the Buddhist order of Fahai in the

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<sup>388</sup> Bai Ling 1998: 255.

hope of having her set free by his deeds. But in the poem the two women have become emancipated and are less sacrificing; they go off together and let Xu Xian stew in his own juices; now he is the one imprisoned in the Pagoda. The essence of the legend, a love story between a man and a woman, is thus thoroughly changed. Ironical though Xu's poem is, it is still one of closure, of a single meaning; he supplants one truth with another and in that sense differs a great deal from Xia Yu's poetry which I will come to later.

One kind of rewriting that is seen a lot in Taiwan poetry is quotation; according to Calinescu it is one of the simplest forms of rewriting and has become 'the object of a large variety of manipulations (it can be deformed, switched from the affirmative mode to the negative one and vice versa, falsely attributed, concealed, made unrecognizable, used as a screen for another quotation, used as a clue or a false clue to a secret meaning of the work and so on) for the most diverse purposes, from showing respect (tinged with irony) for the literary tradition to playing hide-and-seek games with the reader.'<sup>389</sup> Quotation in contemporary writing can have far-reaching consequences. Xia Yu's earlier-mentioned 'Vanished Images' is a complex example of quotation. The original text is only slightly rewritten, but with huge consequences. More frequent are simpler forms of quotation, such as those written above a poem by way of a motto, as in Xia Yu's 'Jiang Yuan' (姜嫄, 1983, from *Memoranda*), which starts with a quotation from the *Book of Odes*.<sup>390</sup> In her new poem the original idea expressed in the motto is completely turned upside down, in a humoristic way better suiting contemporary life. Yet another form of quotation is Chen Li's 'Rose Song' (玫瑰之歌, 1994, from *The Edge of the Island*), which is a compilation of ten existing poems from different origins – so the annotation by the poet tells us.<sup>391</sup> The contribution of the poet is 'only' to translate them into Chinese and bring the poems into interplay. The difference between Xia's and Chen's use of quotation on the one hand and for example Yang Mu's 'Journey' (出門行, 1984, from *Someone* [有人]) where he quotes a line by Meng Jiao above his poem, is that Yang's poem is one of serious esteem and does not uproot the original.<sup>392</sup>

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<sup>389</sup> Matei Calinescu 1997: 246.

<sup>390</sup> Xia Yu 1986: 118-9.

<sup>391</sup> Chen Li 1995: 68-76.

<sup>392</sup> Yang Mu 1995: 435-7.

Frequently going hand in hand with quotations in a text are explanatory notes by the poet at the end of a poem informing the reader of the source of the quotation, as in Chen's example of 'Rose Song'. Such notes are another interesting phenomenon in themselves, as they show an ironic self-reflection or distance toward the poem – destroying any illusions the reader might have had about the text being an authentically written piece and simultaneously making it original in a different sense. But the reverse occurs also: notes are added to the poem to stress its authentic origin, and simultaneously distract from its allusion to another work of art. An example of this is Shang Qin's 'Speechless Clothes' (無言的衣裳) from 1982 (from *Thinking with Feet*):

### ***Speechless Clothes***

Autumn 1960, Three Gorges, seeing a washerwoman at night

A moonshine-like woman  
at the water's brink  
silently  
beats the hard, black rocks

(No one knows where her husband drifted to)

A reed flower-like woman  
at the river's edge  
speechlessly  
beats the cold, white moonlight

(No one knows where her husband flowed to)

A moonshine-like woman  
A reed flower-like woman  
at the river's edge silently beats  
speechless clothes at the water's brink

(The far, dusky mountains only cry out once you've passed them)

Note:

In the autumn of 1960 I traveled with my poet friend Liu Sha through the Three Gorges, staying overnight in a hotel at a back alley near the river – a small building sustained by wooden gantry, hanging partly above the river, so that wind and water flowed beneath it – where we drank rice wine and then Gaoliang, and fell asleep, drunk. In the night the sound of pounding clothes awoke me from my dream, I set the window ajar to look, moonshine, reed flowers, water gleam, everything was bright, the world lay quiet, only one woman was washing clothes at the rivulet's edge – the hammering echoed against the mountain – swathed in desolation. This made me think of the gaiety of the girls who washed clothes together beside the river when I was little, as if the lather and laughter were from yesterday, which made me doleful. I pushed Liu Sha to continue drinking, but without result and drank by myself,

searching for words without finding them, tossing about in bed till the end of the night. Later I also got drunk at this spot with Xiu Tao and others, but I did not again hear the hammering, nor did I find any words. Twenty years later this poem did come about, but all the friends have scattered, a yearning I cannot control is now recorded.

Taibei, 1982.<sup>393</sup>

Without denying the truth of this extensive note – washerwomen beside a river are surely a common occurrence and many of Shang Qin's poems have an autobiographical background<sup>394</sup> – it is hard to imagine that Shang Qin is not also simultaneously alluding here to the famous legend of Xi Shi, the beauty who is much alluded to in literature; she was once in a remote village washing silk in a stream under the moonlight, but was given to the King of Wu and held responsible for the fall of the state by leading him away from government affairs. Shang Qin's note, which stresses the authenticity of the poem, is no less ironic than its counterparts that explain or stress the literary allusion they are making.

In fact, the use of notes generally seems to have increased, notes that do not necessarily allude to literature, but explain how or under what circumstances (occasion, atmosphere) the poem was conceived – which was also common practice in classical poetry. While one may do this for emphasizing the impression of authenticity it may, on the contrary, also stress the constructed quality of the poem. In a note to her poem 'Give Time Some Time' (給時間以時間) for instance, Xia Yu attributes this quote to the former French president F. Mitterrand, who had supposedly said: 'One has to give some time to time' (Il faut laisser du temps au temps). The note stresses that not all her words are hers by origin. In a later reprint Xia Yu explains that after the first print she found a postcard on which the same saying was attributed to Miguel de Cervantes; successive search on the internet again made clear that the saying is in fact attributed to many and exists in many languages. Such expanding notes then may become another game in itself, even though the information given is truthful.

Concerning rewriting and quotation Luo Qing is another poet who has written some interesting examples. One of his, in my view, more successful poems is 'Once More Looking Out at the Deep Blue Sea after Looking Out at the Deep Blue

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<sup>393</sup> Shang Qin 1988A: 78-9.

<sup>394</sup> In conversations with Shang Qin concerning my translations of his work it often struck me that many of his poems have an immediate, realistic cause and are often directly connected to his life.

Sea Many Times Before' (多次觀滄海之後再觀滄海), from *Video Poetics* (錄影詩學, 1988):

On the calm and expansive sea  
There seems to be nothing at all

On the sea where there seems to be nothing at all  
There is in fact simply nothing at all

It is just because there is after all nothing at all  
That we know there was originally nothing at all

But on the calm and expansive sea  
Is there actually nothing at all?

On the sea where there is nothing at all  
Of course there is nothing at all

On the calm and expansive sea  
There is expectedly completely naturally nothing at all

Author's note: Ts'ao Ts'ao's first poem in the 'Walking out of the Summer Gate' series, called 'Looking Out at the Deep Blue Sea,' was written in the seventeenth year of the Chien-an period [A.D. 212 ]. Its lyrics go like this:

Eastward we approach Stele Mountain  
From there looking out at the deep blue sea  
How peaceful and broad is its water  
The mountain island is awesome and erect  
Trees grow in profusion  
The myriad plants are abundant  
The autumnal wind sighs  
Heavy waves surge  
The course of sun and moon  
Seems to start from there  
The river of stars burning bright  
Seems to rise from within it  
How very fortunate  
Songs enchant intent

Also Note:  
This is the first poem I wrote  
with a Chinese word processor  
Since the characters for 'awesome and erect' were not  
contained in its memory  
when I came to write the above note  
I had to create them with the character-graphics program

translated by Joseph R. Allen<sup>395</sup>

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<sup>395</sup> Luo Qing 1988: 258-61; Joseph R. Allen 1993: 377-9. The translation of the fourth line of the Ts'ao Ts'ao poem is mine, Allen's version is: 'Alpestrine spires stand on the mountain isle.'

Luo's work generally reveals a very strong sense of composition and inclines to irony in many ways, by humorous turns of phrases, language games, pretended ignorance or by linkage to popular culture. His book titles set the example, as they are not easily associated with poetry. His first collection, *Ways of Eating Watermelon*, would not be out of place among cookery books; *The Gallant Knights of Cathay* is reminiscent of Chinese martial arts novels (as is the language inside); *Catching Thieves* could easily be a detective novel; *Here Come The UFOs* (不明飛行物來了, 1984) could be a science fiction novel; and *Video Poetics* resembles the title of a work on postmodern literary criticism.<sup>396</sup> This play with book titles of popular genres pokes fun at modern poetry books written hitherto, which carry titles of the more elevated, lyrical and serious kind, such as Luo Fu's *Soul River* (靈河, 1957) or *Death in a Stone Cell*; Zhou Mengdie's *Land of the Solitary* (孤獨國, 1959); Rongzi's *Blue Bird* (青鳥集, 1953); Luo Men's *Light at Dawn* (曙光, 1958) or *Pagoda of Death* (死亡之塔, 1969); Bai Qiu's *Death of a Swan* (蛾之死, 1958) or *Roses in the Wind* (風的薔薇, 1965); Yu Guangzhong's *A Blue Feather* (藍色的羽毛, 1954), to name but a few famous books published in the 1950s and 1960s. Luo instead frequently contrasts a childlike simplicity, taken from popular mass culture, with the deadly serious imagery of so-called high art, creating new poetic forms and styles.<sup>397</sup>

'Once More Looking Out at the Deep Blue Sea after Looking Out at the Deep Blue Sea Many Times Before' is a case in point. The poem was originally published in the *Popular Daily* 民眾日報 under the title 'Looking at the Sea from Guanshan Pavilion' (關山亭觀滄海), together with his 'Goodbye Epistle about Goodbye' (一封關於訣別的訣別書).<sup>398</sup> The two poems were accompanied by several short critiques of other writers, most of them quite negative. The most positive contribution comes from the postmodern critic Meng Fan who stresses, not very surprisingly, the postmodernity of the poem: it is fragmented and there is no meaning in it, which corresponds to the idea that unity cannot be reached in our shattered

<sup>396</sup> Only *Rice Songs* (水稻之歌, 1981) seems to be an exception to this; I have not taken his children's and young people's poetry into consideration.

<sup>397</sup> In this way Luo probably tries to kill two birds with one stone, as his inclination to more popular art forms is also a way to reach the reading public that had been estranged from modern poetry.

<sup>398</sup> *Popular Daily*, November 23, 1987.

world; it is just one line after the other; the form is more important than the content; the insertion of the poem by Cao Cao (Ts'ao Ts'ao) is just some 'collage and montage' without any meaning; and by means of the last note on the word processor, the creation process itself becomes involved, the so-called auto-reflection in postmodern literature.<sup>399</sup> Subsequently, Meng Fan draws the conclusion that Luo Qing is really just playing a game here, which is, according to him, exactly what postmodern literature does: to see literary writing as a game.

Meng's argument appears justifiable enough, and because Luo was one of the pioneers in introducing postmodernism in Taiwan, the link to postmodernism is quickly made. But one may wonder whether Meng does justice to the poem with his enumeration that only stresses the postmodern appearance of the poem. He does, however, clearly appreciate the poem while the others, whether or not seeing it as postmodern, think of it as a letdown: the (for them) foolish and purposeless repetition gives them the impression of a fragmented, meaningless poem, which they see confirmed by the apparently senseless insertion of an entire classical poem and the note on the poet playing with his computer.<sup>400</sup> They refuse to take the poem seriously in any way. If they did so, they would discover that it is not simply a matter of making a conspicuous game, but that the poem is at once fragmented and silly, *and* a coherent and structured seriocomic treatment of a valuable classic. When given some reflection, Luo's poetry often is indebted to classical Chinese poetry (and painting).

The poem is clearly divided into three parts: the first is the sixfold repetition in twelve lines, saying in different but nearly similar words that there is nothing on the sea; the second part consists of the first note with the quotation of the full Cao Cao poem about the sea; and in the third part the writer narrates how he wrote this poem. Luo Qing has here in fact rewritten Cao Cao's poem, sharply contrasting with it in both form and matter. The first part, in simple, colloquial language, is written in free verse, and may seem boring in its manifold repetition – or funny to others. Cao Cao's poem, conversely, counts four characters in each line, has a very rich diction and shows hardly any repetition of words (apart from 'seems to rise/start from' 若出其 in lines 10 and 12); each line adds a new dimen-

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<sup>399</sup> Ku Ling 1987.

<sup>400</sup> The others are: Lin Yangmin, Xu Huizhi, Huang Shugen, Lin Huixiong, Guo Hanchen, Lü Jiantang.



sion to the description. Cao Cao's poem breathes a kind of solemnity in its admiration. Whereas the repetitions in the first part stress that there is nothing on the sea, Cao Cao's poem contains a miniature world: an island covered with plants, and 'The course of sun and moon / Seems to start from there' and 'The river of stars burning bright / Seems to rise from within it'. In the third part an explanation of the poem's circumstances is given, as was frequently done in classical poetry, although these explanations were presumably not meant ironically; Luo Qing's note is. It draws attention to the contrast between Luo's first part and Cao Cao's poem. The sudden mentioning of the word processor is a case of auto-reflection, as Meng Fan noted, but the real point of interest of the note lies elsewhere: in the fact that the characters for 'awesome and erect' (竦峙) 'were not contained in its memory'. True as that statement may be, it can hardly be a coincidence that exactly these two characters are mentioned, since they are the ones that summarize the grandeur of the mountain island in the sea. Again, the difference between the two 'versions' is stressed.

Cao Cao's poem cannot be seen in isolation from the popular Taoist tradition and its myth of the Islands of the Blessed. It is the first known poem about the sea and was followed by many classical poems about 'looking at the blue sea'; many refer to these islands, which were supposed to be situated in the Eastern Sea and to be inhabited by fairies who were immortal because they drank from the elixir of life. When, like so many before him, Luo Qing is once more looking out at the deep blue sea, there is nothing on the sea. Why? Is the new poem a simple inversion to deny this richness of the sea, meaning that we, living in the modern world, no longer believe in fairies and immortality? But it is affiliated with Taoist philosophy in another way. The repetition of there being nothing on the sea concretizes nothingness within the poem, and one may come to think of reading 'nothing on the sea' as the 'Nothing', the Taoist Nothingness or Emptiness in which potentially all is present. Cao Cao's poem is then not so much contradictory to the first part, but complementary to it: the miniature world of the island describes the potential. The sea itself underlines this line of thought, as it is symbolic of the dynamics of life: everything originates from the sea and everything returns to it.<sup>401</sup> Further-

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<sup>401</sup> In some of his other poems the same idea recurs. In 'Key Beach' the bottom of the sea conceals life's secrets, to which the shells on the beach are the key. 'Six Ways of Eating Watermelon' refers

more, in Taoist legends the Emptiness at the beginning of time is associated with ‘watery chaos’. Emptiness and the sea can thus be regarded as the same.

Being self-reflexive the poem raises questions about the position and status of modern poetry and thus about its own position in our contemporary world. What role can poetry play? How can readers be reached? How does modern poetry relate to classical poetry? What is the influence of modern techniques such as computers on poetry writing? These are problems that return in a number of his works. Luo Qing rewrites and rereads literature, and with his ironic quotation in ‘Once More Looking Out at the Deep Blue Sea after Looking Out at the Deep Blue Sea Many Times Before’ he places himself explicitly in the Chinese tradition of poetry writing (instead of a purely Western one) while adding a new dimension to it.

The following poem, Xiao Xiao’s ‘Sky Clear Sand’ (天淨沙 in *Desolate* [悲涼], 1982), may serve as another example of a poem that inserts a whole classical poem. It has a prominent form also, but the poem is much less ironic than Luo Qing’s:

#### **Sky Clear Sand – variation<sup>402</sup>**

dead vines  
aged trees  
dusk crows  
small bridge, brooklet, people’s house  
old road  
West wind  
lean horse

the sun sets West  
heaven then has  
no  
bounds  
no  
limits  
no  
ends

only after noon the face started

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in a different way to the (Taoist) notion of ‘Nothing’ being the condition for all potential (cf. Part II, chapter 3). Luo himself suggests that he took the notion of ‘emptiness’ from the traditional art of landscape painting where the white clouds mediating between mountains and water are the emptiness from which everything originates (Interview with Luo Qing, in Silvia Marijnissen & Martin de Haan 1997: 93-5).

<sup>402</sup> Given the specific form of the Chinese poem, the English version of this poem is as literal as possible.

to rise  
to rise and become packs of  
slow  
and  
slug-  
gish  
black  
clouds

lingering  
and  
lingering

and only then the face started  
to descend  
slow  
and  
slug-  
gish  
black  
clouds, packs of them

a broken man at heaven's end<sup>403</sup>

Xiao Xiao uses the famous poem 'Autumn Thoughts to the Tune of Sky Clear Sand' (天净沙•秋思) by Ma Zhiyuan' (c.1270-1330). The original can be divided into three lines consisting of three two-character-combinations, one line consisting of two two-character-combinations and a closing line consisting of two three-character-combinations, as follows:

Dead vines / aged trees / dusk crows	(枯籐/老樹/昏鴉)
Small bridge / brooklet / men's home	(小橋/流水/人家)
Old road / West wind / lean horse	(古道/西風/瘦馬)
The sun / sets West	(夕陽/西下)
A broken man / at heaven's end	(斷腸人/在天涯) <sup>404</sup>

It is this division into word combinations and lines that informs the design of Xiao Xiao's poem. It alternates the two-character combinations with full lines, and after the fourth line, which might be called the 'eye' of the poem – i.e. the place in the poem that points to or summarizes the essential part of the poem, emphasized here by the shorter line – follows a Xiao Xiao's personal part. This part takes a variant yet similar form: lines of mostly one character and a couple of two charac-

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<sup>403</sup> Xiao Xiao 1982: 25.

<sup>404</sup> Ma Zhiyuan 1993: 198.

ters, occasionally alternated with a longer line. The elongated form that is thus created draws specific attention to the boundless sky with its slowly drifting black clouds. Notably, rather than providing an alternative to or a different vision upon the original poem, Xiao Xiao's poem appropriates the original style and meaning in what is essentially an affirmative fashion: the connotation of despair and of the futility of man opposed to nature is kept intact. The treatment of the poem is one of serious reverence whereas Luo Qing's is obviously serio-comic.

## QUOTATION AS PROCEDURAL POETICS

The same poem by Ma Zhiyuan is used by Luo Qing as well, in a kind of procedural poetics: his writing is based on a self-imposed formal constraint, making a new stanza of each two- or three-character combination of the original. This somewhat reminds one of Yang Mu's method in his 'Etudes', but Luo Qing's constraint is not based upon a traditional fixed form. It works as a new generative device that limits and directs the possibilities of this one poem. Among the writers of the French OuLiPo group, who developed this way of writing, dissenting views exist as to how such constraints should work. Jacques Roubaud, for example, holds that 'a text written according to a constraint must speak of this constraint', but not all OuLiPo writers agree on that.<sup>405</sup> What they do agree on is that writing by means of such a device is not simply a matter of playing a game. For them it has, paradoxically, a liberating effect, because the routine, the usual mechanism of writing is broken: as it is the self-chosen constraint that determines how the poets proceed, they feel less directed by conventions.

This is exactly what stimulated Luo Fu to write a whole book in such a procedural way. All the poems in his *Hidden Titles* are constructed along the same principle: acrostics, in which the characters in the title of the poem are, in order, the first characters of each of the lines in the poem. In his introduction to the book Luo remarks that such procedural writing affects the language of the text: 'It is sometimes inevitable to demolish established grammar and language patterns,

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<sup>405</sup> Quoted in Perloff 1991: 140.

and that demolition even becomes its characteristic.’<sup>406</sup> And he adds that an equally important effect of the self-imposed rule was the liberation it gave him:

‘When the poems with concealed titles became the focus of the subject of the poetry scene, it is true that many confirmed its worth as art, but neither was there any lack of persons who objected to it. There were for instance those who considered the poems with concealed titles a kind of ‘self constraint’, or they called it ‘dancing in shackles’, this is fundamentally true, I don’t think it is wrong. However, while writing I not only did not have any hard-pressed feelings of self constraint at all, but, on the contrary, felt an enormous liberation, because I would sometimes be forced to let go of some habitual grammar, so that purely from my heart’s wishes I could ‘non-transgressionally’ design a whole new poetic sentence.’<sup>407</sup>

The formal constraint thus enforces a certain language, structure or form upon the poem, as we will see in the following example from Luo Qing’s book *Video Poetics*. The first section in the volume contains two ‘Examples of Video Poetics’ (錄影詩學舉例), bearing the titles ‘Sky Clear Sand – First Example of Video Poetics’ (天淨沙:舉例之一) and ‘The Ferry Landing in the Wilderness is Deserted and the Boat Swings by Itself – Second Example of Video Poetics’ (野渡無人舟自橫:舉例之二). With the two ‘Examples’ Luo Qing has rewritten Ma Zhiyuan’s famous poem and one classical line, the final line of ‘West Creek at Chuzhou’ (滁州西澗) by Wei Yingwu (737–792 or 793).<sup>408</sup> These rewritings involve the constraint to incorporate and rewrite each of the original word clusters of the poem or the line. Through the insertion of these famous phrases, the poem again deliberately shows the rewriting strategy, just like in the ‘sea poem’; in all three examples the classical poem (or line) informs the composition of the new poem.

In the first and longest of the two ‘Examples of Video Poetics’, the ‘Sky Clear Sand’ sequence, the original triggers are put in a separate column, which makes it possible to read both horizontally and vertically.<sup>409</sup> Horizontally they serve as

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<sup>406</sup> Luo Fu 1993C: 3.

<sup>407</sup> Luo Fu 1993C: 6.

<sup>408</sup> The full poem by Wei Yingwu reads: Alone, I savor wildflowers tucked in along the creek, / and there’s a yellow oriole singing in treetop depths. // Spring floods come rain-swollen and wild at twilight. / No one there at the ferry, a boat drifts across of itself. Translation by David Hinton (2002: 122). In my own translation I have, in consultation with Luo Qing, translated the last line somewhat differently.

<sup>409</sup> The original reads from top to bottom and from right to left.

headings for the sections; read vertically, the new text literally becomes a parody, in its literal etymological meaning of a 'song sung beside' the old one:<sup>410</sup>

***Sky Clear Sand***

– First Example of Video Poetics

- [1] Dead vines:           The camera moves from  
                                  a power cable  
                                  in a tracking shot up to a group  
                                  of densely, loosely or unclearly entangled power lines  
                                  immediately after this emerges  
                                  a bundle of clouds  
                                  tightly bound by millions of power lines  
                                  emerging, emerging  
                                  continuously emerging
- [2] aged trees:           The camera follows  
                                  a dog lifting its leg  
                                  tracks up to the round middle of a concrete column  
                                  close-up: a red 'Danger. High voltage. Keep away'  
                                  close-up: a blue 'Three Principles of the People, Unify  
  China'  
                                  close-up: a black 'Democratic human rights, vote for me'  
                                  close-up: a golden 'Last units for sale, come and see'  
                                  up again is a swaying transformer on the verge of falling  
                                  and one half of a lonely mercury lamp  
                                  in pairs they hang from the top of the concrete column  
                                  to keep the unbalanced balance  
                                  the transformer vibrates somniferously  
                                  huskily screams a series of vague slogans  
                                  the mercury lamp winks one-eyed  
                                  sends out an ominous secret code  
                                  indicates all kinds of half hidden  
                                  dangers
- [3] dusk crows:           And then  
                                  the camera shifts from  
                                  the twinkling street lamp to  
                                  a twinkling star  
                                  zooms in – close-up:  
                                  it's a lamp on the tail of an aeroplane  
                                  below the lamp ten thousands of roofs and lamps in houses  
  float by  
                                  the air above the roofs is suddenly filled with thousands of  
  television antennas  
                                  the open, flat wings of the antennas  
                                  look like the skeletons of thousands of evening crows  
                                  exposed to sun, rain, wind and earthquakes  
                                  on top of the bamboo poles that look like a cross

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<sup>410</sup> The poems are not numbered in the original. I have added numbers here for the sake of convenience. In the translation I have maintained the idea of the original layout.

they quietly endure  
all kinds of telecommunicative electric shocks

[4] Small bridge: The camera shifts from the rack of bones of the dusk crows  
to construction scaffolding  
and again to a complicated iron construction  
the camera zooms out  
a pedestrian bridge leading in all directions  
is impressive to see  
close-up 'Everyone is responsible for keeping secrets and  
preventing espionage'  
close-up 'Honey soap. Nylons with colored butterflies'  
close-up 'Military service is the most glorious duty of the  
people'  
close-up 'Sale of the complete volume of *How to Emigrate*,  
new edition'  
close-up 'Unite in the struggle. Beware of discord'  
close-up 'Fine for loud honking: nine hundred yuan'  
it's crowded on the bridge (pickpockets are active)  
signpost one 'President's Palace'  
signpost two 'Revival bridge'  
signpost three 'Great China Cinema'  
signpost four 'Big World Theatre'  
in the distance (juvenile delinquents come to blows)  
the electric signaling says:  
heavy traffic jam in the direction of Banqiao  
traffic signs are out of order in the direction of Shilin  
a Taiwanese bus service going to the Three Gorges  
has broken down on the National Reconstruction North  
South Bridge

[5] brooklet: However, the black river under the bridge  
just continues flowing, after a short tumble,  
as if nothing had happened  
the camera zooms in  
investigating the quality of the water in a close-up  
ingredients: bicycle, motorcycle, sedan  
truck, military vehicle, police car  
the camera then focuses for a moment  
above the waterway of the old Danshui River  
the birth of a new Danshui  
is officially announced in color  
using techniques of montage

[6] men's home: Above the Danshui  
colored snakes  
begin to emerge one by one  
from between the apartments on both shores  
they chaotically move to the shore to drink together  
the night market of Huaxi  
begins to writhe like a ring snake  
facing the Chinese Research Institute for venomous  
snakes  
is a specialized hospital for recovering from venereal

- diseases  
a signboard for perfect circumcisions (close-up)  
a trademark for crocodile leather handbags (close-up)  
after the snake whip, snake soup, snake gall, snake wine  
are heaps of imported apples, one after the other,  
getting cheaper and cheaper (pan and tilt)  
adults and children walk and eat  
meanwhile spitting the cores of the apples at will  
between the children's playground and the zoo
- [7] Old road: Beyond the playground  
are 3D overpasses of broad, flat freeways  
taxis racing on them, they come and go,  
shuttling back and forth (focus the camera)  
time meter expenses meter  
passing interchanges (close-up)  
passing toll stations (close-up)  
keep distance, maintain your speed  
passing fog banks (close-up)  
passing rest areas (close-up)  
near the international airport  
lots of airconditioned sightseeing touring cars  
come and go (jumpcut)  
near the Yangmei interchange  
a funeral procession of the municipal funeral home  
disappears on the road to Longtan  
that widely-known  
march of the old road  
is silently blown about in the wind  
after the sound of the car has faded away  
silently blowing, blowing silently  
blowing a sky full of chrysanthemum seeds (close-up)  
in a border full of blooming chrysanthemums (close-up)
- [8] West wind: The time is of course March twenty-something  
the wind is of course blowing from the West  
all of the flocky dandelion seeds blowing about  
are studying and discussing  
the correct direction of the wind  
and increase suspicions as to the truth or falsehood of the  
calendar  
some seeds were blown here long ago, some hundreds of  
years  
fell on the ground and rooted (fade in)  
others were blown back hundreds of years from here  
never to reemerge (fade out)  
some keep floating in the air, hesitating  
others have decided to wander in the clouds  
even more have fallen on the freeway  
stick to the tires of all kinds of vehicles  
rolling ahead disregarding everything
- [9] lean horse: A Qianlima car (close-up)  
flies by Zaoqiao



drives all night, beyond Houli  
 does not stop at Fengyuan, nor at Huatan or Baihe  
 drives into: China Boat Co., China Steel Co.  
 drives into the largest center in Asia for container  
     transport  
 leaves Shanhua, Mituo and Foguangshan behind its wheels  
 and after refueling at Jiadong  
 it goes ahead full horsepower  
 rushes towards Hengchun  
 rushes towards the Hengchun nuclear power station  
 unexpectedly—  
 near the national park of Kending, the car  
 has an accident  
 the puddles of petrol at the spot  
 catch fire  
 a horrifying evening red at the Bashi Channel  
 (new art synthesizes 3D, color and widescreen)

[10] The sun:           The evening sun at the Bashi Channel  
                             a heavy sea mine  
                             full of prickles  
                             in a dark-red color

[11] sets West:        Splash!  
                             on the sea chart between the South China Sea and the Gulf  
                                     of Tokyo  
                             diving into the cold, pure white spray of the waves  
                             (the filming is being carried out  
                             entirely according to the script, perfect and flawless)

[12] A broken man:    (Going on with the filming according to plan)  
                             a large half floating, half sinking wooden boat  
                             should emerge at this moment at  
                             the left side of the picture  
                             floats to the right  
                             a boat floats by  
                             with wide-eyed  
                             Chinese

[13] stands at heaven's end:   (Camera?! Action!)  
                             the large wooden boat starts sinking in the ocean  
                             close-up: a yacht is launched under the sound of  
                                     firecrackers  
                             feet are kicking and sinking in the spindrift  
                             close-up: numerous hands rise from a group of  
                                     demonstrators  
                             long hair, entangled with sea weed, is spread out  
                             close-up: soap glides over the wasp waist that leaves the  
                                     bathtub on television  
                             many cries fade in the wind and clouds  
                             close-up: in the cinema the song 'Build the Republic'  
                             resounds  
                             (the place of the sunken boat)  
                             sea water

spindrift  
 sea water  
 spindrift  
 (the place of the sunken boat) the sun comes up  
 sea water  
 spindrift  
 sea water  
 spindrift  
 (the place of the sunken boat)  
 the shadow of a charter plane leaving the country  
 strokes softly  
 over the place of the sunken boat  
 the thundering shadow  
 is like a strip of cheap plaster that does not stick  
 falling off as soon as you stick it  
 is like a folded paper cross  
 rolling in the wind  
 and that plane  
 like a perfectly fabricated paper toy knife  
 skims in sleek elegance  
 across the shredded map of Asia <sup>411</sup>

We can first of all assess that the poem is a bunch of diverse images, with the reader gliding from one into another. The reason for the large number of images is clear: it is the consequence of the perspective of a film script, a filming poem, so to speak. In fact, among all those variables in the poem the camera is the only real constant, the only continuous element throughout. Even though it is no longer mentioned in the end, it remains present by virtue of the film terms in parentheses and other cinematic effects (such as ‘zooming in’, ‘zooming out’, ‘close-up’). While all these provide instructions for camera handling and image presentation, the camera does not become the actual centre of the poem, but remains in the background. The focus of the sequence is *in* the camera, *on* the various things it films.

The things that the camera is filming, the images, determine the construction of the poem. Two kinds have to be distinguished: central and peripheral. The central images are a result of the chosen constraint to write a new poem based on Ma Zhiyuan’s word clusters. They are mostly modern derivatives of each of the very basic images in Ma’s poem, and all of them are based on metaphorical relations. The following table lists these relations and displays how Ma Zhiyuan’s traditional imagery is contrasted with elements from modern life:

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<sup>411</sup> Luo Qing 1988: 15-29.

1	dead vines	electric power lines
2	aged trees	concrete column
3	dusk crows	aircraft
4	small bridge	foot bridge / traffic bridge
5	brooklet	river
6	men's home	living environment
7	old road	freeway
8	West wind	West wind
9	lean horse	a car?
10	the sun	setting sun / sea mine
11	sets West	sinking in the sea
12	a broken man	sinking wooden boat
13	stands at the horizon	place of the sunken boat in the sea

Of these variations the first eleven are typically modern images; one might even call them predictable, such as the crow that is changed into an airplane, or the freeway that supersedes the 'old way'.<sup>412</sup> From the table one immediately sees that not all items are transformed. The river, the West wind and the setting sun more or less remain what they are; it is the additional, peripheral elements that makes them modern. Thus, all kinds of modern vehicles lie in the water of the modern 'river' and the evening sun gets a second, rather unusual counterpart in the form of the sea mine. The last three images are not actually turned into a typically *modern* counterpart: 'sinking in the sea', 'a sinking wooden boat' and 'the place of the sunken boat' are phenomena that can occur in any era. In the last section 'stands at the horizon', the 'horizon' picture is again adjusted by other images, such as the television, the cinema and the charter plane, that are typical of the twentieth century. Furthermore, the last variation, 'stands at the horizon', is not precisely metaphoric, though it is based on correspondence: both the original and the variation are concerned with the scene of the action. *Zai tianya* 在天涯 means 'be at the ho-

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<sup>412</sup> The 'evening Crows' [3], is the only word cluster with an additional metonymical image, apart from the central metaphoric one. This is the 'skeletons of the crows', which is again a metaphor for the antennas.

rizon' or 'somewhere faraway'; in Luo's sequence this has been changed into the distant ocean south of Taiwan, the place where the boat sinks.<sup>413</sup>

No less important than these thirteen main images are all the peripheral images and information, such as the close-ups from mercury lamps, slogans and advertising on the concrete column or on the footbridge, the antennas on the roofs, etc. They are not mere decorative description, but essential in the transfer from one section to the next. As there are no natural affiliations between the central images of the new poem – not between a concrete column and an airplane, nor between an airplane and a bridge, or a Qianlima car and the setting sun and so on – it would, without the peripheral images, sometimes seem as if the camera had 'jumped' to a completely new scene, whereas now a continuous film is presented in which we slide through the minor images from one central image to the next.

These numerous connective images between the sections are either metaphorical or metonymical. The first transfer, for example, from 'Dead vines' to 'aged trees' is established through an image of power lines (i.e. the variation upon the 'Dead vines') in section one. The concrete column (variation on the 'aged trees') in section two can only be connected to those cables through the things suspended from it. Both the transformer and the mercury lamp bring electricity to mind, and of even more importance is the sign 'Danger. High voltage', because it suggests that the concrete column is an electricity pole. As such these three images become meaningful in their metonymical relations between the central images of sections one and two, enabling coherent transfer.

The following table shows which metonymical and metaphorical shifts are made between one section and the next; the right column provides the connective element.

Part	Type	Connecting images	connective
2-3	metaphorical	mercury lamp > street lamp, star, airplane lamp, house lamp	lights
3-4	metaphorical	antenna's > bridge	iron construction
4-5	metonymical	bridge > river under bridge	bridge

<sup>413</sup> The place-names the Qianlima passes show that it goes from north to south; it ends at the Bashi Channel, in the ocean south of Taiwan; seen on a map it is thus in between the South China Sea and the Gulf of Tongking, which are West and East of Taiwan respectively.

5–6	both	– metonymical: river > entourage along river – metaphorical: river > snake	river  writhing snake
6–7	metonymical	between playground and zoo > beyond playground	playground
7–8	metaphorical	chrysanthemum seeds > dandelions pappi	seeds
8–9	metonymical	seeds > Qianlima car	tires
1–2	metonymical	power lines > transformer, mercury lamp, 'Danger. High voltage'	electricity
9–10	metaphorical	– crashed car > evening sun – crashed car > sea mine	evening red explosive
10–11	metonymical	sea mine > spray of waves	water
11–12	metaphorical	The sinking > the sinking	sinking
12–13	metaphorical	The sinking > the sinking	sinking

The perspective of a continuous, gliding camera is sometimes also ensured within a section. In part [3] for example, the shift from street lamp, star and airplane lamp to the house lamps also provides the smooth metonymical transfer to the antennas on the roofs of these houses.

The first ten sections of the poem – distinguished in the table from [10] – [13] for reasons that will be clarified later – are mostly connected through images other than the central one. Exceptions to this are the transitions from [4] to [5], (from 'bridge' to 'river') and from [5] to [6] (from 'river' to 'home' / living environment). In the latter one might, however, also see a metaphorical connection in the form of the snake – a recurrent image in part six through the snake soup, snake wine etc. The writhing snake, used to describe the night market, can be connected with the dark Danshui River that twists and turns through Taipei, although it is not presented as such, nor compared to it within the poem.

Starting with the 'setting sun' in section [10], the manner of connecting changes. Although there are still metonymical and metaphorical relations, there is also one continuous image throughout parts [10] and [11], that of 'sinking'. This change can be traced back to Ma Zhiyuan's original fourth line, which introduces a change as well. The first three verse lines (the first nine compounds, from 'Dead vines' to 'lean horse') consist of related but separate images, that follow one an-

other without any grammatical coherence. Each of these images is made by a noun modified by an adjective. The fourth line, beginning with the ‘evening sun’, suddenly consists of only four characters in two two-character clusters. The last line again comprises six characters, but in two three-character clusters. And contrary to the first three verse lines, the last two more or less form grammatical wholes, with subjects and predicates: ‘the sun sets West’ and ‘a broken man stands at heaven’s end’.

These grammatical structures have a parallel in Luo’s poem. Part [10] is only a description of the evening sun as an explosive full of prickles and with a dark red color; nothing really happens in it. All the more happens in part [11] that revolves around something sinking. Here an action is described without any reference to a subject. Following Ma Zhiyuan’s structure, one can only conclude that part [10] provides the subject for the action in part[11]; that it is the sea mine, alias the evening sun, which falls into the sea and sinks. And as the sea mine is metaphorically related to the crashed car – both are explosive and they are connected via the evening red – one might assume that the car is the subject of the sinking, just as the setting sun can be seen as symbolic for the broken man in Ma Zhiyuan’s original. The last two lines in the original poem (from ‘goes down in the West’ to ‘a broken man’) are not grammatically connected and there is another break in the line length and division. Luo’s poem follows that break: there is continuity in the form of the two ‘sinkings’, yet they are not the same. Section [11] first has a subjectless sinking (i.e. the sea mine of part [10]) and section [12] then offers the half-sunken boat. The two last sections, finally, are analogous with Ma Zhiyuan’s last grammatical line ‘A broken man stands at heaven’s end’. Section [12], ‘A broken man’, forms the subject of part [13], ‘at heaven’s end’: it shows the ‘half floating, half sinking wooden boat’ packed with Chinese (going from one side of the screen to the other). In the last part the focus is on the scene of the sinking: first the wooden boat sinks until it has completely disappeared and only the waves are left; then the shadow of a charter plane passes over that same spot.

All in all, the poem is tightly organized into a coherent narrative, through the continuous camera and the classical poem.<sup>414</sup> The procedural writing also func-

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<sup>414</sup> Other minor constructing elements could be pointed out, for example, the omen of the final apocalypse: in section [9] the car swiftly bypasses all kinds of places with names connected to Buddhism, as for example Shanhua, Mituo and Fuguangshan – as if religion is put aside In section

tions as a way of juxtaposing old and new, tradition and modernity. Again the concise *wenyan* is juxtaposed to the modern – colloquial, elaborated – *baihua* language. And the contrast once more emphasizes the difference between the two texts: the terseness of images by Ma Zhiyuan and the superfluity of images by Luo.

Ma Zhiyuan's is an outstanding example of a static poem: the few, well-chosen images together evoke a classical Chinese painting. Luo's version, conversely, is highly dynamic, involving a forward movement: the images smoothly follow one another, creating a constant feeling of action. This is intensified by the film terms in parentheses, like 'tracking shot', 'zoom in', 'zoom out', 'jump cut', 'pan and tilt', 'close-up', which constantly remind the reader of the movement of the film.<sup>415</sup> The numerous images in Luo's sequence make it truly representative of modern industrialized city life that is more and more dominated by media images.<sup>416</sup> Through all those images, and the details that come along with it, our view of things is blurred, as it were. All those seemingly minor scenes (seeds sticking to tires!) incorporated in the poem are distracting from the main image – in other words, the centers disappear, they disintegrate.

The juxtaposition of the old and the new poem in two columns also effects the way of reading, as they visualize both the autonomy *and* the interdependence of the texts: the new text would not exist without the classical one, but the original is put in a different light as well. The texts become mutually effective: not only are the power lines a modern variation upon the withered vines, but the vines themselves now cannot help but remind one of power lines; the 'old road' cannot help but reflect crowded freeways. While Ma's poem has 'restricted' Luo's, the latter also undermines the former, or surrounds it with new possibilities. In a sense, it has become impossible to say that the new poem is built upon the old; the boundaries between what is original and what is derived become less evident because of the mutual reflection.

Let me turn to the 'Second Example of Video Poetics'.

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[2], the flickering mercury lamp that points to 'half visible, half hidden dangers' might also be a presage of the disaster at the end.

<sup>415</sup> In this sense I believe that they are quite essential to the poem and as such I do not agree with Lin Yaode, who considered them not very special (Lin Yaode 1989: 217).

<sup>416</sup> In his afterword 'Theoretical Foundation of *Video Poetics*' ('錄影詩學'之離論基礎) Luo Qing himself also goes into this social problem, saying that this century has become more and more characterized by images through film, television, and later video, which strongly influences the way of thinking and feeling, and the use of language (Luo Qing, 1988a, p. 263-276).

***The Ferry Landing in the Wilds is Deserted and the Boat Swings by Itself***

– second example of Video Poetics

***The Ferry Landing***

The Milky Way flows  
sparkling through outer space

(camera zooms in)

sparkling are innumerable  
large and small spacecrafts

***Is Deserted***

Between the spacecrafts  
all kinds of electronic messages are exchanged  
emitted from  
all kinds of different types  
of computers (close-up) 'Ark 1 control center'  
of robots (close-up) 'Ark 2 captain's room'  
close-up of all mammal primates quietly sleeping in a cooling unit at -1  
000 degrees (fade-out)  
the 'automatic dreamless sleep testing device' is installed  
to the right of the metal door of the freezer the projection screen shows  
the instructions for 'waking up after a thousand light-years'  
on the 'test results' to the left of the metal door a big blank

***And the Boat Swings by Itself***

On the spherical picture tube of the memory  
spherical stars flash by  
(the camera zooms in)  
a blue planet  
(zooms in again )  
a blue mountain range  
(zooms in again and again)  
the Virgin Mary Peak of the Himalyas

in the embrace of the Virgin Mary Peak  
lies a  
primitive rectangular wooden boat  
half hidden in the snow  
the visible part  
full of hard ice  
looking like a black mirror  
(camera zooms continuously)  
the mirror  
reflects  
vaguely  
the long narrow tail of  
the Milky Way  
(click click)  
(clack clack)



(click clack)  
(clack click)<sup>417</sup>

This second example is more or less organized in the same way as the first. Again the logical division is followed, triggering the different sections, but this time the original character combinations are not isolated from the new text in a column on the left page. They are simply presented as subheadings. The original classical line is thus more integrated into the new piece, and there is no formal juxtaposition between the two as in the first example. One might argue that there is less reason for juxtaposition because the original is only a single line taken out of its context.

The line ‘The Ferry Landing in the Wilds is Deserted and the Boat Swings by Itself’ 野渡無人舟自橫 is naturally divided into three separate images: a ferry crossing 野渡, [a place] without people 無人, and a boat swinging alone 舟自橫. Luo transfers the whole scene to outer space and again gives a ‘modern’ twist to the original images: the ferry crossing is now a harbor of spacecrafts in the galaxy and the swinging boat has become a wooden boat on earth (which is clear through the mentioning of Mount Everest). In contrast to the original Wei Yingwu line there is thus no more direct connection between the ferry landing and the boat. Furthermore, ‘no people’ is taken very literally, but in a rather sinister way, as all primates have been frozen and robots run the spacecraft. The continuity between the sections is again reinforced by indirect transfers. From the spacecraft seen in the Milky Way a metonymical shift is made to the inside of the spacecrafts; and the second transfer is made metaphorically through the projection screen and a picture tube.

The third connective, the camera, is of course also present in this poem, but it functions slightly differently, despite the fact that the film terms are used again. The reason is that the camera is not explicitly introduced. When reading the second example separately from the first, the first film term ‘(the camera zooms in)’ comes as a surprise, because the reader does not know that the perspective of the poem is one of a camera – unless they have read the first example ‘Sky Clear Sand’. The first sentence in the first poem (‘The camera makes a tracking shot...’)

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<sup>417</sup> Luo Qing 1988: 30-33.

made the perspective clear at once. This continuation of film terms in parentheses without explicit introduction of the camera suggests that there are in fact no two poems, but that the two examples have to be read as one and together form a compound poem, because the centripetal forces in the end outweigh the centrifugal. That idea of one larger whole is supported by two other elements that are in line with the construction of the two 'examples of Video Poetics'. First, there is a metaphorical shift between the two, from the aircraft in the last lines of the first poem to the spacecrafts in the beginning of the second; and secondly, the return of the sunken wooden boat of the last two sections of the first poem in the last section of the second.

Reading the two procedural examples together gives rise to different interpretations: is the science fiction universe that is pictured in the second sequence not the perfect futuristic answer to the apocalypse in the first? The science-fictional context turns the poem into one that is no longer, like the original Ma Zhiyuan and Wei Yingwu poems, about man confronted by and conforming to nature, but about man dominating nature. And in the line of thought of mutual influence between texts one may also wonder if a combination of the two classical poems has any consequence for the readers' understanding of them. If classical and modern texts can be mutually reflective, so can two classical texts; the new Luo Qing poem at least draws Ma Zhiyuan's poem and Wei Yingwu's line closer together and brings the reader to interpret both poems along similar lines of thought. Such postmodern ideas are clearly a matter of interest to Luo Qing, who lets mythical or historical figures interact with contemporary persons in his poem 'On How Du Fu was Influenced by Luo Qing' (論杜甫如何受羅青影響).<sup>418</sup> It is not without reason that postmodern critics like Matei Calinescu tie rewriting closely to rereading, as 'the repeated reading of certain classics over time generates the idea of rewriting them and, more importantly, that rewriting ideally asks for rereading, or for the kind of attention that is characteristic of reflective rereading'.<sup>419</sup>

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<sup>418</sup> Published in *China Times* (中國時報), 20 October 1994.

<sup>419</sup> In Bertens 1997: 243.

## DISUNION

In the serial form and the above examples of video poems, the question of what constitutes a unity came up: the titles suggest that we are dealing with two or more poems composed on similar grounds, but in the end there actually turns out to be only one poem. This question of unity and coherence, of centripetal and centrifugal forces, is of course also relevant to non-serial poems. Until the rise of postmodernism, unity by and large counted as one of the basic principles in poetry, and many readers are probably still inclined to approach a poem from the idea of it being a complex integrated whole, regarding wholeness and coherence as positive qualities. All of the poems discussed so far clearly evolve from that perspective, even though the degree of unity as well as the importance ascribed to it may vary somewhat.

In 1995 a poetry book was published which appears to seek the opposite: Xia Yu's *Friction: Indescribable*. The poems in it have a strong postmodern outlook with much tension on both syntactic and lexical levels, because the relation between the words, phrases and sentences are very loose, disjointed like grains of sand, and also the images are very loosely arranged. As a result, fragmentation and disunion seem to be the basis of these poems instead of coherence. That Xia Yu is in this book less concerned with matters of coherence may come as no surprise, as she notes in her foreword that the book is composed of phrases and words which she literally cut with scissors from her second book, *Ventriloquy*: it is a reincarnation, a palimpsest. She first cut everything, arranged it all on the table, and then formed new poems, pasting words and phrases in an empty photo album – a cut-and-paste procedure which is still visible in the typography.

Let us look at the short poem 'Illustration' 插圖:

then  
se-  
cretly those self-restraints have long lasted  
such an ordinary apiary body flesh  
opens with the shadows  
in this way  
glass      glassy  
encounter

in a pale youthful reflection of light  
the difference between existence itself and the appearance of life  
populace ravings metal fatigue word exhaustion<sup>420</sup>

The poem lacks most of the cohesive elements that still characterized the previous examples. From a grammatical point of view it is full of disruptions: there is not one regular, complete sentence and the verse lines are grammatically unrelated, apart from the first lines, i.e. the first four characters, which clearly have to be read together as a short phrase: ‘then / se- / cretly’ 就 / 偷 / 偷地. Regarding subject matter and imagery, the poem does not give much to hold on to either. The images are not related as they were for example in Yang Mu’s ‘To time’, nor is the ground between tenor and vehicle of an image given, such as in Chen Li’s poem ‘Cloudburst’ (chapter 2). What is for example ‘apiary body 蜂房肉體? We can read it as ‘the apiary that the body is – comparable to a basket of fruit – and we can connect it to the next line: an apiary body opening with the shadows’. But what does that mean? And how does it relate to glass or a glassy encounter? The second stanza speaks of quite different things; the first two lines in it – the spring light, existence and life – provide an abstract observation about life. And finally the three negative images in the last line denote a certain ennui.

No doubt the reader’s imagination will immediately start building with the elements offered to it. Yet, cohesive meaning is obviously not the poem’s first concern. In the preface Xia Yu writes that she wanted ‘to regard words as musical notes and colors’. She ‘looked upon herself as a painter’ and ‘the words and phrases as colors. One day I was looking for a word intervening between serge and khaki color and hit upon “degenerate”; that day I wore an olive green shirt, the “degenerate” that happened to fall down on my skirt fitted wonderfully.’<sup>421</sup> This kind of ‘play’ must have given Xia Yu a feeling of liberation, similar to the one Luo Fu described: to feel free to let go of convention. From a certain point of view *Friction: Indescribable* could therefore be said to be a very personal and intuitive book of poetry. How many others would associate ‘degenerate’ with a color between serge and khaki? That does not mean that it is therefore spontaneous, au-

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<sup>420</sup> Xia Yu 1995: 27. As the pages of the book are not numbered, I have for the sake of convenience done so myself, starting with one at the title page and continuing through the end without restarting anywhere. My page numbers refer to that numeration.

<sup>421</sup> Xia Yu 1995: 11.

thentic and thus belongs to the ‘natural category’. On the contrary, even though intuition must have been important in the creation process, these ‘found’ poems are more ‘artificial’ – or have a more artificial appearance – than Yang Mu’s consciously crafted ‘natural’ poem. This is due to the importance of randomness and the consequent fragmentation and disunion of the poems through parataxis and maximum lexical tension, and is increased by the fact that Xia Yu has laid the procedure of their coming into existence bare by way of the layout and her foreword. As a result *Friction: Indescribable* is one of the most extreme examples of the changed attitude toward language, as described in the previous chapter. Xia Yu here even goes one step further: the book proceeds from the most extreme material possibility of language, in trying to employ language as if it were paint. She wants to use words in the same way as the impressionists used colors; to use language as if unaware of its cultural baggage – as if language were not language with its conventional referentiality. ‘Natural’ poems operate from the opposite: from the certainty that language denotes meaning.

Nevertheless it is difficult, if not impossible, to completely get rid of meaning, as Xia Yu remarks in the end: ‘I must acknowledge that meaning is an extraordinarily tyrannical temptation. Imagery particularly is. And finally I excused myself for not being a painter after all, meaning that I am just not capable of resisting that temptation.’<sup>422</sup> The reader will experience the same: it is impossible *not* to make associations and find connections between all those more or less separate phrases and words: thus, even the seemingly greatest disunion may well evolve into a more coherent whole. Even when poems only exist of prepositions, adverbs and conjunctions, as in the small booklet *With of* (*Met van*, 2002) by the Dutch poet K. Schippers, meaning arises, especially when read aloud.

Surely ‘illustration’ forms no exception to this. When the opening of the ‘apiary body’ is taken as a woman’s body, for example, the poem may refer to a new sexual relationship, which has to happen in secret, i.e. carefully, not in the light but in shadows. ‘Those restraints have long lasted’ may refer to personal constraints or an old relationship, which makes someone resist the new one for a long time. Such a new, secret relationship gives rise to glassy, that is, very fragile encounters. The second stanza seems to equate the new situation to ‘a bleak spring

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<sup>422</sup> Xia Yu 1995:13.

reflection of light', suggesting a cautious new beginning, a change. And this rebirth makes one see the difference between the abstract idea of existence and factual, individual life. The concluding line describes the appearance of that life: full of ennui – which might be the reason why the restraints are put aside and new relationships are given a chance. However, since the centrifugal forces in this poem are clearly stronger than the centripetal ones, interpretations may differ considerably, probably more so than in the case of a poem in which centripetal forces dominate, like for example Luo Qing's 'Examples of Video Poetics'.

Xia Yu concludes her foreword as follows: 'I know that words are never likely to turn into colors, nor into musical notes, nor into vines, and the attempt of this poetry album is perhaps a failure, but I hope that the poems will remain [留下來].'<sup>423</sup> The appreciation of *Friction: Indescribable* may in the end greatly vary: some critics completely negate it and label it as non-poetry; others appreciate the experiment but not the actual poems; and yet others affirm Xia Yu's hope and appreciate the poems as they are: for their color, rhythm and associative meanings. One may also be especially attracted by comparing the original collection, *Ventriloquy*, and its palimpsest, *Friction: Indescribable*. As the original continues to be reprinted as well, both collections exist side by side, and together form an interesting object of study. Let me give a small example to make the difference clearer. The first poem, 'Private Conversation With Animals, 2' (與動物密談) is from *Ventriloquy*, the second, 'Demanding an Example' (要求舉例), comes from *Friction: Indescribable*:

***private conversation with animals (2/4)***

the towels of a nine-headed family all hang on the same stick  
the bathroom is always dark and humid  
the towels that have never fully dried slowly  
rot and turn black the nine-headed family  
washes their faces every day but never  
clean  
they sleep in a large multiple bed  
like nine towels sticky against each other  
the only proof of such a thing as time  
the soap in the bathroom that is consumed incessantly  
and becomes thinner and smaller after which it can no longer be seen  
whether there is life

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<sup>423</sup> Xia Yu 1995: 16.

in the foam of time but  
that never changes never disappears  
only rots until it turns black<sup>424</sup>

### ***demanding an example***

when someone demands an example  
the colored towels  
slightly leaning towards sadness and emptiness  
all hang on the same stick  
and prove that the unknowable black  
is arranged in the bathroom  
like quiet music  
apart from this the night is  
an elegantly formed grave  
under the wolf tooth colored moonlight<sup>425</sup>

Lines 2 to 5 of ‘Demanding an Example’ clearly echo the first poem, but ‘private conversation with animals, 2’ is more expansive and more transparent. The second poem is more surprising, because it is more concise and less coherent with regard to grammar, imagery and meaning – even though it is probably more coherent than ‘Illustration’. The difference between these two poems – one from *Ventriloquy*, one from *Friction: Indescribable* – is typical of the two poetry books as a whole.

*Friction: Indescribable* marks, I believe, a turning point in Xia Yu’s oeuvre. The more transparent poems in her first two books chiefly function by way of imagery and clever irony, whereas *Salsa* profits from the experience of the cut-and-paste-procedure of *Friction: Indescribable*. The poems in *Salsa* explore the elasticity of language itself in its various ways. Still, the difference between *Friction: Indescribable* and *Salsa* is palpable; *Salsa* is in a sense also the opposite of *Friction: Indescribable*. *Salsa*, as we have seen, does not seek freedom through parataxis and fragmentary structures of ‘found’ poems, and instead pushes language to its other extreme by making extensive enjambments. Because of that, the poems in *Salsa* are more coherent, more balanced, and give the impression of being fully controlled – even though intuition may have been an important factor in creating them as well.<sup>426</sup> While *Friction: Indescribable* mainly raises a feeling of disunion,

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<sup>424</sup> Xia Yu 1991: 16, second of a series of four.

<sup>425</sup> Xia Yu 1995: 33.

<sup>426</sup> Xia Yu herself emphasizes her intuitive approach in writing poetry (personal communication, autumn 2005).

*Salsa* rather remains undecided, raising feelings of both coherence and disunion: the ongoing streams of words and phrases are constantly interrupted by the necessary reconsiderations that every next line brings along, and the realization that no reading ever fits all the pieces satisfactorily. Abrupt, unexpected images increase this feeling of disunion, as in ‘give time some time’ 給時間以時間, which is in itself a relatively comprehensible poem, but ends very suddenly with the lines:

[...]  
but i have loved  
if dying wasn't just drifting off alone  
music is vertical  
thus we lie horizontal<sup>427</sup>

Or ‘To Be Elsewhere’ (title originally in English) which concludes with the following answer to a simple question:

[...]  
question: who are you, so easily chilled and weary  
answer: I only know that a thread hangs from my sweater  
just pull it and it will grow longer and longer  
and I will completely disappear<sup>428</sup>

Many poems in *Salsa* flutter like that, going off suddenly in unexpected directions, through hilarious images which seem to arise out of the blue. ‘Somehow’ (title originally in English), for example, shifts from a hand fan to cockroaches and having sex, and from there to thieves.<sup>429</sup> In the poem ‘Cold / Noise / Anguish Separated’ (將冰冷/喧鬧/痛楚分開的), an observation about a kissing couple in the subway train is suddenly interrupted by a relatively long section about the black dot on the maps in subways, indicating the location, which is erased by frequent use.<sup>430</sup> In ‘Hell of the Ego’ (自我的地獄) the reader may wonder why the somnambulist who awakens says: ‘hey, it is raining’ – a remark that only becomes clear through another poem, ‘Soul’ (original English title), where another awakening makes people say the same; there the connection is made between the sounds of

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<sup>427</sup> Xia Yu 1999: 5.

<sup>428</sup> Xia Yu 1999: 4.

<sup>429</sup> Xia Yu 1999: 134.

<sup>430</sup> Xia Yu 1999: 72.





the girls hook their pinkies in the crooked lane hatch their secret plots  
 day after tomorrow it will rendezvous with its familiar in the red mailbox as  
 agreed  
 best to bind them up for recycling  
 if you are tired my dear please play me with a tremolo harmonica  
 it longs to bear a book-bag on its back stroll naked down the avenue  
 later he escorts her across the bridge and midway experiences a temple  
 crisp as a cucumber their brows  
 mock moonlight hangs suspended in the air  
 he rubs her eyes rubs out a storied welt and all the sweat is left there

– translation by Steve Bradbury<sup>433</sup>

The poems of Ye Mimi, who also writes essays and short filmscripts, often seem a succession of snapshots from daily life, or from dreams – as she says herself in an interview with Shin Yu Pai in the internet magazine *Fascicle*, referring explicitly to the long poem ‘A Moth Laid Its Eggs in My Armpit, and Then It Died’ (蛾在腋下產卵,然後死去, 2003).<sup>434</sup> Although Ye Mimi’s sentences are written in a smooth colloquial language, her way of ‘recording’ is very capricious and expressive, with much feeling for the rhythm and ambiguity of the Chinese language. In the given example – a love poem, but not one of the traditional kind – each line contains one or more image, creating a strong painting-like effect in each phrase, but often the lines and sentences are jumpy and seemingly unrelated, both syntactically and from the point of view of the images. The curry, the inscribed name in someone else’s story, the ghost that nods off, the kittens crouching in tummies and so on – how do they all fit in with each other? It is not even always certain what the several occurrences of ‘it’ (它) refer to. The lines and images frequently make large leaps, providing few or no relations to hang on to; readers are thus given much space to create their own poem. From this point of view Ye Mimi’s disunion certainly measures up to Xia Yu’s, and in a different way Ye Mimi also likes playing with the Chinese language. She frequently exploits the ambiguity of plant and animal names; ‘In the Mountains Near at Hand’ (在很近的山裡, 2000) we first read about a ‘pencil-box tree’ (筆筒樹) and then ‘the empty pen and paper squeeze their way among the trees’.<sup>435</sup> Or in ‘His Days Weigh Like Years With Her’ (他度日她的如年), she puns upon the word ‘basil’, which is in Chinese 九層塔, *jiucengta*,

<sup>433</sup> Ye Mimi 2004: 28-9; translation Ye Mimi 2006: 11-2.

<sup>434</sup> Shin Yu Pai 2006-7: [http://www.fascicle.com/issue03/main/issue03\\_frameset.htm](http://www.fascicle.com/issue03/main/issue03_frameset.htm)

<sup>435</sup> Ye Mimi 2004: 137, translated by Steve Bradbury, Ye Mimi 2006: 13-4.

meaning literally ‘nine stories tower’: ‘Will they build for her a basil/“Nine stories tower”?’ (他們會不會幫她蓋一座九層塔?). She also regularly uses nouns as verbs and the other way round; for example ‘She hairs his chest he heartens her sweetheart / [...] / he ocean fleets a vessel / she mountain passes a night’ (她頭髮他的胸膛他晴朗她的情郎 / [...] / 他海過一艘船 / 他山過一個夜晚 [also from ‘His Days Go by the Way her Years’]).<sup>436</sup> Of course word classes like nouns and verbs are in Chinese not quite the same as in English and other Western languages, but one can say that some Chinese words are applied in some functions more than in other functions; hair, ocean and mountain (頭髮, 海, 山) are always used as what we call nouns. ‘Heartens her sweetheart’ (晴朗她的情郎) are homonyms in Chinese: *qinglang ta de qinglang*. Like Xia Yu’s ‘poems of disunion’, Ye Mimi’s poems foreground disunion, randomness and language games, and as such frequently suggest a fully willed incoherence, making these poems clearly belong the ‘artificial’ category as well.

In this chapter I have tried to show that, in addition to the changed attitude toward language and the rise of the serial form, poets have found other ways to stress their poetry as a construct, namely rewriting and extreme disunion, in which other means of composition, such as quotation and procedural poetics are used as well. Although the last examples of ‘poems of disunion’, from Xia Yu’s *Salsa* and Ye Mimi’s ‘And All the Sweat is Left There’ actually do not belong to the category of rewriting, I have added them anyway as they are another illustration of the continuing development of stressing the artificiality of the poem, namely by way of extreme fragmentation and incoherence. Besides, in the case of Xia Yu, these later poems seem a continuation of her previous work, grown out of her palimpsest poetry book.

There are many ways of rewriting, as the examples show. The fact that I have here concentrated only on those that draw explicit attention to their constructedness does not mean that *all* rewriting does so, just as not all rewriting is necessarily postmodern. Rather, rewriting has only been discovered as one more means to break with the air of authenticity and spontaneity of much earlier poetry – some-

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<sup>436</sup> Ye Mimi, Poetry International Rotterdam, translated by Steve Bradbury, Ye Mimi 2006: [http://www.fascicle.com/issue03/main/issue03\\_frameset.htm](http://www.fascicle.com/issue03/main/issue03_frameset.htm)

what similar to the changed applications of the serial forms, which have also always existed in different ways. What these kinds of rewriting have in common, and where they differ from the intertextuality that literature has always known, is irony and playfulness, together with the characteristics already seen in the previous two chapters, i.e. it questions the function of language as a tool of communication and the status of poetry. One is no longer searching for truth, as in Yang Mu's earlier poetry, because this is not believed to exist. Instead, one points to the many contradictions, the many possibilities – in poetry, in society, in life. As authors are no longer in full control of the meaning of the text – they are no longer creators of meaning – the texts are without closure or resolution, leaving a lot of space to the reader. Language has in a sense become less human and more autonomous, turning reality, and thus the author and the reader, into an effect of language. But there is a sliding scale in this: the degree of 'openness' and of disunion clearly differs. In comparison, though Luo Qing's poems point to the new possibilities, his poems are still quite coherent and comply with the rules of reason; Xia Yu's poems, on the other hand, defy these rules. Her poems *represent* many possibilities – in fact, they *are* these possibilities.

## Afterword

Identity and nationalism, modernism and postmodernism, colonialism and post-colonialism, cultural studies, deconstruction, gender studies and feminism, or the influence of political and market forces and so on – all kinds of approaches, leaning heavily on American trends, have been used in Taiwan in recent years to look at poetry and literature in general, but many of them were short-lived.<sup>437</sup> Sung-sheng Yvonne Chang even speaks of a ‘theory boom [...] among comparative literature experts in Taiwan’s foreign language and literature departments around the mid-1980s, making intellectual facility with cutting-edge theories a prestige capital in the academic community.’<sup>438</sup> The problems of identity and nationalism are probably by far discussed most extensively – perhaps partly out of a need to legitimize why Taiwan poetry deserves to be discussed in itself, independent of the greater Chinese literary scene. Identity in poetry has continued to be discussed, especially in Taiwan itself, with shifting perspectives. After much emphasis on Chinese identity in the 1970s, one can see in the 1980s ‘a growing tendentiousness toward a native Taiwan literary history, independent of Chinese heritage’,<sup>439</sup> and under the influence of postcolonialism, the identity perspective has been adapted once more, including the colonial history and the history of the indigenous people. Since the late 1980s the approach of postmodernism has been a widely used method of looking at Taiwan poetry as well. Some of the innovations dealt with in this study – innovations that got off to a slow start in the 1970’s and continue until now – were soon enveloped by the term ‘postmodernism’ and ‘postmodern literature’.

The first introductions to postmodern developments in the western arts appeared in the 1980s, and essays on postmodernist literature in Taiwan followed. Liao Xianhao refers to a first introductory article on postmodernism in painting by Yang Shihong, ‘The Dialectic of Contemporary Fine Arts: An Effort to Analyze Postmodernism’ (現代美術的辯證法：試析後期現代主義), which was published in

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<sup>437</sup> Cf. Sung-sheng Yvonne Chang 2004: 17-44 (chapter one) for a fuller account.

<sup>438</sup> Sung-sheng Yvonne Chang 2004: 26.

<sup>439</sup> Lisa Lai-ming Wong 1999: 31 (note 60).

1983 in the magazine *Artists* 藝術家.<sup>440</sup> According to Liao, the boom in postmodernist poetry started in 1985, when the poetry magazine *Grass Roots* was resuscitated by Luo Qing, Lin Yaode, Huang Zhirong, Bai Ling and others.<sup>441</sup> Worth mentioning are also Luo Qing's *What Is Postmodernism* (甚麼是後現代主義, 1989) and Meng Fan's 'Theory and Practice of Taiwan Postmodern Poetry' (台灣後現代詩的理論與實際, 1990), because of their considerable length.<sup>442</sup> But as Michelle Yeh points out in a reaction to Meng Fan, 'The Smokescreen of Postmodernism: Rethinking "Theory and Practice of Taiwan Postmodern Poetry"' (後現代的迷障 – 對〈台灣後現代詩的理論與實際〉的反思, 1992), the rise of postmodernism has caused some problems in Taiwan literary criticism: poetry critics have, intentionally or unintentionally, constrained and effaced the richness of poetic texts through their assiduousness in emphasizing a number of postmodern concepts; and a related problem is that the postmodernism pursuers are rather one-sided and neglect or distort literary history.<sup>443</sup>

Indeed, some poetry critics in Taiwan are quick with notions like form and language games, subverting typography, kitsch, collage and montage, disappearance of meaning and center, and so on, just to name several aspects of this 'trans-avant-gardism' (超前衛主義), as Meng Fan calls it in a short newspaper article on two poems by Luo Qing.<sup>444</sup> These critics nearly seem blinded by postmodernism and its related concepts, and in their enthusiasm they become somewhat uncritical, which frequently results in superficial name-dropping. In order to convince the reader of the existence of postmodernism in Taiwan poetry, Meng Fan for example combines complex philosophies and poetics as divergent as those of Fredric Jameson, François Lyotard, Jacques Derrida, Charles Bernstein, Ihab Hassan, Roland Barthes, Julia Kristeva, Mikhail Bakhtin, Michel Foucault, Claude Lévi-

<sup>440</sup> Issue 17:5, cf. Liao Xianhao 1996.

<sup>441</sup> Liao Xianhao 1996: 441.

<sup>442</sup> A small selection from the enormous number of discussions related to postmodernism: Jiao Tong, 'Avant-Garde Poetry' (前衛詩), in Jiao Tong 1998; Chen Yizhi (2000), 'Constructs of Post-Modern Poetics from Taiwan (台灣後現代詩學的建構)', paper presented at the International Academic Conference on Taiwan Literature Since the Lifting of Martial Law (解嚴以來台灣文學國際學術研討會) held in 2000; Liao Xianhao (2003) *Beautiful New Century: Early Modernism, Modernism, Postmodernism* (廖咸浩, 美麗新世紀: 前現代.現代.後現代).

<sup>443</sup> Michelle Yeh (aka Xi Mi) 1998: 204.

<sup>444</sup> Ku Ling 1987. Meng himself uses the term 'transavant-gardism', which he translates as *chao qianwei zhuyi* 超前衛主義.

Strauss, John Barth, Harold Bloom, Hans Robert Jauss – each summarized or mentioned in a couple of sentences or sometimes a few paragraphs – within the space of some seventy pages.<sup>445</sup> Even though some observations are accurate – for some of the characteristics which are often ascribed to postmodernism do indeed occur in Taiwan poetry – papers on postmodern poetry frequently end up being predominantly enumerative and superficial in both theoretic and literary interpretation: heedless indeed, as Yeh holds, to literary history and diversity in Taiwan poetry, but also to the diverse stands in postmodern theory.

The quick succession of all kinds of literary theories for examining poetry or literature in general, of which some (like postmodern theories) last somewhat longer than others, seems a result of the wish of Taiwan's critics to prove the country's progress in the literary and cultural field and corresponds to the decade thinking discussed in the introduction to this study. Some critics take a passive attitude towards the poetry itself, being more concerned with what is going on in critical discourse (in the USA) and with following the latest trends. In my opinion, the problem with some of these studies that take postmodern or other literary theories as their starting point is that they become self-fulfilling. To avoid this, I have rather wanted to concentrate on the poetry itself, as explained in my introduction, and to trace some of the historical developments of its language and form – two important aspects that constitute poetry and that were changed most drastically in and after the Literary Revolution of 1917.

In doing so, I soon found large discrepancies between texts written in the 1950s and in the 1990s, which cannot be (fully) accounted for by the fashions of literary criticism, or by the simple fact that they are written by different people. By paying attention to the intrinsic quality and characteristics of the poems, valuing them as 'objects' unto themselves, I detect a development that seems to me to be accurately described as a shift from naturalness to artifice – showing some parallels with Marjorie Perloff's observations on American-English poetry.<sup>446</sup> Although I believe this 'radical artifice' is a new tendency in the so-called experimentalist poetry (as distinguished from more conservative, straightforward poetry), I certainly do not mean to suggest that this has become *the* common way of writing in

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<sup>445</sup> Meng Fan 1990.

<sup>446</sup> Marjorie Perloff 1991.

Taiwan; the 'natural' way of writing is still quantitatively dominant and continues to develop in manifold ways. The reason why I focus on this 'artificial' trend, apart from the fact that for me personally it involves a more exciting way of writing, is simply because, in my opinion, it marks an important and interesting development in Taiwan poetry. The 'natural' kind of poetry has developed in diverse ways along the line of poetry written before the Second World War; the 'made things', the constructs demarcate a substantial difference with this, as the approach to language and to the status of poetry changes. While this idea of 'made things' might in itself perhaps not be entirely new – one might call it a variant upon Viktor Shklovsky's idea of 'laying the procedures bare', as opposed to 'hiding' them, in a dichotomy that can be applied to literature of many times and places – the main difference is that now slowly the materiality itself, of language, of poetry, is becoming the focus, instead of the meaning that is conveyed.

Does this mean that the poetry in this trend is in no way concerned with being realist in the sense of displaying contemporary life – an issue that has always, but especially in the wake of identity problems, occupied many minds in Taiwan ever since the writing of New Poetry began? In his famous article 'On Realism and Art', structuralist Roman Jakobson deals with the uncritical use of the word 'realism' in literary criticism, a term which is seldom clearly defined.<sup>447</sup> Simply put, 'it is an artistic trend which aims at conveying reality as closely as possible and strives for maximum verisimilitude.'<sup>448</sup> But Jakobson points to the very subjective usages of the term and distinguishes among several types of realism – judged by what the author intended with the text, by what the reader makes of it, or estimated by critics according to the characteristics of the nineteenth-century movement 'realism', and so on. Moreover, he states that many literary movements strive to be more realistic than the previous one, in a different, better way. Thus Dostoyevski said 'I am a realist, but only in the higher sense of the word', and the Symbolists, the Futurists, the Expressionists, and so on made similar declarations.<sup>449</sup> Jakobson explains this as follows: 'The words of yesterday's narrative grow stale; now the item is described by features that were yesterday held to be

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<sup>447</sup> Jakobson 1921

<sup>448</sup> Jakobson 1921: 1.

<sup>449</sup> Jakobson 1921: 3.



the least descriptive, the least worth representing, features that were scarcely noticed.’<sup>450</sup>

Changing awareness and judgment of both reality and of realistic traits in poetry were already visible in the 1970s debate between the different generations of poets and the critics Tang Wenbiao and Guan Jieming. The nativists took reality to mean showing concern with the daily life of the common people, but many poets from the older generation, whose backgrounds and experiences differed from the younger generation, also felt that they dealt with what preoccupied them in life, though they concentrated on different aspects of it. At the same time the way of expressing this in words, in poetry, also took a turn, from the more complex, more unconventional imagery of the elder poets to a more straightforward poetry that embodies much less tension. Many of the poets of this more straightforward style, who also came to influence the elder generation, still cherished the same objectives as the poets before them, in the sense that the writing of poetry was a serious undertaking of expressing a truthful meaning in a way they felt aesthetically worthwhile. With the ironic approach that Luo Qing took in some of his poems, an attempt was made to write poems of the playful, irreverent kind, knocking poetry from its pedestal. His best poetry uses irony as a means to create more distance between the author and the poem and between the reader and the poem, making poetry a less emotive affair, even anti-lyrical. Those poems, as seen in this study, do not want to represent one truthful reality, but point to the existence of many realities alongside each other. Through irony they show some of life’s paradoxes and the impossibility of obtaining absolute truth.

On a somewhat different level, the radically artificial way in which such views are expressed in poetry can still be said to bear traces of actual reality. Marjorie Perloff indicates the significant role the media have played: through television, advertising, the computer and internet, the materiality of language and the ‘makeability’ of the world have become increasingly important concepts all over, and it would be strange if this would not somehow have its reflection in literature. Yet, someone like Luo Qing will probably also, like Dostojevski, the Symbolists and others, claim that he is more realistic than those writing before him – realistic in a different, better way. In fact, he has said that when he began writing he felt

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<sup>450</sup> Jakobson 1921: 2.

that it was impossible for a young person with any self-respect not to write and give his view upon things, in the hope that it might contribute something to the society he lived in.<sup>451</sup> And probably he was not the only one to believe in the benefits of literature to society – which was after all a very common point of view in Chinese traditional literature, and also in the 1920s and 1930s when literati saw ‘themselves as social reformers and spokesmen for the national conscience. This is entirely consistent with the prevalent ethos of nationalism in the May Fourth era’, in the words of Leo Ou-fan Lee.<sup>452</sup> While Luo Qing should perhaps be considered a kind of go-between, who has written much non-ironic poetry as well, and has not published much since his last book in 1988,<sup>453</sup> a similar relation to society can be seen in the work of others writing in the radically artificial trend, like Chen Li, Lin Yaode, Liu Kexiang or Hong Hong. Chen Li, for example, as discussed in chapter one ‘ironizes’ Taiwan’s identity problems in his later books, and many of his poems have, like Luo Qing’s, a firm footing in day-to-day reality. Still, even though this poetry originates in Taiwan, by virtue of the diverse techniques that are used, it is poetry that pre-eminently lends itself for reading and interpreting in a larger context than just the history and reality of the nation in which it has come into being – in contrast to many pure nativists.

Among all the poets in the artificial line, Xia Yu stands out as the one who takes the playful side of poetry to the highest levels, making use of irony, ambiguity, paradox, multiplicity, incoherence and so on. Reality and realism, of any kind, certainly do not worry her, yet that does not mean that her work is completely cut loose from reality. Phrases and parts of her poems bring to mind contemporary urban lifestyles, in sexual pleasures among other things; and they have apparently given enough to hold on to for readers and critics to label her as one of Taiwan’s first feminist poets. Yet by reducing her work to that, one overlooks the most important aspect of her work: the pure delight of creating (for both author and reader), of pushing the limits, of ‘operating’ the materiality of language with its visual, acoustic and multi-interpretable effects. This development begins in her second collection, *Ventriloquy*, continues in *Friction: Indescribable* and *Salsa*,

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<sup>451</sup> Personal communication June 1996.

<sup>452</sup> Cf Leo Ou-fan Lee 1973: 37.

<sup>453</sup> He only published a couple of poems scattered in journals, one or two books of young people’s poetry, and a new edition of his first collection *Ways of Eating Watermelon*.

and has lately culminated in her newest ‘poetry’, the beautifully designed, transparent book *Pink Noise* (粉紅色噪音, 2007). About this book she herself remarks in an interview that one could just as well call it ‘non-poetry’.<sup>454</sup> She made this poetry by clipping English phrases from internet blogs and archives and all kinds of other websites. Subsequently the English-Chinese translation software in the Sherlock program in her Apple computer translated these English texts into Chinese, which she again adapted somewhat. Can poetry be more anti-lyrical? Such a way of writing ‘poetry’, yet another sort of palimpsest, reduces the artist’s share in the creation of art – much in the sense of Marcel Duchamp’s readymades. Fully personal creation and expression, authenticity, is superseded by pre-manufactured phrases and sentences, making random or non-rational procedures more important than conscious design – or at least equally important, because the author remains the one who selects the words, the phrases and their order.

Just as Duchamp’s personal national identity is irrelevant for appreciating and interpreting his readymades, Xia Yu’s poetry cannot be called typically Taiwanese or Chinese – it is still less related to the specific Taiwanese context than for example Chen Li’s work, which also transcends the national background even though he every now and then does refer to it. As such Xia Yu’s work might prompt readers, critics and sinologists to ask, as has been done in the case of many other Chinese and Taiwanese writers: ‘Is this Chinese literature, or literature that began in the Chinese language?’<sup>455</sup> According to Lisa Lai-ming Wong the lack of a Chinese cultural identity in Chinese and Taiwanese literature is a question that many Western sinologists are concerned with.<sup>456</sup> This is a legitimate and understandable question of course, as these specialists are often occupied full-time by the literature (and language) they teach; they perhaps tend to identify themselves with the smaller, national context, and want to firmly embed literature in its native nation.<sup>457</sup> This is not the perspective I have wanted to take in this study, for the value of much twentieth-century Taiwan poetry lies beyond that.

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<sup>454</sup> Interview by A Weng with Xia Yu (A Weng 2006: 42-49).

<sup>455</sup> Stephen Owen, quoted by Lisa Lai-ming Wong 1999: 205.

<sup>456</sup> Lisa Lai-ming Wong 1999: 204.

<sup>457</sup> Cf. also Milan Kundera 2005: 51.

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# Chinese Originals of Poems Cited

## CHAPTER 1

### Huang Zunxian, Mixed Emotions, II

#### 黃遵憲, 杂感, II (五首)

大块凿混沌，浑浑旋大圜；  
隶首不能算，知有几万年。  
羲轩造书契，今始岁五千；  
以我视后人，若居三代先。  
俗儒好尊古，日日故纸研；  
六经字所无，不敢入诗篇。  
古人弃糟粕，见之口流涎；  
沿习甘剽盗，妄造丛罪愆。  
黄土同抔人，今古何愚贤；  
即今忽已古，断自何代前？  
明窗敞流离，高炉蒸香烟；  
左陈端溪砚，右列薛涛笺；  
我手写我口，古岂能拘牵！  
即今流俗语，我若登简编；  
五千年后人，惊为古斓斑。

### Zhang Wojun (elegy for Sun Yatsen)

#### 張我軍

唉！  
大星一墜，東亞的天地突然暗淡無光了！  
我們所敬愛的大偉人呀！  
你在三月十二日上午九時三十分這時刻  
已和我們永別了麼？  
四萬萬的國民此刻爲了你的死日哭喪了臉了。  
消息傳來我島人五內俱崩，  
如失了魂魄一樣。  
西望中原，禁不住淚浪滔滔了。  
[...]

### Ji Xian, An Acacia Leaf

#### 紀弦, 一片槐树叶

这是全世界最美的一生，

最珍奇，最可贵的一片，  
而又是使人伤心，最使人流泪的一片，  
薄薄的，干的，浅灰黄色的槐树叶。

忘了是在江南，江北，  
是在哪一个城市，哪一个园子里捡来的了。  
被夹在一册古老的诗集里，  
多年来，竟没有些微的损坏。

蝉翼般轻轻滑落的槐树叶，  
细看时，还沾着那些故国的泥土哪。  
故国哟，啊啊，要到何年何月何日  
才能让我再回到你的怀抱里  
去享受一个世界上最愉快的  
飘着淡淡的槐花香的季节？……

**Xia Jing, Drip from the Eaves**  
**夏菁,檐滴**

有一种语言  
胜过乡音，  
使你闻之泪下。  
从这个世界  
回到另一个。

家是一个——  
当听到檐滴，  
就会使你  
酸鼻的地方。

**Zheng Chouyu, Letter from outside the Mountains**  
**鄭愁予,山外書**

不必爲我懸念  
我在山裏……

來自海上的雲  
說海的沉默太深  
來自海上的風  
說海的笑聲太遼闊

我是來自海上的人  
山是凝固的波浪

(不再相信海的消息)  
我底歸心  
不再湧動

**Yu Guangzhong, Nostalgia**  
余光中, 鄉愁

小時候  
鄉愁是一枚小小的郵票  
我在這頭  
母親在那頭

長大後  
鄉愁是一張窄窄的船票  
我在這頭  
新娘在那頭

後來啊  
鄉愁是一方矮矮的墳墓  
我在外頭  
母親在裏頭

而現在  
鄉愁是一灣淺淺的海峽  
我在這頭  
大陸在那頭

**Zhou Mengdie, On the ferry**  
周夢蝶, 擺渡船上

負載著那麼多那麼多的鞋子  
船啊，負載著那麼多那麼多  
相向和相背的  
三角形的夢。

擺盪著——深深地  
流動著——隱隱地  
人在船上，船在水上，水在無盡上  
無盡在，無盡在我剎那生滅的悲喜上。

是水負載著船和我行走？  
抑是我行走，負載著船和水？

暝色撩人  
愛因斯坦底笑很玄，很蒼涼。

**Qin Zihao, Visiting**  
**覃子豪, 造訪**

夜, 梦一样的辽阔, 梦一样的轻柔  
梦, 夜一样的甘美, 夜一样的迷茫  
我不知道, 是在梦中, 还是在夜里  
走向一个陌生的地方, 殷殷地寻访

雨底街, 是夜的点彩  
雾里的树, 是夜的印象  
穿过未来派色彩的图案  
溶入一幅古老而单调的水墨画里

无数发光的窗瞪著我, 老远的  
像藏匿在林中野猫的眼睛在闪烁  
发著油光的石子路是鳄鱼的脊梁  
我是蓦然的从鳄鱼的脊梁上走来

围墙里的花园是一个深邃的画苑  
我茫然探索, 深入又深入  
在一个陌生的小门前停了足步  
像是来过, 因为我确知你曾在这里等我

**Ya Xian, Abyss**  
**痙弦, 深淵**

*我要生存，除此無他；同時我發現了他的不快。*  
*—— 沙特*

孩子們常在你的髮次間迷失  
春天最初的激流，藏在你荒蕪的瞳孔背後  
一部分歲月呼喊著。肉體展開黑夜的節慶。  
再有毒的月光中，在血的三角洲，  
所有的靈魂蛇立起來，撲向一個垂在十字架上的  
憔悴的額頭。  
這時荒誕的；在西班牙  
人們連一枚下等的婚餅也不投給他！  
而我們爲一切服喪。花費一個早晨去摸他的衣角。  
後來他的名字便寫在風上，寫在旗上。後來他便拋給我們  
他吃賸下來的生活。

去看，去假裝發愁，去聞時間的腐味  
我們再也懶於知道，我們是誰。  
工作，散步，向壞人致敬，微笑和不朽。  
他們是緊握格言的人！  
這是日子的顏面；所有的瘡口呻吟，裙子下藏滿病菌。  
都會，天秤，紙的月亮，電桿木的言語，  
（今天的告示貼在昨天的告示上）  
冷血的太陽不時發著顫  
在兩個夜夾著的  
蒼白的深淵之間。

歲月，貓臉的歲月，  
歲月，緊貼在手腕上，打著旗語的歲月。  
在鼠哭的夜晚，早已被殺的人再被殺掉。  
他們用墓草打著領結，把齒縫間的主禱文嚼爛。  
沒有頭顱真會上升，在眾星之中，  
在燦爛的血中洗他的荊冠，  
當一年五季的第十三月，天堂是在下面。

而我們為去年的燈蛾立碑。我們活著。  
我們用鐵絲網煮熟麥子。我們活著。  
穿過廣告牌悲哀的韻律，穿過水門汀骯髒的陰影，  
穿過從肋骨的牢獄中釋放的靈魂，  
哈里路亞！我們活著。走路、咳嗽、辯論，  
厚著臉皮占地球的一部分。  
沒有甚麼現在正在死去，  
今天的雲抄襲昨天的雲。

在三月我聽到櫻桃的吆喝。  
很多舌頭，搖出了春天的墮落。而青蠅在啃她的臉，  
旗袍又從某種小腿間擺盪；且渴望人去讀她，  
去進入她體內工作。而除了死與這個，  
沒有甚麼是一定的。生存是風，生存是打穀場的聲音，  
生存是，向她們——愛被人膈肢的——  
倒出整個夏季的慾望。

在夜晚床在各處深深陷落。一種走在碎玻璃上  
害熱病的光底聲響。一種被逼迫的農具的忙亂的耕作。  
一種桃色的肉之翻譯，一種用吻拼成的  
可怖的言語；一種血與血的初識，一種火焰，一種疲倦！  
一種猛力推開她的姿態  
在夜晚，在那波里床在各處陷落。  
在我的影子的盡頭坐著一個女人。她哭泣，

嬰兒在蛇莓子與虎尾草之間埋下．．．．．。

第二天我們又同去看雲、發笑、飲梅子汁，  
在舞池中把賸下的人格跳盡。  
哈里路亞！我仍活著。雙肩抬著頭，  
抬著存在與不存在，  
抬著一副穿褲子的臉。

下回不知輪到誰；許是教堂鼠，許是天色。  
我們遠遠告別了久久痛恨的臍帶。  
接吻掛在嘴上，宗教印在臉上，  
我們背負著各人的棺蓋閒蕩！  
而你是風、是鳥、是天色、是沒有出口的河。  
是站起來的屍灰，是未埋葬的死。

沒有人把我們拔出地球以外去。閉上雙眼去看生活。  
耶穌，你可聽見他腦中林莽茁壯的喃喃之聲？  
有人在甜菜田下面敲打，有人在桃金孃下．．．．．。  
當一些顏面向蜥蜴般變色，激流怎能為  
倒影造像？當他們的眼珠黏在  
歷史最黑的那幾頁上！

而你不是甚麼；  
不是把手杖擊斷在時代的臉上，  
不是把曙光纏在頭上跳舞的人。  
在這沒有肩膀的城市，你底書第三天便會被搗爛再去作紙。  
你以夜色洗臉，你同影子決鬥，  
你吃遺產、吃妝奩、吃死者們小小的吶喊，  
你從屋子裏走出來，又走進去，搓著手．．．．．  
你不是甚麼。

要怎樣才能給跳蚤的腿子加大力量？  
在喉管中注射音樂，另盲者飲進輝芒！  
把種籽播在掌心，雙乳間擠出月光，  
——這層層疊疊圍你自轉的黑夜都有你一份，  
妖嬈而美麗，她們是你的。  
一朵花、一壺酒、一床調笑、一個日期。

這是深淵，在枕褥之間，輓聯般蒼白。  
這是嫩臉蛋的姐兒們，這是窗，這是鏡，這是小小的粉盒。  
這是笑，這是血，這是待人解開的絲帶！  
那一夜壁上的瑪麗亞像賸下一個空框，她逃走，  
找忘川的水去洗滌她聽到的羞辱。  
而這是老故事，像走馬燈；官能，官能，官能！  
當早晨我挽著滿籃子的罪惡沿街叫賣，



太陽刺麥芒在我眼中。  
哈里路亞！我仍活著。

工作，散步，像壞人致敬，微笑和不朽。  
爲生存而生存，爲看雲而看雲，厚著臉皮占地球的一部分．．．．．  
在剛果河邊一輛雪撬停在那裏；  
沒有人知道它爲何滑得那樣遠，  
沒人知道的雪撬停在那裏。

### **Bai Qiu, Wild Geese** 白萩，雁

我們仍然活著。仍然要飛行  
在無邊際的天空  
地平線長久在遠處退縮地引逗著我們  
活著。不斷地追逐  
感覺它已接近而抬眼還是那麼遠離

天空還是我們祖先飛過的天空  
廣大虛無如一句不變的叮嚀  
我們還是如祖先的膀翅。鼓在風上  
繼續著一個意志陷入一個不完的魔夢

在藍色的大地與  
奧藍而沒有底部的天空之間  
前途只是一條地平線  
逗引著我們  
我們將緩緩地在追逐中死去，死去如  
夕陽不知覺的冷去。仍然要飛行  
繼續懸在無際涯的中間孤獨如風中的一葉

而冷冷的雲翳  
冷冷地注視著我們

### **Yu Guangzhong, Double Bed** 余光中，雙人床

讓戰爭在雙人床外進行  
躺在你長長的斜坡上  
聽流彈，像一把呼嘯的螢火  
在你的，我的頭頂竄過  
竄過我的鬍鬚和你的頭髮  
讓政變和革命在四周吶喊

至少愛情在我們的一邊  
至少破曉前我們很安全  
當一切都不再可靠  
靠在你彈性的斜坡上  
今夜，即使會山崩或地震  
最多跌進你低低的盆地  
讓旗和銅號在高原上舉起  
至少有六尺的韻律是我們  
至少日出前你完全是我的  
仍滑膩，仍柔軟，仍可以燙熱  
一種純粹而精細的瘋狂  
讓夜和死亡在黑的邊境  
發動永恆第一千次圍城  
爲我們循螺紋急降，天國在下  
捲入你四肢美麗的漩渦

**Yu Guangzhong, If far away there is a war**  
**余光中, 如果遠方有戰爭**

如果遠方有戰爭，我應該掩耳  
或是坐起來，慚愧地傾聽？  
應該掩鼻，或該深呼吸  
難聞的焦味？我的耳朵應該  
聽你喘息著愛情或是聽榴彈  
宣揚真理？格言，勳章，補給  
能不能餵飽無饜的死亡？  
如果有戰爭煎一個民族，在遠方  
有戰車狠狠犁過春泥  
有嬰孩在號啕，向母親的屍體  
號啕一個盲啞的明天  
如果有尼姑在火葬自己  
寡慾的脂肪炙響絕望  
燒曲的四肢抱住涅槃  
爲了一個無效的手勢，如果  
我們在床上，他們在戰場  
在鐵絲網上播種著和平  
我應該惶恐，或是該慶幸  
慶幸是做愛，不是肉搏  
是你的裸體在臂中，不是敵人  
如果遠方有戰爭，而我們在遠方  
你是慈悲的天使，白羽無疵  
你俯身在病床，看我在床上  
缺手，缺腳，缺乏性別

在一所血腥的戰地醫院  
如果遠方有戰爭啊這樣的戰爭  
情人，如果我們在遠方

### **Xiang Yang, Dad's Lunchbox** **向陽, 阿爹的飯包**

每一日早起時，天猶未光  
阿爹就帶著飯包  
騎著舊鐵馬，離開厝  
出去溪埔替人搬沙石

每一暝阮攏塊想  
阿爹的飯包到底什麼款  
早頓阮和阿兄食包仔配豆乳  
阿爹的飯包起碼也有一粒蛋  
若無安怎替人搬沙石

有一日早起時，天猶烏烏  
阮偷偷走入去灶跤內，掀開  
阿爹的飯包：無半粒蛋  
三條菜脯，蕃薯簽參飯

### **Luo Qing, Don't read this** **羅青, 請別看**

— 實驗

.....請別看這篇東西!其內容貧乏,無目無的,虛

聲張勢，拙劣可笑，請聽我勸！馬上扔下，幹正事去。事實上世上的事實，早已全都百在眼前，早已沒甚麼好說了我講的，人都做過，沒講的，人也都想過，這便是一切的真象，聽我勸，別再看下去，後面是一團鉛黑，一片孔白千萬別再看下去，再看，你鐵要後悔，鐵會上當，鐵定一無所獲，唉！你看你，還是不聽——真要命——你這自己為是的小子，你這自滿自大的傢伙，你傻瓜，你笨蛋，你不識時務頑固難化，你.....要知道，要知道以上那些時間你都白白浪費了，就像你就像我就像古今所有的人白白浪

費自己的一生一樣，白白的浪費了浪費了浪費了.....

## CHAPTER 2

### **Ji Xian, Flies**

紀弦, 蒼蠅

蒼蠅們從開著的窗子飛進來，  
我的眼睛遂成爲一個不愉快的巡邏者。  
“討厭的黑色的小魔鬼！  
一切醜惡中之醜惡！”  
我明知道我這嚴重的咒詛是徒然的。  
而當我怨恨著創造了牠們的上帝時，  
牠們劫齊聲地唱起讚美詩來了。

### **Luo Fu, Death in a Stone Cell, 1**

洛夫, 石室之死亡

只偶然昂首向鄰居的甬道，我便怔住  
在潰晨，那人以裸體去背叛死  
任一條黑色支流咆哮橫過他的脈管  
我便怔住，我以目光掃過那座百壁  
上面即鑿成兩道血槽

我的面容展開如一株樹，樹在火中成長  
一切靜止，唯眸子在眼瞼後面移動  
移向許多人都怕談及的方向  
而我確是那株被鋸斷的苦梨  
在年輪上，你仍可聽清楚風聲，蟬聲

### **Chen Li, Cloudburst**

陳黎, 暴雨

殘酷得像上一夜的蝙蝠  
拍打，巨大的羽翼，突然闖進  
不設防的睡夢的鋁門窗  
毫不憐憫地留下惡兆，在正午的嘴角：  
尖叫 □ □  
叫你發現四周是液化與僵硬了的時間  
阡陌錯交  
迷途的恐懼濕得比地還快：

我願意我的世界比糖果盒小些

比易碎的玻璃堅實些

**Wu Sheng, Rice Straw**  
吳晟, 稻草

在乾燥的風中  
一束一束稻草，瑟縮著  
在被遺棄了的田野

午後，在不怎麼溫暖  
也不是不溫暖的陽光中  
吾鄉的老人，萎頓著  
在破落的庭院

終於一束稻草的  
吾鄉的老人  
誰還記得  
也曾綠過葉、開過花、結過果？

一束稻草的過程和終局  
是吾鄉人的年譜

**Luo Fu, Gold Dragon Temple**  
洛夫, 金龍禪寺

晚鐘  
是遊客下山的小路  
羊齒植物  
沿著白色的石階  
一路嚼了下去

如果此處降雪

而只見  
一隻驚起的灰蟬  
把山中的燈  
一盞盞地點燃

**Li Minyong, Streetscape**  
李敏勇, 街景

詩人們

在街角的咖啡店  
談論革命的歷史

偶然  
翻閱著晚報  
在音樂裡議論時間

遠方充滿戰爭的消息  
獨立運動與統一分別進展  
世界在瓷杯裡攪動著

玻璃窗外  
行人匆匆走過  
尾隨著迷失的狗

**Luo Qing, Ant**  
**羅青, 螞蟻**

一隻螞蟻  
自人海中，向你爬來  
你分不清，是喜是愛  
是敵？是友？

螞蟻爬上鞋子  
你發現你穿著的  
竟是一雙戰艦——  
偽裝嚴密，有如堡壘

螞蟻爬上膝蓋  
你發現你光滑如大理石的身上  
竟充滿了險惡——  
肩是斷岸，胸是峭壁

螞蟻爬上脖子  
你發現螞蟻發現了一幢茅屋  
一幢有門有戶有煙囪的  
簡陋小茅屋

螞蟻爬進了你的嘴巴  
爬出了鼻孔，爬上了你的眼睛  
你首次發現，螞蟻，竟是如此的  
巨大，巨大——巨如恐大如龍

終於，螞蟻爬入了腦際

進出了夢中.....  
代你繼續編織你所有來完的夢幻  
而你發現，你已不能再發現

### **Shang Qin, Cough** 商禽, 咳嗽

坐在  
圖書館  
的  
一室  
的  
一角

忍住  
直到  
有人把一本書  
歷史吧  
掉在地上

我才  
咳了一聲  
嗽

### **Shang Qin, Giraffe** 商禽, 長頸鹿

那個年輕的獄卒發覺囚犯們每次體格檢查時身長的逐月增加都是在脖子之后，他報告典獄長說：“長官，窗子太高了！”而他得到的回答卻是：不，他們瞻望歲月。

仁慈的青年獄卒，不識歲月的容顏，不知歲月的籍貫到長頸鹿欄下，去逡巡，去守候。

### **Shang Qin, Boundary** 商禽, 界

據說有戰爭在遠方。

於此，微明時的大街，有巡警被阻於一毫無障礙之某處。無何，乃負手，垂頭，踱著方步；想解釋，想尋出：“界”在哪裡；因而為此一意圖所雕塑。

而爲一隻野狗所目睹的，一條界，乃由晨起的漱洗著凝視的目光，所射出昨夜夢境趨勢之覺與折帶水泥磚牆頂的玻璃頭髮的回聲所織成。

### **Xia Yu, written for others**

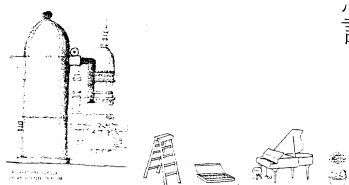
#### **夏宇, 寫給別人**

我在他的手心上寫字筆畫繁複  
到成其爲勾引而且還寫錯了  
又擦掉重寫一橫一豎  
一捺一撇勾勒摩擦引他  
進入一個象形皮筏裡我把  
皮筏的氣放掉我們沈入  
湖裡我說我愛你  
沒有根也沒有巢  
我愛你我愛你把速度  
放慢到最慢慢到乃  
聽見齒輪滑動旋轉  
的聲音在我們身上  
一束筒狀的光是誰  
發明的電影只是爲了讓屋子  
暗下來讓我們學會  
用慢動作做愛在最慢裡  
我愛你慢慢  
分解粒子變粗我愛你  
我們就轉而無限  
分割變細阿我愛你  
我愛你  
我們便成了自己的陌生人  
爲了有人以爲  
他們已經把我們看穿



**Xia Yu, Vanished Images**  
夏宇, 失蹤的象

得意忘言，得忘言  
故立以盡意  
而不可忘也



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## 失蹤的象

言者所以明，得而忘言。  
存者所以得意，而忘言。  
存者，非得意者也。  
存者，非得意者也。  
生於意而存焉。  
則所存者乃非其意也；  
言生於意而存焉。  
則所存者乃非其言也。  
然則，忘言者，乃得意者也。  
忘言者，乃得意者也。



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**Chen Li, Furniture Music**  
陳黎, 家具音樂

我在椅子上看書  
我在桌子上寫字  
我在地板上睡覺  
我在衣櫃旁做夢

$$[\dots]$$

在我聽到的歌裡  
在我說的話裡  
在我喝的水裡  
在我留下的沈默裡

## CHAPTER 3

### Yang Mu, Etudes: The Twelve Earthly Branches

楊牧, 十二星象練習曲

子

我們這樣困頓地  
等待午夜。午夜是沒有形態的  
除了三條街以外  
當時,總是一排鐘聲  
童年似地傳來

轉過臉去朝拜久違的羚羊吧  
半彎著兩腿,如荒郊的野哨  
我挺進向北  
露意莎——請注視后土  
崇拜它,如我崇拜你健康的肩胛

丑

NNE3/4E 露意莎  
四更了,蟲鳴霸佔初別的半島  
我以金牛的姿勢探索那廣張的  
谷地。另一個方向是竹林

飢餓燃燒於奮戰的兩線  
四更了,居然還有些斷續的車燈  
如此寂靜地掃射過  
一方線空的雙股

寅

雙子座的破曉,傾聽吧  
大地湧動憤懣的淚  
傾聽,匍匐的伴侶  
不潔的瓜果  
傾聽 東北東偏北  
爆裂的春天 燒夷彈 機槍  
剪破晨霧的直升機 傾聽

阿露意莎,波斯地氈對你說了甚麼  
泥濘對我說了甚麼

卯

請轉向東方,當巨蟹  
以多足的邪褻搖擺出萬種秋分的色彩  
Versatile  
我的變化是,阿露意莎,不可思議的  
衣上刺滿原野的斑紋  
吞屠女嬰如夜色  
我屠殺,嘔吐,哭泣,睡眠  
Versatile

請與我齊向東方悔罪  
向來春奔跑的野兔  
躍過溪澗和死亡的床褥  
請你以感官的歡悅爲我見證  
Versatile

辰  
在西方是獅 (ESE3/4S)  
龍是傳說裏偶現的東。這時  
我們只能以完全的裸體肯定  
一座狂喜的呻吟

東南東偏南,露意莎  
你是我定位的  
螞蝗座裏  
流血最多  
最宛轉  
最苦的一顆二等星

巳  
或者把你上午多露水的花留給我

午  
露意莎,風的馬匹  
在岸上馳走  
食糧曾經是糜爛的貝類  
我是沒有名姓的水獸  
長年仰臥。正午的天秤宮在  
西半球那一面,如果我在海外……  
在床上,棉花搖曳於四野  
天秤宮垂直在失卻尊嚴的浮屍河

以我的鼠蹊支持扭曲的  
風景。新星升起正南

我的髮鬚能不能比  
一枚貝殼沉重呢,露意莎?  
我喜愛你屈膝跪向正南的氣味  
如葵花因時序遞轉  
響往着奇怪的弧度阿露意莎

未

「我願做你最豐滿的酒廠」  
午后的天蝎沈進了舊大陸的  
陰影。亢奮如丑時的金牛  
吸吮復擠壓,洶湧的葡萄

洶湧的葡萄  
收穫笛聲已經偏西了  
露意莎還在廊下飼鴿嗎?  
偏西了,劇毒的星座  
請你將他的長髮掩蓋我

申·酉

又是一支箭飛來  
四十五度偏南:  
馳騁的射手仆倒,擁抱一片清月

升起,升起,請如猿猴升起  
我是江邊一棵哭泣的樹  
磨羯的猶疑  
太陽已經到了正西

戌

WNW3/4N  
盛我以七洋的鹹水  
初更的市聲伏擊一片方場  
細雨落在我們的檣桿上

亥

露意莎,請以全美洲的溫柔  
接納我傷在血液的游魚  
你也是璀璨的魚  
爛死於都市的廢煙。露意莎  
請你復活於橄欖的田園,爲我  
並爲我翻仰。這是二更  
霜濃的橄欖園

我們已經遺忘了許多

海輪負回我中毒的旗幟  
雄鷹盤旋,若未代的食屍鳥  
北北西偏西，露意莎  
你將驚呼  
發現我凱旋暴亡  
僵冷在你赤裸的身體

## **Luo Qing, Six Ways of Eating Watermelon** **羅青,吃西瓜的六種方法**

### *第五種 西瓜的血統*

沒人會誤認西瓜爲隕石  
西瓜星星，是完全不相干的  
然我們卻不能否認地球是，星的一種  
故也就難以否認，西瓜具有  
星星的血統

因爲，西瓜和地球不止是有  
父母子女的關係，而且還有  
兄弟姐妹的感情——那感情  
就好像月亮跟太陽太陽跟我們我們跟月亮的  
一，樣

### *第四種 西瓜的籍貫*

我們住在地球的外面，顯然  
顯然，他們住在西瓜裡面  
我們東奔西走，死皮賴臉  
想住在外面，把光明消化成黑暗  
包裹我們，包裹冰冷而渴求溫暖的我們

他們禪坐不動，專心一意  
在裏面，把黑暗塑成具體而冷靜的熱情  
不斷求自我充實，自我發展  
而我們終究免不了，要被趕入地球裏面  
而他們遲早也會，衝刺到西瓜外面

### *第三種 西瓜的哲學*

西瓜的哲學史  
比地球短，比我們長  
非禮勿視勿聽勿言，勿爲——  
而治的西瓜與西瓜  
老死不相往來

不羨慕卵石，不輕視雞蛋  
非胎生非卵生的西瓜  
亦能明白死裏求生的道理  
所以，西瓜不怕侵略，更不懼  
死亡

第二種 西瓜的版面  
如果我們敲破了一個西瓜  
那可能是爲了，嫉妒

敲破西瓜就等於敲碎一個圓圓的夜  
就等於敲落了所有的，星，星  
敲爛了一個完整的，宇宙

而其結果，卻總使我們更加  
嫉妒，因爲這樣一來  
隕石和瓜子的關係，瓜子和宇宙的交情  
又將會更清楚，更尖銳的  
重新撞入我們的，版圖

第一種 吃了再說

## **Xia Yu, making sentences** 夏宇, 造句

不得不

不得不  
留下腳印  
謙虛和善地  
在他們  
水泥未幹  
的  
心

就

就走了  
丟下髒話：：  
「我愛你們。」

然後

排好隊 買票  
近場 看電影之類的  
然後吃飯

證明這事的人說了

每當

每當這個時候  
我感覺有音樂響起  
分化了行進中的隱喻

與夫迂迴  
溫婉之  
個人主義

繼續

讓音樂繼續演奏下去吧  
波及三朵沉默的向日葵  
破折號以下  
食道  
和腸胃中間

悲哀到遺忘途中的  
一切衰敗的起點

以後.....之前

醒來以後  
刷牙之前的想法：  
永遠  
我所聽過的  
最讓人傷心的字眼

其他

其他都是零歲的東西

膠帶、筆套  
裁掉的紙  
畫歪的線  
指甲刀、衛生紙  
不斷滴著的  
傘緣上的水  
灰塵  
聲音  
愛

## CHAPTER 4

### Yang Mu, To Time 楊牧, 給時間

告訴我，甚麼叫遺忘  
甚麼叫全然的遺忘——枯木鋪著  
奄奄宇宙衰老的青苔  
果子熟了，蒂落冥然的大地  
在夏秋之交，爛在暗暗的陰影中  
當兩季的蘊涵和紅艷  
在一點掙脫的壓力下  
突然化為塵土  
當花香埋入叢草，如星殞  
鐘乳石沉沉垂下，接住上升的石筍  
又如一個陌生者的腳步  
穿過紅漆的圓們，穿過細雨  
在噴水池畔凝住  
而凝成一百座虛無的雕像  
它就是遺忘，在你我的  
雙眉間踩出深谷  
如沒有回音的山林  
擁抱著一個原始的憂慮  
告訴我，甚麼叫做記憶  
如你曾在死亡的甜蜜中迷失自己  
甚麼叫記憶——如你熄去一盞燈  
把自己埋葬在永恆的黑暗裏



**Xu Huizhi, White Snake Speaks**  
**許悔之, 白蛇說**

蛻皮之時  
請盤繞著我  
讓我感覺妳的痛  
痛中癡狂癡狂的悅樂  
如此柔若無骨

愛,不全然需要進入  
我將用涎液  
塗滿妳全身  
在這神聖的夜晚  
我努力吐出的涎液  
將是你晶亮透明的新衣

小青,然後我們回山裡  
回山裡修行愛和欲  
那相視的讚嘆  
接觸的狂喜  
讓法海繼續唸他的經  
教怯懦的許仙永鎮雷峰塔底

**Shang Qin, Speechless Clothes**  
**商禽, 無言的衣裳**  
一九六〇年秋、三峽、夜見浣衣女

月色一樣的女子  
在水湄  
默默地  
槌打黑硬的石頭

(無人知曉她的男人飄到度位去了)

荻花一樣的女子  
在河邊  
無言地  
槌打冷白的月光

(無人知曉她的男人流到度位去了)

月色一樣冷的女子  
荻花一樣白的女子  
在河邊默默地槌打

無言的衣裳在水湄

（灰朦朦的遠山總是過後才呼痛）

後記：一九六〇年秋，曾與詩友流沙遊三峽，宿背街臨河旅館，房爲木架支撐之小樓，半懸於河上，風並水俱流於其下，遂喝米酒如飲高粱，醉而臥。夜有搗衣聲驚夢，推蓬窗視之，月色、荻花、水光，澄明一片，天地寂然，唯一女子浣衣溪邊，磕磕砧聲迴響於山際，不勝淒其。因憶兒時偕諸姑嫂濯衣河上之歡，水花笑語竟如昨日，不禁戚然。欲推流沙再飲未果，獨酌尋句又未得，遂輾轉以終夜。後又與秀陶等人醉此小樓，不復聞砧聲，亦未得句。二十年後，詩雖成，故友已星散，懷想之情不能自己，是爲記。

### **Luo Qing, Once More Looking Out at the Deep Blue Sea after Looking Out at the Deep Blue Sea Many Times Before**

**羅青, 多次觀滄海之後再觀滄海**

平平坦坦的大海上  
好像什麼都沒有

好像什麼都沒有的大海上  
居然真的什麼沒有

就是因爲原來什麼都沒有  
才知道根本什麼都沒有

可是平平坦坦的大海之上  
的確什麼都沒有嗎？

什麼都沒有的海上啊  
當然是什麼都沒有

平平坦坦的大海之上果然渾然自自然然的是什麼都沒有

註：曹孟德建安十二年作  
「步出夏門行」，首章  
「觀滄海」，其辭如下

東臨碣石，  
以觀滄海。  
水何澹澹，  
山島竦峙。  
樹木叢生，  
百草豐茂。  
秋風蕭瑟，

洪波涌起。  
日月之行，  
若出其中；  
星漢燦爛，  
若出其里。  
幸甚至哉！  
歌以詠志。

後記：  
這是我第一次  
用電腦文書處理系統  
寫詩  
其中「竦峙」  
是用這字系統  
畫出來的

**Xiao Xiao, Heaven Pure Sand, variation**  
**蕭蕭, 天淨沙 變奏**

枯藤  
老樹  
昏鴉  
小橋流水人家  
古道  
西風  
瘦馬

夕陽西下  
天則  
無  
邊  
無  
際  
無  
涯

過了正午,臉才開始  
上昇  
上昇成一堆堆  
緩  
緩  
慢

慢  
的  
黑  
雲

流連  
復  
流連

臉才開始  
下降  
緩  
緩  
慢  
慢  
的  
黑  
雲,一堆堆

斷腸人在天涯

**Wei Yingwu, West Creek at Chuzhou**  
韋應物, 滁州西澗

獨憐幽草澗邊生，  
上有黃鸝深樹鳴。  
春潮帶雨晚來急，  
野渡無人舟自橫。

**Luo Qing, Heaven Pure Sand, first example**  
羅青, 天淨沙 - 舉例之一

枯 藤：        鏡頭從  
                 一條電線  
                 移到一團  
                 或緊或鬆或糾纏不清的電線  
                 然後跟著出現  
                 一朵被千萬條電線  
                 五花大綁的白雲  
                 出現出現  
                 不斷的出現

老樹：  
鏡頭順著  
一隻狗抬起的腿  
上移到水泥柱渾圓的腰  
特寫----紅色的「高壓危險，請勿靠近」  
特寫----藍色的「三民主義，統一中國」  
特寫----黑色的「民主人權，敬請賜票」  
特寫----金色的「保留戶推出歡迎訂購」  
再上去，是搖搖欲墜的變壓器  
是半截孤零零的水銀燈  
雙雙被掛在水泥柱的頂端  
維持不平衡的平衡  
變壓器夢囈似的震動著  
嘶喊出一串模糊的口號  
水銀燈獨眼似的眨動著  
拍發出一組不詳的密碼  
提示著各式各樣若隱若現的  
危機

昏鴉：  
然後  
鏡頭從  
閃爍的路燈移向  
一顆閃爍的星  
拉近----來一個特寫  
原來是一架飛機的尾燈  
尾燈下，緩緩浮現出萬家燈火大小屋頂  
屋頂上，霍然凌空的是千百支電視天線  
天線平展雙翅  
似千百隻昏鴉的枯骨  
在日曬雨淋風吹地震之間  
在十字架似的竹竿之上  
默默忍受  
各種電訊的電擊

小橋：  
鏡頭由昏鴉的骨架  
移到工程的鷹架  
再移到結構複雜的鋼架  
鏡頭拉開  
一組四通八達的行人陸橋  
赫然在目  
特寫「保密防諜，人人有責」  
特寫「蜂蜜香皂，彩蝶褲襪」  
特寫「服兵役是國民最光榮的義務」  
特寫「新版出國移民辦法大全發售」

特寫「團結奮鬥，謹防分化」  
特寫「亂鳴啦叭，罰九百元」  
橋上人擠人(有扒手在活動)  
路標一「總統府方向」  
路標二「中興橋方向」  
路標三「大中華戲院方向」  
路標四「大世界劇場方向」  
遠處(不良少年在相互毆鬥)  
電動字幕上出現  
板橋方向嚴重塞車堵車  
士林方向交通號誌失靈  
往三峽方向的台灣汽車客運  
在建國南北高架橋上拋錨

流水：  
然而高架橋下的黑色流水  
在翻滾一陣子之後  
仍若無其事的流下去  
鏡頭推近  
特寫並分析水質  
成分是：腳踏車、機車、轎車  
大卡車、軍車、警車  
於是鏡頭一陣伸縮  
在舊的淡水河道上  
一條新的淡水河  
以蒙太奇的手法  
五顏六色的正式宣告誕生

人家：  
淡水河上  
開始出現一條條  
彩色的蛇影  
從兩岸的公寓中  
紛紛遊走到河邊來聚飲  
華西街的夜市  
開始錦蛇般的蠕動了起來  
中華毒蛇研究所的對面是  
回春性病專門醫院  
精割包皮的招牌(特寫)  
鱷魚皮包的商標(特寫)  
蛇鞭、蛇羹、蛇膽、蛇酒之後  
是一堆又一堆價錢愈來愈賤的  
進口蘋果(請搖動鏡頭)  
大人小孩邊走邊吃  
順便把蘋果的種子隨意吐在  
兒童樂園與動物園之間

古道：  
樂園外面  
是平坦寬敞的立體交叉高速公路  
計程車在其上橫衝直闖  
來往穿梭（請伸縮鏡頭）  
時間計程，費用計程  
通過交流道（特寫）  
通過收費站（特寫）  
保持距離，保持速度  
通過霧飄區（特寫）  
通過休息站（特寫）  
在國際機場附近  
有許多冷氣觀光遊覽車  
忙進忙出（剪接快速跳動）  
在楊梅交流道附近  
有一列市立殯儀館的靈柩車  
消失在往龍潭方向的路上  
那首家喻戶曉的  
古道進行曲  
在車聲消失以後  
便無聲的飄揚起來  
飄起一天黃花地丁的種子（特寫）  
在一座黃花開滿的岡上（特寫）

西風：  
時間當然是三月二十幾號  
風當然是西風  
所有被吹起的種子花球  
都在研討爭論風的  
正確方向-----  
並進一步懷疑曆法的真偽  
有些種子是早在數百年前  
就飄過來落地生根的（淡入）  
有些則從這裡飄入數百年前  
不再出現（淡出）  
有些尚在半空中踟躕浮游  
有些已決定在雲間流浪  
更多的是降落在高速公路  
黏附在各種車輛的輪胎上  
不顧一切的，向前滾進

瘦馬：  
一輛千里馬（特寫）  
飛速駛過造橋  
通霄駛過后里  
豐原不停，花壇不停，白河不停

開進中船公司、中鋼公司  
開進亞洲最大的貨櫃轉運中心  
把善化、彌陀、佛光山拋在輪後  
在佳多加油之後  
開足馬力-----  
衝向恆春  
衝向恆春核能電廠  
不料-----  
車子在墾丁國家公園附近  
出了車禍  
現場一灘灘的汽油  
燃燒起  
巴士海峽驚心動魄的晚霞  
(新藝綜合立體彩色寬銀幕)

夕陽： 巴士海峽的夕陽  
一枚沉重的水雷  
渾身是刺  
顏色殷紅

西下： 噗通一聲  
從南中國海與東京灣之間的海圖中  
潛入冰冷又純白的浪花之內  
(一切都按分鏡計劃表  
完美無缺的在進行拍攝)

斷腸人： (按照拍攝進度)  
一條半浮半沉的的大木船  
此刻應出現在  
畫面的左邊  
向右飄流  
飄來了一船  
瞪著大眼睛的  
中國人

在天涯： (開麥拉)  
大木船開始在大海中下沉  
特寫：遊艇在鞭炮聲中下水  
幾隻腳在浪花中踢動淹沒  
特寫：許多手在遊行隊伍中舉起  
長長的頭髮在水藻的糾纏中散開  
特寫：香皂滑過細腰在電視裡出浴  
許多吶喊在風雲中消失  
特寫：「以建民國」的歌聲在戲院中



響起  
(沉船的地方)  
海水  
浪花  
海水  
浪花  
(沉船的地方) 日出  
海水  
浪花  
海水  
浪花  
(沉船的地方)  
一架出國包機的影子  
輕輕撫過  
沉船的地方  
那轟隆轟隆的影子  
有如一張貼不住的廉價藥膏  
隨貼隨落  
有如一張被揉皺的紙片十字架  
隨風滾動  
而那架飛機  
則如一把製作精巧的玩具裁紙刀  
在破碎的亞洲地圖上  
姿勢優雅的，一掠而過

**Luo Qing, The Ferry Landing in the Wilds is Deserted and the Boat  
Swings by Itself, second example**  
羅青, 野渡無人舟自橫 - 舉例之二

野渡  
銀河閃亮  
流過太空

(鏡頭拉進)

閃亮的是無數  
大大小小的太空船

無人  
太空船與太空船之間  
相互感應着各種電訊  
發射自

各種不同型號的  
電腦（特寫）「方舟一號控制中心」  
機器人（特寫）「方舟二號船長室」  
特寫所有的哺乳動物靈長類在零下一  
〇〇〇度的冷藏中安睡（淡出）  
「無夢睡眠自動實驗檢驗器」裝直在  
冷凍庫鋼門的右側 螢光幕上顯示出  
「一千光年後醒來」的指示  
鋼門左側「實驗結果欄」中 一片空白

舟自橫  
圓形記憶螢幕板上  
有圓形的星在閃爍  
（鏡頭拉近）  
一顆藍色的行星  
（再拉近）  
一條藍色的山脈  
（再再拉近）  
喜馬拉雅山聖母峰

聖母峰的懷裏  
臥著一艘  
原始的方型木船  
半埋在大雪之中  
露出來的部份  
結滿了堅硬的寒冰  
有如一方黑色的鏡子  
（鏡頭不斷拉近）  
鏡子上面  
隱隱約約  
映照出  
銀河細長的  
尾巴  
（閃閃）  
（爍爍）  
（爍閃）  
（閃爍）

**Xia Yu, Illustration**  
夏宇, 插圖

就  
偷

偷地那些忍耐許久的  
那樣平凡的蜂房肉體  
隨著日影張開  
如是  
玻璃 玻璃地  
遇到

在蒼白青春的反光中  
性命本體與生活表相之差異  
眾人胡話金屬疲憊字衰竭

### **Xia Yu, private conversation with animals (2/4)** 夏宇, 與動物密談 (二/四)

有一家九口的毛巾都掛在同一根木條上  
浴室永遠陰暗潮溼  
毛巾從來沒有乾過逐漸  
腐爛變黑有一家九口  
每天洗臉但從來  
沒洗乾淨過  
睡在一個大通鋪  
像九條毛巾黏膩挨著  
唯一證明時間這種東西的是  
浴室裡的肥皂不斷消耗  
變瘦變小然後不見有生命  
在時間的泡沫中即  
永遠不曾改變不曾消失  
只是腐爛變黑

### **Xia Yu, demanding an example** 夏宇, 要求舉例

當有人要求舉例的時候  
比較傾向於憂傷和需無  
的這些顏色  
的毛巾都掛在同一根木條上  
證明浴室裡的  
不可知的黑暗排列  
如輕音樂  
除此夜是  
狼牙色的月光下  
形狀優美的墳

**Xia Yu, give time to time**  
**夏宇, 給時間以時間)**

[...]  
而我愛過  
死亡如果不是流浪  
音樂是垂直  
我們就水平地躺

**Xia Yu, to be elsewhere**  
**夏宇, to be elsewhere**

[...]  
一問:你是誰看起來冷和疲倦  
一說:我只知道我穿著的毛衣脫了線  
只要你拉著那線愈拉愈長  
我整個人就會消失不見

**Ye Mimi, And All the Sweat is Left There**  
**葉秘密, 汗都被留在那裡了**

你的咖哩裝在別人的盤子裡 名字簽在別人的故事裡  
當你醒來 他們早已習慣黑暗 哼著黏牙的流行歌曲  
有人在隔壁浴室洗手 把香皂握成一條魚  
他咬下的那顆柿子 比獅子還金  
天氣這麼寒冷 約會的地點就在太陽麻花田  
她說新年快樂  
他覺得無聊 只好抽煙  
一隻鬼在黑板樹下瞌睡 小貓在肚子裡罰跪  
我們覺得尷尬極了 從嘴裡吐出一層海  
海的皮膚極白  
事情並不如牠所想的那樣 也並不如牠所想的這樣  
她要風 他就發給她風  
他要火 她就發給他火  
她們在迂迴的巷子裡勾指頭 密謀  
後天 它會和同伴從紅色郵筒相約經過  
最好就一起把它們綑綁 資源回收  
如果妳覺得疲倦 請用複音口琴吹奏我  
牠忽然渴望背著書包 脫光衣服在路上走  
後來他帶她過橋 途中經歷一座廟  
跟小黃瓜一樣清脆 他們的額頭  
假月亮懸浮在空中  
他摩擦她的眼睛 擦出一段傷 汗都被留在那裡了

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## Samenvatting

### *Van transparantie naar kunstmatigheid: moderne Chinese poëzie van Taiwan na 1949*

Dit proefschrift is een studie van de moderne Chinese poëzie van Taiwan na 1949, dat wil zeggen van de poëzie geschreven in het Standaardchinees dat *guoyu* wordt genoemd, met speciale aandacht voor één bepaalde ontwikkeling, die ik typeer als ‘van transparantie naar kunstmatigheid’.

In het Westen wordt Chinese literatuur vrijwel onmiddellijk geassocieerd met literatuur uit de Volksrepubliek China. Pas in de tweede plaats denkt men ook aan literatuur uit de Republiek China (Taiwan), waar de nationalisten onder leiding van Chiang Kaishek zich in 1949 terugtrokken nadat ze de strijd met de communisten op het vasteland hadden verloren. Vanuit een literair standpunt is het opmerkelijk dat veel westerse literatuurcritici de Taiwanese literatuur lange tijd over het hoofd hebben gezien, omdat er tijdens de jaren '50 tot '70 meer literaire experimenten en discussies plaatsvonden dan in het gesloten, communistische China.

Hoofdstuk 1, ‘Oppositions: Poetical Debates from the 1950s to the 1980s’, begint met een globaal literair-historisch overzicht van die experimenten en discussies. De vraag die in dit hoofdstuk centraal staat is hoe, waarom en voor wie poëzie zou moeten worden geschreven volgens de dichters, critici en lezers in Taiwan. Tussen de jaren '50 en '80 schommelden de ideeën over de ‘identiteit’ van de moderne poëzie heen en weer tussen moderniteit en traditie, het kosmopolitische en het inheemse, individualiteit en collectiviteit. Andere terugkerende punten van discussie, die daar uiteraard mee samenhangen, zijn de relatie van poëzie tot enerzijds de realiteit en anderzijds de verbeelding, en het gebrek aan lezersbelangstelling.

Veruit de meest invloedrijke discussie, waarin al deze ingrediënten samenkamen, was die van 1972-3 (aangezwengeld door Guan Jieming en Tang Wenbiao). Hierdoor gingen veel auteurs van de zogenaamde modernistische, verwesterde, individualistische stroming, die onbegrijpelijkheid werd verweten, minder

‘hermetisch’ schrijven, hoewel hun werk nog verre van helder genoemd kan worden, en begonnen ze te denken over de kwestie van een Taiwanese identiteit in de poëzie. Het soort dichtgenootschappen dat in de loop der tijd werd opgericht, bevestigt die algemene tendens: poëzie werd vaker direct betrokken op het dagelijks leven en geschreven in een toegankelijker stijl. Maar er waren ook dichters die minder gingen schrijven of gedurende enkele jaren zelfs helemaal stopten. Chen Li’s minieme productie in de jaren 1980-1988 is daarvan een voorbeeld. Een enkeling, zoals Shang Qin, trok zich weinig aan van de discussies en ging min of meer op dezelfde voet verder. Aan het einde van de jaren ’80 lijkt de polarisering te zijn afgenomen en heeft de discussie haar heftigheid verloren. Het werk van iemand als Xia Yu, die in die tijd begint te schrijven, lijkt er dan ook niet door te worden gehinderd, maar de kritiek op haar bundel *Wrijving: onbeschrijflijk* (1995) – te individualistisch, te moeilijk, afbraak van de Chinese taal – maakte duidelijk dat veel mensen nog altijd volgens dezelfde lijnen dachten.

Het eerste hoofdstuk geeft de algemene achtergrondkennis die vereist is voor een goed begrip van de specifieke ontwikkeling die in de volgende drie hoofdstukken uiteen wordt gezet, onder de overkoepelende titel ‘The Poem as Construct’. In dit deel van het proefschrift wordt de poëzie zelf grondiger bestudeerd, met speciale aandacht voor de zogeheten modernistische (experimentele) tendens. Het algemene idee dat ten grondslag ligt aan deze hoofdstukken is de verschuiving van transparantie naar kunstmatigheid in de laatste twee decennia van de twintigste eeuw, zowel in de taal als in de vorm – dezelfde twee die aan het begin van de twintigste eeuw, toen de klassieke poëzie geleidelijk aan werd vervangen door de moderne poëzie, ingrijpend waren veranderd.

Hoofdstuk 2, ‘A Changing Attitude to Poetic Language’, is gewijd aan de taal. Het overgrote deel van de poëzie in Taiwan na 1949 is geschreven in een proza-achtige stijl, dat wil zeggen in een taal die wordt gekenmerkt door conventioneel-correcte syntactische relaties. Aan de hand van voorbeelden van Ji Xian, Luo Fu, Chen Li, Wu Sheng, Li Minyong en Luo Qing laat ik zien dat de meeste poëzie is geschreven in vloeiende vrije verzen, die worden afgebroken op een natuurlijke plaats in de zin en zodoende de indruk geven van spontaniteit en authenticiteit. Beeldspraak is de voornaamste bron van spanning en verrassing. Alles draait uit-

eindelijk om communicatie, om het overbrengen van betekenis, vandaar dat ik hier van ‘transparantie’ spreek.

Tegen het einde van de jaren '80 komt hierin verandering. Ook Xia Yu's poëzie is geschreven in de prozastijl, maar haar latere werk haalt het idee van de vloeiende, grammaticaal netjes afgebakende versregel overhoop. De gedichten van Xia Yu zijn een spel met de zinnen, betekenis wordt voortdurend uitgesteld. Haar poëzie is dan ook niet langer meer enkel een vorm van expressie met taal als instrument, maar draait juist om het onderzoek naar hoe taal werkt; ze tast de grenzen van de taal af en rekt die op. Omdat de materie van de taal zelf nu meer centraal staat, geeft het gedicht niet langer de indruk van transparantie, maar krijgt het kunstmatige karakter van de poëzie de nadruk: de taal vestigt de aandacht op zichzelf.

Iets vergelijkbaars gebeurt in diezelfde tijd met de vorm: er komen verschillende nieuwe poëtische vormen op die ook specifiek de aandacht voor hun constructie vragen. In hoofdstuk 3, ‘Serial Forms’, wordt de seriële vorm als een nieuwe structurerende vorm bestudeerd. Het gaat hier om poëtisch werk waarbij een hoofdtitel verschillende, schijnbaar onafhankelijke delen overkoepelt, die op hun beurt getiteld of genummerd kunnen zijn. De afzonderlijke onderdelen van deze seriële vormen, die vrij veel voorkomen in de Taiwanese poëzie, kunnen zelfstandig leesbaar zijn of samen een integraal geheel vormen, waarbij de delen enkel betekenisvol zijn in hun relatie tot elkaar. Centraal staan vragen als: hoe nauw hangen de delen samen? Wat voor onderliggende structuur ligt er aan het geheel ten grondslag? En hoe dwingend is de coherentie tussen de losse delen, met andere woorden, zijn ze middelpuntzoekend of -vliedend?

De gedetailleerde analyses van drie voorbeelden (Yang Mu's ‘Etudes: twaalf aardse takken’, Luo Qing's ‘Zes manieren om watermeloen te eten’ en Xia Yu's ‘Zinnen maken’) laten zien dat deze werken strak gestructureerd zijn, en vooral dat ze expliciet de aandacht naar de constructie zelf trekken, door middel van hun presentatie, de subtitels, vormbeperkingen en uitzonderingen daarop. Daarmee zijn deze made things (een term van Marjorie Perloff, uit *Radical Artifice: Writing Poetry in the Age of Media*) tegengesteld aan de meer ‘natuurlijke’ vormen die gebruikelijk waren in de poëzie van die tijd. Ze lijken het resultaat van een dialectische ontwikkeling in de Taiwanese poëzie: van de ‘rigiditeit’ van de vroegere klas-

sieke poëzie, via de volledige 'vrijheid' (die als meer natuurlijk werd ervaren), naar een synthese van beide. In tegenstelling tot de klassieke poëzie beperken deze strakke seriële vormen zich niet tot vaste patronen die vooraf zijn vastgelegd: ze volgen niet steeds opnieuw dezelfde regels maar creëren nieuwe structuren in elk nieuw werk.

Aansluitend onderzoekt het laatste hoofdstuk, 'Rewriting and Other Artificialities', andere specifieke nieuwe vormen, waarin parodie, citaatkunst, procedurele verskunst en incoherentie centraal staan. Voorbeelden van Shang Qin, Luo Qing, Chen Li en Xia Yu brengen opnieuw de 'gemaaktheid' van dergelijke gedichten aan het licht.

Al deze analyses maken duidelijk dat 'radicale kunstmatigheid' een belangrijke verschuiving vertegenwoordigt in de Taiwanese poëzie van de laatste decennia. In plaats van een kunst die zichzelf voordoet als natuur, ontstaat hier een kunst die pronkt met haar eigen kunstmatigheid. Deze poëzie draait niet langer uitsluitend om 'betekenis' en 'waarheid', maar vooral ook om het plezier van het scheppen en de omgang met de taal als materie. Door de ludieke en ironische benaderingswijze wordt tegelijkertijd de hoge status op de hak genomen die van oudsher aan poëzie werd toegekend. Als zodanig is deze poëzie duidelijk verweven met de grotere, mondiale literaire context en ontstijgt ze de Taiwanese realiteit waarin ze ontstond.

## CURRICULUM VITAE

Silvia Marijnissen (Made en Drimmelen, 5 maart 1970) behaalde in 1988 haar eindexamen VWO aan het Dongemond College in Raamsdonksveer, waarna zij haar studie sinologie aan de Universiteit van Leiden begon. In dat kader verbleef zij in 1993-1994 aan de Universiteit Peking in de Volksrepubliek China. In 1995 studeerde zij af in de studies sinologie en algemene literatuurwetenschap in Leiden, op een scriptie over de symbolistische poëzie in China. Van 1995 tot 1997 werkte zij als bibliotheekassistent in de sinologische bibliotheek van de universiteit Leiden. In 1995 was ze mede-oprichter van *Het trage vuur*, tijdschrift voor Chinese literatuur, waarvan zij nog steeds redactielid is. Van 1997 tot 2002 was zij als assistent-in-opleiding voor haar promotieonderzoek verbonden aan de Onderzoeksschool CNWS, School van Aziatische, Afrikaanse en Amerindische Studies, Universiteit Leiden. Voor dat onderzoek verbleef zij in 1998 en van najaar 2000 tot zomer 2001 in Taipei, Taiwan. Van februari 1999 tot september 1999 en van september 2001 tot januari 2002 was zij werkzaam als docent aan de vakgroep Talen en Culturen van China, Universiteit Leiden. Vanaf 2001 is zij werkzaam als literair vertaalster; ze vertaalde onder meer de dichters Chen Li, Duoduo, Shang Ch'in en Hsia Yu, en werkt nu aan een bundel klassieke Chinese landschapspoëzie en met collega's aan een vertaling van Cao Xueqin's *De droom van de rode kamer*. Sinds 2006 is zij recensent Chinese literatuur voor *NRC Handelsblad*.