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MODERNISM AND ITS DISCONTENTS

Taiwan Literature in the 1960s

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In February 1953 the poet Ji Xian (Chi Hsien) founded *Xiandai shi jikan* [Modern poetry quarterly], for which he was chief editor. In the inaugural editorial, Ji emphasized:

> We think all literature belongs to its time. Only when it is the work of its time will it have permanent value. That is to say, we give equal emphasis to the social significance and artistic quality of poetry; above all, we demand the expression and promotion of the spirit of the time so that it becomes modern poetry with its own characteristics, not ancient poetry removed from today's society. Moreover, it should not be old foreign poetry!
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> What we want is modernity. We think in poetic technique we are still backward and naïve. . . . Only when we look to the international poetry scene, learn new modes of expression, so that we can get up and run and catch up with it, then can our so-called New Poetry be modernized.

Although the name of the journal had been changed from *New Poetry* to *Modern Poetry,* the emphasis was on the modernization of new poetry, not modernism. The significance of the new literature is stated by Hu Shi, the "Father of New Poetry," in "A Constructive View on the Literary Revolution": "First, the modes of Chinese literature are inadequate and cannot serve as our models; second, the modes of Western literature are more adequate and better than our own and should be modeled." Therefore, the only way to improve, according to Hu, was to "translate the classics of Western literature as fast as we can." What Ji Xian refers to above as "the international poetry scene" is obviously not the poetry of India or the Philippines but that of Europe and the United States. In essence, his remarks are but an extension of a simple economic idea to the cultural sphere, namely, that technologically backward countries should learn from their technologically advanced counterparts. Therefore, although Ji

emphasizes a "modern poetry with its own characteristics" and "the expression and promotion of the spirit of the time," he qualifies "the spirit of the time" or "modern" in terms such as "technique" and "new modes of expression." Unlike the advanced nations of Europe and the United States, technologically backward nations could not possibly have their own "spirit of the time" or their characteristic "expression and promotion" of that spirit!

At the time, the "modernity" that Ji Xian advocated did not seem to refer to modernism. In his *Xinshi lunji* [Essays on new poetry], compiled in 1955 and published in 1956, he pointed out in a piece entitled "All Literature Is 'Modern'": "All literature, especially poetry, must be 'modern' vis-à-vis the time in which it is written. Otherwise, it is not poetry, nor does it belong to any category of literature. Anything that imitates those who live in an earlier time is not creation and therefore is not literature." Drawing on such examples as Qu Yuan (Ch'ü Yuan), Dante, Li Po, and Shelley, he arrived at the following maxim: "Anything that is 'modern' is eternal; only when it is 'modern' can it belong to the 'classical.'"

> The significance of the essay lies not in its advocacy of modernity but rather in the fact that it harks back to T. S. Eliot's notion in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" that modern and classic are different yet complementary. The works of classical Chinese poets become classic exactly because in their own time they are "modern" and are the "masterpieces."

In July 1961, Yü Guangzhong (Yü Kuang-chung) wrote an essay entitled "Welcome the Chinese Renaissance," which summarized the recently concluded "Debate on Chinese versus Western Culture" and discussed developments in literature and the arts—including modern poetry, modern art, and modern music—which had emerged five or six years earlier. The subtitle of the essay comes from Wang Wei's famous couplet: "Walk to the end of the river / Sit down to watch the clouds rise." Evoking Li Changji (Li Ch'ang-chi)'s essay on the May Fourth movement, Yu advanced the following view:

> The pinnacle of modern Chinese literature and art has to be the intersecting point of Western and Eastern cultures. When that time comes, not only will the modern movement in literature and art be successful but a renaissance will come about and we will have a satisfactory response to our classical literature and art and those of the May Fourth period.
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> Therefore, our ideal is that to advance the Chinese Renaissance, young and middle-aged artists must walk out of the Chinese classical tradition, be baptized in the Western classical tradition and modern literature and art. Then they must return to China to claim and further develop their own classical tradition. The result is the establishment of a

> new and living tradition. In other words, the destination of our journey from Changan to Paris is not Paris. Paris is only a stopover. Our final destination is still China. Maybe we learn alchemy in Paris, but the real pure gold is still buried in Chinese mines, waiting for us to return to excavate.

Although Yu's metaphors of alchemy and gold mining are similar to Hu Shi's notion of learning from Western literary modes and Ji Xian's looking to the international poetry scene, Yu emphasizes inheriting Chinese classical tradition and further developing it. Therefore, the Chinese Renaissance that he envisions truly is "a new and living tradition." He opens the above essay with this prediction: "The cultural scene of 1962 will be colorful." Is such modernity, conceived as classical plus modern or traditional plus modern, the modernism of the 1960s?

On January 15, 1956, Ji Xian called the first annual meeting of the Modernist School in Taipei. Organized by a nine-member committee, the meeting announced the official founding of the school. The cover of issue no. 13 of the *Modern Poetry Quarterly,* published in February of the same year, listed the "Tenets of the Modernist School":

No. 1: We are a group of Modernists who selectively embrace the spirit and features of all the new poetry schools since Baudelaire.
No. 2: We believe New Poetry is [the fruit of] horizontal transplantation, not vertical inheritance. This is the general idea, the basic starting point, for the development of theory and practice of creative writing.
No. 3: [We engage in] adventures on the new continent of poetry and explorations of the virgin land of poetry: expression of new contents, creation of new forms, discovery of new tools, invention of new methods.
No. 4: We emphasize intellectuality.
No. 5: We pursue the purity of poetry.
No. 6: Patriotism. Anti-Communism. Support of freedom and democracy.

Obviously, the modernism that Ji Xian had in mind was broad and vague, because it included "all the new poetry schools since Baudelaire." Hence, the temporal or contemporary nature of the so-called modernism was far more important than the concrete "spirit and features" of the poetry schools. When we consider whether it is possible to subsume the new poetry schools under the notions of "intellectuality" and "pure poetry," the tenets come across as rather one-sided, as does Ji's rejection of modern-

ism's "tendency toward the sickly fin de siècle" and his advocacy of developing "the healthy, the progressive, and the uplifting." If modernism can be dubbed "sickly" and "fin de siècle," how can we extract from it "the healthy, progressive, and uplifting"? Further, whether it emphasizes intellectuality or the pursuit of pure poetry, it has nothing to do with being sickly or healthy, fin de siècle or progressive. These concepts are unrelated to each other.

By the same token, once we impose the criteria of intellectuality and purity, the so-called "adventures" and "explorations" are delimited. Besides, it is not clear how "all the new poetry schools since Baudelaire" fit Ji Xian's definition: "We think New Poetry must be true to its name: making it new from day to day. Poetry that is not new does not deserve to be called New Poetry. Therefore, we emphasize the word 'new.'" If we look at it from this viewpoint, then it is all relative. New for whom? For what tradition? Consider Ji's notorious emphasis on horizontal transplantation. Some of the spirit and features "new" to the Western tradition may in fact be "old" for the Chinese or Eastern tradition. By the same token, what seems "old" to the West may turn out to be "new" to China.

The problem was that Ji Xian and others were not steeped in the great tradition of Western literature, much less in the great tradition of Chinese poetry from the *Shijing* or *Book of Songs* onward. When he talked about classical Chinese poetry, he mentioned only Li Bo, Du Fu, Tang poetry, Song songs, and Yuan arias. When he talked about "national essence," he only referred to "Tang poetry, Song song lyrics, and the like." This suggests his ignorance about classical Chinese poetry of other periods.

The result was predictable. Although Ji Xian emphasized intellectuality and purity, his poems show that personality determines literary style. "Solitary Wolf" compares himself to a wolf whose "shrill and long howls . . . shake Heaven and Earth as if in malaria." In "Days on the Wagon," he says, "I . . . aim those empty bottles at the cement wall far far away" and "two by two I throw them to create a bing-bang sound. . . . Isn't that also a great kick?" This kind of "new" poetry gives release to feelings of boredom and aimlessness, which is actually reminiscent of Yuan arias.

Qin Zihao (Ch'in Tzu-hao) wrote such intellectual poems as "The Existence of a Jar":

> Not an idol, it has no face
> Not a deity, it has no doctrine
> It is an existence, of stillness, of beauty
> Embodied in imagery, visible, sensible, yet uncertain
> It is the existence of another world
> The order of dream, born of the fusion
> Of the Classical, Symbolist, Cubist, Surrealist, and Abstract

Born of the spontaneous design of the Creator
Manifest in clarity amid chaos, a form abstract yet tangible
An existence in the nakedness and lucidity of thought.

In the above excerpt, Qin uses the symbol of the jar to refer to the "order" distilled from various artistic modes; he admits that such order is a dream, a feeling, but it is also a design. He chooses from the various schools of modernism and rejects the expression of personal feeling that is the staple of Romanticism.

The poem begins with these lines:

As if sitting, as if standing too
Sitting quietly in Zen stillness, standing like the solemn Buddha
In the rear, in the front too
With its back to the abyss to face the void
With its back to the void to face the abyss
Seeing everything, it faces the sightless
Facing everything, it quietly sees all sides
Not flat, it is three-dimensional
Not square, it is round and responds to all directions
All-round receptivity, all-round vision
An axle, magnetic and radiating light

The poem not only uses such Eastern concepts as Zen, the Buddha, "seeing quietly," and "all-roundness," but at a more fundamental level, underlying its use of paradoxical language, the poem repeats a parallelism prevalent in classical Chinese poetry. The poem more or less realizes the ideal meeting of Eastern and Western cultures that Yu Guangzhong talked about.

Qin Zihao's "Where Is New Poetry Headed?" was a response to Ji Xian's modernist manifesto. The essay prompted further responses from Ji, including the essays "From Modernism to New Modernism" and "On the Critique of the So-Called Six Principles." The debate between the two poets in fact became a debate between the Modernist School and the Blue Star Poetry Club founded by Qin and others. As I argued earlier, the poetry that poets create does not necessarily accord with their prose discourse on poetry. Although the second tenet of the Modernist School emphasizes that "New Poetry is [the fruit of] horizontal transplantation, not vertical inheritance," at that time a poet whose work was closely related to traditional Chinese imagery and atmosphere was Zheng Chouyu (Cheng Ch'ou-yü), who was on the nine-member organization committee of the Modernist School. To give an example, a stanza from his poem "Fortress in Ruins" reads:

A hundred years ago where heroes tied their horses
A hundred years ago where warriors sharpened their swords

Here in dejection I take off the saddle
The lock of history has no key
Neither is there a sword in my pack
Looking for a jingling dream
In the moonlight I pass a sad "General's Order"
From the strings of my lute . . .

This and such other poems as "Mistake" and "Mistress" are superior to some of Xu Zhimo (Hsü Chih-mo)'s poems from the May Fourth period. In the special issue on the fortieth anniversary of the Modernist School, published as no. 20 of the revived *Modernist Poetry Quarterly,* Zheng reiterates the notion that "personal disposition determines content, content determines form," and emphasizes: "In the work and friendships of the Modernist poets in the early through later period, I discover a salient feature in common. That is, they have similar dispositions—they write poetry not because they want to be poets but because the way they live is indeed like poets."

On March 5, 1960, a bimonthly literary journal called *Xiandai wenxue* [Modern literature] was launched in Taipei. Despite its Western-sounding title, the journal exhibited a strong Chinese consciousness. According to the inaugural statement, the founding of the journal was motivated by a "concern for the future of Chinese literature." "A successful work of art," according to the essay, achieves the goal of "literature as the vehicle of Dao," and this new interpretation of the Confucian concept is emphasized. "If the rich legacy of our ancestors cannot be used properly, it becomes an obstacle to progress. We do not want to be viewed as unfilial posterity." In conclusion, the editors announced: "We respect tradition," "we are proud to be Chinese," and "we encourage ourselves with the self-awareness of Chinese intellectuals."

Two authors are mentioned in the inaugural essay: Cao Xueqin (Ts'ao Hsüeh-ch'in), who represents the pinnacle of traditional Chinese fiction, and Hu Shi (Hu Shih), the pioneer of vernacular Chinese and New Poetry. The editors were mainly concerned with the issue of "vertical inheritance." They thus did not anticipate success in their "experiments in and explorations and creations of new artistic forms and styles." On the contrary, "because those working in literature and the arts who come after us may succeed by learning from our failures," they stated, "we hope our experiments and efforts will be recognized by history." Such statements refer implicitly to the historical value of Hu Shi as a pioneer of New Poetry despite the fact that his vernacular poetry is not very good.

Besides its title, the only connection between the journal and modernism is its plan to "introduce systematically the movements, trends, criticism, and thoughts of contemporary Western arts and, as much as possible, to translate their representative works." Thus, by September

1973, fifty-three issues later, *Modern Literature* had published special issues on Franz Kafka, Thomas Wolfe, Thomas Mann, Archibald Macleish, James Joyce, D. H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, Katherine Anne Porter, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Jean-Paul Sartre, Eugene O'Neill, William Faulkner, John Steinbeck, William Butler Yeats, August Strindberg, T. S. Eliot, J. Ramón Jiménez, Albert Camus, Ernest Hemingway, Sherwood Anderson, André Gide, Samuel Beckett, Henry James, ancient Greek tragedies, and Freud. Although these are primarily major writers from the modern period, whether they can all be subsumed under modernism is questionable. Besides, translation and introduction do not equal creation. The extent of the influence of foreign literature on Taiwan writers at the time is difficult to gauge. In addition to translations of foreign writers, *Modern Literature* also published special issues on classical Chinese literature (no. 33), classical Chinese fiction (nos. 44, 45), and modern Chinese poetry (no. 46). Starting with no. 35, approximately a quarter of each issue was devoted to the study of classical Chinese literature. Therefore, there is some truth to the inaugural declaration that "In doing so [introducing foreign writers], we do not mean to prefer foreign art; but we do it on the principle of learning from others in order to improve ourselves."

The connection between *Modern Literature* and modernism in the 1960s probably lies in the following idea and practice: "We feel that old artistic forms and styles are inadequate for expressing our feelings as moderns. Therefore, we have decided to experiment, explore, and create new artistic forms and styles." "Out of need, we may engage in some 'work of constructive destruction.'" Further, the magazine declares, "We do not want to invoke Cao Xueqin to add value to Chinese fiction"; "All in all, we must depend on our own efforts." The experiments, explorations, and creations concentrated on fiction. Therefore, in the early days of the journal, a separate volume, *Anthology of Modern Fiction,* was published. After the journal folded, another anthology appeared, entitled *Selected Fiction of Modern Literature.* In the preface to the latter volume, "A Retrospect and Prospect of *Modern Literature*" (referred to as ML), Bai Xianyong (Pai Hsien-yung) points out:

> The greatest contribution of ML lies in its discovery and cultivation of the younger generation of fiction writers in Taiwan. Most of the thirty-three stories in this anthology are outstanding; they may be viewed as excellent models of Taiwan fiction in the 1960s. . . . An overview of the thirty-three stories in the anthology reveals that their contents are rich and varied. Some investigate the decline of traditional Chinese culture, such as Zhu Xining's "Tiejiang" [Molten iron] and Bai Xianyong's "Youyuan jingmeng" [Wandering in a garden, waking from a dream]; some depict the native land and people of Taiwan, such as Wang Zhenhe's "Gui, Beifeng, ren" [Ghost, north wind, humans], Chen Ruoxi's "Xinzhuang" [Xin mansion], Lin Huaimin's "Cixiang" [Farewell to my hometown], and Yan Manli's "Chenai" [Dust]; some express the pain and loneliness of humankind, such as Shui Jing's "Love's Torment" and Ouyang Zi's "Zuihou yijie ke" [The last class]; some scrutinize the basic dilemma of human existence, such as Cong Shu's "Manglie" [Blind hunt], Hsi Sung's "Fengshenbang li de Nuozha" [Nouzha in the Pantheon], and Shi Shuqing's "Daofang de tianti" [The upside down heavenly ladder]. There are initiation stories, such as Wang Wenxing's "Qianque" [Flaw]; eulogies to human dignity, such as Chen Yingzhen's "Jiangjun zu" [A tribe of generals] and Huang Chunming's "Gangeng bo de huanghun" [Uncle Gangeng's twilight]; there are stories describing overseas Chinese, such as Yu Lihua's "Huichang xianxing ji" [An exposé of academics] and Ji Zheng's "Weichung" [Counterfeit spring]. The thirty-three writers have their own language and techniques. Some employ allegory and symbolism, others make use of the stream of consciousness and psychoanalysis. Some are earthy and realistic, others are elegant and imaginative. Tradition is fused with modernity, what is Western is mixed with the Chinese. The result is a kind of literature that combines the ancient and the modern, the Chinese and the foreign. This is the reality of Taiwan in the 1960s. Vertically, it has inherited the rich culture of five millennia; horizontally, it has been impacted significantly by Europe and America. We live in a stormy time of unprecedented changes, but as writers we are heavy and anxious in our hearts.

Bai's preface was written in February 1977. The lengthy essay mixes his reminiscences about the organization and operation of *Modern Literature* with his disappointment at its folding and hope for its revival. It is regrettable that this preface has not received the attention that it deserves from scholars. It is one of the most lucid reflections and testimonials on Taiwan literature in the 1960s.

Culturally, Bai emphasizes the "stormy time of unprecedented changes" caught between "vertical inheritance" and "horizontal impact," and "the eventful transition from the old to the new." "Heavy" and "anxious" describes the general state of mind of the writers, because they "have to build [their] own fortress of cultural values on the ruins of tradition." The metaphor suggests that there is no consensus among the writers, and that their common position is a defensive one. In some sense, "traditional values cannot serve as a reliable reference point for their beliefs in life." Yet, unlike the intellectuals in the May Fourth period, they cannot turn to science and democracy as the foundation of a new cultural edifice.

The dilemma can also be seen in the second round of "Debate on Chinese versus Western Culture" in the 1960s. When Bai categorizes both "Molten Iron" and "Wandering in a Garden, Waking from a Dream" as

fiction that investigates the decline of traditional Chinese culture, he clearly recognizes the inappropriate distinction between "nativist fiction" and "modern fiction." Such writers as Zhu Xining (Chu Hsi-ning), Sima Zhongyuan (Ssu-ma Chung-yüan), and Duan Caihua (Tuan Ts'ai-hua) were known as native writers, not "nostalgic, anti-Communist" writers, as they are labeled today. In a society driven at full speed toward modernization, the significance of writing nativist fiction lies not in nostalgia but in the fact that these writers all have to "build their own fortress of cultural values," because they have witnessed the rocky transition from tradition to modernity without finding a spiritual anchor in progressivism. Meng Zhao (Meng Chao)'s screaming when he drinks the iron broth cannot, after all, cover up the noise of the whistling train. But are we willing to let Du Liniang (Tu Li-niang)'s dream fade away? The so-called "depiction of Taiwan's native people and life" also describes the ways in which the native tradition is confronted with the cultural impact of the commercialization of new towns and cities. Therefore, in the final analysis, the ultimate question is how to affirm human dignity and the value of human life, how to transform individual identity, and how to survive in a society that is changing rapidly, becoming increasingly alienating. The urgent question for the writers of the 1960s was not social reform, because that was already subsumed under the agenda of technological and economic development, which, whether they liked it or not, could not be stopped or changed on the basis of "passion" alone. Rather, the writers' mission was to rediscover the meaning of life so as to re-establish their personal beliefs, and to search for a universal way of life in a dehumanizing socioeconomic system. Therefore, "the literary style shared by the writers is introspective, searching, analytical"; they express "a profound concern, an empathetic understanding of and compassion for society and the individuals"—especially the humble, disadvantaged ones—that make up that society.

The fact is, the polysemy of the literature of the 1960s does not derive from the multiplicity or complexity of interpretations or criticism. On the contrary, it comes from the conscious design of the writers and their full awareness of, and meticulous attention to, technique and form. To give an example, in speaking about revising his own work, Wang Wenxing (Wang Wen-hsing) points out that he focuses simultaneously on the symbolic and realistic dimensions of a literary work, which are both independent and interdependent, their relationship resembling the use of counterpoint in music composition. Thus, on the one hand, the work refers to a specific time and space, even to a particular social class and natural environment, that form the basis of realism. On the other hand, it goes beyond the realist structure and the meaning it is capable of relating, by employing imagery, symbols, tone, point of view, contrast, or irony. Many readers tend to focus

on one of the dimensions and fail to grasp both at the same time, especially when their reading is limited either by space or by theme.

For instance, Wang Wenxing's "Mingyun de jixian" [Flaw] is summed up by Bai Xianyong as an "initiation story." However, the temporal and geographical background against which the story takes place is specific: the narrator's middle-school days, when there were few automobiles on the streets; the National Normal University; Tongan (T'ung-an) Street in Taipei. "It was when the simple and natural Taipei just started on its path toward economic prosperity." The initiation is not limited to an adolescent's sexual awakening and disillusionment. The woman he secretly admires is a petit bourgeois capitalist of the newly rising clan-based enterprises. She lives in a modern three-story building, owns a store, and rents out apartments; she also runs an underground loan association. In the end, the narrator is disillusioned by her bankrupting of others, which causes the maid for the narrator's family, who represents good, simple-hearted workers, to lose all the money she has saved for her child's education. Therefore, he is disillusioned not just about the fact that "the human world" or "human life" is imperfect, but also about a capitalist society entering a period of economic boom. Before the story ends, the narrator says:

> Mother saw me come in and started mumbling:
>
> "What do you know, what do you know! The human heart is getting worse and worse year after year. Now that many people are making a fortune, there are more and more scams too. The streets look prosperous all right, but if the human heart is degenerate, what's so good about prosperity?"

When the woman with "a beautiful, kind face" turns out to be a con artist, the protagonist finally abandons his aimless life and infatuation with her and decides to concentrate on studying: "I am ready to listen to my mother and start reviewing my school work." The story is told by a middle-aged narrator, who recounts events between the spring and summer when he was eleven years old. The "I" of the narrator and the eleven-year-old "I" he refers to represent two ages, two experiences, two states of mind that are dialectically related to each other, thus conveying a meaning that is rich, yet hard to pinpoint. Further, the idiosyncratic grown-up narrator is no more reliable and trustworthy than the infatuated boy of eleven. It is clear that the author does not want to present the narrator as his spokesman. The technique of using an unreliable narrator is essential to the complex, multifarious world of art and feeling of many writers in the 1960s. The interaction and fusion of realism and symbolism is referred to by Wai-lim Yip as "abstract realism" in poetry.

In a magazine called *Ouzhou* [Europe], a critic writing under the pen name Jiang Meng (Chiang Meng) engages in a detailed and profound explication of the poem "Fengjing No. 2" [Scenery no. 2] by Lin Hengtai (Lin Heng-t'ai). He analyzes the poem in terms of diction, syntax, structure, imagery, and psychological mode, always focusing on the "symbolic" dimension of the poem, despite Lin's own claim:

> A series of epistemological subversions result in a structural change. The two "Scenery" poems are written under such circumstances. . . . When an experiment reaches this stage, we can almost say it is at the very end of experimentation. In a fundamental way, the two poems reject rhetoric and move toward structural and methodological strategies. In other words, they abandon the search for and careful construction of semantics and reduce their dependence on semantics to the minimum, so that each word becomes an "existence." In view of this, if the critic has not experienced the epistemological subversion but withdraws into [a discussion of] rhetorical strategies, then what is meant to be a "three-dimensional existence" is reduced to a "flat pictorial design."

Yet if we take a look at the poem itself, we will realize that anyone who has ridden on the westbound coastal train in Taiwan and has seen the scenery flitting by the window will find it highly realistic and mimetic with regard to the actual experience:

beyond the windbreak
there still is
windbreak beyond
the windbreak there still
is windbreak
beyond there still is
yet the sea and the rank of waves
yet the sea and the rank of waves

The poem is reminiscent of this couplet from a classical poem: "Mountains rise from human faces / Clouds are born next to horses' heads." When we observe and understand it from the angle of experience rather than from the angle of existence, the verse does not necessarily sound paradoxical. In fact, many so-called strange or obscure expressions actually effect a deeper, more realistic mimesis of experience.

To give another example, here is the first poem in Luo Fu's *Shishi zhi siwang* [Death in the stone chamber]:

> When inadvertently I raise my head and look toward my neighbor's hallway, I am stunned
> In the early morning that man betrays death with his naked body

> Allowing a black tributary to roar through his veins
> So I am stunned. I sweep across the stone wall with my eyes
> Carving two bloody grooves on it.

If we know that Luo Fu was at the time in the tunnels of "stone walls" in the Taiwu (T'ai-wu) Mountain, writing during bombings on the battlefield of Jinmen (Kinmen), the above lines are quite intelligible. By the same token, if we are familiar with such traditional poetic sequences as the eighty-two "Grievances" of Yuan Ji or the fifty "Ancient Airs" of Li Po, which link the poems in the sequence like a chain, then the sixty-four poems of *Death in the Stone Chamber* demonstrate the continuity of Chinese poetic sensibility. Wang Wenxing's *Jiabian* [Family catastrophe] consists of fifteen fragments labeled A through O, which depict how the protagonist looks for his missing father, and 157 fragments numbered 1 through 157, which present his memories of life with his father. The structure of the novel is reminiscent not only of the above-mentioned tradition of poetic sequence, but also of the Ming-Qing (Ming-Ch'ing) tradition of the personal essay, including Mao Pijiang (Mao P'i-chiang)'s *Yingmeian xiyu* [Reminiscences of the plum shadow studio], Jiang Tan (Chiang T'an)'s *Qiudeng suoyi* [Trivial remembrances under the autumn lamp], and Shen Fu's *Fusheng liuji* [Six chapters of a floating life]. Wang has not necessarily read these works, but he has said that he enjoys Zhang Dai's *Taoan mengyi* [Dreamlike reminiscences of the tao studio] and treats the *Liaozhai zhiyi* [Strange tales from the liao studio] as a coherent novel rather than a collection of stories. Given this knowledge, it may be argued that his structural and rhetorical strategies in the controversial novel did not appear out of the blue and in fact can be viewed as a different kind of realism.

Literature of the 1960s is full of juxtapositions of two or more spatial and temporal points. Bai Xianyong's *Taibei ren* [Taipei characters] quotes the classical poem "Black Gown Lane," by the Tang poet Liu Yuxi (Liu Yu-hsi), as the epigraph to the collection of stories:

> Wild flowers and grass by the Vermilion Sparrow Bridge
> Setting Sun aslant at the mouth of the Black Gown Lane
> Erstwhile swallows before the noble houses of Wang and Hsieh
> Now fly into ordinary people's homes

The poem is more than a metaphorical allusion in terms of its theme. Its juxtaposition of disparate times and spaces also underlines the basic structure of the stories in the collection. The composition of *Taipei Characters* clearly harks back to James Joyce's *Dubliners*. But the structure of the book, which opens with "The Eternal Snow Beauty" and closes with

"State Funeral," is even more reminiscent of classical Chinese poetic sequences and reflects the interplay between universality and particularity among the diverse groups of people who fled to Taiwan from the mainland in the late 1940s. The two temporal and spatial frames clearly refer to the present in Taipei against the background of the past on the mainland. There is a contrast between multiplicity and unity, yet the splendid glory of the past is replaced by the pitiful decline of the present. Although Wang Wenxing's *Longtianlou* [Lung-t'ien Hall] is a single work, it employs multiple narrative points of view of the guests at the banquet, thus achieving the effect of unity through multiplicity. It emphasizes the plight of running away from war and exile. In this sense, the horrifying and bizarre nature of the narrative is distinguishable from the lyricism and sentimentality of *Taipei Characters*.

However, the juxtaposition of Taipei and mainland China is only one of the binary structures popular in the 1960s. There is also the juxtaposition between the Restoration and the Japanese Occupation, or between Taiwan and the South Pacific. For instance, both Chen Yingzhen's "A Village Teacher" and Huang Chunming's "Uncle Gengeng's Twilight" focus on the tragedy of those who suffered or were wounded in battle in the South Pacific; even when they returned to Taiwan, they could not recover or adapt to a new life. Wu Zhinxiang (in the first story) commits suicide, and Ah Xing (in the second) becomes insane. These stories reflect the trials and tribulations of the transition time in Taiwan, which are comparable to those of the Civil War on the mainland.

The above-mentioned "Molten Iron" and "Flaw" are geographically located in mainland China and Taipei, and their time periods are different; they nevertheless belong to the same kind of binary structure in that there is no shift in geographical location, yet the cultural changes reflect two spatial and temporal frames—the traditional town and the modern society. Whether they display nostalgia or a tendency toward the new, the irreversible changes described in the stories can be summed up as the indomitable fate of the protagonists.

A third kind of binary structure depicts the protagonist as a drifter who travels from the rural village to the city, or who for various reasons returns, or yearns to return, from the city to the village. The village may be completely different from the city, and symbolizes the pure land in the drifter's mind. Examples are Huang Chunming's "Liangge youqi jiang" [Two painters] and "Shayounala, zaijian" [Sayonara, goodbye], and Chen Yingzhen's "Night Freight"—all of which belong to the 1970s and beyond.

The binary structures discussed above reflect recent historical and political transitions (the restoration of Taiwan and the retreat of the Nationalist government to Taiwan) on the one hand, and the social and

cultural changes from tradition to modernity on the other. Regardless of its rhetorical strategies and style, such reflection itself indicates the central experience of the time period, which can be described as upheaval. As the title of Peter F. Drucker's 1968 book *The Age of Discontinuity* suggests, the irreversible and disruptive nature of the discontinuity is not necessarily unique to Taiwan. Another index of such discontinuity is Margaret Mead's notion of "generation gap." To some extent, the restoration of Taiwan, the retreat of the Nationalist government to the island, and the modernization of economy and society there followed one another so closely that the impact on Taiwan society has been particularly strong and fierce, yet concrete and traceable. Therefore, in contrast to the West, there was no "Lost Generation" due to the loss of values. One representation of the situation reflects on the past versus the present, an approach reminiscent of much Tang poetry with the theme "Things remain but the people are gone." It serves as a convenient semantic and interpretive structure for writers in the 1960s. Such juxtaposition of the past and the present usually treats events as part of the endless cycle of history and produces lyrical modern accounts that look back to the past and sigh over the present. What receives more attention in the literature of the 1960s than in classical poetry, however, is stylistic experimentation and exploration in order to convey concrete experience.

Further, whether it is the past of Taiwan or the past of the mainland that is the focus of the reflection, it is carried out from the point of view of Taiwan in the present. The binary structure allows a search for roots despite the awareness of discontinuity, so as to interpret the present, even to reconnect the disconnected life, history, and meaning. Different ethnic groups and social classes empathize with one another, making possible mutual understanding. The creation of this kind of literature may not be highly conscious, but it implies a desire and maybe a necessity to recognize and accept the fact that all the people in Taiwan are in the same boat. Therefore, the production and popularization of this kind of literature serves an undeniable social function.

Modernization is equated with Westernization, even Americanization. International exchange increases rapidly as a result of developments in transportation and communication. When people in most parts of the world simultaneously watched man land on the moon on TV, the so-called Global Village had in fact come into existence. When the Vietnam War appeared in most people's living rooms as they watched the news on TV, when American soldiers on vacation on the island strolled on the streets of Taipei, when Taiwan shifted its trade emphasis to exports, the world was in effect like everyone's backyard. It was under these circumstances in the 1960s that works claiming to "look outward to the world" and "gaze afar

at outer space" were born. Yu Guangzhong's "Zhijiage" [Chicago], Xia Jing (Hsia Ching)'s "Ziyou shenxiang" [The Statue of Liberty], and Luo Fu's "Xigong shichao" [Poems of Saigon] were all based on personal experience, while Ya Xian (Ya Hsien)'s "Chicago," "Bali" [Paris], "Lunduen" [London], and "Nabulesi" [Naples] were more like Yu's "Ruguo yuanfang you zhanzheng" [If there is a war raging afar] or Luo Men (Lo Men)'s "Danpian, Tron de duantui" [Shrapnel, Tron's broken leg], which were predicated on indirect experience. In the footnote to the last poem, Luo Men says: "Tron is a Vietnamese little girl whose leg was blown off by the Viet Cong (see the December 1968 issue of *Life*)." An expanded version of this perspective can be seen in Ya Xian's "Ruge de xingban" [Andante cantabile], where foreign fiction and film provide rich material:

> The necessity of the basic understanding that you are not Hemingway
> The necessity of the European War, rain, cannons, weather, and the Red Cross

The poem ends with these lines:

> Bodhisattva is on the distant mountain
> Poppies are in the poppy field

The first line may refer to the Bodhisattva Mountain in suburban Taipei or a mountain where there is a Bodhisattva temple. The poppy field may refer to the southwest of China, which is part of the Golden Triangle, a major narcotics center. Or, consider these lines from Ya Xian's "Xiawu" [Afternoon]:

> Sappho works in the
> bakery across the street
> .....
> By the railroad track is Ulysses who stretches out his hand whenever he sees a passerby
> Choose any danger for God, if you will
> .....
> The boy in a red jacket has a handsome face
> Shooting baskets on the court all by himself
> .....
> (Behind the curtain I miss you I miss you in the city with cobbled streets)
> (I miss you amid brocades amid scented night blossoms between the red and gray of a song)
> (I think gently of beautiful Xianyang)

Lines such as these combine the classical and the modern, Chinese and Western, and create a marvelous point of view in that the elements both

interpret and mock each other. They fuse heterogeneous temporal and spatial frames to form an expanded space and time continuum that embraces both Chinese and Western culture.

The experience of multifarious space and time can be conveyed by the parallelism omnipresent in Tang poetry. However, for Taiwan in the 1960s, the spiritual crisis resulting from a discontinuous society and cultural clashes posed a serious challenge. The disaster of the Civil War on the mainland, the divide between the two regimes along the Taiwan Straits, and the uncertainty of Taiwan's future gave rise to a new generation of students whose goal was to study abroad and to emigrate. It also created a "Literature of Overseas Students," a new subgenre in which characters are commonly destined to live discontinuous lives. In addition to homesickness, they suffer from a crisis of cultural identity. They settle down and become naturalized citizens in a foreign country, yet they insist on writing in Chinese. The phenomenon itself suggests schizophrenia. It differs from the binary structure of mainland China/Taiwan or Japanese Occupation/Restoration, which, although they represented discontinuity, nevertheless expressed a collective experience; individuals did not have to assume the responsibility of giving coherence to life and endowing it with a new meaning. In Bai Xianyong's "Zhexianji" [A Chinese girl in New York], and "Zhijiage zhisi" [Death in Chicago], Li Tong (nicknamed "China") and Wu Hanhun (literally meaning "Chinese Soul") first resort to a hedonistic lifestyle, but both end up committing suicide. Whether the dichotomy is China/U.S.A. or Taiwan/U.S.A., these works reveal an identity crisis and a failure to reach a resolution or compromise.

When the continuity of the social context of existence ends abruptly as a result of some unexpected disaster, adjustments in daily life and re-evaluation of the norms of conduct can be difficult, underlined by regret and resentment, or they can be carried on with a high degree of self-awareness. The re-evaluation after a rupture is expressed in the form of allegory in Qi Dengsheng (Ch'i-teng-sheng)'s "Woai heiyanzhu" [I love black eyes]. The choice Li Longdi makes is not that different from that represented in the Sun poet Yan Shu's song lyric "Rinsing Gauze by the Stream":

> Mountains and rivers fill my eyes, but I miss those far away
> Flowers fall in the wind and rain; I am more saddened by spring
> May as well give my love to the one before me.

But the protagonist moralizes his choice. He changes his name to Ya Zipie and insists: "Why can't a man look for the new meaning of life in each present moment?" Consequently, he denies his true feeling. He is obsessed with discontinuity and tries to re-establish meaning in life by

treating a special situation as if it were a universal human situation. What he in fact says is that "life" as a continuous process does not have any meaning; what is left is the "meaning of life" in the eternally momentary "now." This dialectic of continuity and discontinuity not only touches the wound of history but also is the regular condition for people in the flux of life. All eternal or long-term human relationships and meanings of life are questioned by the potentially new—if we can face it truthfully.

The cause of confusion about the meaning of life is not only the discontinuity of daily conditions but also the juxtaposition of Eastern and Western cultures. Culture can no longer ensure a common outlook of society or create a dependable world that can protect, even preserve, the meaning and value of life. Ideas about life are like fashions in clothing; they are decorative but cannot serve as anchors. Both Chen Yingzhen's "Tang Qian de xiju" [Tang Qian's comedy] and Wang Shangyi's "Dabei zhou" [The great mercy incantation] satirize the disappearance of true faith and belief. Existentialism, logical empiricism, and American technology and its open and free lifestyle are, for Tang Qian, all but (Freudian, deconstructive?) cover-ups of sexual impotence and castration anxiety. "The Great Mercy Incantation" begins with a "conclusion," which states: "The truth is we still don't have any faith." Never mind that "Plato, Hegel, and Kant are in one circle, Lao Zi, Zhuang Zi, Sakyamuni Gautama, Nietzsche are in another"; never mind that the protagonist whom the narrator admires becomes a Buddhist monk: "Although he tries to look confident and optimistic, he finds it hard to repress his nihilistic nature." "He keeps searching, keeps craving, imagining, undermining preconceived ideas, trying not to take life too seriously. But he cannot see through life. The world does not lack smart people; they must know that if they can read the Great Mercy Buddhist incantation, they can also read Kant, Hegel, or even Sartre. Many must have done it, but they still have not found liberation." When many cultures and ideas come together in an explosion of knowledge, people not only are confused about which direction to take, but, more important, they are deprived of the possibility to truly believe: "For many years now we have not been able to hold on to the present. We float, drift, chase, abandon; we are negated by existence, swayed by the wind of emptiness, torn up and buried by pain." The pain comes from two sources. It is the price that one has to pay for refusing to live "with no sorrow or piety, like a broken brick, impoverished, acrimonious, heartless." It is also the separation of belief—which is only an imitation of fashionable ideas—from life, "with no compassion, no knowing what one is doing." Consequently, "he can only see his lips moving slightly, making a monotonous and sharp sound, like a tearless sob, making no sense at all."

In a pluralistic culture, there is no consensus. Belief is but a "hastily put together circus, offering mediocre performances." For those who do not want to live in an unthinking state, the search for meaning becomes a lonely, painful quest. Whether in "Wode didi kangxiong" [My younger brother Kang Xiong] or "Diyijian chaishi" [My first assignment], the "existential heroes" of Chen Yingzhen's stories cannot be fully understood by the narrator. Although it is possible for them to have everything, their suicide marks the failure of their lonely quest, which results from their lack of true compassion and self-transcendence. In Wang Shangyi's "The Great Mercy Incantation," the narrator has at least two close friends who engage in the same quest; even the protagonist, who is "envied by everyone and is pitied by everyone," is guided by his teacher. Therefore, even if they do not achieve liberation, they do not necessarily fall into total despair.

Industrialization and commercialization have estranged people, who increasingly live lonely, monotonous lives. Some even have to live in a distorted way: on the job Pan Dilin has to hang upside down in midair; Kunshu in Huang Chunming's "Erzi de dawanou" [My son's big doll] has to wear cardboard and work as a walking advertisement. In a society that lacks a strong tradition and universal beliefs, the only way to avoid such a fate is to establish deep personal ties (such as the concern Kunshu has for his wife and son, or the love and yearning that Baimei in "Kanhai de rizi" [Flowers on a rainy night] has for her family and child), to refuse to live like a skeptic:

> The necessity of balcony, the sea, and smiles
> The necessity of laziness
> And since one is regarded a river one has to keep on flowing
> The world is always like this . . .
> (Ya Xian, "Ruge de xingban" [Andante cantabile])

> At three o'clock in the morning a drowned man's clothes drift ashore
> from the sea
> And getting her into bed is harder than
> Excavations in Greece
> When the sound of the motorcycle fades away
> The Epicureans start singing
>
> —Can teeth in the grave answer these questions
> Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, all the days?
> (Ya Xian, "Xiawa" [Afternoon])

The condition of existence is closer to the description in Luo Men's "Siwang zhi ta" [Pavilion of death]:

life is but the sky's color folded in a black umbrella
sounds of wave laid out in the wind
after the banquet servants are the busiest tomb sweepers
on the wedding night the Aegean Sea's lute is broken by a howling beast
once we lit up a medal with applause
once we entered a dark alley that Maria did not recognize
once we confused day and night because of a rumor or a praise
and we are always too strange to know each other's name
always can't figure out when birds will fly out of their wings
Outside the Pavilion of Death there is only "futile passion."

Such is the impasse of life for people who have lost their beliefs in the pluralistic culture, lost continuity in a swiftly changing society, and, finding themselves trapped in loneliness and anxiety, lost their profound long-term emotional ties. Using allegory, Wang Wenxing points to the root of the problem and almost answers the questions raised in Ya Xian's "Afternoon." In "Zui kuaile de shi" [The happiest thing], Wang writes about a young man who has just experienced sex for the first time. He opens his eyes and stares at the ceiling, away from the woman on the bed, and at the street downstairs through the window: "The ice-cold, empty paved street looks like an anemic woman's face. The sky is gray and misty, giving no clue of distance. The cement buildings are all in a state of paralysis. He has been watching the same street, sky, and buildings for more than two months. So far there's still no sign of the weather changing." But the young man obviously refuses the escapism of "The world is always like this" and "Since one is regarded a river one has to keep on flowing." Therefore, he makes the following confession and commits suicide the same afternoon:

> "They all say this is the happiest thing, *but how loathsome and ugly it was!*" he said to himself.
>
> A few minutes later, he asked himself:
>
> "If indeed as they say, this is the happiest thing, then is there no other happy thing?"

After all, the simplistic assumption that life is the pursuit of happiness cannot explain or resolve our need to search for and realize its meaning. The literature of the 1960s is filled with images and thoughts of death and insanity. It reflects not the plight of a time when survival is difficult, but rather the effort to look for a higher meaning in life while caught in the gap between cultures. The use of symbolism and allegory rather than down-to-earth reality stimulates contemplation of such issues.

The above discussion has focused on modern poetry and fiction, with some references to the modern essay, in the 1960s. As to modern drama, to the best of my knowledge, Yao Yiwei is the only playwright who fuses tradition with modernity, combining the West and China. Integrating various performing traditions, he discovers modern significance in classical settings and instills classical depth into modern life. In short, there is an affinity between his work and the works that have been discussed in this essay.

Is there modernism in the literature of the 1960s? It is arguable, since it may well depend on how we define the term. However, the "new" literature of the 1960s is distinguishable from other periods. Although most of the writers were young, their works, whether in terms of artistic expression or depth and breadth of thoughts, went beyond pure experimentation and reached a degree of maturity. In contrast to the May Fourth or the War of Resistance periods, literature of the 1960s owes its achievements partly to the peaceful time and partly to the access to various resources from Chinese and foreign, ancient and modern traditions. Its perspective is broad and yet based on native reality; its technique is multifaceted and its substance rich. We may say that it embodies a felicitous union of form and content.

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