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Poetry Movements in Taiwan from the 1950s to the late 1970s: Breaks and Continuities

Alain Leroux

EDITOR'S NOTE

Translated by Jonathan Hall

- 1 The historical beginnings of modern poetry in Taiwan² can be traced back to the Retrocession (the return of the island to the Republic of China after the Japanese surrender in 1945), or, more pertinently still, back to 1949 when the remnants of Chang Kai-shek's army and administration retreated to Taiwan. It is not that nothing had happened in the Chinese and Japanese literature of the previous period—in fact, this literature is being rediscovered—but the historical circumstances of those times disrupted any direct continuity. Apart from a few exceptional cases, it took another twenty years for an authentically Taiwanese heritage to reappear on the literary scene. After 1946, the Nationalist government implemented a policy of imposing Chinese culture and language, which meant effectively removing Japanese influences, and this opened a rift between the administration with its official culture and the Taiwanese, upon whom the Japanese had imposed the exclusive use of their language after 1936. Consequently, all political and cultural control on the island passed into the hands of the new arrivals from the Mainland.³
- 2 During these early years, those who were to play a leading role in the development of modern literature and poetry brought with them their recent inheritance from Chinese history, with all its struggles and problems. Principal among these were the still ongoing civil war between the Nationalists and the Communists, and the recently concluded conflict with Japan. And in a more distant way there were all the consequences of the May 4th Movement, which itself had been the outcome of the

earlier traumatic encounters between China and the West (from the fall of the Qing dynasty to the early days of the Republic).

- 3 Modern poetry in Taiwan inherits all of this as its point of departure. That is why it is useful to make a preliminary survey—as briefly as possible for the purposes of this article—to cover the preceding thirty years going back to the May 4th Movement and its consequences. It was during this period that those questions first arose that were later to confront modern Taiwanese poetry, concerning the language and form of poetry as well as its cultural situation and social role.
- 4 In Taiwan, in accordance with the KMT programme for literature and the arts drawn up in 1942,⁴ and in order to maintain the morale of its troops, the army set up an active cultural service. While encouraging cultural activities and the preservation of traditions, this also ensured the maintenance of the correct political line. As for new poetry in this context, what we find is the newspaper publication of material which could best be described as more or less well versified slogans. This was a literature stripped of reality, which barely concealed defeat and cultural collapse. Moreover, the surrounding climate for several years was one of ever-present paranoia, spy-mania, and arbitrary police action.⁵

The Modernist movement and "horizontal transplantation"

- 5 In this atmosphere a reaction against official art arose, led by people with higher demands. The first of these leading figures were those who had taken part in literary movements before the war: Ch'in Tzu-hao 覃子豪, who had been involved with the Crescent Moon 新月, founded a literary supplement, which he called *Blue Star* 藍星; Chi Hsien 紀弦, who had taken part in the group led by Dai Wangshu in Shanghai, relaunched a journal under the same name of *New Poetry Xin shi* 新詩 in 1952, which then became *Xiandai shi* 現代詩 in 1953 (*Modern Poetry*). Its primary purpose was to continue the aims of Dai Wangshu "to express modern emotions, as felt by modern people in modern life, through modern poems in modern language".⁶
- 6 With regard to poetic form, Chi Hsien made some clear-cut choices which were to exercise a decisive influence over the early development of poetry in Taiwan. For him "poetry is not chained to musicality; it must be free,"⁷ it had won its independence in the nineteenth century, when it bid farewell to music, a freedom he dated back to Baudelaire's prose poems. Hence, Chi Hsien concluded, the need to abandon every rule, rhyme and metre, in short every pre-existent form into which the poem must be squeezed. Instead, each poem must create its own form, which is therefore determined by its content.
- 7 A little later, Chi Hsien adopted an even more radical stance. He took to extremes the Westernising trend which had appeared with the May 4th Movement, but he broke with all the subsequent developments, particularly those which came after the 1930s. In February 1956, his "Modern Poetry" issued a new manifesto intended to set Taiwanese poetry in the context of the worldwide Modernist trend, or rather, trends. The first article proclaimed, "We are a group belonging to the Modernist school, who keep alive the spirit and the poetic practices of all the innovative poetic schools which have flourished since Baudelaire". His journal thus claimed as its only inheritance all international poetic movements since Baudelaire. For him the correlative to this Westernisation was the total refusal of Chinese traditions, ancient and modern.

- 8 The second article in the manifesto summed up this position with a formulation that was bound to provoke a vigorous response: "We believe that the new poetry is a horizontal transplant (橫的移植, *hengde yizhi*), not a vertical inheritance".⁸ It was this second article that aroused the greatest controversy. Its proclamation of the abandonment of everything that made up the Chinese tradition, in favour of an international modernity, provoked violent polemics. "Horizontal transplantation" was seen as the end of Chinese cultural identity. Despite this furore, Chi Hsien continued to insist, in a commentary on his manifesto, that "our new, universal poetry is not the expression of a "national essence" like the T'ang poems or the Sung Ballads".⁹

7 and 6 - Chi Hsien

A stick in the hand 7
A pipe in the mouth 6
The number 7 is like a stick.
The number 6 is like a pipe.
And here I am.

The stick 7 plus the pipe 6 = me 13

A poet. A genius.
The unluckiest of numbers!

Oh, a tragedy.
Tragedy tragedy here I am.
And you clap your hands and cheer.

7與6 - 紀弦

拿著手杖7
咬著煙鬥6
數字7是具備了手杖的型態的。
數字6是具備了煙鬥的型態的。
於是我來了。

手杖7 + 煙鬥6 = 13之我

一個詩人。一s個天才。
一個最不幸的數字！

唔，一個悲劇。
悲劇悲劇我來了。
於是你們鼓掌，你們喝采。

- 9 Shunned by the conservatives, Chi Hsien received widespread acceptance among the younger poets of the time. About a hundred of them enrolled under the banner of the Modernist School, which brought together various poets who had assimilated the Western traditions, like Fang Ssu 方思, (known particularly for his translations of Rilke), several native Taiwanese poets, such as Pai Ch'iu 白萩, and Lin Heng-t'ai 林亨泰, who had been educated under the Japanese occupation and were ill at ease with the Chinese language but had become familiar with foreign poetry through Japanese channels, and other young poets who nonetheless remained sensitive to the Chinese tradition, like Cheng Ch'ou-yu 鄭愁予. There were still others who, because of the war and more recent upheavals, had often received only an erratic education and whose literary formation might be called somewhat summary.

Landscape No. 2 - Lin Heng-t'ai

Lines of trees to break the wind
 And beyond them other
 Lines of trees
 And beyond them other
 Lines of trees
 And beyond them others

And now the sea and the lines made by the waves
 And now the sea and the lines made by the waves
風景no.2 -林亨泰

防風林的
 外邊還有
 防風林的
 外邊還有
 防風林的
 外邊還有

然而海 以及波的羅列
 然而海 以及波的羅列

- 10 No doubt that was one of the reasons for the enthusiastic reception of "Modern Poetry". This was a call for a literature which deliberately saw itself as rootless, even as it projected a largely abstract vision of the West; and the reason why it elicited such a response from men and from women who had been thrown this way and that by History, was because they saw themselves being led to a new promised land with only their talent and imagination to rely upon.
- 11 Even those who were culturally better equipped suffered from the consequences of exile, which included being cut off from their native land and its emotional ties, but also from the cultural links and the physical reminders of China's past. Moreover, more recent books and documents were not available, even when they were not banned. These included the better part of all the cultural achievements since the 1930s. Under such circumstances, the West was able to provide a certain intellectual sustenance which, moreover, the regime was inclined to tolerate. This point cannot be overstated. In those years, the enabling condition for the development of modern poetry was the refocusing of creativity onto a purified poetry which, in opposition to the dominant ideology, allowed for the expression of individual feelings, and the rejection of politics, or rather its separation from artistic creation.
- 12 The leading personalities were too diverse to allow this school to develop a genuinely homogeneous style, even if that had been its intention. Nonetheless it enabled the exploration of all sorts of structural plays with meaning, formal experiments, calligrams and innovative page layouts. Admittedly, the themes and materials of these poems were often inspired by Western literature.¹⁰ And while the dominant themes were the tragic self's feelings of exile, nostalgia and solitude, it nevertheless managed to present them within a perspective free of both sentimentality and the stale presuppositions of everyday speech.
- 13 Although this school was dissolved a few years later, leaving Chi Hsien with the sense of having failed to "precipitate", as in chemistry, the production of modern Chinese poems, nonetheless poetry in Taiwan was definitively marked by his exacting demands.

From him it acquired its concern for intellectual content, its refusal of emotional outpouring, its careful attention to expression, and its condensed use of language.

- 14 However, one consequence of the positions taken by his journal was a certain abandonment of the sound of a poem, and a vacillation between poetry and prose, leaving the question of the specifically *poetic* quality of a poetic text broadly unanswered.

The *Blue Star*, and the defence of the lyrical tradition

- 15 Reacting against Chi Hsien's intellectualism, his "horizontal transplantation", and the Modernist tendency in general, a group was formed around Ch'in Tzu-hao, editor of the *Blue Star* literary supplement, whose intention was to maintain the lyrical tradition. They did not repudiate the whole Chinese tradition, either in the form of its ancient classical heritage or its more recent developments in the 1920s, particularly in the works of the Crescent Moon, such as Wen Yiduo 聞一多 and Xü Zhimo 徐志摩.
- 16 Those who gathered around the *Blue Star* were more like an informal group than an organised movement. One of its leading lights, Yang Mu 楊牧, referred to it as a literary "salon". This point is illustrated by Yü Kwang-chung's recollections of its creation: "We never elected a president, and still less did we issue a manifesto or proclaim some 'ism' or other. On the whole, our gatherings were a reaction against Chi Hsien. He wanted to transplant contemporary poetry into Chinese soil, and we were totally against that. Even though we may not have considered our mission to be the perpetuation of the Chinese poetic tradition, that does not mean that we were willing to blindly carry out his horizontal transplantation"¹¹
- 17 This group's indisputable role in the development of the poetry of Taiwan was due to the personality of its members¹² and the quality of their works, rather than to its theoretical positions. Nevertheless, violent polemics with the Modernists broke out, often with Yü Kwang-chung at their centre, over such issues as the importance of prosody, the need to maintain verse, the concern with creating new stable forms, and the role of tradition. On several occasions, however, Yü Kwang-chung took an opposing position and resolutely defended the new poetry against the proponents of classicism, which, in the first years or even decades, still represented the dominant trend in the intellectual establishment.

Solitude - Chou Meng-tieh

Tailing the dusk
 Quietly creeping up from behind to enfold me, wrap around me
 An incomplete moon hangs lonely in the sky
 Reflected in the reed-tangled bed of the stream
 The surface of the stream as clear as the glass in a mirror
 With now and then a floating wisp of white cloud
 And the shadows of birds crying softly as they skim the water

Sitting cross-legged
 I see myself on the bank
 See my shadow in the water

Roused from contemplation, I smile
 And with a twig snapped from a willow
 On the unblemished surface of the water

I carefully trace the character for "man"

Once, twice, three times...

寂寞-周夢蝶

寂寞躡手躡腳的地

尾著黃昏

悄悄打我背後裡來裏來,裏來

缺月孤懸天中

又返照於荇藻交橫的溪底

溪面如鏡晶澈

紙偶爾有幾瓣白雲冉冉

幾點飛鳥輕噪著渡影掠水過.....

我跣坐著

看了看岸上的我自己

在看看投影在水裏的

醒然一笑

把一根斷枯的柳枝

在沒一絲破綻的水面上

著意點畫著「人」字

一個,兩個,三個.....

18 The *Blue Star* also played a leading role in extending the influence of modern poetry, whether through its publication of single authors and collected works, or through organising group recitals and public readings. Both of these activities helped the younger generations to appreciate the new poetry.

19 With the benefit of several years' hindsight, the differences between these schools probably appear less clear cut; Westernisation, along with the repudiation of tradition, seems mainly a matter of degree. However, it was above all the poets of the *Blue Star* group who, having made the greatest effort to sift through the Western imports, and having maintained with the greatest deliberation the taste for Chinese traditions, were the first to introduce the practice of re-interpreting the classical tradition. Because of this, they also made the biggest contribution towards gaining acceptance for modern poetry.

"Epoch" and the exploration of limits

20 The third journal to make a decisive contribution appeared in 1954. This was *Chuangshiji* 創世紀 (*Epoch*, or alternatively *Genesis* or *Creation*, according to other translations). After *Modern Poetry* and the *Blue Star* this journal, which followed the direction opened up by the May 4th Movement, gave a new impulse to poetry in Taiwan in the 1960s.

21 *Chuangshiji* was launched by three young men, Lo Fu 洛夫, Ya Hsien 痲弦, and Chang Mo 張默, who were naval officers at the time. Their primary intention was to "assert the national direction in the new poetry".¹³ In that sense, like *Blue Star*, it was set up in reaction against "horizontal transplantation". In an article entitled "The form of the new national poetry"¹⁴, the new journal advanced two criteria. The first of these was general in nature: the new poetry must have "an oriental and specifically Chinese flavour" and it must "take advantage of the particular qualities of the Chinese language in order to express the life experience of an oriental people"; the second was more technical: there must be no purely psychological or emotional display of feeling. On the

contrary, the poem must be "an expressive image, and the development of its meanings". To refuse the immediate expression of the ideas or emotions, one might say, amounts to "probing the verse", except that in this instance it was less a question of poetry than prose. Once rhyme and metre have been discarded, and even the particular page layout of poetry has disappeared, what is left to distinguish it from prose? To this question, which had been left open since Baudelaire's "Spleen de Paris", and to which Chi Hsien had found no real answer, *Epoch* replied "the image". And it is most likely that this reflection on the image is what led the group to place itself under the banner of Western Modernism and even, in the end, of "horizontal transplantation".

- 22 So in 1959, this group set about fomenting its "new revolution in the new poetry". To the same degree that it had once seen itself as representing national traditions, it now saw itself as a voice of universal poetry. In this second phase, which occurred in the 1960s, there were two major contributions from this group (which does not mean that these were their sole activities), namely the adoption of surrealism and a poetics of pure experience.
- 23 Did André Breton ever know that in Taiwan, far from the *rue Fontaine*, there were poets proclaiming their adherence to surrealism? Yet, at that time at least, those poets had never read his Surrealist Manifestos. As Lo Fu wrote, "Of course, the surrealist works of our poets were not written as a result of understanding French surrealism, and even less after reading André Breton's 'Manifestes du Surréalisme' or other texts, reports, or programmes. In reality, they were influenced by the literary works of the French surrealists and, more broadly by those from other countries".¹⁵
- 24 One of the leading representatives of this surrealism was Shang Ch'in 商禽, who excelled in the prose poem. Although this tendency was unable to take up the task of total revolution, it nonetheless impelled its adherents to free themselves from the constraints of logic and to shake off social and moral norms, at least in their writing, by combining dreams with realism, and summoning up the unconscious. They occasionally practiced a somewhat controlled automatic writing, granting to objective chance and unexpected affinities their share in the final outcome.

Death in a stone cell - Lo Fu

Happening to raise my head towards my neighbour's corridor, I am transfixed
At dawn, his body naked, he has rebelled against death
Sending a black tributary roaring through his veins
I am transfixed, and when my gaze sweeps the stone wall
I see two bloody grooves cut into it

My face opens out like the bole of a tree, a tree matured in fire
All is still, only the eyes are moving behind their lids
Moving towards that of which many men dare not speak
And I am the bitter pear-tree cut down by the saw
In whose rings you can still hear clearly the wind and the cicadas
石室之死亡 - 洛夫

祇偶然昂首向鄰居的甬道，我便怔住
在清晨，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，我以目光掃過那坐石壁
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

- 25 Furthermore, for many years the main criterion for success in poetic writing was based on the idea of *tension* (張力), which ensured the poem's intensity as well as its capacity for epiphanic revelations. Tension should not be understood as a gap between a hypothetical degree zero of language—the absolutely direct language of ordinary speech—and the artistic language of poetry, but rather as a semantic distance within poetic discourse itself, between the terms constituting the image (whether through metaphors or metonymic associations). Moreover, these might be purely verbal constructions with no reference to external reality at all. In such cases, this poetry of tension goes beyond giving figural representation to the unconscious, to pose the possibility of creating images entirely free of representation.
- 26 Another way of opening the doors of mental space through forging a poetic instrument of increased plasticity was the poetry of *pure experience*, whose leading theoretician and best practitioner was Yip Wai-lim 葉維廉. Although this approach relies equally on the image, *pure experience* is not necessarily detached from the external world. It seeks to separate sensations from ideation, to seize the moment when objects of perception reach the surface of conscious awareness in all their immediacy, just before critical judgement reduplicates them in a representational language which fixes their identity. In other words, here poetry attempts to present a pure, intransitive, absolute "here is", and not an expositional "this is a".¹⁶

Meditation on the sky - Yip Wai-lim

1
 Suddenly
 illuminated by silence
 the mountains
 the light
 are ruffled by a keen wind

2
 Starlight
 soundlessly
 shakes
 the turbulent river

the dyke
 crumbles
 then
 a white bird
 plunges into the mountain air

Such a powerful negative!

3
 In the moon are mountains
 in the mountains a moon
 either

mountains
or
moon
mountain moon
moon mountain
flawed
split apart
knowing nothing of blood
攸-葉維廉

然突
自沈默亮起
山
光
被疾風吹皺了

負

星光
無聲
搖動
兇猛的河流

堤
崩便隨
白色的鳥
沉入山氣裏

啊好一個雄渾的負數

- 27 Later these poetic practices were criticised for escapism, subjectivism and even narcissism. It is true that the investigation of the poet's inner world and the search for a language of pure expression played a prominent role in them. But, leaving aside the point that the failures of mediocrities often conceal the successes of superior talents, it is no exaggeration to say that exile and loss of roots, in a virulent combination with a repressive regime and an all-enveloping psychosis, provide ample explanation of why they pursued this path, giving prominence to what they felt: *ennui*, anxious torment, the sense of an unchanging present, frustrated desire, loneliness, imprisonment, and helplessness.¹⁷
- 28 Existentialism, at that time, provided a major frame of reference. Of course, this was part of the general post-war climate. But in addition to their sense of being outsiders in the world, these poets had known the most extreme situations, such as war and the surrounding presence of death. Their detractors point to their nihilism, but it would be better to point to their laying bare of the human condition. As Lo Fu put it: "Hold a mirror before you, and you will not see the face of modern man, but the cruelty of his fate. Writing poems is a means of taking revenge on this fate".¹⁸
- 29 They have also been criticised for their hermetic language. Such obscurity may have been partly a protective measure against the obscurantism of the censors. As one of these poets told me, "we were smarter than they were".¹⁹ But obscurity, or what appeared as such, was probably a necessary consequence of their poetic practices. In all events, they certainly pushed the language to its limits, and more than any others, they

made a major contribution towards forging modern Chinese into a truly poetic instrument.²⁰

Bamboo Hat and collective memory in Taiwan

- 30 Twenty years after the Retrocession, and amidst all the developments which until then had been the work of the émigré poets, a voice was heard claiming to be specifically Taiwanese. In 1964, the journal *Li* 笠, meaning "bamboo hat", was set up. It has often been called "the fourth leg of the tripod", because it played a no less decisive role in the development of poetry in Taiwan than the three mentioned already, while at the same time it brought in new and different concerns. *Li* represented two interconnected phenomena, the resurgence of a properly Taiwanese collective memory and an engagement with the realities of the local situation. With one exception, this movement consisted entirely of native poets born in Taiwan. Like the name of the journal, this simple fact is a sufficient indication of the direction which the group set out to follow. As the journal proclaimed several years later, "we take our point of departure from the real historical and geographical situation of Taiwan. At the same time, we give a voice to the vicissitudes undergone in the years since our island's return to the motherland"²¹
- 31 Among the forty or so members associated with the journal *Li*, the youngest had been educated in Chinese, but those older had had to "step across the language gap", by learning Mandarin. Moreover that gap was precisely why they had had to wait before making their presence felt on the literary scene. In addition, many of them had some prior experience of modern poetry.²²
- 32 But their desire to establish a solid reconnection between the poetry of Taiwan and their native land itself, led them to turn their backs on those very avant-garde trends in which many of them had actually distinguished themselves in former times.²³ Instead of just representing themselves, they now intended to speak for all: "Standing upright on our island, with our two feet on our native soil, and knowing the experiences of all our people, we wish to sing of the great historical scenes which sadden or inspire us all".²⁴
- 33 Some readers at the time wished to see nothing but linguistic ineptitudes in the poems published by the journal. Such flaws might be explained by the fact that many of these poets had had to learn Chinese relatively late. But in fact, the simplicity of their diction was deliberate and linked directly to their intentions. They wanted to give expression to the daily lives of the people around them. Pai Ch'iu wrote that "the strength of language arises from the fact that it creates new relationships. A sentence may be very simple, for it is enough for it to uncover new potential relations in order to capture the human mind and carry it further, into a realm which will not be easily forgotten".²⁵ Clearly it was not for them a matter of simply reproducing a reflection of daily life. According to Huan Fu 桓夫, the reality effect that they aimed at consisted in "seeking the meanings in life, without getting lost in the mass of daily details, and trying to express them in a structured crystallisation".²⁶ It should be added that their poetry adopted a deliberately sarcastic tone, offering no illusions about society and history.

The sky - Pai Ch'iu

The sky must have the gentle bosom of a mother.
 Broad enough to sense the warmth of fresh blood, yet always comforting.
 But A Huo lies in a trench like a flower torn to shreds
 Felled by gunfire. His dying eyes look at the sky
 filled with fury at having been brought to life

never having asked to be born
 never having asked to die
 then, with difficulty, he raises his gun towards the sky
 and shoots it dead.
 天空 - 白萩

天空必有母親般溫柔的胸脯。
 那樣廣延，可以感到鮮血的溫暖，隨時保持著慰撫的姿態。
 而阿火躺在撕碎的花朵般的戰壕
 為槍所擊傷。雙眼垂死的望著天空
 充滿成為生命的懊恨
 不自願的被出生
 不自願的被死亡
 然後他艱難地舉槍朝著天空
 將天空射殺。

- 34 At first, the influence exercised by *Li* was not sufficient to make any significant difference to the way most poetry was written, since both its choice of content and its aesthetics went against the mainstream.²⁷ The same applies to *Putayuan* 葡萄園 ("The Vine"), a journal which, from 1963 onwards, called for clarity in writing and a return to China. But both of these journals heralded the major turning point of the 1970s.

The 1970s and the return to the soil

- 35 The 1970s were to bring about radical changes in cultural preoccupations, particularly in the field of poetic creation, by refocusing them on both Chinese traditions and the real situation in Taiwan. In the first half of the decade, a series of geo-political events precipitated a new awareness. In 1971, the return of the Diaoyutai (or Senkaku) islands to Japan by the United States provoked a wave of patriotism, particularly among the youth of student age who rediscovered their attachment to the country where they lived. Also in 1971, the Republic of China left the UN, which was on the point of expelling it, and this marked the end of its favoured diplomatic status. But while it withdrew to the territory marked by its frontiers (or to be more precise, to the territory still under its jurisdiction), it emphasised its Chinese cultural identity, contrasting it with the Mainland's embroilment in the throes of the Cultural Revolution, which seemed to be liquidating that heritage. Then, after the death of Chiang Kai-shek in 1975, his son, Chiang Ching-kuo undertook a cautious Taiwanisation of the state apparatus, at least at its lower levels, and began a relative liberalisation of the regime.
- 36 Furthermore, to be twenty years old at that time meant that one had been born in Taiwan, or had at least spent his or her early childhood there. It also meant having been educated, with a fair degree of success, in Chinese cultural values, especially in having a sense of China's literary tradition. In this new cultural environment, the younger generation made its presence felt precisely through its own new demands. They also felt sick of the "glut of imagery" and saw no reason to go on with what was called, rather too hastily, "nostalgia literature".
- 37 These early years of the decade saw the appearance of a number of journals, with significant and ambitious titles such as *Longzu* 龍族 ("People of the Dragon"), *Dadi* 大地 ("The Earth"), and *Zhuliu* 主流 ("The Mainstream"). They were founded and actively supported by young poets who were mostly still students. The slogan put out by *Longzu* was typical: "Sound our own gong, beat our own drum, and dance to the rhythm of our own dragon".²⁸

- 38 This slogan was clearly a challenge from the rising generation to the previous one. They clarified their new concerns as follows: "Seize hold of the Chinese style of this time and place, express our thoughts in Chinese words, and, while criticising society, also accept criticism from society".²⁹ And indeed, this questioning of the position and function of poetry in Taiwanese society was to determine a range of new options.
- 39 In the late 1960s and early 1970s, various activities (such as exhibitions and public readings) and several publications, overseas and in Taiwan, gave people a new exposure to modern poetry as it had been practiced over the previous twenty years.³⁰ Actually, it was not so much the publications themselves but the reactions which they provoked in the mainstream press, which attracted attention to contemporary poetry and aroused new controversies. Notable examples of this were a couple of articles in the *China Times* 中國時報³¹ by the Singaporean Professor Kuan Chie-ming 關杰明, who wrote that, "the so-called 'new poetry' is mostly a display, not of national qualities but of an infatuation with imports from the new world [of North America - A.L.]. In addition, these poets have no mastery of the language etc."³² Such reproaches were not new. Their novelty lay in their being pronounced *ex cathedra* to address a wider public. These criticisms met with widespread approval from intellectuals, from the poets of the *Bamboo Hat* tendency, and from younger generation poets as well.
- 40 In 1973 the journal *Longzu* set the framework for the debate in a special issue, devoted to criticism of the poetry of the previous twenty years: "Readers do not expect their major poets to write very Greek fashion, or very French, or very Allen Ginsberg ; they only expect the words of their poets to resemble their own"³³ Driving the point home, the journal asserted that Westernisation was the reason for the divorce between poetry and its readership.
- 41 Several well-established poets supported these criticisms. Yü Kwang-chong returned partly to what he had said about Chi Hsien, while others who had gone along with *Epoch*, turned to self-criticism, emphasising the need to take account of the realities of life and the readers' concerns. They raised the key question: for whom do we write? The journal also gave space to its readers, while other articles carried on the debate. These articles identified two things to be rejected, namely Westernism and hermetic language, and three positive goals: to return to China, to get back to reality, and to address a wider popular readership.
- 42 Perhaps the most surprising outcome was that these reproaches struck home. The writers themselves, including the older poets, took the criticisms on board, and responded to this public reaction by modifying their practice. So there was indeed a return to China, and in the first instance to its literary memories. For example, while Lo Fu continued to defend the demands of pure poetic language, for which excessive obscurity is at least better than excessive clarity, he felt it necessary to recall that the T'ang poets (Li He, Li Shangyin, and even Du Fu) employed hermetic language, and even practiced a kind of surrealism *avant la lettre*. So he situated his own surrealism within a tradition that saw poetic insight as analogous to *chan* illumination which, by leaping over the bounds of logic, achieves a kind of revelation. In the same way, Yip Wai-lim also linked his writing to the kind of experience conveyed in T'ang poetry.
- 43 From this point onwards, far from opposing tradition, these poets set out to recover its spirit, continuing it through their modernising activities. In their thinking as well as in their poetic forms, they drew inspiration from the whole of Chinese poetry since the *Shijing* 詩經. They revisited the history of Chinese literature, borrowing its forms and

themes, and seeking to adapt its language. *Blue Star* had already taken this path, and in the pertinent issue of *Longzu Yü Kwang-chung* had written, "There are two ways to return to China. The first, which I followed ten years ago, is to transform the classical tradition. The other is to rummage about in the tradition, which means to be typically Chinese".³⁴ Taking readers' reactions into account also meant showing a concern for readability and ease in understanding, which led to a simplification in language. The search for surprise and striking effects gives way to a more natural discourse.

- 44 Through this return to China and to a more accessible language, in other words through turning towards its readers, modern poetry gained popular acceptance. It became the definitive contemporary form of Chinese poetry, just as the T'ang quatrain and the Song ballad had been in their time. The newspapers started to publish it, and it soon took its place in school curricula. Then composers started setting it to music. This made Lo Fu feel able to write, "The conception of poetry has broadened. If we are asked what modern poetry is, we could reply that basically poetry is what it is and the way it is. Modernity or tradition, transplanted from outside or transmission from within, realism or surrealism, hermeticism or clarity, intellectualism or effusive expressionism, are all secondary questions".³⁵
- 45 In addition to the felt need to reconnect fundamentally with the Chinese tradition, there was taking local realities into account. The poets of the 1970s were less concerned about exploring their inner selves than with discovering the external world. They took different trends by lending their voice to protagonists on the social scene, identifying themselves with those whom they observed. For them, taking social reality into account without being necessarily exclusive in their allegiances, became a prime necessity. This led to a realism which could be as critical of social developments as it could be supportive of particular individuals. The range of themes broadened into an unprecedented variety. A number of young poets began publishing their works at this time, laying the basis for a notoriety which would become widely established a decade later. They included such figures as Lo Chih-ch'eng 羅智成, Chen Li 陳黎, Do She-sun 杜十三, Su Shao-lien 蘇紹連, Hsiang Yan 向陽, and Pai-Ling 白靈, to name but a few.
- 46 In the meantime, the island of Taiwan had undergone an accelerated process of economic and urban development, taking it from its rural status to being an industrial society. This was not without its anxieties and accompanying nostalgia, producing confusion in social values and an incoherent confrontation between ways of living, as well as a conflict between ancient and modern forms of representation.

Thunderbolt - Wu Sheng

The flashing gold of lightning, the angry growl of thunder
 The thunder, bringing a sense of alarm
 When a moment ago there was fierce sun
 Your bodies were covered in sweat, yet before it could be wiped away
 You were soaked once again with rain
 Your alarm, as you earnestly exhort each other in
 Your persistence
 Quickly hide now
 All those clods of earth waiting impatiently to be turned
 All those seeds waiting impatiently to germinate
 Leave them for a while
 The old sky with its ever-changing face
 Sneers at you coldly
 People singing in their living-rooms

Use a mass of convincing theories
 To reproach you coldly
 All the exhortations, all the sneers and reproaches
 Beneath the criss-cross flashing gold of the lightning
 You understand them all
 And the companion who fell screaming, his body blackened
 You will always remember
 Why, oh why have you not put down your tools?
 I think that heaven too must need
 People who can endure such toil
 So that at this time each year
 It sends golden flashes of lightning
 Straight to the fields of my country
 And in the fields where there is no protection
 Only you stand firm between heaven and earth
 雷殛 -吳晟

金閃閃的閃電，怒叫著雷聲
 雷聲，催趕著驚惶
 剛剛還是猛烈的太陽呢
 滿身的汗水，還來不及擦拭
 又是滿身的雨水
 你們的驚惶，苦苦相勸
 你們的固執
 趕快躲避吧
 每一塊急切等待翻屈的泥土
 每一顆急切等待生根發芽的種籽
 暫且不管吧
 容易變臉的老天
 陰陰冷冷的恥笑
 坐在客廳唱著歌的人們
 以一大堆雄辯的理論
 陰陰冷冷的指責
 所有的苦勸，所有的恥笑和指責
 金閃閃的閃電交映下
 你們都明明白白
 慘叫倒下，渾身發黑的同伴
 你們都記憶深深
 為甚麼，為甚麼還不擱下農具？
 想來，天上也正欠缺
 勤於勞動的人們吧
 所以年年此際
 必定派遣金閃閃的閃電
 直奔吾鄉的田野
 而沒有甚麼遮蔽的田野上
 唯你們頂天而立地

- 47 These concerns find an echo in actual poetic creations, such as can be found in the work of Wu Sheng 吳晟, for example. The journal *Li* had foreshadowed these trends and which it now accompanied, while keeping a certain distance from this "native-soil literature" (鄉土文學 *xiangtu wenxue*). "Native-soil literature" was doubtless the last attempt in Taiwan to give literature a broad popular appeal, by basing it in an awakening political consciousness. It was a committed, deliberately ideological literature, which set out to speak for those excluded from economic development and political power. It was clearly influenced by the Cultural Revolution and its proletarian

ideology, and it looked back beyond Modernism, which it saw as just "a lackey of US imperialism", to rejoin the militant literature of the 1930s on the Mainland.

- 48 Although the debates over this "literature of the soil" in the latter half of the decade were more concerned with fiction than poetry (in itself perhaps an important sign that novels and novellas were about to replace poetry as the dominant genre), there was a definitely poetic aspect to its literary output. But the realism which it proclaimed mostly led to a largely mythical vision of the peasant and the fisherman, based on a naïve nostalgic opposition of town to countryside, and an extremely simplistic apology for traditional family life and its virtues.³⁶
- 49 In fact this trend found a very limited response, and was rejected by most poets, whatever their political persuasion, partly because they did not wish to reduce literature to its social role alone, and partly because this was a poetic discourse that did not construct its own meanings or develop its own language. On the contrary, it treated language instrumentally, by pressing it into the service of a preceding cause or a future goal. In this sense, it is more pertinent to study it in the context of a history of ideologies,³⁷ rather than of literary criticism or history.
- 50 The first issue of a journal entitled *Caogen* 草根 ("Grassroots"), the leading spirit of which was Lo Ch'ing 羅青, appeared in 1975. This journal declared its allegiance to four principles, of which the first two were a concern for the country (China) and the need for poetry to reflect the totality of human life. The second two were as follows: "3) We realise that popularisation and specialisation are both indispensable. The difference between them concerns the treatment of the subject matter and the aesthetic means used. We wish to see both present in mutual harmony. 4) Towards the past we feel a respect that is unblinkered, and towards the future confidence tempered by prudence. We accept Chinese traditions without rejecting the West. We wish to dedicate ourselves wholeheartedly to our beloved land, Taiwan".³⁸
- 51 Some commentators have seen in this programme "the first compromise between modernists and realists".³⁹ But it was a somewhat precarious balancing act, which the new developments in the following decades (postmodernism, and the increasingly pronounced ideological splits around Chinese versus Taiwanese consciousness⁴⁰) were to call into question. At all events, in the 1970s *Caogen* was certainly the last journal to proclaim, through its very moderation, a normative project based on a manifesto. The many journals that followed no longer played the militant role such journals once had.
- 52 By the end of the 1970s, modern poetry in Taiwan had gained itself a durable foundation. It has found its place in Chinese literary trends, and has forged a language corresponding to contemporary life. In the process it has acquired a diversity which it will soon extend still further, in tandem with the country's present economic advances, its opening up to China, its democratising process, its rapid increase in foreign travel and cultural exchanges, and its participation in globalisation. Poetry always accompanies the sensitivities and questionings of its contemporary readership, and sometimes it even anticipates them. But from now on, its role will be decided less by ideological and aesthetic allegiances than by the laws of the market and the encompassing power of the media.

NOTES

1. In Lo Men (ed), *Xinkong wuxian lan (An infinitely blue universe)*, Taipei, Erya Publications, 1986, p. 5.
2. Without entering into current debates over the precise definition of Taiwanese literature, I will restrict myself in this article to poetry written in Taiwan using the so-called national language (國語 *guoyu*), or Mandarin (普通話, *putonghua* i.e., "common language"), which was the principal literary language in Taiwan after 1945.
3. See Hsiao A-chin, *Contemporary Taiwanese Cultural Nationalism*, London and New York, Routledge, 2000, chapters 2 and 3.
4. In September 1942 (in May of that year Mao Zedong's *Yenan Talks on Literature and the Arts* appeared), Chang Tao-fan 張道藩, who was currently director of the KMT propaganda department, had drawn up a list of "six don'ts" and "five dos" in a publication entitled "The literary and artistic policy which we need". The don'ts were: not to describe the baser sides of society, not to foment class conflicts, not to dwell long upon misfortunes, not to indulge in romantic expression, not to write works without positive meanings, and not to point in false directions. The "five dos" were: to create our national art, to write for the least privileged people, to write from the national point of view, to write rationally, and realistically. See Michelle Yeh, *Xiandai shi wen lun*, (Essays on modern Chinese poetry), Taipei, Unitas Press, 1998, p. 35.
5. For an evocation of the dominant mood, see, among others, Yip Wai-lim, "Shuangchong de cuowei: Taiwan wu liushi niandai de shi si" (A double interpolation: poetics in Taiwan in the 1950s and 1960s), in *Epoch*, no. 140-141, 2004, p. 59.
6. Quoted in Hsiao Hsiao *Xiandai shi rumen* (Introduction to modern poetry), Taipei, Guxiang Publications, 1982, p. 55.
7. See *Chi Hsien shilun* (Theoretical writings of Chi Hsien), Taipei 1954, pp. 33ff.
8. The manifesto of the Modernist School was republished in the journal *Xiandai wenxue* (Modern Literature), n° 46 (1972), pp. 90-91.
9. *Ibid.*
10. Nowadays, with more hindsight we can make a more balanced assessment of the depths of this displacement. For a re-evaluation of the opposition between the Western and Chinese traditions in Chi Hsien, see Yang Tzung-han, *Taiwan xiandai shi shi. Pipan de yuedu* (History of Modern Taiwan Poetry: A Critical Reading), Taipei, Juliu, 2002, pp. 285-315.
11. *Xiandai wenxue* (Modern Literature), n° 46 (1972), pp. 12-13.
12. Yu Kwang-chung himself, but also Yang Mu, Chou-Meng-tieh 周夢蝶, Lo Men 羅門, Jung Tzu 蓉子, Hsiung Hung 龔虹, and other members of this group.
13. It should be noted that Lo Fu and Ya Hsien were influenced by Ai Qing, He Qifang, and Bian Zhilin.
14. *Chuangshiji* (Epoch), n° 5, 1956.
15. Lo Fu, *Lo Fu zixuanji* (Selected poems by Lo Fu), Taipei, Liming, 1975, p. 273.
16. Yip Wai-lim bases his approach on an acknowledgement of the non-discursive and non-analytical nature of the Chinese language. His goal is to rediscover, in a modern poetic form, a type of experience analogous to that which is to be found in the great poets of the T'ang dynasty. See Yip Wai-lim, "Zhongguo xiandai shi de yuyan"

(Problems of language in the modern Chinese poem), in *Zhixu de chengzhang* (Ordered Growth), Taipei, Zhiwen, 1971, pp. 170-172.

17. In this respect too, more recent reassessments show that these poets did take account of the real state of things, and that social criticism played its part in their poetry of the time. See Chien Cheng-chen, *Taiwan xianshi meixue* (The Aesthetics of Taiwan Modern Poetry), Taipei, Yangzhi Wenhua Publications, 2004, pp. 75-79; and Michelle Yeh, *Frontier Taiwan*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2001, p. 33.

18. Lo Fu, *op. cit.*, 1975, p. 217.

19. Chou Ting, *Conversations*, 1986.

20. See Ong Manhan, "Taiwan xiandai shi zai baihua jiegou shang de gongxian" (The contribution of modern poetry in Taiwan to the structure of vernacular) in *Chuang shiji* (Epoch), n° 140-141 (2004), pp. 105-106.

21. In Hsiao Hsiao, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

22. The Taiwanese had participated in modernising movements since the 1920s. For example, Hoang Chao-ch'in 黃朝琴, Hoang Cheng-tsong 黃呈聰, and Chang Wo-chun 張我軍, took part in the May Fourth Movement and its aftermath on the Mainland. See Gu Jitang, *Taiwan xinshi fazhan zhiwen* (History of the development of the new poetry in Taiwan), Taipei, Wen-shi-zhe, 1989, p. 18-21. Upon his return to Taiwan, Chang Wo-chun created the journal *Fengche* 風車 (*The Windmill*), which introduced surrealism as early as the 1930's (*ibid.*, p. 49). Many debates took place at this time on whether to use Mandarin Chinese or Taiwanese. Cf. Chin Shang-hao, *Zhanhou Taiwan xiandai shi yanjiu lunji* (Collected research papers on modern poetry on post-war Taiwan), Taipei, Nongxing, 2005. In 1936, the Japanese language was made the official language on Taiwan and its use imposed, to the exclusion of other languages, giving rise to a Taiwanese literature in Japanese. It was often a literature of resistance, which the older writers knew. (Gu Jitang, *op. cit.*, 1989, p. 45) In addition, after the return of the island to China, there were discussions between the writers over the specific qualities of Taiwanese literature in comparison with the Chinese. These were suppressed after 1947 (See Hsiao A-chin, *op. cit.*, 2000).

23. In particular Pai Ch'iu and Lin Heng-t'ai (*vide supra*).

24. Quoted by Hsiao Hsiao, *op. cit.*, 1982, p. 27.

25. Quoted by Chang Mo, *Wu chen de jingzi* (Mirror without dust), Taipei, Dongda Books, 1981, p. 26.

26. Quoted by Li Fengmao, *Zhongguo xinshi shangxi 3* (Critical readings in new poetry III), Taipei, Chang'an, 1981, p. 43.

27. However, we should note that although the movement around *Li* aimed at altering the contents of modern poetry, it did not call its forms or its aesthetic values into question. See Hsiao A-chin, *op. cit.*, pp. 81-86.

28. Quoted by Gu Jitang, *op. cit.*, p. 402.

29. *Ibid.*

30. In particular: Chang Mo and Ya Hsien (eds), *Zhongguo xiandai shixuan* (Anthology of Modern Chinese Poetry), Taipei, Epoch Poetry Society, 1967; Lo Fu, Chang Mo, and Ya Hsien (eds), *Qishi niandai shixuan* (Anthology of Modern Poetry of the 1970s), Taipei, Daye, 1976; Lo Fu, Chang Mo, and Ya Hsien (eds), *Zhongguo xiandai shi lunxuan* (Anthology of theoretical writings on modern poetry), Taipei, Daye Books, 1969; Wang Hsian-yang, *Xinshi jinju xuan* (A selection of the finest works of new poetry), Taipei, Juren, 1970; Lo Fu and Pai Ch'iu (eds), *Zhongguo xiandai wenxue daxi* (Panorama of contemporary Chinese literature), Taipei, Juren, 1972. In addition, the literary and fine

arts review *You-shih* (Youth Literary) published a special issue on poetry in June 1969 (n° 186). Another review, *Hsien-tai wenhsüeh* (Modern Literature) devoted its 46th edition, in March 1972, to modern poetry. This was followed by the journal *Zhong wai wenxue* (Chinese and foreign literature), in June 1974 (n° 25). As for publications overseas: in the United States Yip Wai-lim edited an English anthology entitled *Modern Chinese Poetry* (Iowa City, Iowa University Press, 1970), and this was followed by Rong Chih-ying (ed), *Modern Verse from Taiwan*, University of California Press, 1973. In Japan, an *Anthology of Modern Chinese Poetry*, edited and translated into Japanese by the Taiwanese journal *Li* was published in Tokyo in 1970. In Korea, the journal *Contemporary Poetry* published 17 Taiwanese poets in Korean translation in August 1971.

31. “Zhongguo xiandai shi de kunjing” (The difficulties of modern Chinese poetry), literary supplement *Renjian* (Humanity), February 28th and 29th 1972.

32. Quoted by Chen Fang-ming, *Shi he xianshi* (Poetry and Reality), Taipei, Hongfan, 1977, p. 43.

33. *Longzu*, n° 9, July 1973, p. 6.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

35. *Zhong wai wenxue*, vol. 10, n° 12 (May 1982), p. 18.

36. See Michelle Yeh, *Xiandai shi wenlun* (Essays on Modern Chinese Poetry), pp. 37-38.

37. See Chien Cheng-che, *op. cit.*, 2004, pp. 90-91.

38. *Zhong wai wenxue*, vol. 10, n° 12 (May 1982), p. 203.

39. See Chang Tsuo, *Qian qu zhi dao* (Isle of a Thousand Songs), Taipei, Erya, 1987, p. 35.

40. Despite later *post hoc* interpretations, it was only in the 1980s, following the events in Kaohsiung in 1979, that a Taiwanese national awareness emerged in literature in opposition to Chinese consciousness. Until then, from the *Li* poets to the writers of “the soil”, all national consciousness was above all Chinese. See Hsiao A-chin, *op. cit.*, 2000, pp. 83-86.

ABSTRACTS

The period between 1950 and the late 1970s saw the birth of modern poetry in Taiwan and its emergence from a “rebellion” that took place both within and against the overarching influence of classical poetry, which it finally replaced. During this period it created its own language and cultural space, and finally found its rightful place among the general cultural activities of the time.

At a time when “poets could not avoid forming alliances”, as Yü Kwang-chung (余光中) has observed¹, the journals and the movements for which they provided a voice and a rallying point, played an essential part in encouraging reflection on the nature and role of contemporary poetry, and in developing its language. In addition to the poems they published, the authors they introduced, and the translations of foreign works they made known, each of these journals expressed clearly defined theoretical choices, and made their own contribution to what came to be known in Taiwan as *the modern poem* (現代詩, *xiandai shi*).