



**Taiwanese  
Face,  
Chinese  
Masks**

**Yang Mu** and  
His Postcolonial Poetry

**Wen-chi Li**



TAIWANESE FACE,  
CHINESE MASKS



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Wen-chi Li

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**C A M B R I A  
P R E S S**

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# A NOTE ON CITATIONS, TRANSLATION, AND ROMANIZATION

*Taiwanese Face, Chinese Masks* uses the complete volumes of Yang Mu in Chinese as its primary sources. Each footnote typically includes two sources. For example, “NTG, 77; II, 145” means that the first reference is to the English translation in *No Trace of the Gardener*, and the second refers to the corresponding Chinese original in *The Complete Volumes of Yang Mu, Volume II*. If a footnote cites only one source, such as “I, 264” (abbreviated from *The Complete Volumes of Yang Mu, Volume I*), it indicates that only a Chinese source is used, and the English translation was done by me, with the assistance of Colin Bramwell.

Square brackets are used to indicate missing words, correct errors, adjust quoted texts to fit the surrounding context, or, in translation, to provide words or phrases where the English text does not fully convey the original meaning. In general, the pinyin system is used for proper names, places, and dynasties. However, there are exceptions: for names of Taiwanese citizens born after 1949, the Wade-Giles system is used,

without apostrophes or diacritical marks. Some names, such as Chiang Kai-shek, Sun Yat-sen, Lee Teng-hui, and Chen Shui-bian, are presented as they are commonly known in the English-speaking world. Chinese and Taiwanese names consist of a family name followed by a given name, in that order.

#### **ABBREVIATIONS FOR YANG MU'S WORKS IN ENGLISH**

*CCS*: Several translated poems in *Comparative Critical Studies* 16, no. 1 (2019).

*Com*: *The Completion of a Poem: Letters to Young Poets*

*HM*: *Hawk of the Mind*

*MMQ*: *Memories of Mount Qilai: The Education of a Young Poet*

*NTG*: *No Trace of the Gardener*

TAIWANESE FACE,  
CHINESE MASKS



## INTRODUCTION

We use the Chinese written language, precisely, to create Taiwanese literature.

我們使用漢文字，精確地，創造台灣文學。

—Yang Mu

### **Assertion of Taiwanese Identity**

In 2013, Yang Mu 楊牧 (1940–2020), a Taiwanese author, was awarded the Newman Prize for Chinese Literature in recognition of his wide-ranging contributions as a poet, prose writer, editor, translator, and literary figure. Over more than six decades of creative exploration, Yang Mu's oeuvre intertwines Western and Chinese literary traditions, seamlessly incorporating elements of antiquity, romance, and modernity to reflect the complexities of Taiwan's contemporary reality. Highly regarded in Taiwan, his works serve as aesthetic models for emerging poets, offering insights into the craft of poetry. With his works translated into numerous languages, including English, German, French, Japanese, Swedish, Italian, Dutch, and Czech, Yang Mu's international acclaim underscores his engagement with global literature, cultures, and history, while highlighting the versatility of his literary output.

In his acceptance speech, the poet downplayed his individual achievements, shifting the focus instead to the history of Taiwanese literature. He read from his 2004 essay, "The Wellsprings of Poetry in Taiwan" (*Taiwan shi yuanliu zai tan* 台灣詩源流再探). Yang Mu began by recounting the story of Shen Guangwen 沈光文 (1612–1688), a Ming loyalist whose ship

was blown off course in 1654 and carried to Taiwan, then under Dutch rule. After witnessing the fall of the Ming dynasty on the mainland, Shen remained in Taiwan, living through the arrival of the Chinese military leader Zheng Chenggong 鄭成功 (1624–1662), who expelled the Dutch in 1662. A devoted teacher, Shen conducted classes in villages, teaching both Chinese and Indigenous children to read, and continued writing poetry well into his old age. For Yang Mu, this moment symbolized the genesis of Taiwanese literature—a convergence of political upheaval, a typhoon, the unfamiliar island, its Indigenous peoples, European sailors, and the enduring art of poetry.

Yang Mu further elaborated on how this marked the moment when Chinese-language poetry first took root in Taiwan. After Taiwan came under Qing control in 1683, many officials stationed on the island turned to poetry, often reflecting their sense of disappointment and failure as demoted or exiled bureaucrats. It was only during the reign of the Qianlong Emperor that Taiwanese candidates for the imperial examinations began traveling between Taiwan and mainland China. Over time, these individuals began composing poetry celebrating Taiwan as their homeland. During the Japanese colonial period (1895–1945), poetry in Taiwan flourished anew as a group of young poets embraced free verse to voice their resistance and critique in colloquial Chinese. Their works, which revealed their inner consciousness and aspirations, posed a threat to the colonial authorities, who enforced strict censorship. Undeterred, these poets produced remarkable avant-garde pieces that captured the spirit and vitality of the new era.

After the Kuomintang (KMT), or Chinese Nationalist Party, took control of Taiwan in 1945, the White Terror era (1947–1987) silenced countless voices. Yet, some poets rekindled the artistic spirit with vitality. They incorporated Western modernist techniques and the essence of traditional Chinese poetry. Over the past half-century, these poets have forged a distinctive space, navigating between what has been preserved and what has been discarded. In doing so, Taiwanese poetry

has asserted its resilience, developing a distinct cultural and linguistic identity, shaped by the island's dynamic environment. This poetry resists conventional categorization, engaging a universal human spirit that transcends nationalist boundaries. Combining vivid imagery from both old and new Taiwan, it boldly incorporates elements of traditional Chinese culture. An enduring affinity for Chinese tradition provides the foundation for literary creativity, offering the language, imagery, and allusions that inform creative practice. Yet, this foundation does not overshadow Taiwan's unique identity. As Yang Mu famously noted in his essay, "We use the Chinese written language, precisely, to create Taiwanese literature."<sup>1</sup>

Yang Mu's acceptance speech marked the culmination of a creative trajectory that moved from early modernism shaped by Chinese literary traditions to a firmly Taiwan-centric position articulated on a global stage. At the same time, it laid bare enduring tensions between Taiwan and China, between local identity and Sinocentric norms, and between authenticity and imposed cultural façades. The speech also suggested the possibility of affirming Taiwanese subjectivity while directly contesting dominant Chinese discourses. This Taiwan-centric stance, articulated in 2013, resonated with broader aspirations for sovereignty, particularly among younger generations, and gained political momentum during the 2014 Sunflower Movement. Raised after the White Terror and shaped by the liberalization of the 1990s and 2000s, this generation sought to challenge the Chinese nationalist discourse promoted by then-President Ma Ying-jeou 馬英九, who advocated eventual unification. Yet the resurgence of Taiwanese identity did not emerge abruptly. It is the outcome of a trajectory shaped by recurring negotiations of sameness and difference, conformity and rebellion, across successive periods of political upheaval extending back to the aftermath of the Second World War. These include the February 28 Incident (*Er er ba shijian* 二二八事件) in 1947, the Zhongli Incident (*Zhongli shijian* 中壢事件) in 1977, the Formosa Incident (*Meilidao shijian* 美麗島事件, also known as the

Kaohsiung Incident) in 1979, the Lin Family Massacre (*Lin zhai xuean* 林宅血案) in 1980, and the Taiwan Strait missile crises of 1996 and 2000.

Yang Mu bore witness to the tumultuous events that shaped modern Taiwanese society. Although his works are often described as blending Western literary influences with Chinese tradition, they cannot be understood solely through the lens of interculturalism without considering their political context. Yang Mu's oeuvre instead articulates formations of Taiwanese culture as they emerge under and against official discourses. His writing probes dimensions of local identity shadowed by unspeakable trauma and political repression. Despite these conditions, this identity has not merely survived but has continued to flourish, embodying the resilience and strength of a people who have overcome adversity. I therefore contend that Yang Mu should be understood not only as a modernist but also as a postcolonial poet.

*Taiwanese Face, Chinese Masks*, a title inspired by Frantz Fanon, employs the metaphor of "face" and "mask" to examine how individuals in Taiwan, while operating within the dominant Chinese narrative, navigate ambivalence and hybridity to affirm their local identity. Drawing on Emmanuel Levinas's account of the face-to-face encounter, "face" here refers to an expressive presence that interrupts fixed structures of representation and demands ethical attention. Thus, through an analysis of Yang Mu's oeuvre, this book examines the development of Taiwanese identity (represented as "face") under the façade (or "mask") of Chinese culture enforced by the KMT, through an analysis of Yang Mu's oeuvre. Its central aim is to highlight Yang's poetic voice, which provides a lens for understanding the collective emotional structures experienced by Taiwanese society. To this end, the study employs two principal postcolonial methodologies: hybridity and the minor narrative. The discussion of hybridity arises from Yang's engagement with Western and other non-Chinese literary, cultural, and philosophical paradigms, as well as from his critical reworking of Chinese poetic traditions shaped by the May Fourth Movement. Drawing on both Western and Chinese

literary sources, Yang articulates critical perspectives grounded in his Taiwanese positionality, thus demonstrating a historical consciousness. Especially between 1970 and 2000, he forged connections between past and present, and between history and modernity. Within Taiwan's postmodern cultural milieu, hybridity became a crucial and subversive resource, one that Yang mobilized to expose fissures and limitations within dominant ideological discourses.

The minor narrative is explored in the context of the suppression of the Taiwanese voice. This marginalization occurred first under the direct control of the KMT during the martial law period (1949–1987) and more recently through the influence of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The KMT's authoritarian regime enforced a singular narrative and suppressed dissent regarding Taiwanese identity and political freedom. Today, the CCP's influence continues to constrain global discourse on Taiwan's identity and political status. The minor narrative, in this context, becomes a strategy of resistance and a means of reclaiming agency, seeking to counter the official discourse that marginalizes the Taiwanese voice.

Examining Yang Mu's postcolonial works from the late 1960s to the 2000s, *Taiwanese Face, Chinese Masks* addresses a series of research questions. It explores how Taiwanese individuals articulate discontent within dominant discourses, and how local writers mobilize creativity as a form of transformative justice. The study further examines Yang Mu's capacity, as a culturally hybrid author, to distance himself from official narratives and to articulate alternative imaginaries of freedom. Attending to the shared linguistic terrain of Taiwanese and Chinese literature, it also analyzes the distinctions between the two. Central to this inquiry is the question of whether a Taiwanese literature exists and, if so, how local writers are situated within this literary formation. Adopting a holistic approach that integrates historical, sociopolitical, and textual analysis, *Taiwanese Face, Chinese Masks* advances an understanding of postcolonial poetry not merely as an artistic practice but as a potent

vehicle for resilience and resistance against hegemonic forces. In doing so, the study contributes to broader debates on the intersections of history, culture, and the subversive power of poetic expression.

### The Life of Yang Mu

Yang Mu was born under the name Wang Ching-hsien 王靖獻 in Hualian 花蓮, a small harbor city in eastern Taiwan, during the Japanese occupation. Starting in his late teens, he developed long-term relationships with Chinese modernists. This was a time of significant literary activity in Taiwan. In 1954, Chin Tzu-hao 覃子豪 (1912–1963), Chung Ting-wen 鐘鼎文 (1914–2012), and Yu Kwang-chung 余光中 (1928–2017) founded the Blue Star Poetry Club (Lanxing shishe 藍星詩社); and in the same year, Lo Fu 洛夫 (1928–2018) and Chang Mo 張默 (b. 1931) founded the Epoch Poetry Club (Chuangshiji shishe 創世紀詩社). Chi Hsien 紀弦 (1913–2013), Cheng Chou-yu 鄭愁予 (1933–2025), Lin Ling 林冷 (1938–2023), and Lin Heng-tai 林亨泰 (1924–2023) established the Modernist School (Xiandai shishe 現代詩社) in 1956.<sup>2</sup> Each group championed its own poetics. Chi Hsien in his modernist manifesto proposed “horizontal transplantation” (*heng de yizhi* 橫的移植), arguing for the wholesale adoption of Western literary techniques to create a wholly new Chinese poetry. In contrast, Blue Star countered with “vertical inheritance” (*zong de ji cheng* 縱的繼承), contending that writing in Taiwan must not eradicate the ancient Chinese legacy. This literary landscape provided the backdrop for Yang Mu’s formative years and his engagement with diverse literary ideologies.

Such polemics aimed to redefine national poetry, challenge political authority, and open new formal and thematic possibilities.<sup>3</sup> In the 1960s, for example, the Epoch poets began to adopt French surrealism and write poetry characterized by “intrinsic obscurity and ambiguity.”<sup>4</sup> Despite their differing perspectives, all these poets, as Michelle Yeh observes, harbored a “common disaffection [toward propaganda in literature], an aversion to traditionalism, and a commitment to creative freedom.”<sup>5</sup> Before leaving Taiwan, Yang Mu associated with many poets, including

Chin Tzu-hao, Shang Chin 商禽 (1930–2010), Ya Hsien 痲弦 (1932–2024), Cheng Chou-yu, and Chu Ke 楚戈 (1931–2011), and embraced the pursuit of absolute beauty and a modernist style in his early works. In 1964, Paul Engle, director of the Iowa Writers' Workshop, recruited Yang Mu for the MFA program in Creative Writing at the University of Iowa. Upon completing his MFA, he pursued a PhD in Comparative Literature at UC Berkeley in 1966, completing it in 1971 with a dissertation entitled "The Bell and the Drum: Shih Ching Formulaic Language and Mode of Creation." From the late 1950s to the 1960s, his poetic style, indebted to British Romanticism, was elegant and melancholic, featuring motifs such as stars, forests, mountains, rivers, and falling leaves.<sup>6</sup> The persistent themes of solitude, loneliness, and a sense of drifting were reminiscent of the Wertherian tradition.

The 1970s and 1980s marked the second stage of Yang Mu's career, inaugurated by his abandonment of the old pen name Yeh Shan 葉珊 (literally "leaves-jade") and his adoption of the name Yang Mu in 1972. This shift coincided with Taiwan's entry into the next stage of the democratization process, catalyzed by the Protecting Diaoyutai Movement, or Baodiao 保釣 for short, which protested the US transfer of administrative control over the Senkaku Islands to Japan in 1970. Yang's poetic transformation during this period marked a departure from the Romanticist sentimentalism characteristic of his work as Yeh Shan. The metamorphosis may have been influenced by student protests against the Vietnam War that Yang witnessed at UC Berkeley in the 1960s and the Baodiao Movement in which many of his friends, such as Kuo Sung-fen 郭松棻 (1938–2005), Li Yu 李渝 (1944–2014), and Liu Ta-jen 劉大任 (b. 1939), participated in the early 1970s. The shift also aligned with the Modern Poetry Debate of 1972–1974, during which he and other poets faced criticism from figures such as John Kwan-Terry 關傑明 (1939–1993) and Tang Wen-piao 唐文標 (1936–1985) for perceived excessive Westernization and detachment from Chinese/Taiwanese society.

The Modern Poetry Debate influenced the development of Taiwanese poetry. Young poets of the Bamboo Hat Poetry Society (Li shishe 笠詩社), founded in 1964, began distancing themselves from the radically Westernized techniques of the previous generation of poets in the 1950s and 1960s, including Yang Mu. They criticized the excessive use of Western imagery and syntax, undue indulgence in individual sentiment, evasion of contemporary social reality, and semantic ambiguity. They wanted poetry to be more concerned with the social landscape than with inner experience.<sup>7</sup> Other new poets and poetry societies expressed similar views. Influential figures such as Chen Fang-ming 陳芳明 (b. 1947) and Su Shao-lien 蘇紹連 (b. 1949) from the Dragon Society (Longzu 龍族), established in 1971, and later, Lo Ching 羅青 (b. 1948) from the Grass Roots Society (Caogen shishe 草根詩社), founded in 1975, and Hsiang Yang 向陽 (b. 1955) from the Sunshine Society (Yangguang xiaoji 陽光小集), founded in 1979, all entered the debate, criticizing what they saw as poetry's abandonment of tradition and social responsibility. This broader reorientation of literary priorities was further intensified by the Nativist Literature Debate of 1977, during which writers across genres began to advocate for the necessary conditions for a literary trend that would more fully reflect Taiwan's lived realities and sociopolitical context.

Yang Mu was not a leading figure in the nativist literature movement of the 1970s and 1980s. However, he supported and promoted local literary voices during this period. As editor of a newspaper literary column, he introduced and encouraged poets such as Hsiang Yang, Chen I-chih 陳義芝 (b. 1953), and Chen Fang-ming. Notably, Hsiang Yang later emerged as a leading poet writing in the Minnan dialect, while Chen Fang-ming, a member of the Dragon Poetry Society, became a prominent postcolonial literary scholar. It is also important to recognize Yang Mu's role in co-founding Hongfan Press with his lifelong friend Yeh Pu-jung 葉步榮 (b. 1940) in 1976. In the 1980s, the press published important writers such as Li Ang 李昂 (b. 1952), Shih Shu-ching 施叔青 (b. 1945), and Wu Sheng 吳晟 (b. 1944), with Yang Mu even contributing short biographical notes for them. This social commitment also manifested in his poetry. Beginning in

the mid-1970s, Yang Mu revisited images and motifs from Chinese classics in his dramatic monologues<sup>8</sup> and explored sociopolitical themes such as Taiwan's White Terror, the Vietnam War, the Spanish dictatorship, the British occupation of Ireland, the Tiananmen Square protests, and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. References to these events abound in his collections, including *Tree Rings* (*Nianlun* 年輪, 1976), *The Spirit of Berkeley* (*Bokelai jingshen* 柏克萊精神, 1977), *Forbidden Games* (*Jinji de youxi* 禁忌的遊戲, 1980), *Seven Turns of the Coast* (*Hai'an qi die* 海岸七疊, 1980), and *Someone* (*Youren* 有人, 1986). From that point on, his poetic outlook was determinedly postcolonial and cosmopolitan.

Yang's late stage, generally considered to have begun around 1990, was marked by a shift toward more abstract and philosophical works with themes of temporality and eternity. Despite the prevalence of abstract poems during this phase, he remained committed to exposing postcolonial conditions. In his unfinished play *The Story of Five Concubines* (*Wufei ji* 五妃記, 1990), he adapted a local folk tale, offering a narrative of resistance against Chinese hegemony. This resistance continued in works such as "The Lost Ring" (*Shiluo de zhihuan* 失落的指環, 2000), where he expressed his rejection of Chinese dominance, as well as in works that expressed his affection for the landscape of Hualian and the forgotten stories of Indigenous people. He also engaged in translation, rendering pieces by W. B. Yeats and translating Shakespeare's *The Tempest* to explore his postcolonial identity.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, this period saw a broader trend among Taiwanese writers, who, as Michelle Yeh observes, began to criticize the grand narrative—be it nationalism, patriarchy, or history—as teleological and monolithic.<sup>10</sup> These criticisms sought to expose these narratives as partial and distorted views that served the interests of those in power, thereby suppressing alternative perspectives.

Yang Mu's prolific career has earned him many names, each testifying to his multifaceted contributions. Recognized as the "poet of Hualian," he skillfully portrayed his homeland through vivid imagery and enduring affection.<sup>11</sup> His unique style not only influenced contemporary poets but

also granted him the title “the master of the Yang school.”<sup>12</sup> He is hailed as a “game changer” for his decisive influence on literary fashions.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, he is acknowledged as a “poet-scholar” and a trailblazer for the “school of academic poets” (*xueyuan pai* 學院派), demonstrating erudition in both Chinese and Western classics.<sup>14</sup> Widely acclaimed as one of the greatest modern poets in the Chinese-speaking world, Yang Mu received several prestigious awards, including the National Prize for Culture and the Arts (Taiwan, 2000), the Hua Zong Literature Prize (Malaysia, 2007), the Newman Prize for Chinese Literature (United States, 2013), and the Cikada Prize (Sweden, 2016). Yang Mu’s contribution to literature continued until he died in Taipei on March 13, 2020, at the age of seventy-nine.

### **Minor Narrative and Minority Discourse**

To read local identity against KMT-imposed Chineseness, this book adopts postmodern and postcolonial approaches, especially Lyotard’s minor narratives and Bhabha’s minority discourse. Taiwan’s 1980s diversification and democratization, along with the 1990s debates on postmodernism versus postcolonialism, shaped a literary field attentive to small stories, heterogeneity, and dissent.<sup>15</sup> For some scholars, such as Chen Fang-ming and Kuei-fen Chiu, the KMT’s authority represented “internal colonization.”<sup>16</sup> Although some scholars acknowledge postmodernism for introducing concepts of heterogeneity and decentering that enrich postcolonial discourse, they consider it too Western-centric to fully capture Taiwan’s distinctiveness.<sup>17</sup> Postcolonial studies offer a more effective framework for understanding Taiwan because Taiwan, from Chiu’s perspective, is naturally hybrid, transcultural, and translingual.<sup>18</sup> In a context where Sinocentrism renders Taiwan absent, inferior, and empty, the concept of “Taiwaneseness” (*Taiwan xing* 台灣性) serves as a vehicle for expressing revolt.<sup>19</sup> Chen Fang-ming underlines the difference between Chinese consciousness (or motherland consciousness, *zuguo yishi* 祖國意識) and Taiwanese consciousness, asserting that the latter has been continuously evolving since the early twentieth century. From this

standpoint, he critiques the historical amnesia of the Taiwanese people and the KMT's fear of Taiwanese rebellion.<sup>20</sup> Seeking to conceptualize Taiwan as both a postcolonial and postmodern locus, Ping-hui Liao proposes an "alternative modernity" to reposition Taiwanese colonial and postcolonial histories.<sup>21</sup> Yang Mu's challenges to the KMT's narrative thus position him within the context of postmodern/postcolonial Taiwan.

Although postmodern and postcolonial approaches differ in their interpretations of cultural production and colonial power, together they can be used to comprehend the complexity of Taiwan. In postmodernism, narratives asserting cultural supremacy and historical priority are, as Jean-François Lyotard puts it, "grand narratives" or "metanarratives" that, in effect if not intention, suppress alternative stories and annihilate difference and dissent. Typically propagated by states, political parties, professions, institutions, historical traditions, and other authorities, these grand narratives emphasize the great names and heroes of history and present seemingly authoritative interpretations of history, science, law, and morality, essentially serving as instruments of power. Within a grand narrative, historical events are perceived not as contingent but as determined by other events, with explanations rooted in etiological and teleological reasoning.

Lyotard observes, however, that the proliferation of technologies has weakened the appeal and authenticity of such homogenizing narratives. Grand narratives have lost credibility<sup>22</sup> in the face of these changes and must be replaced by minor narratives. Minor narratives reject the notion of unitary truths and emphasize complexity, uncertainty, conflict, and heterogeneity. Minor narratives are spatiotemporally entangled; they come into being "through the intersection of a group or groups for a specific reason and at a particular moment in time."<sup>23</sup> Unlike grand narratives, minor narratives emerge from the bottom rather than the top and constitute decentralized and localized forms of knowledge. The postmodernist approach to knowledge production, exemplified by the ascendancy of minor narratives, mirrors the diversity of human

experience and embraces a wide range of alternative voices. It serves as a mode of dissent that “disturb[s] the order of ‘reason’” and welcomes a multiplicity of discursive practices and heuristic methodologies.<sup>24</sup>

Homi Bhabha’s theory of minority discourse, while distinct from Lyotard’s postmodernism, similarly challenges the idea of national “social cohesion,” which imagines the nation as a unified whole and suppresses internal difference.<sup>25</sup> The concept of nation, in this view, depends on homogeneity and anonymity, treating gender, class, and race as coherent and totalizing identities.<sup>26</sup> Against this logic, minority discourse mobilizes strategies such as mimicry, ambivalence, and cultural translation to unsettle dominant knowledge and expose its claims to stability. Central to this process is what Bhabha calls a “supplementary movement of writing,” a concept adapted from Jacques Derrida.<sup>27</sup> The supplement both reveals what the dominant discourse lacks and destabilizes its claim to original purity, introducing belatedness, contingency, and contradiction. Such writing resists sociological generalization and opens a liminal space in which heterogeneous histories and competing temporalities can emerge. As a result, marginal and colonized subjects are no longer confined within the national narrative of linear progress and unified modernity. Importantly, “minority” status is not determined by numbers. As Dipesh Chakrabarty observes, European histories have long positioned themselves as universal norms despite their numerical minority within humanity at large. Conversely, numerically larger populations may still occupy a minor or marginalized position when their histories are excluded from dominant frameworks of value and recognition.<sup>28</sup>

### **In-Between Space and Hybridity**

The voice of Taiwanese writers like Yang Mu emerges from a liminal space, one that is fruitful but also unpredictable, unstable, and ambiguous. A liminal space is located between two seemingly stable discourses and is thus marked by transition and interconnectedness. It oscillates between localism and globalism, imprisonment and transgression, submission and rejection, obedience and rebellion, assimilation and exclusion. This

conception of liminality distances itself from Edward Said's theory of Orientalism. For Said, the colonizer holds absolute power to authorize colonial discourse in a unidirectional, universal manner. Conversely, Bhabha seeks to expose the ambivalence and discontinuities within colonial discourse, creating gaps or fissures "in which resistance to colonial power can be produced."<sup>29</sup> This space involves an interplay between difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion, a place where "the intersubjective and collective experiences of *nationness*, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated."<sup>30</sup> As an interstice, this space provides terrain for elaborating "strategies of selfhood" that initiate "new signs of identity."<sup>31</sup> Identity here is neither predetermined nor categorizable. This in-between space exhibits protean, contradictory, and sometimes conflicting attributes such as alienation, confusion, amorphousness, ambiguity, and individuality.

In the interstitial phase, colonized subjects become aware of their transitional position in relation to "race, gender, generation, institutional location, and geopolitical locale."<sup>32</sup> They recognize themselves as constituted through cultural hybridity, which allows differences to coexist without hierarchy. Rather than signaling dilution or contamination, hybridity challenges claims of cultural purity, affirms attachment to local roots, and foregrounds plurality within the spaces between cultures. The discourse of colonized subjects, situated in this in-between space, is both cumulative and supplementary, at once presence and proxy. This positionality enables them to resist discrimination, unsettle narcissistic colonial domination, and question portrayals of history. As Bhabha observes, hybridity redirects the colonial gaze back onto power itself through strategies of subversion.<sup>33</sup> Occupying the in-between thus makes possible a revisionary understanding of time, one that returns to the present not in nostalgia but as a condition of living,<sup>34</sup> and that moves beyond singular categories such as class or gender toward the heterogeneous textures of everyday life and hybrid histories.<sup>35</sup>

### A History of Internal Colonization

Before turning to Yang's oeuvre as an exemplar, it is necessary to understand the strategies and repercussions of the KMT's internal colonization practices and the resistance they encountered. Taiwan is a multi-ethnic society, comprising Chinese mainlanders (*waishengren* 外省人, who immigrated to Taiwan from 1945 onward), Taiwanese islanders (*benshengren* 本省人, including Minnan and Hakka peoples who arrived before 1945), and Indigenous peoples. Historically, Taiwan was first known to the world by Portuguese sailors in 1542, who called it Ilha Formosa, literally "beautiful island." It became a commercial port for the Spanish East Indies in 1626–1642 and the Dutch East India Company in 1624–1668. In 1661, Zheng Chenggong attacked the Dutch colony and founded the regime of the Eastern Capital (Dongdu 東都). In 1683, after two decades, the kingdom was taken over by the Qing Empire. In 1895, following its defeat in the First Sino-Japanese War, the Qing ceded Taiwan to Japan. After the Empire of Japan was defeated during World War II, Taiwan ended its five decades under Japanese colonial rule and was transferred to the Republic of China (ROC), the successor state to the Qing dynasty.

After the Chinese Civil War, the CCP established the People's Republic of China (PRC) in mainland China, forcing the KMT government of the ROC to retreat to Taiwan in 1949. To secure its regime, the KMT eradicated Japanese influence on the island and championed mainland Chinese culture under the guise of "cultural reconstruction" (*wenhua chongjian* 文化重建). According to this ideology, the people of Taiwan, with little knowledge of Chinese culture after fifty years of Japanese occupation, were likely to resent the influx of mainlanders. Therefore, a comprehensive "re-Sinification" was deemed necessary. The pejorative label "Japanese slave" (*Riben nu* 日本奴) was often applied to the Taiwanese-born, who faced fewer opportunities for state and professional employment. Even when hired, they received smaller salaries.<sup>36</sup> Culturally, their Japanese heritage and their hybrid identity were expunged from official discourse.

The first major sign of Taiwanese resistance occurred before the KMT's withdrawal from the mainland to the island. During the Civil War, the KMT government faced severe supply shortages and consequently extracted Taiwanese resources for transport to the mainland. This resulted in issues such as a food crisis, inflation, and the emergence of black markets. Simultaneously, resentment over discrimination, corruption, land expropriation, unemployment, and deteriorating sanitation intensified tensions between Taiwanese locals and newly arrived mainlanders. On February 27, 1947, when Monopoly Bureau (Zhuanmai ju 專賣局) agents attempting to seize contraband cigarettes shot a bystander, island-wide protests erupted. Many believed this was the time to assert the rights and the dignity of the Taiwanese people and to define, for the first time, what it meant to be Taiwanese and what the island of Taiwan should become.<sup>37</sup> As the riots spiraled out of control, KMT troops landed at the ports of Keelung and Kaohsiung, killing people indiscriminately on the streets. This massacre claimed thousands of lives and initiated forty years of repression known as the White Terror.

To legitimize its authority, the KMT party-state engaged in a comprehensive revision of the nation's history. This effort emphasized the continuity between Chinese history before 1945 and Taiwanese history after 1945, portraying the CCP as rebels who unlawfully seized control of the mainland. This revisionist historical discourse relied on a unitary concept of China that included, geographically, some controversial territories and, historically, all successive dynasties. The people of Taiwan were offered a narrative that cast them as "descendants of the dragon" (*long de chuanren* 龍的傳人), in which the dragon symbolizes the Chinese noble spirit. To manufacture patriotic zeal, the Taiwanese were encouraged to study Chinese classics rather than local Taiwanese works. In middle-school textbooks, for instance, only Chinese classics were considered appropriate for nationalist education, not just because they were considered safe but also because they fit the KMT's propagandistic goal of persuading all individuals—whether Taiwanese islanders or Chinese mainlanders—that Chinese tradition could be transmitted from ancient China to Taiwan

seamlessly. All works by the May Fourth writers who had stayed on the mainland after the Civil War were labeled leftist and banned.<sup>38</sup>

Chinese values and customs in postwar Taiwan were promoted through the reconstruction of various state institutions, including the National Palace Museum, Confucian temples, school curricula, the China Youth Corps, and military training classes.<sup>39</sup> The comprehensive program embodied Benedict Anderson's idea of "an imagined political community," portraying the nation as inherently "limited" and "sovereign."<sup>40</sup> In this context, "limited" refers to the imagined boundaries along cultural, ethnic, and geographical dimensions, while "sovereign" underscores the nation's role in establishing organizations and processes that foster social order and stability. For Anderson, the census, the map, and the museum serve as instruments of this imagined political community, controlling the citizenry, asserting the state's claim to its territory, and legitimating the nation's ancestry.<sup>41</sup> The top-down approaches to national identity implemented in postwar Taiwan were driven by the overarching goal of creating a homogeneous Chinese identity.

The KMT repressed Taiwanese culture by instituting cultural societies and imposing censorship on the mass media. In 1950, the Chinese Literature and Art Awards Committee (Zhonghua wenyi jiangjin weiyuanhui 中華文藝獎金委員會) was established to sponsor works and writers dedicated to anti-Communist themes, promoting the use of literary and artistic techniques to enhance nationalist consciousness.<sup>42</sup> The committee was later renamed the Chinese Literature and Art Association (Zhongguo wenyi xiehui 中國文藝協會), with a mission to facilitate cultural construction based on the Three Principles of the People, resist Chinese and Russian Communism, restore the nation, and advocate for world peace. The association's membership comprised individuals from the KMT's political class and a community of reliable Chinese writers. In 1954, the association formed the Research Team for Cultural Purification Movement (Wenhua qingjie yundong zhuanmen yanjiu xiaozu 文化清潔運動專門研究小組) to criticize "red pollution," "yellow decadence,"

and “black sin” in newspapers, magazines, and books. These tendencies were said to have damaged the citizens’ mental health.

In 1955, Chiang Kai-shek, the leader of the ROC, decided that “combat literature” (*zhandou wenyi* 戰鬥文藝) should be supported to promote anti-Communism among women and the youth in particular. Two new state-supported literary organizations were set up: the Youth Writing Association (Qingnian xiezuoxiehui 青年寫作協會) and the Women’s Writing Association in Taiwan Province (Taiwan sheng funü xiezuoxiehui 台灣省婦女寫作協會). The relationship between literature and politics forged by these organizations enabled the KMT to mobilize civil society and secure compliance from literary and artistic communities. Writers seeking publication were expected to affirm Chinese patriotism, express nostalgia for tradition, denounce Communism, and legitimize the regime. Over time, the state tightened its control over language, knowledge, and thought, producing a feedback loop between compliant writers and political power in which patronage was exchanged for obedience. This system not only suppressed local and personal experience but replaced it with an official and fictive historical consciousness, ultimately hollowing out local culture.

The cultural emptiness, the decadence of the KMT, and the incompetence of Chiang Kai-shek were criticized by the periodical *Free China Journal* (*Ziyou Zhongguo* 自由中國), edited by Hu Shih 胡適 (1891–1962) and Lei Chen 雷震 (1897–1979). Founded in 1949, the journal initially opposed Chinese Communism, supported Chiang’s rule, and promoted freedom of speech. In 1956, however, Lei Chen published a special issue offering political criticism and reformist advice to Chiang, provoking a strong government backlash. Accused of abusing the rhetoric of freedom and democracy to defame the president, party, and state, Lei was increasingly targeted by the regime.<sup>43</sup> In 1957, he openly questioned the feasibility of retaking mainland China and reported low military morale, urging the government instead to focus on Taiwan through political reform and power-sharing with the local population. His opposition to

Chiang's third presidential term in 1960 and his plan to form the Chinese Democratic Party (*Zhongguo minzhu dang* 中國民主黨) led to his arrest; a military court sentenced him to ten years in prison. *Free China Journal* was subsequently shut down.

In the 1970s, however, the KMT's control began to weaken, and resisters, both political and cultural, were able to carve out a viable in-between space. The KMT encountered a series of setbacks. The harsh repression of the Baodiao Movement extinguished the patriotic fire of the Taiwanese people. The UN recognized the PRC as the only representative of China in 1971, and the following year, the US formally acknowledged that there was only one China, the PRC, on both sides of the Taiwan Strait. In 1975, Chiang Kai-shek passed away. All these setbacks compelled his successor, Chiang Ching-kuo, to cautiously begin a process of Taiwanization and, to a lesser extent, liberalization.<sup>44</sup>

During this period, many Taiwanese became increasingly aware of the incompatibility between their local identities and the narrative promoted by the KMT. The Dangwai 黨外 ("outside the KMT") coalesced around a shared sense of Taiwanese identity, rejecting both the portrayal of Taiwan as merely a province of China and the regime's authoritarian rule.<sup>45</sup> Advocating political reform and deeper Taiwanization, these activists expressed a growing demand for self-determination and cultural autonomy. Their participation in elections to the Taiwan Provincial Assembly, often marred by allegations of rigging, led to repeated confrontations and marked a crucial phase in resistance to KMT hegemony. These struggles laid the groundwork for a broader movement that would challenge existing power structures and press for recognition of Taiwan's distinct identity.

Key moments in the resistance against the KMT's dominance include the Zhongli Incident of 1977, followed by the Qiaotou Incident (*Qiaotou shijian* 橋頭事件) and the Formosa Incident in 1979. During the Zhongli Incident, Hsu Hsing-liang 許信良 (b. 1941), a Dangwai activist, ran for magistrate of Taoyuan County. Election observers noticed that a poll worker had destroyed ballots and took him to the police station. However,

he was swiftly released and resumed his duties at the polls. As rumors of ballot rigging spread, public anger escalated, and protesters hurled rocks and overturned police cars. Ultimately, Hsu won the election, defeating the KMT candidate by more than 100,000 votes.

The Qiaotou Incident and the Formosa Incident of 1979 escalated public discontent and set the stage for a series of events that exposed the KMT's authoritarian practices. In 1979, the former magistrate of Kaohsiung County, Yu Teng-fa 余登發 (1904–1989), and his son, Yu Jui-yen 余瑞言 (1926–1987), faced charges of knowing a Communist and not reporting it, leading to an eight-year prison sentence. In response, then-magistrate Hsu Hsing-liang and other Dangwai activists organized a demonstration in Qiaotou, a rural township of Kaohsiung County, demanding the release of Yu Teng-fa and his son. This protest provided the KMT with grounds to impeach Hsu Hsing-liang, sparking further public outrage. In December 1979, in Kaohsiung City, the Dangwai sought to raise awareness of International Human Rights Day, recognized by the United Nations. The attempt was suppressed by the military police, an event that became known as the infamous Formosa Incident. Shih Ming-te 施明德 (b. 1941) received a life sentence, while Lin Yi-hsiung 林義雄 (b. 1941), Chen Chu 陳菊 (b. 1950), and Lu Hsiu-lien 呂秀蓮 (b. 1944) were sentenced to twelve years in prison.<sup>46</sup> Even more shocking, in February 1980, assailants suspected of KMT affiliation stabbed Lin Yi-hsiung's mother and two daughters to death in their home. The Formosa Incident and the Lin Family Massacre marked the culmination of resistance to the KMT regime at that stage and represented a watershed in the democratization movement. After these events, there was no turning back.

The early 1980s witnessed an increasing split in nativist discourse between “Chinese consciousness” and “Taiwanese consciousness.”<sup>47</sup> The former implies that Taiwan is part of China and should be reunited with it eventually, whereas the latter considers Taiwan an independent nation that should be treated as a separate entity both politically and culturally.

Figure 1. Two views of the Taiwan–China relationship.



The Venn diagrams represent the cultural identity transition that was taking place.

The first diagram, which represents the view endorsed by the state discourse, posits that Taiwanese identity is a component of Chinese identity. In this view, Taiwanese identity is assimilated into hegemonic Chineseness, and thereby belittled and silenced.

Certain Taiwanese individuals, Yang Mu included, occasionally employed terms like “Chinese culture” or “Chinese people” in a way that encompassed Taiwanese culture and people. However, as they observed various social movements in the 1970s and 1980s, they developed a heightened awareness of their identity, firmly asserting themselves as Taiwanese. This perspective is captured by the second diagram. They accepted the influence of China while simultaneously appreciating the distinctiveness of Taiwan. This viewpoint can be characterized as hybrid, as it positions itself in the overlapping gray area. In the words of Bhabha, its adherents become the “figures of a doubling, the part-objects of a metonymy of colonial desire which alienates the modality and normality of those dominant discourses.”<sup>48</sup> The overlapping zone embodies Bhabha’s notion of being “partial” and “camouflaged”; it represents an ambivalent space generating the power to resist hegemony. It is partial and in-between because resistance operates through gaps within dominant discourse, and it is camouflaged because mimicry functions both to conceal the self and to mock authority.

During the 1980s and 1990s, a series of political crises accelerated Taiwan's path toward full democratization. Public outrage intensified after the death of Chen Wen-cheng 陳文成 (1950–1981), a Dangwai supporter who fell from a building at National Taiwan University under circumstances widely suspected to involve KMT violence. In 1986, Cheng Nan-jung 鄭南榕 and fellow activists launched the 519 Green Action (*Wu yi jiu lüse xingdong* 五一九綠色行動), calling for an end to four decades of martial law. That same year saw the founding of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), which advocated democratic reform, ethnic justice, and Taiwanese self-determination. Martial law was lifted in 1987, followed by the abolition of newspaper licensing restrictions in 1988. Democratization came at a high cost. In 1989, Cheng Nan-jung died by self-immolation after being charged with insurrection for publishing a draft “Constitution of the Republic of Taiwan” (*Taiwan gongheguo xianfa cao'an* 台灣共和國憲法草案). Momentum nonetheless continued. In 1990, the Wild Lily Movement mobilized student protests against corruption and demanded democratic elections, leading in 1991 to the repeal of the Temporary Provisions enacted during the civil war period. Taiwan's first fully democratic parliamentary election took place in 1992, followed by the landmark presidential election of 1996 under Lee Teng-hui 李登輝 (1923–2020), which consolidated democratic transition and promoted ethnic reconciliation.<sup>49</sup> In 2000, the election of Chen Shui-bian 陳水扁 (b. 1950) from the opposition DPP ended more than five decades of KMT rule, marking the decline of the party's hegemonic Sinocentric discourse.

### Chapter Overview

This study examines Yang Mu's works from the late 1960s to 2000 to trace literary responses to Taiwan's changing sociopolitical context, with particular attention to the White Terror. Later writings (post-2000), including dialogues with Chinese writers and Greek myth, fall outside the study's scope. The analysis is organized around six themes: figurative masks and ambivalence; social lyricism; anger, compassion, and solidarity;

transcultural relations; alternative historical discourse; and personal myth versus political myth. Chapter 1 situates Yang Mu amid late-1960s–1970s political upheavals and shows how he employs performativity, ambivalence, and figurative masks to rework Chinese classics and local legends under the KMT’s discourse. Through appropriation and mimicry, Yang Mu localizes these sources to articulate a “poetics of rebellion.” Chapter 2 traces how White Terror violence, Cold War tensions, and anti-Vietnam War activism shape Yang Mu’s social lyricism. It outlines four principles through which the lyric form responds to dictatorship: linking scholarship and engagement, maintaining critical detachment, representing upheaval, and pursuing equality. Chapter 3 focuses on the Formosa Incident and the Lin Family Massacre and reads Yang Mu’s compassionate and angry responses as part of the 1980s struggle for democracy. The analysis shows how anger is redirected toward constructive visions of community rather than retaliation. Chapter 4 examines transcultural relations and Taiwan-specific hybridity through Yang Mu’s engagements with Lorca, Yeats, and *The Tempest*. These comparisons frame alliances among marginalized traditions without equating distinct histories. Chapter 5 reads *The Story of Five Concubines* and “The Lost Ring” as efforts to recover suppressed histories and test them against present meanings, first within Taiwan and then comparatively. The works challenge Sinocentric narratives and model historical pluralism. Chapter 6 contrasts KMT political myths with Yang Mu’s personal mythology centered on Hualien. This local mythic geography reorients identity toward specific places and articulates resistance through sympathy and memory.

This book situates Yang Mu’s social poems within the broader historical and cultural context of postwar Taiwan. While these poems constitute only a small part of his expansive and stylistically varied oeuvre, they offer rich material for examining his evolving political consciousness and sense of local identity. Given the extraordinary range of Yang Mu’s work, a comprehensive study of every dimension would be beyond the scope of a single volume and risk diluting its focus. Instead, I have chosen to

concentrate on a selection of poems that engage, implicitly or explicitly, with the postcolonial conditions of their time.

I do not suggest that Yang Mu wrote with a postcolonial agenda. Still, the lack of explicit political intent does not rule out the value of a postcolonial reading, particularly when it illuminates the tensions between Chinese tradition and political critique in his poetry. My approach diverges from much existing scholarship, which tends to frame Yang Mu primarily through the lens of modernism and in comparison with contemporaries such as Yu Kwang-chung and Ya Hsien. By foregrounding the historical and political textures of his writing, I aim to offer a new line of inquiry in Yang Mu studies and to highlight literature's capacity to negotiate the complexities of Taiwanese identity in the aftermath of authoritarian rule.

This study builds on the work of Lisa Wong, Michelle Yeh, Tseng Chen-chen, Liu Cheng-chung, and Chen Fang-ming, who have shown how Yang Mu's poetic innovations resist a singular notion of Chineseness and challenge dominant Chinese and Taiwanese historiographies. Their scholarship has raised vital questions for me about how and why Yang Mu chose to articulate his poetic vision through the forms and styles he employed. Concepts such as hybridity and localization, which are central to postcolonial thought, may offer some answers. Given that Yang Mu lived through the transformative decades of the 1980s and 1990s, marked by Taiwan's postcolonial and postmodern shifts, it is difficult to regard his aesthetics as grounded solely in early modernism.

Yang Mu's poetry engages with questions of cultural identity, colonial legacy, and resistance that postcolonial theory helps illuminate. His work navigates the tensions between imposed Chinese identity and emerging Taiwanese consciousness, employs strategies of mimicry and ambivalence in relation to dominant cultural forms, and creates spaces of hybridity that challenge official narratives. These concerns are central to postcolonial studies. While Yang Mu did not explicitly align his work with postcolonial theory, his poetics emerged from the lived experience of colonial and authoritarian rule that postcolonial criticism examines.

His refusal to adopt contemporary theoretical discourse reflects his grounding in classical literary traditions and aesthetic autonomy rather than ideological frameworks. This distance from theory, however, does not diminish the relevance of postcolonial concepts for understanding how his poetry negotiates questions of cultural belonging, resistance, and identity formation under conditions of political domination.

Drawing on multiple literary theories and traditions, this study explores underexamined postcolonial questions in Taiwanese poetry while challenging regional frameworks that cast non-Western cultures as passive or derivative. Yang Mu emerges as a writer engaged simultaneously with local realities and global debates. His works, of comparable stature to those of postcolonial poets like Seamus Heaney and Wole Soyinka, underscore his distinctive position in the international postcolonial landscape. Through this analysis of Yang Mu, I hope to speak to individuals grappling with struggles in places such as Hong Kong, Tibet, Xinjiang, Scotland, Catalonia, Ukraine, and Chechnya, and in other regions living in the shadows of hegemony. They are not alone in their rebellion, and one day authoritarian regimes will fall.

## NOTES

1. The translation was published on Yang Mu's official website in 2013, <https://yang-mu.blogspot.com/p/newman.html>.
2. Chi Hsien edited and published the first issue of *The Modern Poetry Quarterly* (*Xiandai shi* 現代詩) in 1953. He, along with other poets, established the Modernist School in 1956.
3. Chang Hui-ching, *Yang Mu* 楊牧 (Unitas, 2002), 72.
4. Yeh, introduction to *No Trace of the Gardener*, xxiii.
5. Yeh, "Chinese Literature from 1937 to the Present," 619.
6. Yeh, introduction to *No Trace of the Gardener*, xvii.
7. Leroux, "Poetry Movements in Taiwan," 13.
8. The concept of returning to the soil in the 1970s could refer to both China and Taiwan because Taiwanese identity had not been fully awakened. Departing from Western influences, Yang Mu, like most other young poets of this period, focused on reinvigorating Chinese tradition in dramatic monologues such as "Lin Chong the Night Fugitive" and "The Sacrifice of Wu Feng."
9. W. B. Yeats's political works illustrate the violence of English rule and Irish cultural identity. In Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, the character Caliban is oppressed and discriminated against by his master Prospero. These works provided meaningful frameworks for Yang Mu to reflect on the Taiwanese situation.
10. Yeh, "Chinese Literature from 1937 to the Present," 678.
11. Chen and Chang, "Notes on Yang Mu's Poetics."
12. Michelle Yeh, "Yang Mu: A Game-Changer," 37.
13. Yeh, "Yang Mu: A Game-Changer," 41–42.
14. Yeh, "Yang Mu: A Game-Changer," 37.
15. Liao, "Postcolonial Studies in Taiwan," 199.
16. Liao, "Postcolonial Studies in Taiwan," 199.
17. Chiu, "It Is Postcolonial," 141.
18. Chiu, "Discover Taiwan," 154–155.
19. Chiu, "Discover Taiwan," 155–156.
20. Chen, "Colonial History," 110, 113, and 117.
21. Liao, "Postcolonial Studies in Taiwan," 209.
22. Minor narrative is also known as the "little story" or *la petite histoire*. See Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 37.

23. Du Toit, "Grand Narrative, Metanarrative," 87.
24. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 61.
25. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 142.
26. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 142.
27. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 154.
28. Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 100.
29. Ginsburg, "Signs and Wonders," 231–232.
30. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 2.
31. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 1.
32. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 1.
33. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 112.
34. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 7.
35. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 1.
36. Steven Phillips, "Between Assimilation and Independence," 284–289.
37. Davison, *A Short History of Taiwan*, 80.
38. Yeh, "Chinese Literature from 1937 to the Present," 613.
39. Makeham, "Indigenization Discourse in Taiwan," 187.
40. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6.
41. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 146.
42. Quoted in Yeh, "Chinese Literature from 1937 to the Present," 614.
43. Yang Hsiu-ching, "Evaluating the Ten Years in Prison," 126.
44. Leroux, "Poetry Movements in Taiwan," 11.
45. Murray A. Rubinstein, "Political Taiwanization and Pragmatic Diplomacy," 440.
46. J. Bruce Jacobs, "'Taiwanization' in Taiwan's Politics," 21–23; a vivid illustration of the incident and the trials can be seen in Jacobs's memoir, *The Kaohsiung Incident*.
47. Yeh, "Chinese Literature from 1937 to the Present," 675.
48. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 88.
49. Clark, "Taiwan Enters Troubled Waters," 497.

## CHAPTER 1

# CONFESSIONS OF THE MASKS

In that uncertainty lurks the white-masked black man; and from such ambivalent identification—black skin, white masks—it is possible, I believe, to redeem the pathos of cultural confusion into a strategy of political subversion.

—Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*

The introduction highlighted a series of political upheavals in the 1970s and 1980s, including the Baodiao Movement, the UN withdrawal, American recognition of the PRC, and Chiang Kai-shek's death, which collectively undermined the KMT's legitimacy. This period also witnessed a cultural tension between Sinocentric assimilation and Chinese-Taiwanese coexistence. Yang Mu's early works reflect similar oscillations between Chineseness and Taiwaneseness, acceptance and challenge, and belief and skepticism. Employing the literary device of dramatic monologue, he diverges from the KMT's official narrative, creating a gray zone of partial, overlapping, and ambivalent meanings. This departure from Chinese literary conventions fosters something tentative and innovative in Taiwanese literature, implicitly resisting the KMT's assimilationist political agenda. This chapter examines these oscillations, focusing on four works: "Jizi of Yanling Hangs Up His Sword" (*Yanling Jizi guajian*

延陵季子掛劍, 1969), “Lin Chong the Night Fugitive” (*Lin Chong yeben* 林沖夜奔, 1974), “Miaoyu Sits in Meditation” (*Miaoyu zuochan* 妙玉坐禪, 1985), and “The Sacrifice of Wu Feng” (*Wu Feng chengren* 吳鳳成仁, 1978). Through these poems, Yang Mu expresses profound melancholia, finding it challenging to wholeheartedly accept a Chinese identity and instead taking pride in acknowledging their Taiwanese culture.

### **Dramatic Monologue in Literary Tradition**

Dramatic monologue, particularly through its use of metaphorical masks, assumes a crucial role in Yang Mu’s works during this period. This literary form is characterized by a single historical or fictional speaker, an imagined, silent listener (or listeners), a particular milieu, and a dramatic situation.<sup>1</sup> T. S. Eliot’s essay “The Three Voices of Poetry” identifies three poetic voices, regarding the third—dramatic monologue—as the most important. The first poetic voice involves the poet speaking to themselves or to an undefined audience. The second entails the poet addressing a general readership. The third voice is that of the poet speaking through a fictional character within a dramatic setting.<sup>2</sup> While each character should have lines suited to their persona, the author might imbue the character with “some traits of his own, some strength or weakness, some tendency to violence or indecision, some eccentricity even, that he has found in himself.”<sup>3</sup> This could include elements never realized in the poet’s own life, perhaps unknown even to the poet.<sup>4</sup> In essence, to develop a particular situation, the poet may evoke psychic material that transcends a particular character, as Eliot contends that lines of poetry emerge not from an original impulse but from a “secondary stimulation of the unconscious mind.”<sup>5</sup>

In light of Eliot’s insights, the mask-wearing in Yang Mu’s dramatic monologue, I argue, suggests both psychological and postcolonial dimensions. Yang’s use of the mask is reminiscent of Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks*, which explores themes of discrimination, inferiority, and anti-colonial struggle. Fanon observes that a colonized Martinican who learns French culture acquires a “white” identity overlaying a Black

self. Such a person becomes a black man under a white mask, a product of hybridity: "In France one said, 'He talks like a book.' In Martinique, 'He talks like a white man.'" <sup>6</sup> This duality resonates with Stuart Hall's concept of cultural identity. Hall argues that identity is not "fixed in some essentialized past," nor does it exist "unchanged outside history and culture."<sup>7</sup> Rather, it is "strategic" and "positional," formed through competing and intersecting discourses.<sup>8</sup> For Hall, "identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past."<sup>9</sup> He emphasizes how "Martinique both is and is not 'French'" (a situation reminiscent of Taiwan's relationship to Chineseness).<sup>10</sup> Creolization is negotiated in such places, where people appreciate the aesthetics of the crossover and cut-and-mix rather than some ideal purity.<sup>11</sup>

Homi Bhabha's concept of mimicry and ambivalence offers another lens through which to understand the role of the mask for the colonized. The colonized subject employs strategies of mimicry and ambiguity to imitate the culture and styles of the colonizer and thereby gain access to power. Bhabha understands ambivalence as translatable into camouflage, not as a marker of radical difference but as a mode of partial resemblance produced through display.<sup>12</sup> It can be intentionally subversive because mimicry is the sign of a "double articulation," a "complex strategy of reform, regulation, and discipline, which 'appropriates' the Other as it virtualizes power."<sup>13</sup> The ambivalence of mimicry seeks to be "almost the same, but not quite."<sup>14</sup> It "poses an imminent threat to both 'normalized' [knowledge] and disciplinary powers."<sup>15</sup> Thus, ambivalence within stereotypical discourse is a form of intervention through which an understanding of the process of subjectification becomes possible.<sup>16</sup> Although no subject can stand outside the dominant discourse, the subject, who is produced and interpellated by repetitions of the norms, can take advantage of the norms to forge patterns of resistance and subversion. In other words, the subject can find an oppositional, in-between place within the interpellation of discourse.

The insights of Hall and Bhabha collectively illuminate what a mask is, how a mask is formed, and what becomes of what is masked. Yang Mu is “positioned” in the context of the 1970s, a period in Taiwanese history inundated with Chinese patriotism and anxieties about excessive Westernization. His poetry at this time exemplifies the masking induced by these twin trends, presenting a double articulation of an exterior semblance and an interior reality. The exterior aspect of the mask reflects a fixed Chinese surface, essentialized in a past that is manifestly patriotic, responding to the ROC’s diplomatic setbacks. Wearing this mask involves a gesture, akin to Judith Butler’s concept of body actions imposed by external power<sup>17</sup>—here, a Chinese nationalist discourse—that demands identification with a normative phantasm. This process results from cultural interpellation, in which the KMT proclaims, “You are Chinese” to the Taiwanese. Psychologically, Yang Mu may be expressing melancholia rooted in an unacknowledged loss. As a Taiwanese, he is diminished and excluded by the imposed discourse of Chineseness; he will always fail to emulate Chinese mainlanders, who feel empowered to effortlessly claim possession of the authentic tradition. The representation of a particular cultural and political ideology through figurative masks can be investigated by asking how, in Yang Mu’s case, the dynamics of the poet’s psyche are masked or camouflaged in a depiction of Chinese tradition that simultaneously reacts to Taiwanese social realities.

### **Cultural Hybridity**

If cultural identity is “strategic,” as Stuart Hall posits, or, using Homi Bhabha’s term, “partial,” the dramatic monologue becomes a vehicle for negotiating the complex dynamics between China and Taiwan, the ancient and the contemporary, and literary texts and reality. In Yang Mu’s poem “Jizi of Yanling,” the narrative of Jizi draws from two historical sources: Sima Qian’s 司馬遷 (145 or 135–86 or 91 BCE) *The Grand Scribe’s Records* (*Shiji* 史記) and Zuo Qiuming’s 左丘明 (556–452 BCE) *Commentary on the “Spring and Autumn Annals”* (*Zuochuan* 左傳). In Sima Qian’s account, Jizi 季子 (literally “the fourth son of King Wu”;

also called Jizha 季札) is enfeoffed with the territory of Yanling and sent as an envoy to the North. During his visit to the Lord of Xu 徐, the lord admires Jizi's sword but refrains from expressing his desire. Jizi, aware of the situation, completes his mission with the sword. Upon his return, he discovers that the Lord of Xu has passed away. Jizi removes his sword, hangs it on a tree by the lord's grave, and departs.<sup>18</sup> This historical event symbolizes the fulfillment of a promise.

In another account by Zuo Qiuming, Jizi is portrayed as an appreciator of dance and performance. During an official mission to the State of Lu, he expresses a desire to witness the music of Zhou 周 preserved in Lu because these odes are not allowed to be performed in his homeland, the State of Wu, a southern place often seen as marginal or barbaric in the eyes of the North.<sup>19</sup> While observing performances from *The Book of Songs*, he provides commentary connecting different styles and tones to regional political and historical contexts.<sup>20</sup> This story exemplifies how music and poetry align with local political climates while reflecting the sentiments and thoughts of the people.<sup>21</sup> Jizi's skill in interpreting *The Book of Songs* earned him the reputation of the "forefather of poetry commentators" among ancient scholars.<sup>22</sup>

Yang Mu reinterprets Sima Qian's story, infusing it with alternative details that allude to Jizi's commentary on *The Book of Songs*. As the lyrical "I," Jizi elucidates how a southern mountain entices him to stay, despite his desire to journey to the North: "I always hear the mountain's lament / At first, I traveled on purpose; how can I explain / the lack of concern for so many reunions and partings?" (我總是聽到這山岡沉沉的怨恨／最初的飄泊是蓄意的，怎能解釋／多少聚散的冷漠？)<sup>23</sup> To become a Confucian disciple, Jizi relinquishes his proficiency in swordsmanship.<sup>24</sup> He calls the North a "foreign land" (*yibang* 異邦) and remembers the southern landscape: "You and I once sat withering / under the scorching sun: / a pair of drooping lotus stalks. / That was before my journey north, when / summer's threat most grieved me. / And the delicate songs of southern women!" (你我曾在烈日下枯坐——／一對

瀕危的荷芰：那是北遊前／最令我悲傷的夏的脅迫／也是江南女子纖弱的歌聲啊。<sup>25</sup> Now he is a Confucian and would rather stay in the North: “Who would guess that the northern ladies, the glorious rituals of Qi and Lu and endless chanting / of the *300 Songs* would convert me / into a dawdling Confucian...” (誰知北地胭脂，齊魯衣冠／誦詩三百竟使我變成／一介遲遲不返的儒者！)<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, after reaching China’s Central Plains (*Zhongyuan* 中原), he is disillusioned. He says that, in earlier times, Confucius and his disciples were adept with both pen and sword: “Archery, horsemanship, saber, and sword / meant more than the arts of rhetoric and debate” (弓馬刀劍本是／比辯論修辭更重要的課程)<sup>27</sup> But “after the Master struggled in distant lands / Zilu’s violent death and Zixia’s appointment at the court of Wei / we all scrambled for places in great lords’ houses” (自從夫子在陳在蔡／子路暴死，子夏入魏／我們都悽惶地奔走於公侯的院宅). Therefore, he “set aside his sword / tied up his hair, chanted the *300 Songs* / and acted like an eloquent scholar” (封了劍，束了髮，誦詩三百／儼然一能言善道的儒者了)<sup>28</sup> He comes to the realization that none of these pursuits—being eloquent, renouncing swordsmanship, residing in a foreign land, maintaining an official position, or serving a lord—align with his true aspirations. In the poem’s conclusion, he resolves to abandon his ambitions and embrace the life of a boatman, choosing to dwell in the in-between place:

Ha, Confucian Scholar! This Confucian Scholar  
 broke his wrist in the darkening  
 woods by your grave—from then on  
 neither swordsman nor Confucian scholar  
 Perhaps the blue glow of my precious sword can  
 brighten you and me on this lonely autumn night  
 You died longing for a friend  
 I languish as a hermit  
 The tired boatman, once so full of pride and honesty  
 is me

呵呵儒者，儒者斷腕於你漸深的  
 墓林，此後非俠非儒

這寶劍的青光或將輝煌你我於  
 寂寞的秋夜  
 你死於懷人，我病為漁樵  
 那疲倦的划槳人就是  
 曾經傲慢過，敦厚過的我<sup>29</sup>

There are multiple overlaps between the lyrical “I” and the poet. The poem was composed after Yang Mu had spent several years at UC Berkeley focusing on the study of Chinese classics while engaging in less creative writing. However, after his PhD defense, he began to ask himself if he had missed something.<sup>30</sup> In keeping with Eliot’s “third voice” of poetry, Yang drew on his reading experience and, perhaps, his identity crisis to create the character of Jizi. That the “southern mountain” persuades the hero to stay suggests the sadness of the author’s Taiwanese homeland at its separation from him when he decided to study abroad.<sup>31</sup> Like the early commentator Jizi, Yang Mu, in his PhD dissertation, also explored the use of motifs and recurring formulaic phrases scattered throughout the corpus of *The Book of Songs*. Yang Mu may admire Jizi’s deep understanding of *The Book of Songs* and therefore chooses to adopt the mask of Jizi. Like the hero who travels north, Yang Mu goes to the US for advanced studies and aspires to the zenith of Confucianism and the auditory beauty of *The Book of Songs*. Their birthplaces, Taiwan and the State of Wu, were both marginalized under the concept of the Central Plains. Jizi’s feelings of “languishing” and “tiredness” in the last stanza reflect Yang Mu’s reactions to the decline of the poetry/music tradition and may suggest his exhaustion with *The Book of Songs* after the demanding work of writing his dissertation.

The poem is structured around the dichotomy between a “Confucian” in the North (or the Central Plains) and a “swordsmen” in the South, specifically Jiangnan 江南, and by extension, between Chineseness and Taiwanese-ness, with Jiangnan serving as a metaphor for Taiwan. The North is portrayed as mature, sophisticated, civilized, and gentle, while the South, encompassing Jiangnan and Taiwan, is depicted as fledgling, innocent, brutal, and supercilious.<sup>32</sup> Jizi comes from a region considered

peripheral and inferior, where the musical style may resemble *the Songs of the South* (*Chuci* 楚辭) from the Warring States Period. The southern songs, symbolized by the “delicate songs of southern women” (江南女子纖弱的歌聲), are described as “needles” that cause him mental pain and evoke nostalgia. Nevertheless, he travels north because of his admiration for Confucius’s philosophy and the odes of Zhou, exclusively preserved there. Staying in the Central Plains, a region rich in resources for Chinese classics, Jizi transforms himself from a “swordsmen” into a “Confucian,” transitioning from a wandering envoy to a dweller immersed in Confucian culture. If Yang Mu is Jizi, the poet’s yearning for Chinese classics is a masked desire evoked, in Butler’s terms, by the deeply rooted interpellation of the KMT’s official discourse embodied in the metaphors of the Confucian tradition and *The Book of Songs*. The masked, melancholic desire to attain pure Chineseness is rooted in his Taiwanese identity. Wearing the mask of Jizi suggests a way to overcome one’s Taiwanese inferiority complex and embrace Chinese high culture and Confucianism.

The practice of appropriating Chinese stories is accompanied by the localization and incorporation of a Western style. The final stanza, which marks a return to the South after Jizi’s disillusionment, shifts the focus back to Taiwan rather than China. Departing from Chinese classical texts, the poem engages with the reality of Taiwan and offers contemporary, dramatic, postcolonial, subversive, and personal perspectives that reinterpret the classic story. Jizi’s narrative is no longer a grand narrative canonized by Chinese authorities; instead, it has become a minority narrative for the Taiwanese. Moreover, this appropriation is an intentional effort to “make it new” by incorporating the Western style of dramatic monologue. Yang Mu reflects on the writing of this poem in the essay “Abstractness and Alienation: Two” (Chouxiang shuli: Xia 抽象疏離下) published in 2009:

I am sure that the use of poetic form to master a story in the crucial moment of my life was a by-product of my studies, particularly of those *Western canons*. Moreover, I was reconsidering the issue of “*poetry verbalizes intent*” (*shi yan zhi* 詩言志), doubting the width,

depth, density, and efficiency of the *lyrical tradition*. After some readings and contemplations, I realized how to put together the subjective self-expression and the objective poetic expression—the two universal and transcendent issues—and integrate them with aesthetic and ethical possibilities.

我相當確定，在這平生重要的時刻我竟選擇用詩的形式去掌握一個所謂故事情節，應該和那前後所讀書有關，尤其是西方古典。何況，我正在重新思考「詩言志」的問題，開始懷疑整個抒情傳統的寬和廣，深度，密度，乃至於效用等問題。在累積的閱讀領域之餘，思考到一個詩人創作當下，自我的流露和詩的客觀表現，那種普遍，超越或結合了美學和道德的潛力，應該如何對應，相提並論。<sup>33</sup>

The Chinese concept of lyricism (*shuqing* 抒情) encompasses a spectrum of articulations in which inputs and outcomes are linked to emotional impact. A lyrical work is made intelligible through sensory and imagistic data, serving to inform the “intellectual and literary culture of a historical moment”; it also signifies a formulation of intense and personal feeling, whether through engagement with temporal caesura and self-reflexivity or through expressions of subjectivity in music or poetry.<sup>34</sup> Yang Mu’s lyricism can be seen as a synthetic product of both Chinese lyricism and Western modernism. He navigates his postcolonial experiences through a historical narrative presented in the Western form of dramatic monologue. This form inherently involves the idiosyncrasies of the speaker, audience, and occasion, as well as the interplay between speaker and audience, dramatic action, and revelations of character.<sup>35</sup> “Jizi of Yanling” is shaped by the amalgamation of all these effects.

After journeying north and returning south, Jizi addresses the Lord of Xu at his tomb, constructing a soliloquy to articulate his dreams and subsequent disillusionment. Following the dramatic revelation, in which Jizi abandons Confucianism, he transforms into a boatman, wandering within the symbolic liminal space of the river. The hero, now a boatman, occupies the intermediary ground between Western forms and Chinese lyricism, capable of transcending boundaries and evading any

sociopolitical normativity imposed upon him. This in-between position sheds light on the oppressive nature of the official discourse on China and Taiwan. In this grand narrative, China is often portrayed as authentic, pure, and superior, while Taiwan is deemed inferior, savage, and viewed as derivative of Chinese tradition, despite benefiting from Western modernity. The poet's deliberate use of hybridization reflects his intent to reshape the Chinese narrative and more effectively convey his Taiwanese experience, a perspective entirely novel in the preconceived Chinese discourse. This strategic approach aligns with Bhabha's concept of the "severance of tradition," challenging assertions of original purity with a "poetics of relocation and re-inscription."<sup>36</sup> Enriched by Chinese tradition, Taiwanese reality, and Western aesthetics, the poem exemplifies the unique potency of cultural hybridity.

Within Chinese hegemonic discourse, the term *huaxia* 華夏, literally signifying "pan-Chinese,"<sup>37</sup> is employed to encompass the people within and beyond China. It carries connotations of being "cultured and civilized," distinctly set apart from the peripheral barbarians who are perceived as not yet having acquired the proper customs of dressing, eating, dwelling, and traveling.<sup>38</sup> The notion that China holds a unique cultural and civilizational status is reinforced by the myth of the "Children of the emperors of Yan and Huang" (*yanhuang zisun* 炎黃子孫), along with a historical consciousness shaped by extensive rituals and traditions.<sup>39</sup> Similarly, the ROC utilized a parallel term, *huaqiao* 華僑 (literally "overseas Chinese"), to assimilate overseas citizens like Yang Mu and promote Chineseness by linking it to abstract concepts such as filial piety and loyalty, as well as to concrete historical documents, making it evident why Yang Mu chooses Sima Qian's text. He reexamines Taiwanese historical consciousness, portraying it through the narrative of someone who departs from the periphery, ventures to the Central Plains, adopts mainstream rituals, chants *The Book of Songs*, only to face disillusionment and return home. In the dichotomous world Yang Mu creates between the civilized and the barbarian, Jizi's decision to return

to the “barbarian” South symbolizes his attachment to and reassessment of Taiwanese identity.

However, returning to Taiwan’s reality does not mean that Yang Mu abandons Chinese tradition. He instead disrupts the established dichotomy by positioning himself in the in-between space. In the final stanza, Jizi rejects the arbitrariness of the dichotomy, stating that he is “neither swordsman nor scholar.” Once proud or conceited, once honest or gentle, he recognizes that none of these one-dimensional traits can adequately encapsulate his hybrid identity. The symbolism of the “boatman” must be reassessed in this context: it alludes to the vocation of a Taiwanese poet who, the poem suggests, should resemble a boatman navigating the in-between space, transporting readers between Chinese tradition and the new Taiwanese situation. Rather than depicting a simple opposition between a swordsman and a Confucian, the poem embodies the spirit of a “knightly Confucian” (*ru zhong you xia* 儒中有俠).<sup>40</sup> This synthesis not only expresses local identity but also disrupts the dominant historical narrative, challenges Chinese tradition, and dispels the myth of cultural homogeneity.

### **Multiple Voices beyond an Official Discourse**

The international setbacks of the 1970s not only questioned the KMT’s authority over Taiwan but also sparked the Modern Poetry Debate, which called for a renewed focus on Chinese culture among writers. In response to this debate, Yang Mu forged his path by infusing Chinese traditional motifs with uniquely Taiwanese perspectives. This marked a departure from the prevailing notions of Chineseness, reflecting a nuanced understanding of Taiwan’s cultural hybridity. His 1974 verse drama “Lin Chong the Night Fugitive,” with the epigraph “Drama of Voices” (*shengyin de xiju* 聲音的戲劇), revisits an episode from *Water Margin* (*Shuihuzhuan* 水滸傳), a fourteenth-century novel about a group of 108 outlaws gathered at Mount Liang. It retells the story of the outlaw Lin Chong, who, after witnessing bureaucratic corruption, revolts against the officials.

In this poem, Yang wears not only the mask of Lin Chong but also those of personified nature spirits such as Wind, Mountain God, and Snow to express sympathy for the hero. In Act One, the drama unfolds with the voice of Wind, an onlooker who notices the hero on his way to exile at the fodder depot. Wind taps at the window and peers at Lin Chong, who is solitary and forlorn. Wind then reminisces about how Lin encountered Lu Zhishen 魯智深 and became his sworn brother, expressing affection with the lines: “You, hero, swallow-chin, tiger-whiskers / you trespassed on the military’s inner sanctum / with a saber at your waist, and were found guilty: / twenty lashes, face tattooed, exiled to the distant place” (這樣一條好漢／燕頷虎鬚的好漢，腰懸利刃／誤入節堂。脊杖二十／刺配遠方).<sup>41</sup> Prognosticating a conspiracy, Wind attempts to persuade Lin to leave the depot: “I chill him, make him quiver / long for a drink—I whisper: / *There’s a marketplace five miles from here. / Why not buy some wine?*” (教他寒冷抖索／尋思嗜酒——／五里外有那市井／何不去沾些來喫?).<sup>42</sup>

In Act Two, Mountain God takes center stage. He observes the hero strolling “in the snow, where he plods with a felt hat / shoulders a spear with his wine gourd dangling” (頭戴毡笠雪中行／花鎗挑着酒葫蘆).<sup>43</sup> The god recounts how Lin Chong was set up and tortured by officials during his exile: “Lin Chong’s feet bled the whole way / two guards shoved, shouted and cursed him / they tied him to a winding tree. I saw two sticks / move to batter him, even a robust hero would have vanished” (林冲雙腳滴血，被兩個公人／一路推捱喝罵，綁在／盤蟒樹上，眼看水火棍下／又是一條硬朗崢嶸的好漢).<sup>44</sup> Despite considering himself all-powerful, Mountain God was unable to assist and thus commanded a siskin to find Lu Zhishen, who followed Lin Chong’s bloody footsteps. Reflecting on this, he sadly remarks, “I was Mountain God, yet I could only watch” (我枉為山神是／親見的).<sup>45</sup> Now, Mountain God anticipates another group of enemies coming from the capital city to frame Lin Chong. To prevent Lin from staying in the depot, Mountain God instructs Wind and Snow: “Fall fast, you Snow! Blast, you Wind! / Collapse these shacks! I am Mountain God / [...] / Lin Chong will not die today” (雪你快快下，

風你／用力颳，壓倒他兩間破壁茅草廳／我枉為山神／……／林冲命不該絕).<sup>46</sup> After buying wine and seeing the collapsed thatched roof, Lin Chong retreats to the temple.

In Act Three, Lin Chong's enemies burn down the depot, proceed to the temple, and revel in Lin's misfortune. Unbeknownst to them, Lin Chong hides in the temple, overhearing their sinister plot. Lin exposes himself and exacts revenge: "I thought you were an old friend from childhood / but you ruined me in the tavern where we drank together / after it was done, my unsheathed sword waited for three days / you escaped, and now you chase / and set my snare with fire / Take this!" (我與你自幼相交／你樊樓害我，尖刀等你三日／讓你逃了，如今真尋來滄州／放火陷我，千里迢迢／且吃我一刀).<sup>47</sup> After killing his enemies, he must flee. He is now a fugitive.

In Act Four, the narrative returns to the viewpoints of Snow and Wind, observing Lin Chong standing in the boat heading toward Mount Liang. Much like Jizi, the boatman navigating between swordsmanship and Confucianism, Lin Chong hovers between Mount Liang and the location of his persecution:

Wind is quiet, I am  
the soundless Snow. He looks around  
in the boat, holding his sword  
Mountain is dark

Wind is quiet, I am  
the soundless Snow. He passes  
through the bent reeds, he seems forlorn  
he was an arms instructor  
of the Mighty Imperial Guards  
now he sails in silence  
to join the outlaw band  
Mountain is dark

風靜了，我是  
默默的雪。他在

渡船上扶刀張望  
 山是憂戚的樣子

風靜了，我是  
 默默的雪。他在  
 敗葦間穿行，好落寞的  
 神色，這人一朝是  
 東京八十萬禁軍教頭  
 如今行船悄悄  
 向梁山落草  
 山是憂戚的樣子<sup>48</sup>

The coexistence of Lin Chong's, Mountain God's, and Snow and Wind's voices resonates with what Mikhail Bakhtin characterizes as *heteroglossia*. According to Bakhtin, language is never "unitary" but "stratified and heteroglot in its aspect as an expressive system."<sup>49</sup> Heteroglossia refers to the language used by characters, where each character's speech reflects its own belief system, influences authorial speech, and thereby introduces stratification and speech diversity.<sup>50</sup> In Yang Mu's case, the poem as a work spoken by three fictional voices initially seems unitary and consistent, but beneath that smooth surface, speech diversity is submerged and embodied in an exhibition of the emotions and motives of the speakers. The allegories presented by Snow and Wind are compassionate, Mountain God is omniscient but disquieted by his inability to help, and Lin Chong feels despondent in exile and enraged when he takes revenge. The drama unfolds as a collage of multiple perspectives, layers, and times, spanning the past, present, and future, and incorporating heterogeneous elements such as pitiable moments, fearful incidents, sudden reversals, and violent effects. The emplotment itself creates language stratification, and, in Paul Ricoeur's terminology, a "concordant discordance."<sup>51</sup> This multivocal performativity generates a constantly shifting sense of authorial intention, as if Yang is dissatisfied with the constraints of traditional narrative. All the poem's speeches serve as masks to enable a multiplicity of views and emotions and to avoid any impression of monologic authority.

Yang Mu's reinterpretation of Lin Chong introduces a modern political implication of being in-between. In *Water Margin*, 108 characters are demons trapped under a stone by a Taoist sage. Upon being released, they are reincarnated in human forms and undertake a redemptive mission to help the Song emperor fight foreign invaders and restore justice in the kingdom. When corrupt officials oppress the people, Lin Chong and his comrades revolt and seek refuge on Mount Liang. In contrast to the corrupt officials, they are righteous in their dealings with the people and loyal to each other. However, living outside the court system, they can be seen as representing a counter-Confucian culture, as their illegitimate use of violence is frowned upon by conservative society. Consequently, they symbolize the marginalized and powerless people. Yet, Yang Mu does not unreservedly endorse their misdeeds, even if they are committed in the name of justice. In the postscript of *Manuscript in a Bottle* (*Pingzhonggao houji* 瓶中稿後記, 1975), he expresses his appreciation for Lin Chong's character and agrees with his acts of self-defense: "Among all the characters of *Water Margin*, I greatly appreciate Lin Chong because he is brave and sincere. Wu Song and Lu Zhishen cannot compare with him. Lin Chong becomes an outlaw because he is in a desperate situation. He is forced to go to Mount Liang" (我於水滸人物中最愛林沖，認為他的勇敢和厚道，實非其儕輩如武松，魯達之流所能比較。林沖之落草，是真正的走投無路，逼上梁山)。<sup>52</sup> The use of "forced" suggests that Lin would have preferred not to join the rebels and does so only because he has already been marginalized. He cannot be part of a corrupt government, nor can he wholeheartedly participate in the rebels' righteous outlawry. His double marginalization, by both officials and bandits, suggests a radical sense of unbelonging and a strategic position of vigilance and refusal to compromise.

Yang Mu's poem was composed in 1974, four years after the KMT suppressed the Baodiao Movement. In this movement, overseas students in the United States marched under the slogan "Resist foreign powers, eliminate national thieves inside" (*Wai kang qiangquan, nei chu guozei* 外抗強權，內除國賊). "Foreign powers" referred to the US and Japan,

while the “national thieves” were the KMT officials who, in the students’ view, had failed to defend the ROC’s sovereignty. The KMT, perpetually concerned about possible rebellion and subversion, promptly blacklisted overseas activists such as Kuo Sung-fen 郭松棻 (1938–2005), Li Yu 李渝 (also known as Kuo’s wife, 1944–2014), and Liu Ta-jen 劉大任 (b. 1939), refusing to permit them to return home.<sup>53</sup> The KMT’s feeble response to the US and Japan and its harsh suppression of nationalism frustrated the overseas students, causing some to place their hope in the alternative China, namely the PRC. A few visited the mainland with the apparent intention of settling there, but the Cultural Revolution soon disillusioned them.<sup>54</sup> Disappointed now by the two competing Chinese regimes, they chose to stay in the US. Against this background, Yang’s ambivalent attitude toward Lin Chong suggests that his hero’s desire to escape the corrupt Song dynasty (a metaphor for the KMT) does not require him to join the bandits on Mount Liang—in other words, the CCP (the party is also called “Communist *bandits*” [*gongfei* 共匪] by the KMT)—but that it would have been more upright for him to remain an exile and embrace his unbelonging. Yang Mu’s final image of Lin Chong depicts him not at his arrival at Mount Liang but suspended, as it were, in the “in-between” space of the river, that is, the margins of the periphery. He wanders, in Deleuze’s terms, “without aim or destination, without departure or arrival.”<sup>55</sup> He belongs neither to Mount Liang nor to the Song court, neither to the PRC nor to the ROC. For him, there is “another justice, another movement, another space-time.”<sup>56</sup>

### A Female Outsider

Thus, in “Lin Chong the Night Fugitive,” the multitude of voices endeavors to carve out an escape route for its protagonist, illustrating the potential of nomadism and deterritorialization. Akin to this approach, Yang Mu’s subsequent poem, “Miaoyu Sits in Meditation,” employs a similar strategy to resolve the predicament of the female protagonist. In Cao Xueqin’s 曹雪芹 (1715–1763) novel *Dream of the Red Chamber* (*Hongloumeng* 紅樓夢), Miaoyu is a nun living in Prospect Garden (*Daguan yuan* 大觀園)

with the male hero Baoyu 寶玉 and other female characters after her family's decline in fortune. Nicknaming herself "outsider" (*Jianwairen* 檻外人), she prefers to stay alone, reading Buddhist scriptures. She harbors a secret love for Baoyu, exuding an outward demeanor of coldness and disdain toward those she deems ordinary, inadvertently leading other female characters to perceive her as aloof.

Yang Mu lays bare Miaoyu's sexual desire through a poignant exploration. In this dramatic monologue, Miaoyu reminisces about her encounter with Baoyu, who sought plum blossoms from her, and the sense of desolation that enveloped her after his departure. Her yearning for him reaches an apex, and this fervent desire manifests in the tangible world:

What sound is moving? Boundless willow waves, the fleeting  
green rolls across the sleeping bed. The wind, making a vacuous  
accusation  
runs like an orphan fleeing famine and perishes in  
the whirlpool of consciousness. The pale memory is  
formed of a blaze and soot, a sort of fear  
reserve, satisfaction, and self-pity

甚麼聲音在動？是柳浪千頃，快綠  
翻過沉睡的牀褥。風是虛無的控訴  
奔走如逃荒的孤兒，且消滅在  
意識的漩渦；而蒼白的記憶  
烈火和黑烟合成，一種恐懼  
矜持，滿足，自憐<sup>57</sup>

The poem employs a series of evocative images to delve into Miaoyu's psychic reality, where the wind, the sound, and the willow waves serve as potent symbols encapsulating desire, accusation, and fear. Concrete descriptions of her emotions, such as "reserve," "satisfaction," and "self-pity," emerge only in the final line. Miaoyu's recollection of her encounter with Baoyu reveals a complex layer of emotions, at once sweet and painful, unforgettable yet unbearable. She describes memory as "a string of prayer beads violently snatched and spilled across / the floor, deep in

this autumn night” (記憶是暴力扯斷一串念珠滾了滿地／在這秋夜深處), she portrays the turbulence within: “[the beads are like] fish eyes fleeing from my ten fingers / teasing, rolling to the forty-eight corners of the house / light and shadow folding / twisting, compressing, shattering continuously” (只見粒粒魚目從十指間逸去／戲弄着，溜向四十八重屋角／折疊的光影不斷／扭曲，壓縮，破碎).<sup>58</sup> Despite her external calmness, Miaoyu recognizes the internal turbulence beneath, metaphorically expressed as “the oil lamp before the statue of the Buddha is merely external / Behind my ascetic face burns boiling blood, transcending / perception covered with a cloak of ashes” (青燈不過外在，我寡慾的表情後面／燃燒着沸騰的血，超越的／感性教灰燼衣裳來蓋).<sup>59</sup>

Even adopting the moniker “outsider” fails to liberate Miaoyu from the grip of erotic anxieties, doubts, and the pervasive sense of exclusion from patriarchal discourse. Interpellated by a patriarchal system that dictates submissive, chaste, and obedient female behavior, as well as expectations of abstinence, self-sacrifice, and selfless devotion, Miaoyu finds herself constrained. Normative social demands render her unable to articulate openly her desire for pleasure, leaving her able to express only weakly:

Though an iron threshold lasts a millennium...  
 At this moment, shadows pass across the paper window  
 Those are not the demons of desire but autumn trees in the wind  
 or unsleeping wood sprites dancing and jumping? No—  
 Quiet, quiet, fading sparks linger in the incense burner  
 sadly keeping me company; my mind reflects inwardly  
 pursuing a little peace. Or is it my doppelgänger?  
 They sacrifice by renouncing this world, for my infantile disorder  
 concerned about me, they come back to visit me frequently  
 But even so, I've seen through it, but  
 have I seen through it? Outside the threshold I trip and fall  
 hesitate, covet poetry and music of the human world  
 From afar I gaze back through the threshold, someone inside the  
 threshold

縱有千年鐵門檻……

這時，紙窗外閃過陣陣黑影  
 那些不是慾的精靈，是秋樹迎風  
 或許是不眠的木魅舞躑？不是一一  
 靜，靜，香爐裏還剩點殘星  
 淒切陪伴我，心神向內反射  
 追尋些許安寧。或者我的替身？  
 她們捨入方外，為了我幼穉的病  
 牽惹着，時時歸來探訪  
 然而我已經完全看開了，然而  
 我是不是看開了？我在檻外顛躑  
 猶豫，貪戀人間的詩和管弦  
 我遙遙張望着檻內，檻內一個人<sup>60</sup>

“Threshold” serves as a metaphor for her in-between performativity, existing in the spaces between concupiscence and abstinence, as well as between embracing her sexuality and adhering to the interpellation dictated by male hegemony. Miaoyu recognizes her inability to fully “see through” her desires and attain serenity. The desire to venture out is met with moments of “falling” and “hesitation.” She covets the “poetry and music of the human world” not merely because they express freedom beyond patriarchal interpellations but also because they offer a way to express her feelings. Miaoyu, in the Deleuzian sense, acknowledges all the lines of flight from sexual oppression, a revelation she shares during her solitary game of Go:

Then absentmindedly withdrawing a move, I ask:  
 “Where did you come from?” I see no chess pieces  
 Who’d have guessed he did not answer—he came from where  
 he did  
 A stone at the foot of the Blue Peak on Absurd Cliff in the Great  
 Wilderness Mountains  
 he goes where he’s going. I dimly know where you are going  
 a place of merciless parting grief, on the other shore of knowledge  
 Even if I meditate a lifetime, I’ll never make that crossing  
 My world is that of emptiness and reality, the twists and turns  
 of the road back, I say, it all bewitches

遂撒棋失神，叩問：  
 「你從何處來？」目無餘子  
 誰知他竟不回答——從來處來  
 大荒山無稽崖青埂峰下一塊頑石  
 向去處去。我冥冥能詳你的去處  
 那是無情離恨的天地，在知識彼岸  
 縱使我一生苦參也無從涉渡  
 我的世界是虛與實，轉折彎曲  
 回去的路，我說：都要迷住了<sup>61</sup>

Yang Mu combines myth and the game of Go to describe Miaoyu's aimlessness. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze employs the same game to illustrate nomadism, in which the nomad, like a Go stone, moves across boundaries while occupying and relinquishing territory.<sup>62</sup> Miaoyu channels her nomadic desire onto the Go board, transforming it, in Deleuze's image, into an open "smooth space." However, the lines of flight are destroyed, compelling her to turn to Buddhist scripture to rediscover the genuine path to freedom and peace. She chants: "Sitting cross-legged in meditation on a mattress / erroneous thinking must be cut off / mind bent solely on Thusness" (結跏趺坐禪牀 / 妄想必須斷除 / 一心趨真如).<sup>63</sup> The term "Thusness," or the Sanskrit *tathātā*, aligns with the word *dharma*, encapsulating justice, morality, religious merit, law, duty, the Good, the Truth, the Norm, and the Way.<sup>64</sup>

Remaining indifferent becomes impossible once desire is acknowledged, akin to Pandora's box unleashing a maelstrom of feelings: loneliness, reproach, disgrace, and melancholy, especially for the love and freedom she has lost. Eroticism proves both enticing and demon-like: "the sharp-edged, precious sword for subduing demons / madly striking at my will and mood, inciting / limitless ire [...] / [...] / My chest burned like fire, cold sweat running down my back / All of a sudden, at the juncture of intoxication / a string broke" (伏魔的寶劍帶萬刃鋒芒 / 狂潮向我的意志和情緒撲來，揚起 / 無限的怨憤..... / ..... / 我前胸熾熱如焚燒，背脊是潺潺冷汗 / 突然，卻在我迷醉顛倒的關口 / 蹦的一聲斷了).<sup>65</sup> Connecting her overpowering desire to images of disaster,

she implies that female sexual liberation is perceived as destructive: “Calamity peeking. Unexpected in the dark” (災難在／窺伺。無妄，黑暗).<sup>66</sup> Shockingly, not only is her sexuality suppressed, but she is also subjected to physical violence, as she notices the greedy eyes of gangsters preparing to abduct her at the story’s end:

Calamity...

Quiet, quiet, the unobstructed wilderness ahead  
Urgently, one upon another, riding toward me  
one bloodstained caravan after another, kicking  
over ten years of wakeful loneliness

劫數……

靜，靜，眼前是無垠的曠野  
緊似一陣急似一陣對我馳來的  
是一撥又一撥血腥污穢的馬隊  
踢翻十年惺惺寂寞<sup>67</sup>

In Chinese tradition, patriarchal norms have historically exerted control over the female body and desire, assigning women to kinship roles such as wife, daughter, daughter-in-law, mother, mother-in-law, maid, concubine, and courtesan. Within these roles, women were obligated to align with the wishes and needs of closely related men. The patrilineal and patriarchal ideology was strengthened in the Song dynasty, thereby buttressing a family system in which women were disadvantaged.<sup>68</sup> From the Song to the Qing dynasties, the increasingly official endorsements of wifely fidelity, as well as the plethora of models that spawned in literati writings, underscored the bodies of women as vessels for normative pronouncements. Analogous to Western patriarchy, female identity within Chinese tradition was culturally shaped by what Butler terms “[s]ocial constraints, taboos, prohibitions, [and] threats of punishment.”<sup>69</sup> The feminine is domesticated and seen as intelligible only within a “phallogocentrism” that “claims to be self-constituting.”<sup>70</sup> In “Miaoyu Sits in Meditation,” however, Miaoyu’s gender consciousness awakens as she perceives patriarchal oppression and constraints. The interplay

between sexual awakening and social limitations is evident in her fond memory of encountering Baoyu, which is soon repressed by the Buddhist chant. Realizing that she cannot escape the effects of interpellation by merely labeling herself an “outsider” and withdrawing from the world, she must confront discipline, accept obedience, and stifle her inner voice.

Following up on Cao Xueqin’s critique of Confucian patriarchy, Yang Mu also presents an alternative discourse to challenge the stereotypes prevalent in traditional Chinese literature, where female characters are often portrayed in stark dichotomies as either overtly lewd or excessively innocent. Figures like Da Ji 妲己 in *The Investiture of the Gods* (*Fengshen yanyi* 封神演義), Bao Si 褒姒 in *Biographies of Exemplary Women* (*Lienü chuan* 列女傳), and Yang Guifei 楊貴妃 in *Comprehensive Mirror to Aid in Government* (*Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑) are depicted as destructive forces, seducing emperors and leading to the downfall of dynasties. Conversely, the popular “scholar-beauty” (*caizi jiaren* 才子佳人) romances narrate the story of a young man striving for success through the civil service examination system. Upon achieving success, he either returns to marry the woman who aided him in overcoming his challenges or forsakes her for a more advantageous marriage. In “Miaoyu Sits in Meditation,” Yang Mu distances himself from conventional stereotypes, choosing instead to draw inspiration from *Dream of the Red Chamber*, which despite being written by a man, delves into the narratives of women. Using a dramatic monologue, Yang adopts a female persona, allowing him to wear a metaphorical mask and theatrically present Miaoyu’s desires and fate. In this poem, Miaoyu not only vocalizes her thoughts but also expresses her emotions through her body and senses, enriching the narrative with a multifaceted feminine perspective. Incorporating dreams, fantasies, aspirations, and myths, the poem unfolds through a variety of emotions and temporalities, weaving a non-linear, non-teleological, and occasionally repetitive and circular narrative. The poem appears to evoke a distinctive “woman’s time,” navigating the realms of both “repetition” (through the repetitive phrases and disturbance of sequence) and “eternity” (through mythical elements).<sup>71</sup> Much like Cao Xueqin’s

critical exposition of women's lives within a patriarchal framework, Yang Mu, in his "feminine" writing, reshapes female archetypes in Chinese literature, rendering visible the structures of patriarchal oppression and dismantling the discourse of phallogentrism.

The overarching question provoked by the poem is why Yang Mu chooses Miaoyu as the heroine rather than other protagonists such as Lin Daiyu 林黛玉, Xue Baochai 薛寶釵, or Shi Xiangyun 史湘雲. Among them, Miaoyu's fate of being abducted by gangsters represents the most atrocious form of patriarchal violence, an act that enables Yang Mu to reflect on the condition of women in Chinese classics as well as on the postcolonial condition of postwar Taiwan. Yang's performance of the female mask recalls Deleuze's notion of becoming. Becoming-woman is a way to win back "their own history, their own subjectivity."<sup>72</sup> The femininity of becoming-woman is also a fundamental way to explore other forms of becoming.<sup>73</sup> In this vein, becoming-woman in the domain of male hegemony can be a metaphor for becoming-minority, against an official discourse, in the context of Taiwan. Just as females cannot speak, must encounter potential danger, and are even threatened with physical violence,<sup>74</sup> so too Taiwanese people, as Yang obliquely suggests, are silenced, vulnerable, and threatened with imprisonment and execution during the White Terror. Much like Miaoyu, they suffer from the internal conflict stemming from the unfulfilled desire to follow their hearts in the face of relentless social norms. Vulnerable to outlaw violence, they still yearn for freedom and autonomy, aspiring not to be confined in jail or terrorized like females or slaves by the fear of punishment but to possess the power and resources enabling the exertion of their free will in a society that no longer imposes limitations on their bodies and actions.

An analogous instance of using females to allegorize colonized bodies is the famous Minnan song "Courtesan" (*Wunü* 舞女), in which the main character dances with different men while concealing her sadness. The song becomes a metaphor for protesters like Cheng Nan-jung who see Taiwan under both Japanese and ROC rule as a prostitute deprived of

her voice. In Yang Mu's poem, the female inclination may echo the traditional concept of "grievance in the inner chamber" (*guiyuan* 閨怨), where men often assumed a female mask to express discontent with their ruler's neglect of their service. However, Yang's poem transcends this tradition; opting to challenge authority, it, through a subversive feminine consciousness, embraces difference, celebrates nomadism, and transcends gender boundaries, temporalities (old story versus contemporary alternative meaning), and regions (Chinese literature versus Taiwanese reality). This poem should be seen not merely as a Chinese tradition of female grievance but as a metaphor for all colonized bodies.

### **Deconstructing a Taiwanese Legend**

In addition to wearing masks to reorient old Chinese stories, Yang Mu applies a similar rhetorical technique to a Taiwanese legend in the poem "The Sacrifice of Wu Feng." Controversial today, the poem retells the story of the Chinese/Han hero who sacrifices himself to end the Indigenous practice of headhunting in Taiwan. The myth served a propagandistic purpose, aiming to interpellate Taiwanese people into a Chinese identity. Teachers could use the story to encourage students to pay respect to the paradigm of a benevolent person and foster their love for their country and fellow citizens. Telling the story was a strategy not merely to teach the concept of "loyalty" (*zhong* 忠) but also to inculcate Chinese orthodoxy. In the 1990s, the legend faced substantial criticism for its "narcissistic" Han attitude because it portrayed Han people as inherently superior while stigmatizing Indigenous Taiwanese as savages. The legend certainly creates a dichotomy: Han people are civilized, virtuous, and benevolent, willing to sacrifice themselves for others, whereas the Indigenous people are superstitious and primitive, needing to be disciplined and taken care of like children.

Composed in 1978, Yang Mu's retelling of the legend portrays Wu Feng as remembering the ideal image of Confucian scholars in his childhood dream when he was in mainland China. Like Jizi, who experienced the disillusionment of Confucianism, Wu Feng's experience in China led

him to the conclusion that scholars were misguided by the classics. He realized that they were academically conceited and that the Confucian knowledge they had misinterpreted had become illusory. Thus, he decided to leave China for Taiwan. Now he remembers how, when crossing the Taiwan Strait, he had identified himself with Ming loyalists who rejected the hegemony of the Qing dynasty. He remembers Zheng Chenggong, who established a base in Tainan; Zhang Huangyan 張煌言 (1620–1664), who fought against the Qing regime; Zhu Shunshui 朱舜水 (1600–1682), who went to Japan to promote Confucianism; and Wang Fuzhi 王夫之 (1619–1692), who adopted an anti-Manchu stance in his writings. Like Wu Feng, they were Ming loyalists in exile, either mentally or physically, devoted to their ideals and in revolt against Qing hegemony. The nature of their marginalization does not depend on how authentic a person or a regime can be. Compared to the Manchu Qing regime, Zheng Chenggong, Zhang Huangyan, Zhu Shunshui, and Wang Fuzhi might have claimed themselves and their teachings as orthodox Chinese. But they had no power, and their voices were almost silenced in the dominant political discourse.

The grand discourse did not eclipse the glow of these marginalized Ming loyalists. In Yang Mu's story, Wu Feng identifies with them and realizes that the contemporary Confucian literati he knows on the mainland are hypocritical and unrealistic. He attempts to test the words of the sages by having an actual encounter with the Taiwanese landscape and the Indigenous people. He states, "How fortunate I am to discover that / life can be as immense, wide, and upright / as the green mountains / and can glaze like the ocean / The meaning of my life relies on / the cry and laughter of other people" (我何幸能够發現，原來／生命的堅毅和廣大／轟然如並起的山巒蒼翠／耀眼如浩瀚的海面閃光／在別人的啼哭和歡笑裏／生命潛沉發揮)。<sup>75</sup> In his mind, his efforts correspond to two ideas from *The Analects of Confucius*: "the broad caring of people" (*fan'an* 泛愛) and "cleaving to the saints" (*qinren* 親仁).<sup>76</sup> He decides to follow Confucianism by sacrificing himself and hopes that the Indigenous people will remember his sacrifice: "If they will

remember that / I prevented Mount Ali from bloody massacres forever / then my death will be no less significant than Zhang Huangyan's / and my life can become no more valuable to me / [...] / [...] even if they may forget me / after my death" (假如他們能記憶着我／讓阿里山永離血腥和殺戮／一死不輕於張煌言從容就義／則吳鳳的性命並不足惜／……／……何況一死之後／他們也可能就把吳鳳忘記).<sup>77</sup>

The poem, composed prior to Taiwan's democratization, presents a progressive perspective that diverges significantly from the original Sinocentric legend and the official discourse of the KMT, both of which depicted Indigenous people as uncivilized. In this poem, Yang Mu delves into the psyche of Wu Feng, illustrating how Wu, akin to the Ming loyalists in history, embraces a "nomadic" existence, opting for naturalization and local identity in a foreign land, according to Deleuze's conceptualization. Nomadism, in this context, aligns with the notions of "becoming," "heterogeneity," "passage to the limit," and "continuous variation."<sup>78</sup> Wu Feng's nomadism follows a trajectory from China to Taiwan and from the center to the margin. It possesses a centrifugal nature and poses a threat by challenging the fundamental axioms and principles of the state. In China, the hero undergoes disillusionment with Confucianism, while in Taiwan, he acknowledges the existence of valuable elements beyond the confines of Chinese discourse.

While the poem is inevitably haunted by the specter of Han-centrism, the protagonist succeeds in moving from China to Taiwan, embodying, in Levinasian terms, an ability to heed and respond to the call of the Other, someone radically distinct from the subject in terms of culture, race, language, religion, and background.<sup>79</sup> Wu Feng's encounter with the Other is conveyed through his connection to the mountains and oceans, as well as to the "cry and laughter" of the Indigenous people. Notably, Yang Mu, in his autobiography *The First Book of Mount Qilai*, recounts childhood experiences with the Amis people, during which he was exposed to their culture and gained access to a world that inspired admiration and love.<sup>80</sup> This early affection may constitute a

hidden sentiment (or sediment) within Wu Feng's monologue, wherein he articulates a sense of responsibility toward the Indigenous people and an acknowledgment of the call of the Other. Wu Feng's magnanimous response to Taiwan signifies an unconditional openness toward the unknown and anonymous Other, without any expectation of reciprocity.<sup>81</sup> Through his relationship with Indigenous people, his sense of identity is disrupted, opening a process of deterritorialization and the exploration of alternative possibilities.

Through the persona of Wu Feng, Yang Mu envisions a reconfiguration of his own cultural identity. This involves aligning himself with the Ming loyalists who resisted the Qing regime (analogous to the poet's resistance against the KMT) and connecting with Taiwanese Indigenous people and the local landscape, drawing on his childhood experiences with the Amis people. The poem delves into the intricate exploration of Wu Feng's position, straddling Taiwaneseness and Chineseness, providing Yang Mu with a lens to contemplate the contemporary predicament shaped by the KMT's discourse. Utilizing Wu Feng as a narrative mask creates a layer of signification that appears to mark a shift from Sinocentrism to a local perspective and from Confucianism to an embrace of the Taiwanese landscape.

### **Masks, Ambivalence, and Postcolonial Resistance**

Inspired by the Western tradition, Yang Mu's use of masks draws from postcolonial perspectives, enabling his speaking subjects to express ambivalence during the perilous era of the White Terror. External masks and internal cultural identities are intricately intertwined, creating a dynamic tension. Outward performativity, susceptible to a dominant discourse, manifests through the characters' body language and tones. However, when the speaking subjects become cognizant of their local identity, they adopt a subversive stance, deviating from the roles they have assumed. This inconsistency, arising from their inability to fully liberate themselves from the grand discourse, encapsulates a dilemma expressed in their struggles between revolt and obedience, freedom and

interpellation, and dream and disillusionment. This oscillation gives rise to the dimension of the in-between space, a potent metaphor for the postcolonial condition. Jizi remains stranded in his boat, caught between Chinese culture and Taiwanese reality. Lin Chong occupies the space between the corrupt regime and Mount Liang. In Buddhism, spiritual liberation traditionally involves sexual abstinence, and a nun seeks to transcend paternal interpellation. Yet, in Miaoyu's narrative, patriarchy continues to shackle her, even outside the system. Miaoyu's monologue becomes an embodiment of the in-between zone, revealing her suppressed sexual desires. Wu Feng positions himself between the Han and the Indigenous people. All these characters can be interpreted through a postcolonial lens, embodying minority narratives that challenge the dominant discourse.

During this period, Yang Mu's conception of cultural identity was ambivalent and strategic. Indeed, his critical writings in the late 1960s and the 1970s often framed Taiwanese literature as an integral part of Chinese literature. The story of Jizi in the late 1960s exemplified how the poet revisited Chinese classics and incorporated Taiwanese elements to creatively reinterpret the classical literary and philosophical tradition. However, the international challenges of the early 1970s led to an identity crisis. The Modern Poetry Debate thus urged a return to Chinese roots. Influenced by this debate, Yang Mu shifted toward Chinese culture while integrating Taiwanese elements to create a hybrid poetics. Lin Chong's escape can be interpreted as fleeing political persecution, Miaoyu's game of Go may suggest a challenge to the boundaries of gender and identity imposed by patriarchal interpellations, and Wu Feng's embrace of Taiwanese identity can be seen as a metaphor for transgressing political constraints. These transgressions pave the way for a new localization and hybridity that extends beyond established Chinese discourses.

Yang Mu's poems from this period maintain inherent ambivalence due to the tension between the masked persona and the authorial voice, resisting straightforward interpretation of cultural identities. To compre-

hend this complexity, it is essential to historicize the poems within the context of the KMT's declining legitimacy, the ROC-PRC-USA relationship in the 1970s, and the myriad influences from Chinese stories, local Taiwanese characteristics, and Western literary traditions. The characters in these poems function as symbols of resistance to multiple forms of oppression, embodying the struggles of a disenfranchised minority against a state-centered grand narrative that privileges stability over their well-being.

## NOTES

1. Stagg, "The Dramatic Monologue," 49.
2. Eliot, "The Three Voices of Poetry," 192.
3. Eliot, "The Three Voices of Poetry," 195.
4. Eliot, "The Three Voices of Poetry," 195.
5. Eliot, "The Three Voices of Poetry," 200.
6. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 11–14.
7. Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," 225.
8. Hall, "Introduction: Who Needs 'Identity'?" 3.
9. Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," 225.
10. Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," 228.
11. Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," 234–236.
12. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 90.
13. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 86.
14. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 86.
15. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 86.
16. Newton, "Homi Bhabha," 294.
17. Judith Butler contends that power governs life and identity by imposing limitations, prohibitions, regulations, and control. She views the body as a passive medium, marked by an inscription from a cultural source external to itself. The body becomes subject to various historical forces as it is interpellated by a power regime, seen as a manifestation of "history." See Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 3 and 175–178.
18. Ssu-ma Ch'ien, *The Hereditary Houses of Pre-Han China*, 6–13.
19. Yang Chia-jung, "The Content and Aesthetic Analysis of 'Jizha Appreciating Music,'" 32.
20. Durrant, Li, and Schaberg, *Zuo Tradition/Zuozhuan*, 1242–1247.
21. Wong, "The Music of Ritual Practice," 253.
22. The Ching scholar is Chu I-tsun, quoted in Yeh, "Modern Poetry in Taiwan," 235.
23. Yang Mu, *NTG*, 34; II, 23.
24. In Yang's lyrical poem, the protagonist is deliberately transplanted into an anachronistic setting. Historically, Jizi is much older than Confucius. It makes sense if he were younger and had a chance to witness the decline of Confucianism (Yeh, "Modern Poetry in Taiwan," 236). See

- chapter 5 to understand an alternative version of historical discourse for modern use.
25. Adapted from Yang Mu, *NTG*, 34; *II*, 23–24.
  26. Adapted from Yang Mu, *NTG*, 34; *II*, 24.
  27. Adapted from Yang Mu, *NTG*, 35; *II*, 24–25.
  28. Adapted from Yang Mu, *NTG*, 35; *II*, 25.
  29. Adapted from Yang Mu, *NTG*, 35; *II*, 25.
  30. Yang Mu, in *X*, 236–237.
  31. Chen I-chih, “The Hualian Context in Yang Mu’s Poetry,” 180.
  32. Liu Cheng-chung, “The Dramatic Monologue in Yang Mu’s Poems,” 298–299.
  33. *X*, 238; emphasis added.
  34. Wang, *The Lyrical in Epic Time*, 1.
  35. Sessions, “The Dramatic Monologue,” 508–509.
  36. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 225.
  37. Lydia H. Liu asserts that the concept of *huaxia* is very different from China, Chineseness, or the Central States (*Zhongguo* 中國). See the chapter “Figuring Sovereignty” in Liu, *The Clash of Empires*, 75–81.
  38. Tu, “Cultural China,” 146.
  39. Tu, “Cultural China,” 146.
  40. Liu, “The Dramatic Monologue in Yang Mu’s Poems,” 299.
  41. Yang Mu, *CCS*, 88; Yang Mu, *II*, 288.
  42. Yang Mu, *CCS*, 88; Yang Mu, *II*, 289.
  43. Yang Mu, *CCS*, 88; *II*, 289.
  44. Yang Mu, *CCS*, 89; *II*, 291.
  45. Yang Mu, *CCS*, 89; *II*, 290.
  46. Yang Mu, *CCS*, 89–90; Yang Mu, *II*, 293–294.
  47. Yang Mu, *CCS*, 90; Yang Mu, *II*, 295.
  48. Yang Mu, *CCS*, 91; Yang Mu, *II*, 298–299.
  49. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 288.
  50. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 315.
  51. Ricoeur, vol. 1 of *Time and Narrative*, 66.
  52. Yang Mu, *II*, 310.
  53. Yang Mu had life-long friendships with Kuo and Liu. When Kuo passed away in 2005, Yang Mu wrote an elegy, “Old-Fashioned Dialectics” (*Laoshi de bianzheng* 老式的辯證, 2005), for him. While teaching at the University of Washington in Seattle, the poet wrote a letter of recommendation for Chen Fang-ming, enabling him to pursue historical studies there. Chen later became a vocal supporter of the Dangwai

movement and was placed on the government's blacklist, preventing his return to Taiwan until 1989. However, this does not suggest that Yang Mu was entirely opposed to the KMT during that period. He supported students and scholars from a wide range of backgrounds, including those affiliated with the KMT, born in Hong Kong, or connected to Anglo-American academic circles. I am grateful to the reviewer of this monograph for highlighting the complexity of Yang Mu's political stance.

54. Yang Mu's anti-PRC stance during that period, evident, for example, in his refusal to read student dissertations written in pinyin romanization, warrants more nuanced contextualization. His position, while aligning with the KMT during Taiwan's martial law era, must be understood against the broader backdrop of geopolitical instability. The PRC was undergoing internal upheaval, including the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, from which Taiwan, under authoritarian rule, remained relatively insulated. This divergence in historical trajectories helped shape the intellectual and political environment in which Yang Mu's views developed. I am thankful to the reviewer for prompting a reflection on the ambivalent dimensions of his political orientation.
55. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 353.
56. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 353.
57. Adapted from Yang Mu, *HM*, 55; *IV*, 188.
58. Adapted from Yang Mu, *HM*, 55; *IV*, 189.
59. Yang Mu, *HM*, 57; *IV*, 192.
60. Adapted from Yang Mu, *HM*, 58; Yang Mu, *IV*, 194–195.
61. Yang Mu, *HM*, 59; Yang Mu, *IV*, 197–198.
62. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 353.
63. Yang Mu, *HM*, 60; Yang Mu, *IV*, 198.
64. Young, "Tao and Dharma," 321.
65. Adapted from Yang Mu, *HM*, 60; *IV*, 199–200.
66. Yang Mu, *HM*, 55; Yang Mu, *IV*, 189.
67. Yang Mu, *HM*, 62; Yang Mu, *IV*, 203.
68. Ebrey, introduction to *Women and the Family*, 12.
69. Butler, "Critically Queer," 21.
70. Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 13.
71. Kristeva, "Woman's Time," 16.
72. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 276.
73. Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, 249.
74. Cixous, "Castration or Decapitation?" 43; Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics*, 106.

75. Yang Mu, *III*, 273–274.
76. Yang Mu, *III*, 276.
77. Yang Mu, *III*, 276.
78. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 363.
79. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 33–52.
80. Yang Mu, *MMQ*, 35; Yang Mu, *IX*, 65.
81. Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 23.



## CHAPTER 2

# SOCIAL LYRICISM, SOCIAL MIND

When the great terror came / I became speechless—  
—Nelly Sachs, “When the Great Terror Came”

In Western literature, a poem assuming the first-person perspective or expressing personal feelings, typically in a concise form, is categorized as lyric. This definition evolved over time and has roots in various twentieth-century theoretical works. Scholars observe that ancient lyrical poetry, exemplified by Sappho’s and Pindar’s odes, differs from modern poetry. To probe the contemporary meanings of lyricism, theorists like Gérard Genette and Mikhail Bakhtin turn to two concepts from the nineteenth century: Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s classification of poetry as lyric, epic, or dramatic—derived from Aristotle’s poetics<sup>1</sup>—and John Stuart Mill’s assertion that “eloquence is heard, poetry is overheard.”<sup>2</sup> Genette discerns that Aristotle’s tripartite system describes modes of enunciation rather than genres.<sup>3</sup> Due to a potential “retrospective illusion” associating lyric as a major genre ingrained in literary minds,<sup>4</sup> modern poets should reconstruct a lyrical mode as something it has never been before. Bakhtin challenges Mill’s notion of poetry as a solitary “feeling confessing itself to itself”<sup>5</sup> and introduces the concept of addressivity, emphasizing the active participation of an addressee in a dialogue that

influences the author's choice of genre, compositional devices, and language vehicles.<sup>6</sup>

Yang Mu's concept of lyricism in poetry aligns with Bakhtin's notion of addressivity and Genette's idea of modern lyric, which defies categorization within the traditional tripartite system. As demonstrated in the preceding chapter, Yang's lyricism also exhibits resemblances to W. B. Yeats's mask theory and T. S. Eliot's impersonal theory, including his three forms of poetic voice. Extending beyond these Western resonances, Yang's engagement with Chinese literature and theory, particularly Chen Shixiang's 陳世驥 (1912–1971) concept of lyrical tradition (*shuqing chuantong* 抒情傳統) inspired by Lu Ji's 陸機 (261–303) "Essay on Literature" (*Wenfu* 文賦, 300 CE), provides him with an expansive perspective on the essence of lyricism. Chen Shixiang served as Yang Mu's PhD thesis adviser at UC Berkeley, and both Chen and Yang published their annotations on Lu Ji's "Essay on Literature" in 1953 and 1985, respectively. In Chen's introduction to "Essay on Literature," Chen delves into Lu Ji's experiences during what he describes as "one of the darkest ages in man's history," characterized by social upheavals and political intrigues.<sup>7</sup> Lu Ji witnessed the downfall of the state of Eastern Wu (*Dongwu* 東吳) at the age of twenty, and in the subsequent Jin 晉 dynasty, the entire moral order became bewildered. Lu's dedicated public service amid court intrigues only fueled jealousy and rancor.<sup>8</sup> The year 291 CE saw the eruption of the Rebellion of Eight Princes (*Bawang zhiluan* 八王之亂, 291–306), with eight princes and kings vying for power. In 300 CE, Sima Lun 司馬倫 (240–301), the third of the eight princes, seized control, triggering a chain of civil wars that persisted until the invasion of the Five Barbarians (*Wuhu luanhua* 五胡亂華, 304–316) and the ultimate collapse of the empire.<sup>9</sup>

Within this historical context, it is no surprise that Lu Ji articulated an acute awareness of life's fragility and a belief in the consolatory power of literature in his "Essay on Literature," which Chen regards as a radiant achievement amid the medieval darkness of China. According to Chen,

Lu's poetics embody "a high buoyance sublimated from deep sorrow [...] rejecting [escapist] transcendence and strongly reaffirming human values, [imparting] emotional depth and benignancy."<sup>10</sup> It is noteworthy that Chen weaves reflections on the tumultuous events of the twentieth century into his annotations. Having experienced the Sino-Japanese War in China and witnessed the onset of the Chinese Civil War during his time at UC Berkeley, he effortlessly identifies with Lu Ji. This connection arises because Lu, in contrast to his contemporaries such as the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove (*Zhulin qixian* 竹林七賢), who escaped from the secular world and sought refuge in religious otherworldliness, maintained "an adamant faith in the utmost of human possibilities."<sup>11</sup> As Chen contemplates the destiny of modern China, he endeavors to find a resonant response in Lu's example for the generation of writers emerging from these catastrophes. This underscores how political upheaval can lead to "poetic elation," and corporeal mortality can give rise to "literary infinitude."<sup>12</sup>

Chen's exploration of Lu Ji proposes an approach to lyricism rooted in the experiences of wars and social upheaval. This perspective perceives lyricism as an interaction between the poet's subjectivity and the phenomenal world; it also sheds light on how pivotal public events played a role in shaping the lyricism of Chen's student, Yang Mu. This chapter delves into how Yang Mu's social lyricism, reflective of life in Taiwan, encapsulates the struggles of its people, addresses issues of justice and freedom, and envisions a more promising future. The investigation focuses on four of Yang Mu's essays to comprehend the chronological evolution of his social awareness: "The Spirit of Berkeley" (*Bokelai jingshen* 柏克萊精神, 1975), "The Romanticist in Right Field" (*You waiye de langman zhuyizhe* 右外野的浪漫主義者, 1977), "Social Engagement" (*Shehui canyu* 社會參與, 1986), and "A Great Fictitious Era" (*Da xugou shidai* 大虛構時代, 1991).

### **Intellectual Engagement in Society**

The 1960s emerged as a tumultuous decade, marked by iconic crises that left an imprint on global history. These crises included the construction

of the Berlin Wall, the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Vietnam War, the US Civil Rights Movement, and the assassinations of John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King. Against the backdrop, Yang Mu's essay, titled "The Spirit of Berkeley," engages with the question of how students and scholars can participate in communities of resistance. He recognizes the prevailing ethos of liberation and persistence among UC Berkeley students, encapsulating this sentiment as "academism" (*xueyuan pai* 學院派).<sup>13</sup> He goes on to argue that Berkeley's essence surpasses the rigid boundaries of "academism." Consequently, he introduces the concept of the "spirit of Berkeley," defining it as a harmonious fusion of "both academic research and social engagement."<sup>14</sup>

To underscore this perspective, Yang Mu recounts a moment when taking a course in medieval studies at Berkeley. He initially anticipated that delving into this field would afford him a state of privileged seclusion from the harsh realities of the world. However, his expectations were challenged by a story shared by his professor. This instructor narrated the experience of a Dutch medievalist who was on leave in London at the onset of World War II. When approached for a comment by a British journalist following the German occupation of the Netherlands, the medievalist responded with an unexpected assertion: "I am researching the Middle Ages, not modern history."<sup>15</sup> This tale of political apathy catalyzes Yang's reflection on the connection between scholarly pursuits and social responsibility. In his contemplation, Yang concludes that "while engrossed in research on medieval culture, one cannot turn a blind eye to the pressing issues of the modern world. The pursuit of knowledge through books must coexist with a sense of duty toward worldly affairs that demand attention and care."<sup>16</sup>

Yang Mu regards the students of the Free Speech Movement at Berkeley in 1964 and 1965 as embodying the "spirit of Berkeley." They commandeered Sproul Plaza to demand the lifting of the ban on on-campus political activity, asserting free speech rights and protesting the Vietnam War. The pivotal moment occurred on December 2, 1964, when a group

of students ventured further, entering the administrative building to stage a nonviolent sit-in demonstration. In response, law enforcement authorities initiated a forceful crackdown on the student rallies, resorting to tactics that included dropping tear gas canisters from helicopters. The escalating violence witnessed by thousands in their efforts to disperse the demonstrators became a defining moment in the Free Speech Movement. Amid this tumultuous scene, the faculty at Berkeley were confronted with a stark choice. Faced with the clash between student activism and authority, they overwhelmingly voted to endorse the Berkeley Free Speech Movement, aligning themselves with the students' advocacy for the fundamental right to free expression on campus.

Yang highlights that, in addition to this act of civil disobedience, the students "cared for communities living in poverty, advocated for under-privileged families, and pursued equitable profit distribution."<sup>17</sup> They also protected the local neighborhood by raising awareness of industrial pollution and condemning capitalist pressures that threatened to replace green spaces with buildings. According to Yang, the student movement was characterized by its "practical" approach, avoiding unrealistic goals, eschewing boastful rhetoric, and standing against bureaucracy and capitalism.<sup>18</sup> He suggests that scholars and intellectuals should similarly engage with the community, offering solutions for social problems rather than waiting until the situation deteriorates.<sup>19</sup> Reflecting on his years of study at Berkeley, Yang appreciates how the experience opened his eyes to the importance of observing and participating in society. He contends that the power of knowledge, especially in the humanities, should not remain confined to academia but be applied to society. A liberal arts education should not only aim to equip students with livelihood skills but also enable them to understand and critique their social roles and responsibilities. This essay encourages young adults to apply not only their practical knowledge but also humanistic qualities, including integrity, compassion, respect, and independent thinking, in contributing to the well-being of their communities.

Composed in 1975, “The Spirit of Berkeley” serves as Yang Mu’s literary response not only to the Vietnam War and the US Civil Rights Movement but also to Taiwan-related events, including the Baodiao Movement, the ROC’s removal from the UN, and the US’s recognition of the PRC. These geopolitical shifts prompted reflections on Taiwanese people’s identity, nationalism, and cultural authenticity within the realm of literature. Faced with international political challenges, literary critics like John Kwan-Terry and Tang Wen-piao spearheaded a nationalist perspective that reevaluated modern poetry. While Kwan-Terry’s critique centered on the over-westernization of modernist poetry, emphasizing its detachment from Chinese cultural roots, Tang launched attacks on poets like Yu Kwang-chung, Chou Meng-tieh 周夢蝶 (1921–2014), and Yeh Shan (Yang Mu’s early nom de plume). These poets were accused of indulging in narcissism, embracing obscurity, practicing escapism, and succumbing to decadence. Tang advocated for a form of poetry that would harmonize Taiwan’s Chinese heritage with its contemporary social reality.<sup>20</sup> Particularly, Yang Mu faced severe criticism from Tang Wen-piao, who accused him of “riding on the horse of Western Romanticism, strolling in nothingness, and missing the point” (騎著書本上的西方浪漫的彩馬，在虛空中逍遙，不著邊際).<sup>21</sup> This critique, coupled with Yang Mu’s experiences at Berkeley and political setbacks in Taiwan, likely shaped his literary transformation, prompting him to adopt a new pen name and a heightened social critique.

Yang Mu’s transition to a new form of social lyricism is evident in *Tree Rings* (1976). Despite being a central figure in the New Literary Debate, his burgeoning social consciousness predates this period. In 1971, following his graduation from UC Berkeley, he relocated to Seattle and, the following year, adopted his new nom de plume when he published the essay “Tree Rings” (*Nianlun* 年輪) in a magazine. This piece is later expanded in the experimental and occasionally picaresque prose collection of the 1976 version. In this identically titled book, the narrator, an outsider, chronicles his observations across various U.S. cities during his stay. Alongside recounting real experiences, Yang crafts a fictional

narrative about the Vietnam War featuring an American soldier, Frank, who carries out orders to loot, burn villages, and massacre civilians and livestock. Frank is traumatized by what he has done, and he meets a tragic end in a car accident on his way home to Kentucky after completing his tour of duty.<sup>22</sup> This poignant tale is revisited in the poem “Etudes: The Twelve Earthly Branches” (*Shi'er xingxiang lianxiqu* 十二星象練習曲, 1970). Here, Yang alternates depictions of fighting in Vietnam with copulatory images of Frank with his girlfriend, Louisa, in the US.<sup>23</sup> Eros and the death drive are simultaneously invoked to convey the vulnerability of human love and life in a time of war. These sociopolitical portrayals represent Yang’s alternative modes of social engagement: he knew that he empathized with the indignation of fellow students at UC Berkeley, but his status as an overseas student, wary of potential deportation, compelled him to refrain from active involvement. This self-imposed restraint, however, paved the way for the creation of a new style under a different nom de plume, a decision Yang justified in a 2003 interview: “It was hard for me to effect radical changes under the same name, although I treasure my early style.”<sup>24</sup>

Influenced by the Civil Rights Movement, Yang Mu formulates his concept of social engagement through ideas reminiscent of Chen Shixiang’s poetics. In Yang’s view, institutional violence manifests through the curbing of freedom of speech, the stifling of dissenting voices, and the waging of wars. However, when violence was employed as a last resort to quell student protests at UC Berkeley, it failed to instill conformity and instead fueled more resentment and disobedience. The protesters did not acknowledge the institutional power imposing itself on them and did not take retaliatory measures. By embracing the tactics of nonviolence, they protested peacefully and petitioned rationally. Yang’s social lyricism, which emerged at the same moment, was a response to his inability as a vulnerable overseas student to participate in the protests actively. It served as an outlet to channel his emotional turbulence, transforming it into the anti-war poem “Etudes,” which, according to Chen Shixiang, illuminates the gloomiest and darkest age.<sup>25</sup> This poignant

composition aimed to censure politicians who, for their own vainglory, initiated wars and condemned soldiers to death. Moreover, faced with pervasive institutional violence, the Vietnam War, and a sense of insufficient sacrifice, Yang sought refuge from authority and war while amplifying the muted voices of subalterns within the pages of *Tree Rings*. *Tree Rings* unfolds as a contemplation of human existence and a lamentation for lives caught in the throes of war. The recurring theme of a “waste land” (*huangyuan* 荒原 or *huangye* 荒野), reminiscent of T. S. Eliot’s conceptualization, permeates the entire volume. The narrator, Yang Mu, in the travel notes of *Tree Rings*, assumes the role of a picaresque figure, comparable to the heroes of Mark Twain or to a ragpicker or bohemian in the sense described by Walter Benjamin, collecting the stories of ordinary people. Crafting a work reflective of society was Yang’s method of social engagement, a means to defy politicians, denounce injustice and violence, aspire, love, revolt, and contribute something meaningful to the world. This is the spirit of Berkeley.

### **Irreducible Distance**

The second principle of Yang’s social lyricism, encapsulated in the notion of irreducible distance, finds expression in the essay “The Romanticist in Right Field,” a composition he crafted for the preface of *The Collected Prose of Yeh Shan* (*Ye Shan sanwen* 葉珊散文, 1977). In this essay, Yang employs a metaphor drawn from baseball to portray the feelings of boredom and loneliness experienced by a “right fielder” (*you wai yeshou* 右外野手), an outfielder who is often overlooked and seldom given the chance to catch a ball. Yang contrasts the infield players’ running, shouting, and animated strategizing with the right fielder’s quiet exclusion, depicting him standing apart, picking at a grass stem, and savoring his isolation.<sup>26</sup> This metaphor articulates a broader condition of disconnection and alienation within social structures, a recurring motif in Yang’s social lyricism.

The social distance, akin to the isolation experienced by a right fielder, may also arise from an individual’s deliberate act of dissent, as highlighted

by Yang in a childhood incident. He recounts a moment when students gathered to witness a biology teacher dissecting a live dove: “The dove’s breast was open, the blood was gushing and darkening the feathers. I squeezed my way through the crowd, returned to sit in a corner of the lecture hall, and stared blankly” (鴿子胸膛裂開，鮮血湧出沾在羽毛上，我從人堆中擠出來，坐回梯形教室的一角發呆).<sup>27</sup> This anecdote shows that standing on the outside need not signal passivity but can function as a deliberate strategy of observation and critique. Yang’s return to a corner of the lecture hall becomes a metaphor for his refusal to conform and his deliberate distance from objectionable social norms.

Yang Mu further recounts an episode during a typhoon when, eager to contribute, he offered assistance to some fishermen. However, they declined, citing the potential danger and inconvenience he might pose. Undeterred by this initial rejection, Yang took initiative and joined a non-governmental organization in the aftermath of the storm to aid in the cleanup of a remote village. Ironically, his efforts were met with a villager’s comment suggesting he had too much time on his hands. Yang emphasizes that, beyond these childhood experiences, numerous opportunities still awaited him. Engaging in meaningful actions does not necessarily require active participation in associations or hands-on involvement. Likewise, not everyone is suited to be an infielder; assuming the role of an outfielder can carry significance. By embracing this position, the outfielder can discover sweetness in the grass stem and discern a subtle emotion flowing through his mind. This experience, as Yang Mu astutely observes, is akin to water breaking a dike, with words flowing seamlessly into the pages of a manuscript.<sup>28</sup> In recounting these episodes, Yang Mu not only portrays the complexities of social engagement but also highlights the responses and roles individuals can assume within a society. This exploration illustrates the various ways one can navigate the social “game” with a spirit of resilience, observation, and meaningful participation.

This fascination with the overflow of powerful feelings into the pages of a manuscript prompts Yang to reexamine the works of the five Romantic poets. First on the list is John Keats, with a focus on his Medievalism, a stance taken against the legacy of Neoclassicism. Yang Mu contends that this nostalgic writing, aimed at resisting the neoclassical style, ultimately falls short in proposing a constructive alternative and is destined to have a brief lifespan. On the other hand, Samuel Taylor Coleridge's reliance on mystical atmospheres, according to Yang, becomes monotonous over time. William Wordsworth, the third exemplar of the Romantic spirit according to Yang, exhibits greater wisdom than Keats and Coleridge by embracing the concept of innocence, thus uncovering perpetually fresh themes in the rural landscapes of his childhood. Yang positions Lord Byron, the fourth archetype of Romanticism, within adventurous journeys, both spiritual and physical, in foreign realms. As for Percy Bysshe Shelley, the fifth touchstone of Yang's Romanticism, he finds his voice in challenging authority and resisting the violence of despotism.<sup>29</sup> Yang highlights Shelley's verse drama *Prometheus Unbound* as pivotal, where the poet embodies the idea of rebellion in a hero who refuses to reconcile with the tyrant and accepts the dire consequences. Yang Mu encourages readers, especially, to revisit Shelley and imbibe his spirit of revolt.

In addition to his admiration for Shelley, Yang Mu holds a special reverence for W. B. Yeats, who is often acknowledged as the last Romanticist. Yeats's works undeniably exhibit a wealth of romantic features, encompassing not only the primacy of imagination and emotions but also a commitment to political engagement and deep-rooted humanism. As Yeats matured, he elevated the Romantic spirit to profound depths, establishing a dialogue between the poet and the divine, and employing this connection to deliver more stringent critiques of social realities. For Yang, Yeats is unquestionably the Romanticist positioned in right field, where he metaphorically "stand[s] outside the game, chewing a grass stem—which may be shamrock—and witnessing his friends in the game engage in debates, vanquish enemies, and create a 'terrible beauty'" (孤

獨站在局外，嚼着地裏扯出來的青草——那應該是酢漿草了——看他的朋友們在局裏商議廝殺，以血肉創造「可怖的美」。<sup>30</sup> Yang aligns himself with the Irish poet, seeing him as another Romantic right fielder:

Although Yeats loves Ireland as much as John McBride, he chooses a different path. I can imagine if Yeats had seen my teacher dissect a dove, he might have turned his head, squeezed out of the way, sat in the corner, and stared blankly.

葉慈對愛爾蘭的愛絕不下於馬克布萊少校他們，可是他選擇的是一條完全不同的路。我可以想像，如果葉慈當年也在人堆中看老師解剖鴿子，血光閃處，他一定也擠出來不願意看，坐在一角發呆。<sup>31</sup>

Upon initial consideration, one might be surprised by Yang Mu's leap from the concept of irreducible distance to examples like Shelley's resistance to Napoleon and Yeats's disdain for British imperialism. Yet, these connections gain clarity upon consulting Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), where she explores the rise of Nazi Germany. The totalitarian regime established concentration camps, not only degrading human beings but also employing them for the "ghastly experiment of eliminating, under scientifically controlled conditions."<sup>32</sup> This represented an attempt at "transforming the human personality into a mere thing, into something that even animals [were] not."<sup>33</sup> It marked the manifestation of radical evil devoid of political, historical, or moral standards.<sup>34</sup> The entirety of life was systematically organized to inflict the maximum conceivable torment upon Jewish victims.

The practice of dehumanization, sanctioned by people's ignorance, finds a parallel in Yang Mu's reflections on violence. The dissection of the dove shows how animal suffering is callously denied and animal life is devalued, treated as expendable in the pursuit of scientific knowledge. The students who witnessed this experiment, from Yang's perspective, become symbolic of those individuals who passively observe the process of dehumanization, sacrificing empathy for the pursuit of loftier scientific goals. However, within this unsettling context, Yang Mu proposes two

approaches that function as safeguards against succumbing to false ideologies or participating in barbaric acts. First, he suggests that adopting the initial principle of social lyricism, the spirit of Berkeley, enables individuals to avoid scholarly detachment by fostering a connection with pressing social issues. Paradoxically, Yang also proposes an alternative strategy, that of being a “right fielder” and preserving a degree of detachment from the people. By assuming this outfielder role, one can navigate the social landscape with a degree of distance, avoiding the pitfalls of blindly conforming to prevailing norms. This dual strategy, grounded in the principles of social lyricism, offers individuals the means to traverse the complex terrain of social expectations while preserving a sense of moral integrity and empathy.

Shelley’s *Prometheus Unbound* and Yeats’s “Easter, 1916,” cited by Yang Mu as exemplars, demonstrate the harmonious synthesis of social engagement and detachment. *Prometheus Unbound* bears witness to the bloodshed and despair unleashed by the era of Napoleon, lamenting the loss of hope in freedom and equality that were once synonymous with the Enlightenment. In the face of new despotisms and social upheavals, Shelley questions the re-establishment of successive tyrannies in France, portraying the terrible consequences of a social disparity where one individual revels in luxury while another languishes in famine.<sup>35</sup> As Shelley explores the possibility of ending injustice and oppression, he skillfully employs the ancient myth of Jupiter’s despotism and the unyielding defiance of Prometheus. Here, Prometheus symbolizes perseverance, hope, and moral courage, standing for the enduring efforts of generations of intellectuals and inspiring collective endurance in times of social upheaval.<sup>36</sup>

While Shelley brought attention to the havoc wrought by Napoleon’s despotism, a century later, Yeats portrayed the misdeeds of British imperialism in Ireland, thereby expanding the temporal and thematic dimensions of the discourse on social engagement and detachment. The roots of British rule in Ireland trace back to the Anglo-Norman

invasion of 1169, and despite the formation of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland after the 1798 rebellion, Irish demands for freedom persisted, met with continued British imperial violence. A series of resistance movements and revolts over the years culminated in the momentous Easter Rising of April 1916. Despite being a supporter of Irish independence, Yeats opted not to actively participate in the Rising, choosing instead to maintain a certain intellectual distance while bearing witness to the unfolding events. In his renowned poem “Easter, 1916,” Yeats captures the faces of his rebel friends, who congregated in a tavern, sharing drinks and jokes before embarking on their final battle. The concluding lines resonate with solemnity as he invokes their names: “I write it out in a verse— / MacDonagh and MacBride / And Connolly and Pearse.”<sup>37</sup> While Yeats’s realism in “Easter, 1916” stands in stylistic contrast to Shelley’s allegorical approach in *Prometheus Unbound*, both poets utilize the power of lyricism to convey personal emotions while embodying a socially engaged spirit of resistance against oppression. The expansion of the historical context surrounding British rule in Ireland adds depth to the discussion, highlighting the enduring struggle for freedom and the complex dynamics between social engagement and detachment.

### **Poetic Truth as a Touchstone**

The third principle of social lyricism, articulated in the essay “Social Engagement” from *The Completion of a Poem (Yi shou shi de wancheng — 一首詩的完成, 1989)*, opens an inquiry into the interaction between poetic form and social reality. In this essay, Yang Mu imagines writing to a young adult who has asked how to navigate social engagement while preserving an idealistic view of art without succumbing to currents of corruption or forsaking one’s artistic integrity.<sup>38</sup> To answer this question, the poet initially defines “social engagement” as the “possible interrelation of a poet’s choice of subject and adoption of generic forms with current social problems or even political crises” (一個詩人在創作活動中選擇題目，斟酌體裁，是否有意和當前社會問題乃至於政治風雲互為牽

涉).<sup>39</sup> He then draws examples from John Milton's "Lycidas," Yeats's "Easter, 1916," and the poetry of Du Fu 杜甫 (712–770) and Bai Juyi 白居易 (772–846). By doing so, he underlines the power of writing with a "journalistic purpose," emphasizing the role of an artist in engaging with and commenting on the pressing issues of their time.<sup>40</sup> However, employing poetry as a tool for social commentary entails a dilemma. The inherent conflict arises from the tension between art's aspiration to express something "broad and encompassing" (*changyuan guangbo* 長遠廣博), universally applicable to all corners of the world, and the pragmatic nature of social engagement that necessitates "grappling swiftly and effectively with some prominent local event, which may seem trivial to the rest of the world" (快速把握時效，這個地方的大事可能是全世界其他地方的小事).<sup>41</sup> In acknowledging this tension, Yang Mu notes that a poem crafted with an immediate objective in mind is likely to be transient and may not endure perpetually.<sup>42</sup>

To reconcile the dilemma, Yang Mu introduces the concept of "poetic truth" (*shi de zhenshi* 詩的真實) as a touchstone for evaluating the artistic quality and universality of a poem.<sup>43</sup> He posits that poetic truth emerges as "the result of interaction between artistic imagination and philosophical contemplation, a blending of sounds, colors, points, and lines to arrest beauty in a poetic form, and from this realm truth emerges" (藝術想像和哲學思考激盪的結果，通過聲音，色彩，點與線的平衡，捕捉到美以為作品定型，並且在那範圍裏呈現了真).<sup>44</sup> This definition highlights the synthesis of artistic elements contributing to poetic truth, acknowledging the delicate dance between reality, imagination, philosophy, and aesthetic values that shape the poetic form. The balance between maintaining the integrity of poetic truth and fulfilling an intellectual's social responsibility is undoubtedly a challenging task. However, Yang Mu, in his wisdom, encourages emerging poets to bravely embrace this challenge. He urges them to explore the interplay between artistic purity and social engagement, recognizing that this interaction is an essential aspect of the poet's journey:

[W]e must use our pen to intervene directly with a kind of concise, comprehensive social critique. [...]

[...] We must observe the mundane world with shrewd eyes and listen to what happens in society with wise ears so as to analyze it, judge it, and condemn and attack it. [...] If justice and righteousness stay in our hearts and our minds become united in a spirit of enlightenment, these labors will surely reinforce our faith in being a poet, purify our intentions, and crystallize our sense of mission.

必須調整筆鋒，以某種更直接朗暢的方式參與社會問題的批判……

……我們要以敏銳的眼光觀察人間，以聰慧的耳朵諦聽社會，思索它，判斷它，撻伐譴責……若是我們心存公理和正義，若是意念能與神明相通，這一切工作就必然將更厚植我們做為詩人的信心，淨化我們的企圖，凝聚我們的使命感。<sup>45</sup>

In the concluding section of the essay, Yang Mu investigates Milton's life and poetics. In "Lycidas," Milton employs ancient myth to condemn the ineptitude of the clergy and the corruption within the Church of England. In *Areopagitica*, he criticizes the censorship of books, advocating for the "liberty to know, to utter, and to argue freely according to conscience, above all liberties."<sup>46</sup> His experience of political persecution serves as a catalyst, leading him to explore themes of freedom, free will, revolt, reason, and dictatorship in works such as *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained*, and *Samson Agonistes*. Yang specifically emphasizes *Samson Agonistes* as a socially engaged piece, illustrating "how a person caught up in conflicts with his social environment can arrive at a resolution, how a symbol of courage and power can be fashioned, and how universal ethical values can be found in a battered era of collapse" (個人和外界的衝突，以及解決之道，生死勇氣與力的象徵，割裂的時代如何接受永恆的倫理價值).<sup>47</sup> While Yang's choice of Milton might not immediately appear overtly political, as he encourages artists to "rise above the concerns of the mundane world and strive toward beauty in the abstract, for the

sake of defining poetic truth” (超越的現實世界的關注，企及抽象的美，為詩的真實下定義)，<sup>48</sup> it is crucial to consider Milton’s challenges as a blind bard and the tumultuous state of England during his time to fully grasp the depth of social critique embedded in his works.

The deep layer of social engagement evident in the poetry of Du Fu, Bai Juyi, Milton, Shelley, and Yeats is perhaps best understood through an exploration of Paul Celan’s “The Meridian,” the speech delivered by the Romanian poet upon receiving the Georg Buchner Prize in 1960, amid the backdrop of the Cold War. Celan bemoans the silence of contemporary poetry regarding the Shoah. He posits that poetry, to find a solution, must embark on a journey “in a certain space in a certain direction, on a certain road,” even venturing “beyond what is human,” into the “uncanny and the strange [to] free itself.”<sup>49</sup> The resulting strangeness and alienation contribute to the obscurity of poetry, but there may be another possibility—a turning of our breath (*Atemwende*)—that allows poetry to emerge from the silence and disaster, enabling reflection.<sup>50</sup> In this scenario, each poem venturing “out” is destined to return and contemplate the origin marked by the date January 20, 1942, the day of the Nazi Wannsee Conference outlining the “Final Solution to the Jewish Question.”<sup>51</sup> Attention to the world’s details, outlines, structures, and colors, informed by the senses, requires a form of concentration mindful of “our dates,” including the pivotal dates of the Shoah.<sup>52</sup> Celan finds himself both at his point of departure and in search of his place of origin, symbolized by the immaterial yet earthly shape of a circle—a meridian. This meridian, as Jacques Derrida elucidates, invites “the encounter with the other in a single place, at a single point, that of the poem.”<sup>53</sup> The meridian is a binding circle that connects while delineating “distance, singularity, and situatedness,” bringing otherness into the present.<sup>54</sup> The “here” and “now” of the poem encapsulate “one, unique, momentary present,” with its otherness giving voice to, in Celan’s words, “what is most its own: its time.”<sup>55</sup>

Yang Mu and Celan share similarities, particularly noted by Jane K. Brown, a scholar of German literature, who places them in the same category for their deployment of abstract language's beauty.<sup>56</sup> As writers of minor literatures, they craft their works in a cryptic and fragmented manner, incorporating new phrases to reimagine and protest the German or Chinese language. While Celan emphasizes the poet's role in remembering the disaster, marking its singularity within specific temporal and spatial dimensions, and simultaneously seeking its universality beyond such constraints, Yang Mu, in his essay "Social Engagement," takes Milton as his primary exemplar to illustrate how poetry can engage with reality, resist social evils, and still retain universality and timelessness. Milton, a Puritan, opposed the power of the Church of England and the monarchy, living through the English Civil War, the regicide of Charles I, and the Restoration. His literal darkness, losing his sight in middle age, became metaphorical in *Paradise Lost*, where he repeatedly employs images of "brightness" and "light." The figure of Lucifer (in Latin the "light-bringer"), with whom Milton sympathizes, serves as a metaphor for resistance against tyranny. The poem explores the meaning of life in the context of social upheavals, delving into opposites such as redemption and loss, obedience and rebellion, free will and providence. It portrays liberation from monarchy and envisions a better future free from oppressive power. These notions are conveyed through an allegory extracted from social reality, rendering them eternal and universal. For Yang Mu, *Paradise Lost* illustrates how poetry can remember incidents, present their situatedness and singularity, and transcend historical conflicts, creating a space for abstract beauty and eternal ethics.

### **Anarchist Persistence against Hegemony**

In the late 1980s, Yang Mu broadened his political perspective by immersing himself in the ideology of anarchism. This exploration assumes a prominent position within his autobiography, *The First Book of Mount Qilai* (2003), particularly in the chapter entitled "A Great Fictitious Era." Unlike conventional autobiographical accounts that often revolve around

the recollection of factual childhood memories, this chapter diverges into a realm of creative expression. Here, Yang weaves a tapestry of fictitious experiences, deploying a literary technique that seems to emulate the natural proclivity of youth toward the fantastical. It serves as a medium for him to articulate a deep-seated yearning to emancipate himself from the shackles of political repression.

At the inception of this chapter, Yang envisions an alternative reality where he escapes from Taiwan during his youth, assuming a myriad of roles for himself. Whether as a seaman embarking on an ocean voyage, a lighthouse keeper in a foreign land, a war correspondent, a mineralogist in southern Africa, or a reclusive forester residing amid a vast virgin forest and a newly planted one, these imaginative scenarios serve not only as a means of contemplating a Deleuzian line of flight but also as symbolic representations of an insurmountable detachment from the reality of Taiwan. Implicit in these fantasies are deep engagements with several postcolonial concepts, including exile, diaspora, transcultural relations, localization, and the neocolonial exploitation encapsulated within the metaphorical concept of a “Dark Continent.” Although Yang Mu employs this term ironically, it evokes parallels with Chen Shixiang’s “darkest age” and resonates with Yang Mu’s own experiences in Taiwan during the White Terror. Furthermore, the in-between spaces, symbolized by the forester’s chosen location, embody the complexities of postcolonial hybridity, offering an exploration of identity and belonging in a world shaped by historical and political forces.

Concluding the series of fantastical escapades, Yang Mu introduces yet another scenario that adds depth to the tapestry of his imaginative journey. It features a Mandarin-speaking anarchist scholar immersed in research on medieval European culture. In this envisioned reality, he narrates,

Determined, I stubbornly reside alone in the Black Forest in Germany near the Austrian border, where I am engaged in academic research, humanistic creation, and bravely criticizing the

government from a position of conscience firmly from the opposition, having become famous for not compromising with officialdom.

我堅毅而頑劣地獨居於德國和奧地利邊界，在黑森林區域從事學術研究和人文創作，並且以勇於批評政府，以堅持政治反對立場的良心，以不和官方妥協著名於世。<sup>57</sup>

Existing in the intermediary realm between two European nations, he is shaped by this in-between state, enabling him to maintain a detachment from distant Taiwan and craft editorials critiquing its authority. While it is worth noting a potential geographical misalignment in Yang's reference to the Black Forest, which is situated between Switzerland and Germany, he may have intended to evoke the Bavarian Forest, a low-mountain region in Bavaria located between Austria and Germany. Despite this minor discrepancy, Yang's primary objective is to conjure the imagery of an in-between space, particularly at the border of Austria and Germany. Here, he illustrates the coexistence of a shared language with unequal political power, a dynamic that parallels the relationship between Taiwan and China. In 1938, when Nazi Germany's troops entered Austria, a significant portion of the population expressed enthusiastic support, leading to the annexation of Austria to Nazi Germany. During World War II, many Austrians actively served in the Nazi German armed forces, while others played crucial roles in the Nazi administration. Yang Mu seems to suggest a disobedient attitude against hegemony, whether it is the ROC or the PRC. This fantasy of residing in the Bavarian Forest, engaging in academic research, humanistic creation, and criticizing the government from a position of conscience aligns with the context of historical events, reflecting Yang's inclination toward resisting oppressive regimes and advocating for autonomy.

Subsequently, Yang reflects on why he assumes the role of an anarchist within this fantasy. This imaginative move becomes a means of engaging sociopolitical realities, allowing him to navigate power, critique authority, and pursue intellectual and creative autonomy beyond

geographic constraints. In doing so, he offers readers a glimpse into the layers of his visionary narrative, where the boundaries between reality and fantasy blur, giving rise to a rich and self-reflective exploration of identity, resistance, and the interaction between individual agency and the social milieu:

The development, growth, and formation of an anarchist are dependent upon a host of real political factors and cultural and noncultural inspiration. He must experience several powerful shocks, spiritual and emotional shocks, such as witnessing one or more governments become dictatorships with a disregard for all power, the corruption of justice, the greed of legislators. [...] The anarchist must have bitterly experienced these realities, joined the opposition, and suddenly withdrawn before he could become a true, complete, and good anarchist, an anti-governmentalist.

安那其之發展，養成，定型，皆有待外在許多政治現實因素來促進，有待整個文化社會和非文化社會之啓迪。他需要經歷一些有力的衝擊，精神和感情之衝擊，例如目睹一個或多個政府如何驕縱獨裁，司法者腐敗，立法者貪婪……他必須曾經為這些現實痛心疾首，曾經介入對抗，然後廢然退出，才可能轉變為一個真正，完整，良好的安那其，一個無政府主義者。<sup>58</sup>

According to Yang, an anarchist typically chooses solitude and abstains from involvement in any parties. The anarchist is also perceived as having a romantic inclination, seeking simplicity and peace.<sup>59</sup> In the fantasy, a young European scholar questions Yang about his decision to conduct academic research at an institute near the Austrian border, far from his home in Taiwan. Yang responds, “I’m an anarchist, I’m against governments” (我是一個安那其，無政府主義者).<sup>60</sup> The European scholar interprets these words as indicative of Yang’s scholarly dignity and integrity, coupled with a sense of melancholy reflection on his homeland.<sup>61</sup> In this dialogue, Yang Mu portrays the nature of anarchism not merely as a political stance but as a profound lifestyle choice. The concept of choosing solitude aligns with the romanticized

image of the anarchist, emphasizing the rejection of social norms and the pursuit of personal freedom.

Two questions emerge for deeper exploration: Why does Yang Mu indulge in fantasies of anarchism? And how is this political stance manifested in his autobiography? The first inquiry is rooted in the likelihood that his concept of anarchism draws inspiration from Federico García Lorca and the era in which he lived. Anarchism, fundamentally, champions a spirit of freedom, equality, and spontaneity, seeking to “shake off the repressive apparatus created by hierarchical society.”<sup>62</sup> Its historical roots in Spain are deep, culminating on the eve of the Spanish Civil War when the anarcho-syndicalist Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (CNT) claimed approximately one million members in a Spanish population of twenty-four million.<sup>63</sup> During this period, anarchists had transformed a formerly hierarchical society, fostering an environment where people regarded each other as equals. However, with Franco’s fascist Falangists triumphing in the Civil War, Spanish anarchists were compelled to go underground or abandon their cause.<sup>64</sup> It is plausible that Yang Mu acquired knowledge of anarchism through his readings of Lorca. While mourning Lorca’s execution by the Falangists and drawing parallels between the Spanish dictator Franco and Chiang Kai-shek in his work “Forbidden Games” (*Jinji de youxi* 禁忌的遊戲, 1976),<sup>65</sup> it is not surprising to observe how he leverages Spanish anarchism from the 1930s to deconstruct the authority of the KMT.

Yang Mu’s advocacy for nonviolent anarchism may find its origins in his observations of the prevailing public distrust toward the KMT’s authority, the brutal repression witnessed during the Formosa Incident, and, on a broader scale, the overarching perils associated with the Cold War arms race. In the realm of his imagination, he immerses himself in medieval literature, envisions self-exile to Europe to distance himself from Taiwan’s harsh reality, and vehemently criticizes social injustice by penning editorials that reflect the plight of a minority. While the act of composing social commentary and poetry remains inherently nonviolent,

its purpose extends beyond the creative realm; it serves as a tool to enlighten and motivate oppressed communities, bringing attention to prevalent issues and fueling a collective demand for justice.

To explore the political stance in Yang Mu's autobiography, it is useful to read it through the lens of Taiwanese history. The concept of anarchism does not abruptly surface in Yang Mu's writings; rather, it evolves in response to a trajectory of political tumult and emotional frustrations. In the chapter "Love, Beauty, and Rebellion" (*Aimei yu fankang* 愛美與反抗) in *The First Book of Mount Qilai*, delving into his school life in the 1950s, he remembers that he and other Taiwanese students were called "shameless and nation-less slaves" (*wuchi wangguo nu* 無恥亡國奴) by their Chinese teachers.<sup>66</sup> Seeking an escape from discrimination, he turned to the seascape as a metaphorical assertion of resistance: "I once again heard those tidings emanating from that dark place in my soul, saying that which never moves is love, sympathy, beauty, *rebellion*, and poetry."<sup>67</sup> In the chapter "That Age" (*Na yi ge niandai* 那一個年代), he writes, "It was such a severe and destructive age," referring to the jailing, disappearance, and execution of Taiwanese dissidents during the White Terror.<sup>68</sup> The poet further touches upon the repeated armed conflicts between the ROC and the PRC on Kinmen Islands, as well as global Cold War conflicts, such as Soviet tanks patrolling the streets of Budapest during the 1956 Hungarian Revolution and the People's Army of Vietnam occupying the city of Saigon in 1975.

All these upheavals, together with the emotional frustrations and existential crises they provoked, played a pivotal role in shaping Yang Mu's inclination toward anarchism as a mean of liberating himself from state oppression. This contemplation extends beyond the borders of semi-democratic entities like the ROC to encompass the far-reaching grasp of totalitarian communist regimes, exemplified by the experiences of the USSR and the PRC. Yang Mu's endorsement of anarchism is not a groundless fantasy but a result of meditating on a variety of events recorded in the autobiography, including Japanese colonization, the years

of World War II, the Chinese Civil War, the ROC's takeover of Taiwan, the February 28 Incident, the White Terror era, the armed clashes in Kinmen, the Hungarian Revolution, and the Vietnam War. However, it is crucial to note that certain events, such as the Formosa Incident, his engagement with Lorca's works during the Spanish Civil War, and the potential influence of Yeats's poetry on the struggle for Irish independence, are conspicuously absent from the explicit mentions in the autobiography. These omissions, far from diminishing the depth of Yang's reflections, add a transcultural layer to the mosaic of influences that have led him to reject any form of hegemony.

### **Social Lyricism: Principles and Practice**

This chapter explored the connection between Yang Mu's poetic lyricism and social upheaval. To illuminate the lyrical mind in a politically turbulent period, the chapter engaged with key theories and critical perspectives. Against the backdrop of the Chinese Civil War, the concept of "lyrical tradition," as expounded by Chen Shixiang, came to the forefront. This concept, shaped by Chen's engagement with Lu Ji's "Essay on Literature," emphasizes the transformative role of literature as a vehicle for transcending the darkest epochs of human history. Chen Shixiang contends that in the face of calamity, words, images, and ideas gain the power to preserve the essence of experience. From this perspective, literary works become vessels of lyricism that transcend moments of social upheaval and endure across history. Building on this view, the chapter examined how social turmoil shaped Yang Mu's poetry while situating his lyricism within broader literary traditions and sociopolitical contexts. Yang Mu's social lyricism develops through four overarching principles. The first principle, captured by the "spirit of Berkeley," illuminates the importance of humanistic education and academic knowledge. It reflects a belief in the transformative power of education to shape worldviews and social awareness. This chapter examined how education and knowledge contribute to the formation of a socially engaged poetic mind. The second principle, the "Romanticist in

right field,” directs Yang Mu toward unbiased observation and a refusal to comply with authoritarian dictates or condone violence. This principle manifests itself in works such as Shelley’s *Prometheus Unbound* and Yeats’s “Easter, 1916,” where detachment underpins the pursuit of truth and artistic integrity. It symbolizes a commitment to upholding principles in the face of oppressive authority. The third principle, “poetic truth,” turns to universal aesthetic values. Milton’s work serves as a model for integrating political experience into literary form without sacrificing aesthetic merit, illustrating Yang Mu’s effort to balance the political and the aesthetic. The fourth principle arises from Yang’s reflection on contemporary political conflicts and his disillusionment with all forms of government. From this disillusionment emerges an anarchist stance grounded in nonviolence, freedom, equality, and sustained social critique.

These four principles developed chronologically in Yang Mu’s social lyricism and resonated with Chen Shixiang’s lyrical tradition, Paul Celan’s commemorative reworking of the past, and Hannah Arendt’s critique of totalitarian violence. For Yang Mu, poetry is not an ethereal pastime but a grounded, practical form of engagement, a medium through which values were sustained and beliefs articulated. This view captures the depth of his social lyricism, shaped by principles responsive to shifting social realities.

## NOTES

1. Jackson and Prins, general introduction to *The Lyric Theory Reader*, 3.
2. Mill, "Thoughts on Poetry," 95.
3. Genette, "The Architext," 25.
4. Genette, "The Architext," 17–18.
5. Mill, "Thoughts on Poetry," 95.
6. Bakhtin, "The Problem of Speech Genre," 231.
7. Chen, introduction to *Essay on Literature*, ix.
8. Chen, introduction to *Essay on Literature*, x.
9. Chen, introduction to *Essay on Literature*, xi.
10. Chen, introduction to *Essay on Literature*, xiii.
11. Chen, introduction to *Essay on Literature*, x–xi.
12. Wang, *The Lyrical in Epic Time*, 19.
13. Yang Mu, *VII*, 108.
14. Yang Mu, *VII*, 108–109.
15. Yang Mu, *VII*, 109.
16. Yang Mu, *VII*, 110.
17. Yang Mu, *VII*, 110.
18. Yang Mu, *VII*, 110.
19. Yang Mu, *VII*, 110.
20. Yeh, "Chinese Literature from 1937 to the Present," 631.
21. Tang Wen-piao, *The Heavens Belong Not to Us*, 224.
22. Yang Mu, *VI*, 340–352.
23. Chen Fang-ming, "The Dialectics of Life," 344.
24. Yang Mu, "Frontier Perspectives: Three Interviews on Contemporary Poetry in Taiwan," interview by Michelle Yeh, *Mānoa: A Pacific Journal of International Writing* 51, no.1 (2003): 29.
25. Chen, introduction to *Essay on Literature*, vii.
26. Yang Mu, *VI*, 11–12.
27. Yang Mu, *VI*, 13.
28. Yang Mu, *VI*, 16.
29. Yang Mu, *VI*, 18–21.
30. Yang Mu, *VI*, 23.
31. Yang Mu, *VI*, 23.
32. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 438.
33. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 438.

34. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 443.
35. Shelley, preface to *Laon and Cythna*, in vol. 3 of *The Complete Poetry of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, 115.
36. Shelley, preface to *Laon and Cythna*, in vol. 3 of *The Complete Poetry of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, 115.
37. Yeats, "Easter, 1916," in *The Poems*, edited by Finneran, vol. 1 of *The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats*, 184.
38. Yang Mu, *Com*, 74; Yang Mu, *VII*, 313.
39. Yang Mu, *Com*, 75; Yang Mu, *VII*, 313.
40. Yang Mu, *Com*, 75; Yang Mu, *VII*, 314.
41. Yang Mu, *Com*, 76; Yang Mu, *VII*, 315–316.
42. Yang Mu, *Com*, 76; Yang Mu, *VII*, 316.
43. Yang Mu, *Com*, 76; Yang Mu, *VII*, 316.
44. Yang Mu, *Com*, 76–77; Yang Mu, *VII*, 316.
45. Yang Mu, *Com*, 79; Yang Mu, *VII*, 319.
46. Milton, *Areopagitica*, 54.
47. Adapted from Yang Mu, *Com*, 80; Yang Mu, *VII*, 321.
48. Yang Mu, *Com*, 80; Yang Mu, *VII*, 321.
49. Paul Celan, "The Meridian," in *Collected Prose*, 42–44.
50. Celan, "The Meridian," 47.
51. Celan, "The Meridian," 47.
52. Celan, "The Meridian," 50.
53. Derrida, *Sovereignties in Question*, 13.
54. Thomas, "Meridians," 5.
55. Celan, "The Meridian," 50.
56. See the documentary, *Toward the Completion of a Poem*, DVD, directed by Wen Chih-i (Fisfisa Media, 2011).
57. Yang Mu, *MMQ*, 180; Yang Mu, *IX*, 292.
58. Adapted from Yang Mu, *MMQ*, 181; Yang Mu, *IX*, 292.
59. Yang Mu, *XI*, 194.
60. Adapted from Yang Mu, *MMQ*, 182; *IX*, 294.
61. Yang Mu, *MMQ*, 182; Yang Mu, *IX*, 294.
62. Bookchin, *The Spanish Anarchists*, 17.
63. Bookchin, *The Spanish Anarchists*, 1; Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible*, xi.
64. Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible*, xi.
65. Lisa Wong, "It Is Not So Far," 149.
66. Yang Mu, *MMQ*, 113; Yang Mu, *IX*, 186–187.
67. Yang Mu, *MMQ*, 124; Yang Mu, *IX*, 201–202; emphasis added.

68. Yang Mu, *MMQ*, 188; Yang Mu, *IX*, 302.



## CHAPTER 3

# FEELINGS THAT MATTER

So too I would say we South Africans will survive and prevail only together, black and white bound together by circumstance and history as we strive to claw our way out of the morass that was apartheid racism.

—Desmond Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness*

The preceding chapter explored diverse approaches to social lyricism, each reflecting the backdrop of political upheavals. The “spirit of Berkeley” suggests a fusion of academic research and the practical concerns of quotidian life. The “Romanticist in right field” signifies maintaining a compassionate distance while responding empathetically to the victims of injustice. The idea of “poetic truth” advocates for crafting works directly distilled from social reality, asserting the freedom to resist political corruption. Lastly, the notion of “anarchism” is rooted in a love of liberty and an unyielding rebellion against authoritarianism. While these four aspects contribute to theorizing about Yang Mu’s social lyricism, they cannot replace a thorough exploration of the structure within his lyrical poems. Such an inquiry necessitates a return to textual analysis, focusing on how diverse emotions are integrated into the verbal and rhythmic fabric of poetry in response to social injustice. Notably, the Chinese term

for “lyrical,” *shuqing*, literally translates to “giving vent to emotions” and evokes the concept of “poetry verbalizing intent” (*shi yan zhi* 詩言志). The emotions of compassion, anger, grief, anguish, and despondency in reaction to the Taiwanese reality are particularly prominent in Yang’s works composed during the height of the democratic resistance before the lifting of martial law in 1987.

This chapter, therefore, examines not only how Yang Mu uses social lyricism in the major poems of this period—“An Elegy in Lin Yi-hsiung’s Stead” (*Beige wei Lin Yixiong zuo* 悲歌為林義雄作, 1980), “Seven Turns of the Coast” (*Hai’an qi die* 海岸七疊, 1980), “Embark” (*Chufa* 出發, 1980), and “Someone Asks Me about Justice and Righteousness” (*Youren wen wo gongli he zhengyi de wenti* 有人問我公理和正義的問題, 1984)—but also investigates how various emotional responses to Taiwanese politics are woven into the texture of these poems, as well as what sort of communities are imagined in them. Yang Mu envisions three types of alternative communities: first, he nostalgically looks back to an original community untainted by KMT control; second, he looks forward hopefully to a fully democratic community where future generations can fearlessly challenge authority; and finally, he envisions a community of unity in diversity, based on social justice that welcomes identities and ideologies that are not aggressive and discriminatory but socially oriented and compatible.

### **Theorizing Compassion and Anger**

To ground the analysis of Yang Mu’s literary texts, the section introduces Martha Nussbaum’s affect theory. According to Nussbaum, emotions, encompassing grief, fear, anger, and compassion, intricately shape both the mental and social dimensions of our lives.<sup>1</sup> They are not merely the fuel that powers the psychological mechanism of a reasoning creature but also an essential element of our reasoning.<sup>2</sup> Departing from the perception of morality as a system of principles to be grasped by the detached intellect, Nussbaum integrates emotions and judgments, defining emotions as value judgments that assign great importance to external

entities for personal flourishing.<sup>3</sup> Emotions combine perceptions of an object with judgments of its significance, often involving reflection and self-awareness. Therefore, emotions entail not only ways of seeing an object but also beliefs about it and critical evaluation.<sup>4</sup>

Nussbaum highlights the importance of anger in her examination of social injustice. While anger may involve a desire for violent retribution against the wrongdoer, it extends beyond a retrospective inclination. It can manifest as an “associated future-directed action tendency.”<sup>5</sup> In societies marked by corruption and brutality, this form of anger anticipates a shift toward future good, requiring compassionate hope and constructive thinking. Nussbaum terms this constructive form of anger “transitional anger” because it signifies that the oppressed not only recognize the wrong done to themselves but also motivate themselves to “protest and struggle against injustice” and to communicate the nature of their grievances to the broader world.<sup>6</sup> To illustrate the nobility of anger and its role in empowering the oppressed to assert themselves and pursue future justice, Nussbaum points to three prominent postcolonial figures: Martin Luther King Jr., Mohandas Gandhi, and Nelson Mandela. These figures demonstrate how anger, when channeled constructively, can serve as a powerful force for positive change, enabling the oppressed to transcend their circumstances and work toward a more just future.

While compassion and anger play crucial roles in galvanizing protesters against injustice, the dimension of grief must not be overlooked. This grief is often triggered by the tragic loss of innocent lives, exemplified by the victims of the Lin Family Massacre within the backdrop of Taiwan’s White Terror. Importantly, in the Chinese, the terms *beishang* 悲傷 (meaning “grief” or “sorrow”) and *fennu* 憤怒 (meaning “anger” or “indignation”) are frequently combined to form the compound term *beifen* 悲憤 (literally “sorrow-anger”) to articulate a response to unbearable maltreatment inflicted upon an individual. Expressions like *beifen jiaojia* 悲憤交加 (meaning “mixed feelings of grief and anger”), *beifen tianying* 悲憤填膺 (meaning “righteous indignation fills one’s breast”), and *beifen buyi* 悲

憤不已 (meaning “endless grief and anger”) encapsulate this complex emotional state. This emotion, unlike melancholy or immersion in loss, aligns with Nussbaum’s contention that it can serve as an impetus for action. Therefore, her concept of “transitional anger” in the Chinese context can equivalently be understood as “transitional grief.” This transformative grief enables individuals to cultivate greater compassion and engage in critical reflection on power dynamics, privilege, and both collective and individual experience, fostering the potential for meaningful change.

### **Restoring the Community**

The Formosa Incident was a watershed for the democratization movement because it galvanized the Taiwanese people into mass political action. Together with the Lin Family Massacre, this seminal moment had a decisive influence on Yang Mu’s view of Taiwan’s existential crisis and exposed the problem of KMT authoritarianism as he makes clear in the postscript to *Seven Turns of the Coast* (*Hai’an qi die shi yu* 《海岸七疊》詩餘, 1980):

The newspaper these days reported the trial of the Formosa Incident and the concerning debates. In Seattle, I had seen the faint northern lights and cried for the event without restraint. This morning, I heard Ying-ying walk to the door with the bamboo staff we found in Xitou. She collected the mail and newspaper, returned upstairs, and read the news about the trials one after the other. I laid the English manuscript (on the literary criticism of Chen Yinke) aside on the desk and instantly wrote down “Seven Turns of the Coast” with my intensive thoughts and aspiration. [...] We were expecting the birth of Ming-ming.

幾天來報上正在大篇刊幅刊登高雄事件的審判消息和辯論，我曾經對着微茫的北極光，不能自制地為一個事件的發生而放聲痛哭。這天早上，我聽見盈盈開門出去取信，仗着一年以前我們在溪頭撿到的竹竿，回來在樓上拆讀一版又一版的審判消息，我將一篇修改中的英文稿（關於陳寅恪的文學批

評) 推到桌子一角, 以我充沛的思念和期待, 迅速寫好〈海岸七疊〉。……我們正在期待名名的出生。<sup>7</sup>

The joyful expectation of parenthood, the sweetness of domestic life, and Yang's reminiscences of the breathtaking northern lights witnessed in Seattle stand in stark contrast to the harsh political realities unfolding in Taiwan. The incident triggers a complex array of emotions: initially, compassion for the protesters, followed by anger at the oppressive measures, and then grief over the unjust trial. This emotional journey eventually transitions into feelings of love and hope as Yang anticipates the birth of his son. These intertwined emotions prompt reflection and evaluation of the legitimacy of the KMT's rule, raising questions about community and that become more urgent with his son's birth amid such social turbulence.

The lyrical poem "An Elegy in Lin Yi-hsiung's Stead,"<sup>8</sup> penned in memory of the victims of politically motivated murders, transcends expressions of sorrow and anger by harboring a vision of community restoration. The epigraph, "Looking into the distance can bring me home" (*Yuanwang keyi danggui* 遠望可以當歸), comes from an anonymous poem in the *yuefu* (樂府) genre in the Han dynasty. In the poem's initial segments, Yang Mu laments, "What disappears is not merely the mother and the daughter / [...] / we say farewell to love, mercy, and anticipation too" (逝去的不祇是母親和女兒 / ..... / 告別了愛, 慈善, 和期待).<sup>9</sup> The murderers not only extinguished the lives of Lin's mother and daughters but also eradicated the emotions of love, mercy, and anticipation that are essential for underpinning family and social structures. The emotional damage done by the KMT's policy of torturing and murdering dissidents and their families has corroded the humanity of the entire Taiwanese community. For the poet, evil now prevails, consigning the subaltern to feelings of anxiety about and grief over the distortion of reality: "We cannot face the domineering ignorance, arrogance, / and cruelty, and merely see the anxious, distorted streets" (不能面對飛揚的愚昧狂妄 / 和殘酷, 乃省視惶惶扭曲的街市).<sup>10</sup>

Worse still, oppression not only removes the roots of Taiwanese identity but also estranges people from their local experiences. Childhoods vanish, memories fade, and time is stolen. As the lyrical “I” declares, in “crying for the loss of our homeland / what is lost is the record of the time— / now so weak, perishing, ruptured, and fractured / and childhood is like a folk song deserted on the ground” (掩面飲泣的鄉土／逝去，逝去的是年代的脈絡／稀薄微亡，割裂，繃斷／童年如民歌一般拋棄在地上).<sup>11</sup> The disappearance of childhood and the lost “record of the time” signify the displacement of minor (Taiwanese) narratives by authoritarian (Chinese) discourses, both culturally and historically. The realization that Taiwanese, as a marginalized language and culture, is “perishing, ruptured, and fractured” evokes not only melancholy and despondency in Yang Mu but also concern for the next generation: “My generation has had a hard time; the next generation must not / face more, it must not face even more hardships than ours” (上一代太苦，下一代不能／比這一代比這一代更苦更苦).<sup>12</sup>

In the subsequent segment of the poem, the poet incorporates elements from the Western tradition of pastoral elegy, marking a stylistic shift that adds layers to the emotional resonance. In a departure from the singular perspective, the poet adopts a plural first-person pronoun, creating a collective voice that amplifies the expressions of grief and compassion. By embracing the plural “we,” the poet invites readers to partake in a shared experience of mourning, emphasizing a sense of unity in the face of profound loss. This strategy transcends individual suffering and underscores the universal themes explored in the elegy, forging a link between the poet’s intimate reflections and the broader human experience:

We silently pray  
 asking the cool stars at midnight to wipe away our tears  
 to build a solid bridge so that  
 the worried mother and frightened daughters  
 are enabled to leave the city and the dust. Bring  
 them (mother and daughters) back

to the plain of the marshes and rice fields, the homeland—  
back to the homeland of the marshes and rice fields  
to the plain

我們默默祈求  
請子夜的寒星拭乾眼淚  
搭建一座堅固的橋樑，讓  
憂慮的母親和害怕的女兒  
離開城市和塵埃，接引  
她們（母親和女兒）回歸  
多水澤和稻米的平原故鄉  
回歸多水澤和稻米的故鄉  
回歸平原<sup>13</sup>

In the tradition of pastoral elegy, a poet's grief is often expressed through a tapestry of nostalgic rural imagery. This convention finds a resonant echo in John Milton's "Lycidas," where the lament for the drowning of his friend Edward King unfolds through memories of a shared life in an idyllic rural setting. Positioning himself within a lineage of esteemed Western pastoral elegists, including Shelley, Milton, Spenser, Petrarch, Virgil, Theocritus, and Moschus, Yang Mu takes a localized approach to the genre. By invoking the traditional dichotomy between the vibrant city and the idealized countryside, Yang Mu illuminates Taiwan's contemporary social realities. The rapid modernization pursued by the KMT regime not only alienated young Taiwanese from their rural origins but also engendered social indifference among the population. From Yang Mu's perspective, technological advancement appeared to serve primarily the KMT's claims to legitimacy rather than supporting diverse, rebellious minor narratives. While some KMT supporters viewed social stability (maintained through suppression) and economic prosperity as Taiwan's zenith, Yang Mu ardently articulates his hope of guiding the victims, and perhaps all Taiwanese, back to the countryside, a realm untouched by the KMT's version of modernity. There, amid abundant water and uncontaminated rice fields, they might reconnect with local culture and reclaim their distinct identity.

Among Yang Mu's poems from the White Terror period, "An Elegy" stands out as a key articulation of Giorgio Agamben's concept of bare life, formulated in relation to the state of exception. Agamben contends in his analysis of biopolitics that sovereignty operates both "outside and inside the juridical order."<sup>14</sup> Sovereign power establishes itself by constructing a political order grounded in the logic of inclusive exclusion: incorporating an individual's bare life into the juridical order only through its isolation and exclusion, typically through imprisonment or execution. Agamben cites Auschwitz as an extreme instance of exception, where violence is linked to law, justifying the application of violence to individuals stripped of legal status and transformed into bare life without rights. Bare life is the life of *homo sacer*, or the sacred man, who "may be killed and yet not sacrificed," existing outside the law as the exception and abandoned by it.<sup>15</sup> In this condition, killing is no longer regarded as homicide and becomes unpunishable. In the Lin family case, the KMT executes Lin Yi-hsiung's mother and daughters without facing legal repercussions or assuming responsibility. The victims, according to Agamben's framework, become outcasts, banned, tabooed, and dangerous.<sup>16</sup> Through the annihilation of bare life, the KMT seeks to legitimize its sovereignty and render it unquestionable. However, the Taiwanese scenario may depart from Agamben's idea that excluding and killing individuals based on declaring them outcasts can strengthen a regime. The KMT's acts of killing or torturing dissidents did not bolster its authority but instead prompted reflection on its legitimacy, ultimately leading to the downfall of its rule.

For the poet, witnessing social injustice becomes an affective convergence of compassion, anger, and grief. Compassion reframes the murders not as trivial acts but as unbearable tragedies, directly challenging the KMT's logic that devalues bare life as expendable. In this ethical vision, there is no such thing as bare life; the compassionate spectator can only see victims of state violence. Their suffering enters the poet's circle of concern, reminding him that the same fate could befall his beloved son and, by extension, the next generation. It also makes him aware of the Taiwanese people's vulnerability in the face of totalitarian power.

The power of compassion to foster a sense of family-like community appears in its use of the first-person plural and its portrayal of the victims as “[our] mother and daughters.” Most telling, however, is the epigraph: “I miss my homeland / strongly and intensively / I desire to return home but there are no people / I desire to cross the river but there is no ship” (思念故鄉／鬱鬱累累／欲歸家無人／欲渡河無船). Stranded in Seattle, Yang longs for home, but homecoming is impossible because there is “no one at home”; they are already slain. Moreover, by adapting the *yuefu* folk-song form, the poet frames the poem as a collective song and a minor narrative voiced by and for Taiwanese people who feel lost, suppressed, and angered by injustice. The victims are not strangers but the mother and daughters of all Taiwanese people.

Additionally, in “An Elegy,” anger and grief are powerful affects, yet they do not authorize retribution. Instead, they function as transitional emotions oriented toward future hope. Although the poet recognizes that the atrocity erases mercy, love, and aspiration and deprives people of access to *eudaimonia*, understood as the conditions of human flourishing, he nonetheless affirms the value of family and imagines the dead returning to an idyllic homeland in the poem’s final lines.

The KMT’s policies alienated Taiwanese people from local culture and, together with the economic success known as the “Taiwan Miracle,” produced a modern yet authoritarian society. Yang Mu, shaped by the legacies of KMT rule and, by extension, Japanese colonialism, laments the loss of familiarity, fraternity, and conviviality that followed. In response, he calls for a return to premodern social values, articulating this desire through a ritualistic refrain: “bring them back.” The invocation imagines the dead returning to a homeland defined by unity and freedom from colonial alienation. Yet Yang’s longing for a lost community, grounded in the persistence of a distinct Taiwanese identity and the need to re-recognize local culture, also invites caution. As Jean-Luc Nancy reminds us, such mythical visions often disregard the reality of the past and instead construct images of it in service of an idea or future projection.<sup>17</sup> Idealized

communities risk excluding difference and can slide into intercommunal conflict or even ethnic cleansing. Even so, Yang Mu's vision of an emergent community in "An Elegy in Lin Yi-hsiung's Stead" remains deliberately underdetermined. It nevertheless marks an ethical aspiration that is further clarified and refined in the subsequent poem, "Embark."

### **A Future Community of Justice**

Around the same time, Yang Mu crafted two lyrical poems, "Seven Turns of the Coast" and "Embark," dedicated to his newborn child. "Seven Turns of the Coast," written in January 1980, foreshadows the birth of Yang Mu's first child, Ming-ming, in Seattle that March. The poem unfolds as Yang Mu and his wife, Ying-ying, settle in a location that is geographically aligned with Taiwan. Amid surges of dark waves, "the giant whale's garden lies behind the heavy fog / ships at regular intervals detour around it as they / head straight for our homeland, Taiwan" (濃霧後面是巨鯨的花園 / 有定期的船舶繞道航過 / 航過，直放臺灣我們的故鄉).<sup>18</sup> It is a site of simplicity and contentment.

Everything looks simple and easy  
 all the preparing, cleaning, watering  
 of potted flowers, feeding of squirrels on the patio  
 crossing the road with a bamboo staff from Lugu village  
 and bringing back a bag full of mail  
 On the seacoast where dark waves surge  
 you [Ying-ying] open your brother's airmailed letter and newspapers

好像一切都這麼從容簡單  
 預備着整理着，忙着為盆花  
 澆水，將陽臺上的小松鼠餵胖  
 杖着鹿谷鄉的竹竿過馬路  
 捧回一兜滿滿的郵件  
 在一個黑潮洶湧的海岸  
 拆讀弟弟的信，以及航空版<sup>19</sup>

The news he receives from his brother-in-law about the trial of those involved in the Formosa Incident intensifies Yang Mu's anticipation for Ming-ming and deepens his connection to Taiwan. He envisions his son returning to a future Taiwan reshaped by a new political landscape:

Spring will soon be here, the next generation  
will live more fully, confidently  
in Taiwan; outspoken and strong  
though our son is born in another country  
on the seacoast where dark waves surge

春天即將來到，下一代  
會比我們活得更充實放心  
在臺灣，辯才無礙而剛強  
雖然他是在外國出生的孩子  
在一個黑潮洶湧的海岸<sup>20</sup>

In a place with freedom of speech, publication, and assembly, Ming-ming will grow up “confidently,” without the fear of persecution, where the young man can be “outspoken and strong” and speak out firmly about what he believes.

“Embark,” an ambitious fourteen-sonnet sequence, serves as a more elaborate rendition of “Seven Turns.” Composed around the time of the Lin Family Massacre, it articulates the anticipation of the child's birth and imagines his upbringing within the context of contemporary politics and hopes for an ideal community. The sequence opens with a storm in the couple's Seattle backyard, a symbolic prelude to a more significant event:

We transplant holly, nail up the side gate  
spontaneously. The whole night, wind and rain  
tighten a prophetic string  
on the enormous zither of our life, and open  
a magnanimous, lofty, sublime, profuse day of March.  
We hold each other through the morning cold  
in anticipation, and hear the farthest rain clouds  
slowly cluster over the sea and break apart.

移植一棵冬青，順手將角門  
 釘牢。然後又是徹夜的風雨  
 在我們生命巨大的古琴上  
 拉緊預言的絃，張開一片恢弘  
 嚴肅崇高，豐盈的三月天  
 我們在凌晨的小寒中依偎  
 互相期許等待，傾聽最遠處  
 雨雲在海面漸漸聚集，分裂。<sup>21</sup>

In a fervent, impassioned tone, the poet envisions his child immersed in the American natural landscape, drawing parallels to Western Romantic poetry's deep connection with nature:

My gate opens wide to face the sprouting  
 leaves, buds, and gestures of the august trees  
 a flock of birds spring from the lawn chanting  
 inside the wall, outside the wall, staying  
 with the fresh green twigs, with the eaves  
 where wind chimes sing

面向萌發的葉芽，巨樹  
 森嚴的手勢，我的大門洞開  
 羣鳥從草地上躍然飛起  
 啁啾相呼於牆裏牆外，搶據  
 新綠的枝頭，叮噹搖響的  
 簷角。<sup>22</sup>

In the fifth sonnet, the perspective shifts from the West to the East, transitioning from the present Western imagery of the Pacific Northwest to future scenes imagined in Taiwan. The focus moves from contemplating how the child will have matured in the past to eagerly anticipating the child's future in an idyllic Taiwanese setting:

you must remember the green  
 beyond ten thousand waves, your native land  
 copy it a million times ampler and grander  
 remember subtropics with banana,

pineapple, west coast with vast sea and sky  
 grand volcano peaks in chains rupture snow  
 and rivers run in four directions to  
 the aspiring, waiting ocean.

牢記蒼鬱一片  
 萬里風波外的才是鄉土  
 模仿它，億萬倍廣闊偉大  
 牢記香蕉鳳梨的南溫帶  
 藍天大海的西涯，美麗的  
 火山連鎖裏突破雪線的峯巒  
 而所有河水都向四方奔流，齊赴  
 仰望，等待的汪洋。<sup>23</sup>

With paternal warmth, the poet encourages the child to explore, make mistakes, and dream fearlessly: “I’ll even let you ruin a mirror / with a crayon-drawn color spectrum, / see how you feel puzzled and experience the affection / for the mistakes of your wild imagination” (我甚至讓你肆意將光的七色／揉碎在一面鏡子上，看你如何／對着暗淡的後果納悶，體驗／性情，一次放縱想像力的失誤).<sup>24</sup> Embracing mistakes, gaining experience, and unleashing creativity will aid the child’s intellectual and moral development. In the seventh sonnet, the child’s imagination is portrayed as soaring like a paper airplane propelled toward East Asia, ultimately reaching Taiwan: “A silent armed paper plane / glides from the north high window, through / the flower-falling garden, straight west to east / and breaks up the shadows of the swings / may our fantasy run wild, but keep listening” (透過落花的小院，北窗高處／若無聲息一架軍機，筆直／由西向東飛行，穿破解散的／秋千影，讓我們神馳傾聽).<sup>25</sup>

The eighth sonnet adopts a more political tone as the poet envisions himself and his generation, symbolized by the inclusive pronoun “we,” uniting like the Dangwai dissidents to challenge authority and voice demands for righteousness, justice, and empathy:

Your voice and your face are so familiar

so familiar is the distant past,  
 another era where we were one:  
 a form and shadow never split but roved  
 from the wholly silent seven heavens  
 bucked—with a will defying a recall—  
 philosophies and acts of human folly,  
 challenged mad authority, kept a calm smile  
 that defied translation. Side by side,  
 we have passed through thousand landscapes to see  
 earthly righteousness, justice, sympathy

你的聲音和面貌，如此熟悉  
 許久許久以前，在另外的  
 一個世代，我們曾經是一體  
 結伴而行的形和影，流浪過  
 在無比沉寂的七重天外  
 以一份不可追懷的意志，反抗  
 人間愚妄的法則和哲學體系  
 向激情的權威挑戰，以冷漠  
 以不可詮釋不可模仿的微笑  
 我們曾經並肩，跋涉千山萬水  
 搜索人間的公理，正義，同情<sup>26</sup>

The sequence, encompassing “challenge,” “calm smile,” “defy,” “righteousness,” “justice,” and “sympathy,” lists the values that the speaker considers essential for the political struggle. It also encapsulates the essence of anger, disobedience, and aspirations of the dissidents in 1970s Taiwan. The poet yearns for this spirit of the era to be inherited by his son. In the ninth sonnet, likening political struggle to a theatrical production and his son to a spectator, he urges the child to observe the “players” and “events” with insight and detachment, akin to the concept of the “right fielder” discussed earlier: “if you can in applause / maintain our silence, observe, realize / by reason and scrutinize the repeat / of this drama with an eye that never / ever reconciles” (倘若可能／在歡呼聲中保持我們的沉默／用理性的心靈去觀察體會／逼視冗長，一再重複的戲劇／帶着不妥協的眼光).<sup>27</sup>

The entirety of society, as represented in the ninth sonnet, must adhere to the grand rule of nature—the universal truth: “A plot’s truth can be split from its falseness / in agreement with every single aspect / of nature, sun, moon, stars, mountains, rivers, / following a rule that created the cosmos, / except this, all can be dispensable” (事件的虛實可以辨別，根據／大自然，日月星辰和山岳河川／根據宇宙開闢的法則和秩序／除此之外，一切都不必容許).<sup>28</sup> Yang’s point is that only by applying the order and truth of the universe to the sociopolitical realm can the elder generation create conditions in which children may develop compassion, discernment, and a sense of righteousness. In his view, such conditions are essential to happiness.

Yang Mu envisions his son’s return to Taiwan’s natural landscapes, likening it to the journey of a salmon, a metaphor he frequently employs to express his nostalgia. He imagines the child soaring over a timeless, powerful abstraction and rediscovering Taiwan’s tropical expanse from west to east, rich with natural abundance: “You will fly over that timeless strong abstraction / turn and find Taiwan’s amiable tropic / stretching west to east / in higher heat and humidity / and see the green isle opulent with nature’s beauty” (你將飛越這永恆的抽象和威猛／感受，且旋轉尋覓親切的／北回歸，西東不斷的走向／再上升的氣溫和濕度中，葱龍／快綠，平生最美麗的島嶼).<sup>29</sup> The natural world, like William Wordsworth’s poetic philosophy, imparts a kind of knowledge beyond a child’s rational comprehension: “Wind blows down the valley, and river comes / from primitive tranquility. Tattoos, / screaming crickets comprise our secret world, / too opulent in its infinitude / to be expressed with crayons” (風也吹向山谷，河水來自／原始的寧靜。刺青，鳴蟬／那是我們秘密的世界，充滿／無遠而弗屆，不是你有限的／粉蠟筆所能够描摹).<sup>30</sup> While acknowledging that his son may not fully grasp it presently, Yang Mu describes how “real” the natural scenery in Taiwan is for the child, and envisions how this experience will sweetly nourish the child’s future memory and intellect: “Everything here is real, like reed flowers / Let them fly under the railway bridge / through roaring cars and beating pulses, blood / real and lofty, rise and fall, and remain / —unlike

foreign clouds over your learning eyes / in your clanging memory” (這一切都是真實的，蘆葦花／如此，容許它在鐵路橋下飛奔／過車聲和心血的脈搏，真實／凝重跌宕，不是異邦的白雲／它閃過你學習認識的眼睛／復停留在磊落鏗鏘的記憶).<sup>31</sup>

Yang Mu further urges his child to connect with the Indigenous people: “Be not afraid, but walk / to the blooming betel palms, speak their dialect / with warm gesture and in the right occasion / smile at the curiosity of your kin / and they will care for you as if you were / inviolable like our land, a brother” (你不必畏懼，往檳榔樹開花的／方向走去，使用簡單的方言／有禮親善的手勢，在適當的／場合，以微笑回報族人的好奇／他們將擁戴你如部落的兄弟／故鄉，我們不可凌辱的土地).<sup>32</sup> Additionally, he recounts the history of the Han ancestors who, with unwavering determination, settled in Taiwan: “They undertook, bore / a will like a machete battling / into a dark wood. Everything here is real / our ancestors, inviolable” (見證擔當／一份意志之揮舞，又如彎刀／砍入黑暗的森林。這一切都是／真實的，我們不可凌辱的先人).<sup>33</sup> In the thirteenth sonnet, the narrator expresses love for the accent of the homeland, the resonating temple bell, the rhythmic drum, and the breeze over sugarcane fields. He acknowledges that he and his generation have idealized a return to nature out of disillusionment with human society:

we have sought out  
a solid standing point to scrutinize  
objectively the skulking scurrying  
dust, the pointless and ludicrous soapbox  
and indictment, because we too once were  
lost, but thought, and thought, and chose the mountains,  
and the profusion of cold spring. We left  
nature for the city, now return to nature  
pure and with the spirit of a new drum

我們找尋到穩固的立足點  
冷眼觀察竄走潛伏的灰塵  
輕薄可笑的宣言和控訴，因為

我們也曾經失落，卻在認真的  
 思考之後，選擇了青山巍巍  
 流泉的冷冽和充沛，我們  
 從鄉村進入都市，又回歸  
 鄉村，清潔亢奮如新鼓<sup>34</sup>

In its drive toward modernization, urban expansion, and resource extraction, the government marginalizes environmental protection, social justice, and human rights, thereby raising doubts about its ethical commitments. In response, the poet calls for a collective reorientation, invoking a return to the countryside as a symbolic gesture. This vision emphasizes environmental sustainability, integrity, and a commitment to righteousness as the foundations of a just and harmonious society.

The final sonnet returns to the sequence's outset, reiterating the love and anticipation surrounding the imminent birth. Yet, it goes beyond mere reflection, expressing the hope that the child's life will unfold along the restorative trajectory traced in the fourteen sonnets:

Let goose quacks  
 be negative longitudes, whale spray be positive latitudes  
 In the moonlight, wee stars twinkle on the bed  
 where you learn how to raise your head and turn over  
 In the stage station, horse and ship wait to go  
 precise like a symphony, like a seal or clerical script  
 like dazzling patterns on an ancient robe, like fourteen sonnets

讓飛雁的行列  
 嘎嘎為西經，鯨魚噴水是北緯  
 月色安詳着色，小星星亮晶晶  
 裝飾你學習抬頭翻身的床  
 車馬和船舶都在驛站上等候  
 準確如音樂交響，如篆如隸  
 如黼如黻，如一組十四行詩<sup>35</sup>

Poised like a horse or ship awaiting departure, the child stands at the threshold of a transformative journey. The sonnet sequence serves as a

prelude to his life, tracing a broad geographical arc from Seattle to Taiwan. This movement signifies not only a passage from birthplace to homeland but also a symbolic transition from the enclosure of inexperience to a landscape of expansive possibility. As the child grows, the vision articulated in the sonnets will be realized as he embarks on a path toward a more just and equitable society.

Far from being merely a convention inherited from English or Italian traditions, the sonnet has long aligned with themes of rebellion and resistance. Modern Irish sonnets, for example, demonstrate the form's capacity to contest English cultural and political hegemony. In postcolonial Ireland, the sonnet becomes a site of thematic, tonal, and contextual dissent, a space for debate and argument that reshapes what an "Irish" sonnet can be.<sup>36</sup> By revising and resisting the hegemonic claims of a "foreign" form, Irish poets establish the Irish sonnet as a distinct mode with strong local cultural and political inflections. This view accords with Helen Vendler's reading of W. B. Yeats, who balances allegiance and disobedience to both modernize the sonnet and "[make] it Irish."<sup>37</sup> Yeats's departures from Petrarchan and Shakespearean structures, including altered rhyme schemes and extensions beyond fourteen lines, produce what Vendler terms "hybrid" and "transgressive" sonnets.<sup>38</sup>

In Yang's adaptation of a traditional design, the well-structured form reflects the aspiration for a rational and harmonious society amid social upheavals and contradictions. Formal structures, with their patterns and arrangements, possess a unique relationship with their context, capable of organizing both social and literary elements while enduring through time.<sup>39</sup> Yet, Yang Mu does not completely follow the English or Italian sonnet conventions. He does not rhyme, nor does he obey the rules of three quatrains followed by a final couplet in an English sonnet or an octave plus a sestet in an Italian sonnet. This departure from Western rhyme schemes, meters, and stanzaic rules implies a desire for both social and literary liberty. Yang's free-form structure reflects not merely his negotiation with—and hybridization of—the Western tradition

but also his vision of an ideal society that accommodates rebellion and disobedience.<sup>40</sup>

Examining the themes of “Embark” clarifies Yang Mu’s choice of the sonnet sequence. The sequence provides an extended frame in which individual sonnets register internal tensions while collectively reflecting on the past, present, and future.<sup>41</sup> Within the “rational” constraints of the fourteen-line form, Yang Mu gains flexibility to articulate emotion and judgment without relinquishing formal discipline. Written in the aftermath of the Lin Family Massacre, the sequence resists despair. It redirects negative affect toward the anticipation of his son’s birth (Sonnets 1–4), imagined journeys from Seattle to Taiwan (Sonnets 5–7), and a reckoning with Taiwan’s history of repression and censorship (Sonnet 8). Responding to the Formosa Incident, the later sonnets project the possibility of democracy, freedom, equality, and justice (Sonnets 9–13), before returning, in the final sonnet, to renewed hope for the child’s future. Across this arc, each sonnet maintains its own emotional register while inviting reflection on justice, democracy, and historical memory. Like Yeats and other modern Irish poets who pioneered the postcolonial “Irish” sonnet, Yang’s incorporation of the sonnet sequence leverages the form to envision alternative configurations of identity and justice across personal, poetic, and national scales. Through this process, the sonnet recasts itself, ultimately evolving into something “Taiwanese.”

Justice is central to Yang Mu’s vision of an ideal civil society and aligns with the notion of justice as fairness, articulated by John Rawls. This conception rests on two principles: first, that every person has an equal right to a fully adequate scheme of equal rights and liberties; and second, that public offices and positions must be open to all under conditions of equal opportunity.<sup>42</sup> In “Embark,” equal liberty finds expression in Yang’s portrayal of dissidents who resist authority and affirm democracy during the Formosa Incident (Sonnet 8). Equal opportunity, in turn, appears in his call to recognize the rights of Taiwan’s Indigenous peoples (Sonnet 11) as well as the rights of Hakka and Minnan communities whose

ancestors arrived before 1949 (Sonnet 12). Under KMT rule, Taiwanese islanders endured marginalization, discrimination, and violence. Against this history, Yang urges his son to engage with these communities as equals, learn their histories, and recognize them as brothers.

The concept of justice as fairness grounds political agreement among citizens understood as free and equal.<sup>43</sup> It also informs Yang Mu's vision of an ideal community, in which resistance to the KMT's oppression is transformed into a commitment to social justice for Hakka, Minnan, and Indigenous peoples. For Yang, guaranteeing basic rights, liberty, and equality of opportunity constitutes a social contract that secures a just society, ensuring equal access to resources, health care, political participation, protection under the law, freedom of conscience, thought, and speech, and protection from violence.

### **A Community of Tolerance**

While the poems discussed thus far articulate Yang's vision of an ideal community, they do not address the situation of Chinese Nationalists who migrated to Taiwan after World War II. Known as mainlanders, their Chinese identity became fixed through the KMT's practice of registering citizens' "ancestral home" (*jiguan* 籍貫). Despite their diverse origins—including Mongols, Tibetans, Muslims, and Manchus—they shared a common narrative of fleeing the CCP and seeking refuge in Taiwan. These mainlanders' historical consciousness and identity were further solidified by the KMT's policy of settling military families in designated "military dependents' villages" (*juancun* 眷村). Consequently, mainlanders developed their own language, self-perception, and historical interpretations distinct from those of the Taiwanese. While mainlanders envisioned Taiwan as a base for eventually reclaiming the mainland, the Taiwanese islanders maintained a connection to the land and incorporated certain Japanese characteristics into their lifestyle. This Taiwanese identity was marginalized by the KMT, which, after the war with Japan, was extremely hostile toward any vestiges of Japanese influence. Since

the Taiwanese were seen as former Japanese subjects, they were treated with suspicion.

Anger at this discrimination informs Yang Mu's lyrical meditation "Someone Asks Me about Justice and Righteousness" (1984). The poem emerged from a specific political context. In the 1983 legislative election, the KMT nominated several plutocrats, who clinched victory primarily through illicit means such as bribery. Disturbed by this ethical impasse, a concerned student of Yang Mu sought his guidance, posing the challenging query: "What is justice? Is there any righteousness in the world?"<sup>44</sup> Two years later, one of these plutocrats was exposed for siphoning funds from the Taipei Tenth Credit Cooperative (十信), leaving a debt of NT\$15 billion and triggering a major financial crisis. The scandal undermined the KMT's credibility and caused widespread panic. The convergence of the student's question, the KMT's corrupt practices, and the poet's imperative to create "Someone" is recorded in the postscript to *Someone*, subtitled "Poetry is made for humanity" (*Shi wei ren er zuo* 詩為人而做).

Around this period, Yang Mu received a letter from a stranger recounting an unsettling life story, an experience he later reworked in the poem "Someone." Yang describes the letter's formal, carefully composed tone, complete with exhaustive personal details such as a social security number, age, ancestral home, and occupation. The stranger confesses to adopting a Taiwanese Mandarin accent, a linguistic trait acquired during his formative years spent with his Taiwanese mother in a military dependents' village after his Chinese father abandoned the family following a heated dispute: "after a fiery quarrel his father—his impassioned speech and heavy accent that even his / only son cannot fully understand— / he left home" (父親在一場大吵鬧後 / (充滿鄉音的激情的言語, 連他 / 單祧籍貫香火兒子, 都不完全懂) / 似乎就這樣走了).<sup>45</sup> The absent father continues to haunt the stranger as a reminder of his fatherlessness and lack of paternal love. In the poem, Yang recasts this father as a metaphor for the Chinese cultural tradition the protagonist searches for in vain. The father is imagined as having

retreated to the mountains “where the climate resembles the North China plains to cultivate / a newly transplanted fruit, the Twentieth Century pear” (可能大概也許上了山／在高亢的華北氣候裏開墾，栽培／一種新引進的水果，二十世紀梨)<sup>46</sup> Here, Yang aligns the protagonist’s fractured sense of identity with the transplanted pear, a figure for cultural displacement and deferred belonging:

But what is a Twentieth Century pear?  
 They were found in the island’s mountainous region  
 a climate comparable to the northern China plains  
 and transplanted to the fertile, abundant virgin land  
 a seed of homesickness that sprouted, grew  
 and bore flowers and fruit—a fruit  
 whose pitiful shape, color, and smell were not mentioned in classics  
 Other than vitamin C its nutrient value is uncertain  
 It symbolized hardly anything  
 but its own hesitant mind

唉到底甚麼是二十世紀梨呀——  
 他們在海島的高山地帶尋到  
 相當於華北平原的氣候了，肥沃豐隆的  
 處女地，乃迂迴引進一種鄉愁慰藉的  
 種子埋下，發芽，長高  
 開花結成這果，這名不見經傳的水果  
 可憐憫的形狀，色澤，和氣味  
 營養價值不明，除了  
 維他命C，甚至完全不象徵甚麼  
 除了一顆猶豫的屬於他自己的心<sup>47</sup>

Shaped by the “ancestral home” inscribed on his ID card and his upbringing in a military dependents’ village, the protagonist aligns with his mainlander heritage, choosing to disregard his mother’s Taiwanese ethnicity. He metaphorically perceives himself as a fruit transplanted from the “northern China plains.” Paradoxically, contemplating China deepens his “homesickness,” while Taiwan, despite being his “birthplace,” holds no profound sentimental value for him:

“My place of origin has taught me that wherever I go I will always carry homesickness like a birthmark,” he said,  
 “But birthmarks come from the mother, and I must say mine has nothing to do with it.” He often stands on the seashore and gazes far away. He’s told that where mists and waves end there is an even longer coastline, beyond them, mountains, forests, and vast rivers  
 “The place that Mother has never seen is our homeland.”

籍貫教我走到任何地方都帶着一份  
 與生俱來的鄉愁，他說，像我的胎記  
 然而胎記襲自母親我必須承認  
 它和那個無關。他時常  
 站在海岸瞭望，據說煙波盡頭  
 還有一個更長的海岸，高山森林巨川  
 母親沒看過的地方才是我們的  
 故鄉。<sup>48</sup>

He aspires to a “homeland” he has never visited while simultaneously disavowing any connection with his “birthmark.” This tension produces a psychic struggle between envisioning an idealized China and the lived reality of Taiwan. He romanticizes China’s vast coastline and majestic mountains and rivers, diminishing the significance of Taiwan’s landscape. However, the memories of Taiwan, epitomized by his relationship with his mother, persist and resist erasure:

On autumn nights his mother taught him Japanese nursery rhymes about Peach Boy’s conquest of Devil Island. With sleepy eyes he watched her rip out the seams of old army uniforms and scissor them into a pair of wood pants and a quilted jacket  
 Two water marks on the letter, probably his tears  
 like moldy spots left by the rain in the corner. I look outside  
 Heaven and Earth have cried, too, for an important question that transcends seasons and directions. They have cried  
 then covered their embarrassment with false sunlight

秋風的夜晚，母親教他唱日本童謠  
 桃太郎遠征魔鬼島，半醒半睡  
 看她剪刀針線把舊軍服拆開  
 修改成一條夾褲和一件小棉襖  
 信紙上沾了兩片水漬，想是他的淚  
 如牆腳巨大的雨霉，我向外望  
 天地也哭過，為一個重要的  
 超越季節和方向的問題，哭過  
 復以虛假的陽光掩飾窘態<sup>49</sup>

The entanglement of Japanese, Chinese, and Taiwanese cultural legacies produces a conflicted identity unable to take firm root. Despite the man's academic pursuits in labor law, criminology, and the history of law, along with his adeptness in citing evidence and employing deductive reasoning, his rational inquiry offers no resolution to his sense of in-betweenness and erasure. Interpellated by the KMT's discourse, he disavows his Taiwanese heritage and refuses to acknowledge his hybrid background. However, the rise of Dangwai activists advocating democracy, freedom, and local identity, together with exposures of KMT corruption, renders his Chinese identification increasingly untenable. Mainlanders and the hybrid Chinese Taiwanese, especially those disenfranchised blue-collar workers excluded from KMT patronage, seem to either miss or refuse the train named "local identity." They oscillate between what is believable and real and what is fictional and fabricated. Ultimately, as the poet concludes, the stranger is "no prophet but a disciple who has lost his guide" (他不是先知，是失去嚮導的使徒).<sup>50</sup>

The poem explores emotions ranging from indifference and mockery to a concluding note of compassion and mutual understanding. Initially, the poet adopts an objective and cruel stance in analyzing the puzzle presented in the letter. Intent on weakening the protagonist's argument, the poet negates his ideas, attacks his mental state, and criticizes his fallacious ways of gathering data. This emotional landscape is marked by contempt, antipathy, traces of malice, and an air of academic conceit, contrasting with the protagonist's modest background. The harshness

may stem from the poet's negative experiences with unknown Chinese mainlanders or those identifying with mainland China. As the stranger unfolds his narrative—detailing his mixed origin, fatherless upbringing, conflicted childhood memories, academic diligence, and confusion about the KMT's abuse of the justice system—the poet begins to perceive the stranger's marginalization and political disillusionment. A shift toward mutual understanding takes place between the poet and the stranger, as well as between the pro-Taiwanese view and the pro-Chinese perspective, aligning with Judith Butler's concepts of nonviolence, notably "genuine sympathy."<sup>51</sup> The poet's exercise of "genuine sympathy," within the framework of Butler's theory, is prompted by encountering the pro-China stranger, who exists outside the poet's community that celebrates Taiwanese values while occasionally denouncing Chinese values.<sup>52</sup> This form of sympathy involves adopting "modes of identification that involve playing a role."<sup>53</sup> In other words, the poet puts himself in the stranger's shoes and, in doing so, realizes that the man is also a victim.

The poem "Someone Asks Me about Justice and Righteousness" explores the potential of shaping a more equitable community. Before investigating this social vision, it is essential to revisit a debate within Sinophone criticism regarding the Chinese diaspora. Shu-mei Shih distinguishes two perspectives on the subject: diaspora as history (dispersals of people) and diaspora as value (a way of looking at and being in the world).<sup>54</sup> Surveying what the KMT has done to Taiwan, she notes that the discourse of diaspora as value has been used to mask the oppressions of settler colonialism: "To frame [colonial] history in terms of diaspora is a displacement and disavowal of colonial violence and its attendant cultural genocide."<sup>55</sup> For many diasporic peoples, however, diaspora—as represented by the values of diasporic communities—implies loyalty to the ancestral homeland. In Taiwan, for example, it requires members of this community to assume a Chinese identity even though they have grown up locally. Shu-mei Shih argues that it is time for governmental authorities to dismantle this colonial discourse and afford all residents of Taiwan the "chance to become local."<sup>56</sup> Advocating "against diaspora,"<sup>57</sup>

she emphasizes that cultural and political practices are tied to local contexts. This stance prompts a reevaluation of the interplay between “roots” and “routes.” Shih suggests that the concept of roots should be “place-based” rather than “ancestral,” while routes should convey a more fluid understanding of “homeness” rather than conforming to the traditional notions of “wandering” and “homelessness.”<sup>58</sup>

David Der-wei Wang, however, counters Shih’s critique of diasporic identity, arguing that it risks becoming a pretext for stifling diversity.<sup>59</sup> Drawing on the Malaysian Chinese writer Dai Xiaohua’s 戴小華 novel, *Suddenly: A Taiwanese Family in the Rapids of History* (*Hu ru gui: Lishi jiliu zhong de yi ge Taiwan jiating* 忽如歸：歷史激流中的一個台灣家庭, 2017), Wang explores an alternative perspective for diasporic communities. Rather than identifying with either local cultures or ancestral origins, this model locates affiliation in a “religious community” (*zongjiao juluo* 宗教聚落), offering a form of spiritual belonging that exceeds national boundaries.<sup>60</sup> Dai’s attachment to Chineseness is not an isolated case but part of a longer literary tradition. In 1940s and 1950s Malaya, Chinese nationalism underpinned resistance to Japanese occupation and British colonial rule, giving rise to “resistance literature” (*kangzhan wenxue* 抗戰文學) that reinscribed Sinophone Malayan writing within a broader Chinese literary narrative.<sup>61</sup> In the 1970s, Woon Swee Oan 溫瑞安 (b. 1954) and Fang E-chen 方娥真 (b. 1954), while studying in Taiwan, founded the Shenzhou Poetry Society (Shenzhou shishe 神州詩社) to promote a vision of Chineseness constrained by the policies of the Malaysian state. This China-centered narrative, often inattentive to hybridity, was later contested by writers who foregrounded local consciousness. In contemporary Sinophone Malaysian literature, figures such as Ng Kim Chew 黃錦樹 (b. 1967), Li Yung-ping 李永平 (1947–2017), and Chen Ta-wei 陳大為 (b. 1969) treat Chineseness as integral to Malaysian local identity. Crucially, this insistence on Chinese identification (*Huaren rentong* 華人認同) does not stem from enduring attachment to China but from the ways in which the Malaysian nation-state defines and regulates belonging.<sup>62</sup>

Malaysian Chinese narratives of Chineseness, in this sense, should not be read as a critique of Taiwanese efforts to assert cultural distinctiveness or to challenge the KMT's discourse on Chineseness. Wang's concern appears rooted in his witnessing, in the 1970s, the emergence of a Taiwanese identity distinct from mainland China and its potential to solidify into a new hegemonic formation. From this perspective, he emphasizes that the impulse to return to Chinese roots deserves recognition. While Wang's caution toward localization is understandable, it risks lending support to a new strain of conservatism within Sinophone studies. This risk becomes especially acute considering the PRC's deployment of Chineseness to forcibly subsume regions such as Hong Kong, Xinjiang, and Tibet into a mainland-centered cultural and political order. The Malaysian case further underscores this distinction. Malaysian Chinese communities invoke Chineseness in opposition to a state-sponsored discourse of Malay exclusivity that marginalizes other languages and cultures. By contrast, in Taiwan, "mainlanders" mobilized Chineseness as a means of discriminating against local Taiwanese culture.

The notion of a "religious community," or spiritual belonging, in David Wang's argument remains essentially Chinese. In Dai's novel, for instance, the narrator's desire to assume a Chinese identity and her attachment to the Chinese community resemble a form of cultural nationalism. Wang's use of "religion" appears to function as a strategic detour away from explicit references to China or Chineseness, perhaps as a way to avoid charges of Sinophilia. This move recalls Jean-Luc Nancy's critique of nostalgia for an original community and, in the Malaysian context, operates as a substitute for a fractured or suppressed Malaysian Chinese identity. Yet Wang's framework does not resolve the problem of homogeneity after localization. Instead, it reverts to a traditional Chinese discourse that has long structured Han identity through demands for loyalty to China, articulated in Dai's novel as the imperative to "acknowledge one's ancestors and return to the lineage" (*renzu guizong* 認祖歸宗). While many Malaysian Chinese regard Chineseness as inseparable from local identity in response to the Malaysian state's exclusionary Malay

nationalism, this position remains largely unintelligible to Taiwanese subjects, who seek Taiwanese-ness precisely as an alternative to Chinese-ness. Consequently, although both Shih and Wang aspire to universal frameworks for addressing identity, neither fully persuades constituencies shaped by divergent historical conditions.<sup>63</sup> Shih's emphasis on localization risks generating hostility toward mainlanders and silencing their voices, while Wang's turn to origins underestimates how nostalgia may reproduce Chinese homogeneity and cultural hegemony.

Agamben's concept of "whatever singularity" can shed light on the perplexity of Sinophone studies, echoing the insight Yang Mu articulates in "Someone." A community is often based on both inclusion and exclusion. Similarly, every form of identity politics interprets belonging through criteria of identification and differentiation.<sup>64</sup> Agamben's "whatever singularity" rejects the very notions of belonging and identity, representing a form of being detached from common forms, properties, natures, or identities. Instead of subscribing to a "being-thus" paradigm, he advocates "*the* thus," allowing individuals to enter a community without presuppositions or subjects, fostering communication without the incommunicable.<sup>65</sup> This perspective challenges the conventional requirement for individuals to *become* Taiwanese; the act of self-identifying as Taiwanese is sufficient for inclusion in the community. Unlike Nancy's mystical communion or nostalgic return to a lost and harmonious *Gemeinschaft*, and distinct from Shih's localization or Wang's spiritual community, Agamben envisions a society characterized by perpetual flexibility, never fully shaped. The coming community has no being proper to it, and thus "no destiny to fulfill and no essence, no historical or spiritual vocation to attain."<sup>66</sup> It cannot be bounded by any classifying concept since no terms, concepts, or other representational axioms can claim to represent it.

The non-identarian community is what Yang Mu also explores in "Someone." The protagonist oscillates between attaching himself to Chineseness (in both Nancy's sense of nostalgia and Wang's notion of

spiritual community) and acknowledging his Taiwanese-ness (in Shih's idea of "against diaspora"). His adoption of a Chinese identity does not endear him to other Taiwanese people (such as the poet who, at the beginning at least, disdains him) because this society, after the Formosa Incident, has tilted toward Taiwanese consciousness and seeks to repair the shattered nation by promoting Taiwanese culture and excluding anything related to the KMT and Chinese-ness. Thus, the man's conflicted hybridity leads to double discrimination: his Chinese-ness is not pure enough to earn recognition from the authorities, while his repudiation of Taiwanese-ness causes people to reject him regardless of his positive personal qualities.<sup>67</sup> He exists in a zone of indistinction between Chinese nationalist and local Taiwanese discourses. However, as his story develops, it begins to move the poet, ultimately compelling him to sympathize with this situation and, through the feeling of compassion, to imagine another possibility of community, one that does not judge an individual's level of belonging or claim to a certain identity. The poet learns to understand and respect an individual's freedom to be Taiwanese, Chinese, or "whatever."

A community of multiple "whatever singularities" challenges the idea that justice can be delivered by the authorities. As Hannah Arendt contends, totalitarianism represents a "lawless government where power is wielded by one man," where power operates without legal constraints and is manipulated for the ruler's interests.<sup>68</sup> Totalitarian lawfulness only pretends to have found a way to establish the rule of justice on earth.<sup>69</sup> Its rule is not "lawless" but derives authority from which laws receive their ultimate legitimation and even allow violence; it also requires more obedience to these "superhuman forces" than any government in history.<sup>70</sup> In the case of Taiwan, Chiang Kai-shek was portrayed as a superhuman figure, a "savior of [Chinese] ethnicities" (*minzu de jiuxing* 民族的救星), and a "great man of the world" (*shijie de weiren* 世界的偉人).<sup>71</sup> Under his regime, suspects and dissidents could be executed based solely on Chiang's decree. While judicial processes were superficially followed, their independence was a fabrication. The KMT's rule was not

truly lawless, but the application of laws ultimately rested on one man's absolute power to decide whether a life should be excluded or included. Some indictments are now digitized and can be accessed on the website of the Transitional Justice Commission, the goal of which is to investigate the injustices committed by the KMT, discover the truth, exonerate those convicted in political trials, remove symbols of authoritarianism, declassify the then-confidential documents, and establish a political trial database.<sup>72</sup> In May 2024, when I was working on this chapter, about 1,700 cases of capital punishment had been rediscovered and filed since the establishment of the commission in 2016. The victims were finally proven innocent, although too late. These discoveries are just a small part of the picture; there are still many undiscovered false accusations. In Yang Mu's poem "Someone," the question of justice raised by the protagonist (and the poet) alludes not merely to electoral fraud and the scandal of the Taipei Tenth Credit Cooperative in 1983–1985. It also points to the injustice inflicted on Taiwanese people, both islanders and mainlanders, as well as to the nature of totalitarian power more generally, which, in Agamben's terms, claims "the legal power to suspend the validity of the law, [and legally place itself] outside the law."<sup>73</sup>

A totalitarian regime commands its people either to obey and serve it or be annihilated. Ordinary people may not have any specific, conscious ideology; they are likely to see themselves simply as law-abiding citizens. From their point of view, this is a virtue, but it may unexpectedly enable disaster or oppression.<sup>74</sup> Not unique to Nazi Germany, the banality of evil also occurs in other countries, as Arendt knew. Taiwan's White Terror is a case in point. Numerous Taiwanese people were killed; some perpetrators have been identified, but most of the time, the perpetrators who unthinkingly accepted the deadly commands are still unknown. Not all mainlanders were compliant, either actively or passively or silent. Some, like Yang Mu's protagonist, conscious of the social injustice inherent in their privileged status, were willing to cooperate with Taiwanese islanders in efforts to reform the system and build a democratic, nonviolent form of community. As Tseng Chen-chen points out in her analysis of this poem,

“Only by comprehending humanity, perceiving social reality, and thereby having mercy and compassion and knowing how to welcome the Other, can [Taiwanese people] amend the laws and rationally defend justice and righteousness” (唯有達觀人性、透視現實並從而生發慈悲、憐憫，懂得悅納異己，才能協助法治和理性守護公理和正義).<sup>75</sup> The poem’s underlying message is that justice cannot be achieved through retribution but only through the collective efforts of minds that are upright, forward-looking, and compassionate, and that celebrate rather than try to stifle heterogeneity of races, languages, and cultures.

### **Justice, Reconciliation, and Solidarity**

This chapter examined three social lyrics, exploring how these poems envision diverse communities in relation to social justice. The emotions of compassion and anger emerge as integral components for comprehending social justice and fostering human well-being. Compassion arises when confronted with undeserved suffering, fostering a connection with others and a shared commitment to the welfare of all humanity. On the other hand, anger, initially inclined toward retribution, possesses the transformative potential to become a positive and creative force. This transitional anger fuels protests against injustice, promotes reconciliation with offenders, and facilitates cooperation for the advancement of social justice and collective well-being. Such transitional anger finds resonance in the works of postcolonial thinkers like Martin Luther King, who envisioned a just community uniting African Americans and their former white oppressors; Mahatma Gandhi, a proponent of nonviolent resistance and reconciliation with colonizers in a spirit of love; and Nelson Mandela, who democratically fought against a racist system, emphasizing forgiveness and reconciliation. The pursuit of nonviolence, forgiveness, love, and solidarity becomes attainable when one acknowledges justified anger without succumbing to a desire for revenge against wrongdoers.

Compassion, anger, and, most importantly, grief emerge as pivotal emotions guiding Yang Mu’s exploration of diverse communities in his social poems. Crafted in the aftermath of the Lin Family Massacre, “An

Elegy in Lin Yi-hsiung's "Stead" serves as a pastoral elegy, contemplating the tragic fate of the victims. The KMT's sovereign power arbitrarily reduced individuals to a state of "bare life," a politicized form of existence vulnerable to violence and death. The tragedy of the Lin family stirred the poet's compassion, anger, and grief, prompting contemplation of a utopian alternative to the KMT's totalitarian dystopia.

The second manifestation of an imagined community appears in "Seven Turns of the Coast" and "Embark," written in the aftermath of the Formosa Incident and during the pregnancy of the poet's wife. The anticipation of his son's birth mitigates Yang's anger and sorrow over political injustices, transforming these emotions into compassion and hope. While acknowledging Taiwan's dark history of totalitarianism, the poet concludes by envisioning a new era of democracy and freedom, foreseeing his son and the upcoming generation fearlessly challenging autocratic rule. Yang's envisioned community is built upon the principles of justice as fairness, nonviolent activism, and an unwavering commitment to the pursuit of democracy. Above all, it is a forward-looking vision, avoiding nostalgic retrospection.

The third iteration of community complements the preceding models, which do not explicitly incorporate mainlanders and may even exhibit antagonism toward them. However, in "Someone Asks Me about Justice and Righteousness," the protagonist, initially denying his hybrid identity and uncritically embracing the KMT's discourse of Chineseness, undergoes disillusionment as the corruption of the KMT is exposed. Ridiculed and ostracized by Taiwanese individuals who respond to the KMT's oppression by rejecting all things Chinese, he experiences marginalization and internal conflict. Initially, like other Taiwanese islanders, Yang Mu appears to dismiss him, but as the man's narrative unfolds, Yang comes to comprehend and feel compassion for his predicament. Yang concludes that not all mainlanders are privileged oppressors or compliant tools of the KMT. Therefore, he envisions a future achievable through reconciliation and collaboration, rather than exclusion and vengeance.

Revisiting these poems in twenty-first-century Taiwan is illuminating not only for their articulation of a minor historical discourse with distinctive affects and values but, more importantly, for their vision of reconciliation, which exposes the ethical limits of constructing a homogeneous society. Taiwan remains politically divided along ethnic lines, pitting mainlanders against islanders, and by attitudes toward China, oscillating between reunification and independence. Ethnicity and ideology continue to serve as litmus tests, determining one's purported love for Taiwan or authentic Taiwanese identity.<sup>76</sup> As Yang foresaw, the narrow-mindedness of Taiwanese nativism has engendered another form of oppression. "Someone" provides a remedy for the ailment of parochialism, offering a solution to rescue society from the grips of Taiwanese nationalism. Yang Mu would likely endorse Agamben's utopian notion that a just society should be grounded in the idea of "whatever singularity," a mode of living that does not depend on fixed identities. Such a society would welcome anyone arriving in Taiwan, fostering a sense of solidarity that embraces heterogeneity. This type of community operates without presuppositions, thereby eliminating exclusion and suppression—a world of real justice.

## NOTES

1. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, 1.
2. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, 3.
3. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, 4.
4. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, 28.
5. Nussbaum, *Anger and Forgiveness*, 22.
6. Nussbaum, *Anger and Forgiveness*, 221.
7. Yang Mu, *III*, 390–391.
8. The poem was first published in the Hong Kong-based journal *Eight Directions* (*Bafang* 八方) in 1980 and later appeared in the Taiwanese literary monthly *Unitas* in 1993. It was not included in any of Yang Mu's poetry collections until the first edition of *The Second Volume of Yang Mu's Poetry* in 1995. This delay may suggest that Yang not only feared repercussions but also desired for the poem to be recognized and known by the broader Sinophone community.
9. Yang Mu, *IV*, 182.
10. Yang Mu, *IV*, 183.
11. Yang Mu, *IV*, 183.
12. Yang Mu, *IV*, 184.
13. Yang Mu, *IV*, 185.
14. Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 15.
15. Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 8.
16. Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 79.
17. Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, 10. Nancy discerns a prevalent nostalgia for the lost, harmonious, and intimate original community, *Gemeinschaft*, disrupted by the advent of modern society, *Gesellschaft*. In Nancy's analysis, modern society is marked by alienation, violence, and the prevalence of self-centered individuals, as exemplified in Nazi Germany's adoption of the logic of "the extermination of the other, of the subhuman [...] who did not satisfy the criteria of pure immanence" (Nancy 1991, 12). To counteract this social disintegration and reconstruct the fractured community, Nancy proposes the pursuit of fraternity as a model for familial love. He suggests that the restoration of a future community can be achieved "through its institutions, rituals, and symbols—an embodiment, indeed a living tribute, to its own immanent unity, intimacy, and autonomy" (Nancy 1991, 9).

18. Yang Mu, *NTG*, 135; *III*, 318.
19. Yang Mu, *NTG*, 136; *III*, 319.
20. Adapted from Yang Mu, *NTG*, 136; *III*, 319.
21. Yang Mu, *CCS*, 84; *III*, 355.
22. Yang Mu, *III*, 358.
23. Yang Mu, *III*, 359.
24. Yang Mu, *III*, 361.
25. Yang Mu, *III*, 362.
26. Yang Mu, *III*, 362–363.
27. Yang Mu, *III*, 364.
28. Yang Mu, *III*, 364.
29. Yang Mu, *III*, 365.
30. Yang Mu, *III*, 366.
31. Yang Mu, *III*, 367.
32. Yang Mu, *III*, 366–367.
33. Yang Mu, *III*, 368.
34. Yang Mu, *III*, 369–369.
35. Yang Mu, *III*, 370.
36. Guissin-Stubbs, *The Modern Irish Sonnet*, xii.
37. Vendler, *Our Secret Discipline*, 147.
38. Vendler, *Our Secret Discipline*, 181.
39. Levine, *Forms*, 13.
40. One can also argue that, as Levine say, a form can travel across cultures and time periods. However, Yang Mu does not simply reproduce the Western form of the sonnet but refashions and makes it Taiwanese. See Levine's *Forms*, 4.
41. Guissin-Stubbs, *The Modern Irish Sonnet*, 73.
42. Rawls, "Justice as Fairness," 227.
43. Rawls, "Justice as Fairness," 230.
44. Yang Mu, *IV*, 207.
45. Yang Mu, *NTG*, 168; Yang Mu, *IV*, 21.
46. Adapted from Yang Mu, *NTG*, 168; Yang Mu, *IV*, 21.
47. Yang Mu, *NTG* 167; Yang Mu, *IV*, 18–19.
48. Adapted from Yang Mu, *NTG*, 168–169; Yang Mu, *IV*, 22–23.
49. Adapted from Yang Mu, *NTG*, 168; Yang Mu, *IV*, 21–22.
50. Yang Mu, *NTG*, 170; Yang Mu, *IV*, 25.
51. Butler, *The Force of Violence*, 89.
52. The politics of recognition can also be seen in Homi Bhabha's interpretation of Kristeva's "paradoxical community" and the idea of hospital-

- ity. See Bhabha, *Our Neighbors, Ourselves*; Kristeva, *Stranger to Ourselves*, Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, and Derrida, *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*.
53. Butler, *The Force of Violence*, 89.
  54. Shu-mei Shih, "The Concept of the Sinophone," 713.
  55. Shih, "The Concept of the Sinophone," 713.
  56. Shih, "The Concept of the Sinophone," 714.
  57. Shu-mei Shih, "Against Diaspora," 45.
  58. Shih, "Against Diaspora," 46.
  59. Wang and Shih, "Forum on Sinophone Taiwan," 85.
  60. Wang and Shih, "Forum on Sinophone Taiwan," 80.
  61. Tee, "Sinophone Malaysian Literature," 307.
  62. Zhan, "Transnational Connection in Sinophone Studies," 52.
  63. To illustrate, Ng Kim Chew has strongly criticized Shih in his article "We Can Stop This Sort of 'Sinophone Studies': What Does Shu-mei Shih Intend to Be against in Her Concept of 'Against Diaspora'?" in *Story Studio*, January 2, 2018.
  64. Salzani, "Coming Community," 44.
  65. Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 64.
  66. Salzani, "Coming Community," 45.
  67. See Tseng Chen-chen's analysis of the potential exclusion in the homogeneous Taiwanese society in "Analysis of Yang Mu's 'Someone.'"
  68. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 461.
  69. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 462.
  70. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 461.
  71. These eulogistic phrases are from the song "Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Song" (*Jianggong jinian ge* 蔣公紀念歌, 1975).
  72. See the website Taiwan Transitional Justice Database, National Human Rights Museum, last modified November 14, 2025, <https://twtdb.nhrm.gov.tw/>.
  73. Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 15.
  74. See Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 120.
  75. Tseng, "Analysis of Yang Mu's 'Someone.'"
  76. Lin, "Literature's Role," 69–79.

## CHAPTER 4

# SAILING ON OCEANIC ROUTES

“Oceania” denotes a sea of islands with their inhabitants. The world of our ancestors was a large sea full of places to explore, to make their homes in, to breed generations of seafarers like themselves. People raised in this environment were at home with the sea.

—Epeli Hau‘ofa, *We Are the Ocean*

Yang Mu’s fusion of Chinese and Western literary traditions in his poetry has attracted the attention of scholars such as Michelle Yeh, Stephen Owen, and Lisa Wong. Yeh situates Yang alongside Taiwanese modernists such as Chi Hsien, who enthusiastically embrace French and English models. She argues that Yang extends this trend by incorporating references to Greek mythology, Christianity, European history, and a diverse array of Western literary figures, including Virgil, Marlowe, Dryden, Wordsworth, and Emily Dickinson.<sup>1</sup> Stephen Owen describes Yang’s approach as “bicultural,” asserting that his work is notable for the way it navigates Chinese and Western traditions with nuance, never exoticizing either.<sup>2</sup> For Owen, Yang’s materials encompass a sense of poetic and cultural history that transcends the division between the “West” and China.<sup>3</sup> Lisa Wong introduces the terms “intracultural” (referring to “vertical” intertexts drawn from classical and vernacular Chinese

literature) and “cross-cultural” (referring to “horizontal” intertexts from foreign literatures) to delineate Yang’s syncretic approach to world literature.<sup>4</sup> According to Wong, Yang reconfigures Chinese tradition in innovative forms while assimilating Western texts, thereby expressing expansive artistic and political concerns.<sup>5</sup> This strategy enables Yang to infuse a cosmopolitan perspective into both regional and universal interests, offering a transnational outlook.<sup>6</sup>

While the analyses by Yeh, Owen, and Wong are significant, they may nonetheless reinforce a dichotomy between Western and Chinese cultures, privileging an outdated notion of cultural purity. Such a framework perpetuates a monolithic stereotype of both Chinese and Western cultures, overlooking their inherent heterogeneity. For instance, China’s Central Plains culture differs from its Jiangnan culture, just as French culture cannot be equated with Celtic culture. Using the terms “Western” and “Chinese” also embraces the problematic perspectives of Eurocentrism and Sinocentrism. In the case of Taiwan, this dichotomy fails to explain why writers are relatively open to new foods, lifestyles, and cultural products from Japan, Korea, Europe, America, and Southeast Asia. The importance of interpreting Yang Mu within the framework of the dichotomy between the West and China is acknowledged in the preceding chapters. This approach can yield a more nuanced analysis.

However, Yang Mu’s experiences defy simple categorization into Chinese and Western influences. He is proficient in English, German, Old English, and Greek; has lived in both the US and Taiwan; and has extensively studied literature from China, Europe, and other regions. Beyond (Western) Europe, the US, and China, Yang Mu has composed works such as “Panjshir Valley” (*Panjshir shangu* 班吉夏山谷, 1984) for his Afghan friend and “Isaac the Scout” (*Isaac chihou* 以撒斥候, 2001) for his Israeli friend. His concerns about minorities also extend to Chechnya in “The Lost Ring” and Tibet in “Lama Reincarnated.” This poetics of hybridity resonates with the chapter epigraph from Epeli Hau’ofa, in which Oceanian peoples understand themselves as at home in the sea and

connected to others through it. Yang Mu's transcultural poetics likewise emerge from a dynamic engagement with diverse traditions and resist rigid binaries. It is therefore necessary to reevaluate his work from a fresh perspective that foregrounds how a local writer engages with the world and shapes his cosmopolitan network.

### **From Continental Mentality to Oceanic Literacy**

Édouard Glissant's *poetics of relation*, a theory rooted in the Caribbean context of Martinique, motivates my turn to an oceanic or archipelagic perspective for thinking through the postcolonial dilemmas faced by islands such as Taiwan. By opposing "continental thought" with "archipelagic thought," Glissant advances a mode of thinking that resists hegemonic colonial discourse. Continental thought apprehends the world as "a bloc, taken wholesale, all at once, as a sort of imposing synthesis," whereas archipelagic thought preserves the irreducible multiplicity of singularities.<sup>7</sup> While continental thinking privileges centrality and closure, archipelagos have no center and instead foreground motion, mutability, and openness to difference and change.<sup>8</sup> This refusal of stability and finality finds fuller expression in Glissant's concept of relation, which draws on Deleuze's rhizome, in which "each and every identity is extended through a relationship with the Other."<sup>9</sup> Such a perspective embraces errantry, a mode of movement that seeks connection rather than territorial expansion. Errantry thus unfolds as a circular, nomadic search for the Other, in contrast to the linear, arrow-like nomadism of imperial conquest.<sup>10</sup> Open and non-totalizing, relation operates multilingually, challenging the hegemony of "official" languages, resisting the "totalitarianism of any monolingual intent," and transgressing the "imposition of economic forces and cultural pressures."<sup>11</sup>

Taiwan has not been absent from oceanic literary history. Historically, the majority of present-day Taiwanese migrated from mainland China. In postwar Taiwan, to escape the shadow of Chinese discourse promoted by either the KMT or the CCP, they too developed an oceanic conception that understands the sea as both a vital resource and a medium for connection

to the world. In 1990, Tsao Yung-ho 曹永和 (1920–2014) challenged the dominance of the KMT's Sinocentric discourse by offering a vision of "Taiwan's island historiography" (*Taiwan dao shiguan* 台灣島史觀). His goal was to position Taiwan on the global stage, emphasizing its interconnectedness with other nations through its maritime relationships. Since the 2010s, Shu-mei Shih has drawn on Glissant's poetics to envision interconnection transcending time and space. She contends that all geographic spaces, regardless of scale, can be viewed as interconnected islands within oceanic networks.<sup>12</sup> This relational concept serves to unite marginalized literatures that hegemonic interests have historically pushed apart.<sup>13</sup> In her view, Han Taiwanese individuals clinging to a continental mentality should acknowledge that Taiwan has forged its own "literary arc." This arc is not a closed circuit but an "extendable and contractable trajectory," seamlessly connecting texts along a global curved pathway.<sup>14</sup> It serves as a bridge linking Taiwan to diverse world cultures and histories, fostering a process of creolization that is at times painful or joyful, suppressive or creative, yet ceaseless and ever generative.<sup>15</sup>

The application of Glissant's theory by Shih might appear incongruous, given that the ethnic group she represents is not Indigenous but consists of Han settlers who migrated from the mainland. This mismatch between Yang as a Han settler and Indigenous perceptions, as elucidated by Glissant's "poetics of relation," occurs too in this chapter. Despite this incongruity, there are notable similarities between them, facilitating mutual learning for both Taiwan's Indigenous and Han populations from the Global South. Like the struggles of the Global South to emancipate itself from hegemonic discourse, Taiwan grapples with the legacy of the KMT's colonial history. Taiwan, akin to Glissant's Martinique, is deemed a "small, peripheral, minor nation," yet it actively participates in the context of world history.<sup>16</sup> It implicates itself in the "interconnected orbits of culture, politics, and economics in [the] dynamic interaction" with other countries.<sup>17</sup> How the theories of the Global South reflect on foreign powers and develop interconnectedness with other islands can serve as a valuable lesson for Taiwan.

Yang Mu's poetry is shaped by foreign discourses, largely European in origin, yet it is neither simply Westernized nor reducible to imperial, continental, or colonial frameworks. Rather, these influences are incorporated and transformed through a postcolonial, relational, archipelagic, and oceanic sensibility that seeks to confront the violence and injustice produced by colonial regimes. This orientation permeates Yang's lifelong writing, which repeatedly turns to the seascape, echoes the ebb and flow of waves, and cultivates an oceanic sense of time and space. Yang Mu's fluid, oceanic identity is evident in works such as "I Came from the Sea" (*Wo cong hai shang lai* 我從海上來, 1986), "Fish Festival" (*Yu de qingdian* 魚的慶典, 1986), "The Definite Sea" (*Yiding de hai* 一定的海, 1991), "Isle" (*Dao* 島, 1992), "Leaving Clear Water Bay, 10th December" (*Shi er yue shi ri ci Qingshuiwan* 十二月十日辭清水灣, 1993), and "Boat" (*Chuan* 船, 1993), among many others. These texts form a literary arc that transcends temporal and spatial boundaries and enters into dialogue with other canonical representations of peninsulas and islands. This chapter therefore focuses on nomadism, errantry, relation, and detour in Yang's work. Like Lorca's Iberian Peninsula, Yeats's Ireland, and the island of *The Tempest*, Yang's imagined geographies negotiate the tension between the local and the universal and align with counter-hegemonic Global South discourse and postcolonial critiques of asymmetric colonial power.

### **Music Beyond an Enclosed Political System**

Yang Mu's reflections on Federico García Lorca are rooted in his lived experiences of social turbulence and personal adversity. The Baodiao Movement, the ROC's expulsion from the UN, and the US recognition of the PRC regime collectively challenged the legitimacy of the KMT. In 1975, the death of Chiang Kai-shek and the succession of his son Chiang Ching-kuo signaled a shift from authoritarianism toward gradual democratization. These sociopolitical transformations relaxed ideological constraints and facilitated the emergence of minor narratives. Parallel to these social shifts, Yang Mu underwent a personal upheaval when

his first marriage ended in 1976. The confluence of public and private turbulence triggered an existential crisis, prompting him to question the relevance of his academic pursuits. This introspective exploration is captured in the postscript of his 1980 collection *Forbidden Games*:

When I selected what to write, I felt a setback rooted in the reality. I hesitated between the abstract, objective ideas I read in books, and the concrete, subjective impression of the native soil. The former often hints at the eternal universe, encouraging me to manage broad themes and forget potential failures in the stream of history. The latter suggests my emotion [that is connected to the land because] blood is thicker than water. Although it is transient, I cannot see it silently vanish.

寫作落筆之間，對於題材內容的選擇，即刻感覺現實環境的衝擊，來回於書籍的抽象客觀和鄉土的具體主觀之間，感覺前者對我的啟迪往往指向較永恆的宇宙，鼓舞我處理較廣大的主題，將成敗付諸歷史，而後者卻是血濃於水的感情運作，稍縱即逝，又不忍心讓它無聲無息地消滅。<sup>18</sup>

The concept of *xiangtu* 鄉土 (literally “native soil”) refers to the debate over *xiangtu* literature (*xiangtu wenxue lunzhan* 鄉土文學論戰, “native-soil” literature, 1977–1978). This pivotal term, coupled with the term “reality” (*xianshi* 現實), emerged as a direct response to socioeconomic shifts and a growing disillusionment with the political myths propagated by the KMT. Writers like Wang To 王拓 (1944–2016) asserted that literature should be grounded in the “realities of life,” advocating for narratives that speak on behalf of the common people, expressing the sorrows and joys of society.<sup>19</sup>

Influenced by this literary movement, Yang Mu strategically shifted his focus toward abstract themes such as “love, revolution, prejudice, persecution, and death” (愛情，革命，偏見，迫害，死亡) embodied in narratives that explore diverse dimensions, including “academic inheritance, an intellectual’s aspirations, cultural renaissance, sacrificing one’s life for the sake of safeguarding benevolence, recklessness, and a

hero's disillusion" (學術傳承和知識份子的抱負，文藝復興，殺身成仁，血氣之勇與英雄幻滅).<sup>20</sup> All these motifs recur vividly across the poems in this collection.

The interlinking of academic inheritance and intellectual aspirations is exemplified in the poem "Zheng Xuan Awakes from his Dream" (*Zheng Xuan wu meng* 鄭玄寤夢, 1977). Renaissance and recklessness converge in Yang's engagement with Christopher Marlowe, whose literary brilliance and volatile temperament are evoked in "Marlowe Drinks the Wine" (*Marlowe yin jiu* 馬羅飲酒, 1977). The themes of sacrifice and disillusion are embodied in "The Sacrifice of Wu Feng" (1978). Through these works, Yang Mu aims to showcase his triumph over the "deadlock of life" (生命的膠著狀態) and create a resonance that transcends cultural boundaries.<sup>21</sup>

This collection also places particular emphasis on the martyrdom of Federico García Lorca, executed by Nationalist militia during the Spanish Civil War in Granada. Poems such as "Forbidden Games" (1976), "Spain 1936" (*Xibanya: Yi jiu san liu* 西班牙：一九三六, 1976), and "Ballad: On the 40th Anniversary of Lorca's Death" (*Minyao: Lorca si nan si shi zhounian ji* 民謠：羅爾卡死難四十週年祭, 1976) revisit this event. Among them, "Forbidden Games" has drawn sustained scholarly attention for its implicit comparison between Francisco Franco's dictatorship and Chiang Kai-shek's martial law in Taiwan.<sup>22</sup> In a 1996 interview, Yang Mu confirmed this deliberate juxtaposition, underscoring how both regimes governed through terror, persecuted dissidents, and clung to power until their deaths in 1975.<sup>23</sup>

The poems draw inspiration from the popular Spanish guitar piece known as "Romance," which serves as a central musical theme in the 1952 film *Forbidden Games* (*Jeux interdits*), directed by René Clément.<sup>24</sup> The film tells the story of a Parisian family's flight to the countryside as the German army advances on the city. Tragically, the parents are killed during a German air raid, leaving their five-year-old daughter, Paulette, confused, helpless, and traumatized. She finds solace and companionship

in Michel, the son of the peasant family that adopts her. Together, they engage in “forbidden games,” such as stealing crosses from the church to mark the graves of dead animals they bury—a ritual to cope with the trauma of war. However, when Michel’s father discovers their activities, Paulette is sent to the Red Cross. The film’s central theme revolves around the innocence of children as they seek inner serenity amid the horrors of war.

Adopting the imagery of a young girl and exploring the potency of music, Yang Mu’s collection of poems of the same name centers on the corrosive impact of dictatorship. “Forbidden Games: One” opens with a scene of leaves swaying like “a sentiment, the incomprehensible Romance” (一種情調，無從了解的大羅曼史).<sup>25</sup> As the wind of Granada blows, a girl emerges, discussing the challenge of mastering the guitar’s G chord. When she finally learns to produce the correct, beautiful timbre of the note, the narrator hears a chinaberry tree flourish and drop its fruits. The span between the fruit leaving the branch and touching the ground is described as short, seven years, then extending to twelve years. The chinaberry plummets through the octave, and then another moment, a bitter dripping sound, lower and more bitter than the first. As the fruit hits the ground, the narrator listens gloomily to the inaudible leaves swaying outside the window. The girl eventually masters the G chord. With a smile, her finger presses easily, as if she knows how to control the wind of Granada. At this moment, Lorca opens the window and steps into the intersection, only to encounter a cluster of gunshots. The fulfillment of mastering the music is juxtaposed with the tragic end of Lorca’s life: “Lorca / cannot speak his mind as he falls” (羅爾卡／無話可說了，如是撲倒).<sup>26</sup> His people notice the tragedy and push open the windows to get a better view, inadvertently knocking over several pots of pansies. As a metaphor for Lorca’s life and his melodious poetry, the chinaberry tree now resonates “one octave lower / ending [the] short-lived Romance in silence” (降八度／沉默地結束了一段早夭的大羅曼史).<sup>27</sup>

In the subsequent piece “Forbidden Games: Two,” the lyrical “I” (possibly Yang Mu) grapples with the realization of Lorca’s violent death and undergoes the emotional shock of this revelation. In this poem, the girl, who had learned the guitar in the preceding work, imparts to the lyrical “I” that music is an artistic amalgamation of “time” and “space.” While Yang Mu affirms this assertion, he insists that the dimension of “spirit” must also be considered to render the music complete, uplifting, and ecstatic. Lorca’s death appears to shatter Yang’s belief system, prompting him to convey to the girl that life inevitably leads to death, but death, in turn, does not confer meaning upon life. As political repression stifles the music, Yang’s solitude deepens, and he perceives “a mood more serene, more sonorous / than any sound, a slight rage real / as a low cry, on the edge of dream and memory / in tears, in blood” (一種更寧靜的情緒比所有的聲音／響亮，一種淺淺的憤懣是真實／是小小的吶喊，在夢和記憶的邊緣／在血在淚).<sup>28</sup> His grief is stirred by the incomprehensible nature of death: “I can’t imagine / the gunshot that leads to death and eternal life” (我不能想像／那槍聲引導的死滅和永生).<sup>29</sup>

The third poem underscores the imperative of historical remembrance. The narrator urges himself not to forget Lorca’s compassion and sacrifice, the people’s suffering, and the dictator’s repression: “Try to remember / the great concern in Granada / try to remember your language and pain” (試着來記取／一份偉大的關懷，在格拉拿達／試着記取你們的語言和痛苦).<sup>30</sup> The act of remembering, interwoven with René Clément’s film story, is subsequently expanded to encompass the wartime ordeals of children during World War II. Yang Mu offers a prayer to Saint Michael, whose archetype may be represented by Michel in the film, beseeching him to safeguard this “good, curious girl” (善良好奇的女孩) and enlighten her about the history of the struggle against the dictator:<sup>31</sup>

teach her to hear—as she listens to the bell chime—  
history’s deeper sigh

recorded in an obscure place in the textbook  
 on the other side of the olive stained-glass window—  
 the peasant's sweat  
 the soldier's blood  
 Teach her to recognize [...]  
 [...]  
 that the persecuted boy once lay dying under a row of beautiful  
 fig trees, too soon to shed  
 the peasant's sweat and the soldier's blood

教她在傾聽鐘鳴的時候  
 聽到一片更深的歷史底嘆息  
 記載在教科書不顯著的地方  
 在橄欖窗彩色玻璃的反面——  
 那是農民的汗  
 兵士的血  
 教她認識……

[...]  
 少年曾經臥死在這一排好看的  
 無花果樹下，來不及流淌  
 那農民的汗和兵士的血<sup>32</sup>

Upon awakening to historical consciousness, she might evolve into a “radical heathen” (過激的異教份子), a label used by the dictator to denounce dissenting individuals. She will gather folk songs steeped in peasants' sweat and soldiers' blood. Her innocence will give way to an anti-war, anti-totalitarian perspective grounded in solidarity with the oppressed.

“Forbidden Games: Four” explores the remembrance of Lorca's sacrifice and illustrates the power of music beyond the realm of political repression. Initially, the narrator dismisses music as merely ornamental: “I say to myself: ‘Music is at best / ornamental to the story, so are melody and rhythm’ / When the music's lost (for example, now) / the story is still there, the hero still alive” (我對自己說：「音樂最多祇是故事的裝飾，韻律和節奏都是」——／音樂逸失的時候（比如說此刻）／故事還在，英雄栩栩若生）。<sup>33</sup> The poet concludes that, similar

to the relationship between music and story, love is also an accessory to life: “When love vanishes, life can still be / [fulfilled]” (愛逸失的時候，生命應當還可以／完成).<sup>34</sup> This logic leads to the consoling belief that Lorca’s spirit survives beyond death, transcending Granada and summoning others to resistance: “the once-leaping / life still lives in a place farther than Granada” (那一度躍動的／生命活在比格拉拿達更遠的地方).<sup>35</sup> Yet this resolution proves unstable. When the narrator hears “Romance” played again, his naïve optimism collapses before the recognition of each life’s irreducible singularity. Lorca has been shot, and his life cannot be redeemed through metaphor or collective struggle. This bleak insight is sealed when the guitar is abruptly cut off by “a cluster of gunshots...” (一排槍聲.....).<sup>36</sup>

To shed light on Yang Mu’s intentions in this sequence, it is essential to examine Lorca’s life, musical accomplishments, and political perspectives. In 1922, Lorca engaged in a festival dedicated to promoting Andalusian folk music, specifically *cante jondo*, translated as “deep songs” in Andalusian Spanish. This experience inspired him to compose lyrical ballads that explored themes ranging from the extremes of love and death to plenitude and tragedy.<sup>37</sup> Lorca conceptualized the idea of *duende*, a representation of the ineffable and mysterious charm of art. Duende was linked to a heightened soulfulness characterized by “the spirit of earth, with visible anguish, irrational desire, demonic enthusiasm, and a fascination with death.”<sup>38</sup> Politically, Lorca maintained a distance from formal party affiliations. While he empathized with socialist political goals, he prioritized his creative independence and resisted becoming a mere mouthpiece for party policies. Committed to authenticity, innovation, and originality, his poetry is rooted in a concern for truth, justice, and individual self-fulfillment.<sup>39</sup>

The metaphor of music is inspired by Lorca’s life and musical achievement as well as by the guitar song “Romance” and the little girl in the eponymous film. As the girl gains mastery over the G chord, the resulting notes resonate at a lower pitch, reminiscent of the bitter taste

of chinaberry fruit. The music is emotional and expressive, fusing time and space, and “uplifting” the spirit. Simultaneously, it is entwined with Lorca’s love and his tragic demise, embodying the passionate essence of *duende*. Furthermore, the music serves as a political metaphor, transcending boundaries as it remains all-encompassing, formless, and inef-fable, eluding any attempt at embodiment or capture through semiotic representation. There are infinite and interminable things to be said about it, yet it cannot be explained.<sup>40</sup> Its indefinability mirrors Lorca’s rejection of discipline and political obedience. This freedom of music relates not only to Lorca’s life but also to his artistic ethos, which was independent, unruly, aspiring to the infinite, and could not be suppressed by a dictatorial regime. While the music ceases with Lorca’s untimely end, Yang Mu endeavors to believe that its echoes persist, influencing those who listen, remember, and make a move.

Yang Mu’s belief in the redemptive power of music during a political crisis aligns with the reality of Taiwan. Historically, Taiwan experienced conditions similar to an enclosed system, akin to Franco’s one-party regime, which imposed censorship and restrictions on travel abroad. The transgressive potential of music finds resonance in the Taiwanese folk song movement of the 1970s. The movement was sparked by the dissatisfaction of popular musician Li Shuang-tse 李雙澤 (1947–1977) with the prevalence of Mandarin music that often carried militaristic and nationalistic sentiments. His call, during a 1976 event, to “sing our own songs” (*chang ziji de ge* 唱自己的歌) ignited widespread discussion. This speech marked a pivotal moment in the campus folk scene’s transition toward songs that engaged with Taiwanese sociopolitical issues following Chiang Kai-shek’s death. While acknowledging the influence of Chinese culture and White American protest singers like Bob Dylan and Joan Baez, the singers and songwriters of the new movement opted not only to express their emotions but also to critique sociopolitical problems Taiwan was facing at the time.<sup>41</sup> In particular, they admired Baez, who is of Mexican and Scottish descent and incorporates influences from Black musicians into her music. During the American folk song revival of the

1960s, genres like jazz and blues, rooted in African American experiences, were drawn upon to reflect on the history of slavery and express dissent against US involvement in the Vietnam War. The rebellious spirit of blues, jazz, country and western, and rock and roll music, inherited from these traditions, resonated not only with Baez but also later with Taiwanese singers as they confronted their own political and social issues.

Although some of the new songs were banned by the KMT for alleged obscenity, violations of Chinese tradition, or threats to the regime's stability, the artists circulated their music through small-scale concerts, radio broadcasts, and noncommercial magazines. Instead of endorsing nostalgic yearning for China, they offered alternative discourses, such as memories of growing up in Taiwan, as seen in "Childhood" (*Tongnian* 童年, 1982). Moreover, they explored local identity, as evidenced by "Bring You Home to Hualian" (*Dai ni hui Hualian* 帶你回花蓮, 1977), adapted from Yang Mu's 1975 poem of the same title.

Notably, Yang Tsu-chun 楊祖珺 (b. 1955), a student leader and Dangwai activist, was also a singer. She was familiar with African American works as minor discourse, singing about and publicly discussing taboo themes such as ethnic conflicts, censorship, political prisoners, capital punishment, and rebellion in Taiwan. Her song "Formosa" (*Meili dao* 美麗島, 1977), adapted from the translingual poet Chen Hsiu-hsi's 陳秀喜 (1921–1991) identically titled poem,<sup>42</sup> boldly proclaimed Taiwan as the motherland. The song lent its name to *Formosa Magazine*, launched by Dangwai leaders in 1979 to promote democratization, and to the Formosa Incident itself. After the Incident, the Presbyterian Church, which has consistently supported democratization and independence, adapted the song into Taiwanese Minnan. In 1980, it was banned for challenging the KMT's vision of Taiwan as merely a base for reclaiming China. Despite the KMT's suppression, the song persisted, gaining posthumous recognition and becoming widely appreciated after the end of the White Terror. It was later sung during the Wild Lily Movement and, in 2016, at President Tsai Ing-wen's 蔡英文 (b. 1956) inauguration ceremony.

Although Yang Tsu-chun was a descendant of Chinese mainlanders, her song carried significant meaning for local identity. Though somewhat Han-centric, it was later covered by artists such as Indigenous singers Ara Kimbo 胡德夫 (b. 1950) and Panai Kusui 巴奈·庫穗 (b. 1969), as well as fellow mainlander descendant Deserts Chang 張懸 (b. 1981). The song also served as the theme music for *Girl Friend, Boy Friend* (*Nü pengyou, nan pengyou* 女朋友·男朋友, 2012), a film depicting student protests in the late 1980s. Manifesting in various forms, including poetry, music, magazines, marches, and film, “Formosa” remained a powerful cultural and political symbol, lingering in people’s minds and urging them to revolt.

Yang Mu aligns music’s resilience under repression with the identity-shaping folk songs of 1970s Taiwan. Yang’s use of the term “forbidden” (*jinji de* 禁忌的) from Clément’s film partially references the KMT’s prohibition of songs (*jinge* 禁歌), political parties (*dangjin* 黨禁), newspapers (*baojin* 報禁), and taboo topics of public discourse (*jinji de huati* 禁忌的話題). The innocent girl who steals crosses from the church in Clément’s film can symbolize an unorthodox thinker who rescues meanings from dogmatism, akin to a protester in Taiwan freeing local songs and culture from the KMT’s repressive discourse. Mastering the G chord implies that the girl finds her voice in folk songs, embodying the spirit of rebellion, the language of protest, and the history of torture. Referred to as a “radical heathen” by the regime, she is seen not only as a cross-stealer but also as a potential dissenter, according to Yang’s interpretation. Just as Lorca’s poetry is remembered beyond his time, so too Taiwanese folk music can implicitly subvert the KMT’s grand discourse and challenge its closed political system. Poetry and music are forbidden “games,” or in Agamben’s terms, a politics of play that can challenge monolithic discourse and deactivate its power. Describing the subversive potential of play in *State of Exception*, Agamben even predicts that “one day humanity will play with law just as children play with disused objects, not in order to restore them to their canonical use but to free them from it for good.”<sup>43</sup>

### W. B. Yeats and Minor Literature

Yang Mu's appreciation for W. B. Yeats was not merely a matter of individual taste.<sup>44</sup> Many Taiwanese view Ireland through a lens that parallels Taiwan's own struggle for cultural rejuvenation and resistance against political and cultural hegemony.<sup>45</sup> This sentiment is echoed in works like Wu Chien-cheng's *Sailing to Ireland: W. B. Yeats and Celtic Imagination* (*Hang xiang Ireland: Yeats yu Sai'erte xiangxiang* 航向愛爾蘭：葉慈與塞爾特想像, 1999) and *Cruise around the Island: The Social Engagement of Heaney and Taiwanese Writers* (*Daoyu xunhang: Heaney he Taiwan zuojia de jieru shixue* 島嶼巡航：黑倪和台灣作家的介入詩學, 1999), which explore the literary defiance and societal involvement of Irish poets in relation to Taiwanese poets striving for their identity beyond the confines of Chinese discourse. The poet Chen Li from Hualian has translated numerous poets, including Seamus Heaney, into Chinese. In his discussions on Heaney, he underscores how Heaney's works grapple with the tensions between the Irish and the British.<sup>46</sup> As for Yang Mu, he not only translated Yeats's works but also composed several important poems about him and his oeuvre, including "Sailing to Ireland" (*Hang xiang Ireland* 航向愛爾蘭, 1971), "Ireland" (愛爾蘭, 1972), "Among School Children" (*Zai xuetong dangzhong* 在學童當中, 1975), "Propositions of Temporality" (*Shiguan mingti* 時光命題, 1993), "Then Cross the River" (*Sui duhe* 遂渡河, 1999), and "Cycad Aulacaspis Scale" (*Jiekechong* 介殼蟲, 2003). He also penned three essays: "Chinese Translation and W. B. Yeats" (*Yingshi hanyi ji Yeats* 英詩漢譯及葉慈, 1994), "Ireland in Yeats and Yeats in Ireland" (*Yeats de Ireland yu Ireland de Yeats* 葉慈的愛爾蘭與愛爾蘭的葉慈, 1996), and "Poetry, Love, and Politics" (*Shi he ai yu zhengzhi* 詩和愛與政治, 1999). Irish anticolonial imagery has long shaped Taiwanese intellectuals' reflections on resistance to foreign domination.

"Sailing to Ireland," inspired by Yeats's "Easter, 1916," is an elegy for the Irish republicans who revolted against British rule. On St. Patrick's Day, March 17, 1916, thousands of Irish people, refusing to participate in the UK's World War I efforts, marched through the streets of Dublin. The

following month, on Easter Monday, April 24, Irish rebels occupied the General Post Office and other key public buildings, hoisting the republican flag and declaring the “Easter Proclamation,” affirming the “right of the people of Ireland to the ownership of Ireland” and establishing the Irish Republic. The rebellion was suppressed within days by the British army, resulting in nearly 500 deaths. Despite the hasty military trials and execution of several rebel leaders, the severity of the British response sparked a remarkable surge in public support for independence.

In “Easter, 1916,” Yeats recalls encountering the rebel leaders casually around Dublin, viewing them as ordinary individuals. However, their involvement in the uprising transforms them. Initially, they appeared content in a bar, but when the rebellion commenced, they stood united, aligning their hearts with a singular purpose. In death, they become like a “stone / To trouble the living stream,”<sup>47</sup> symbolizing a disruption in the flow of life. Yeats reflects on the toll of prolonged sacrifice, pondering how many victims it takes before people become desensitized to injustice: “Too long a sacrifice / Can make a stone of the heart. / O when may it suffice?”<sup>48</sup> He questions the significance of their sacrifice, considering whether it was in vain: “Was it needless death after all? / For England may keep faith / For all that is done and said.”<sup>49</sup> Nonetheless, he finds solace in the knowledge that they dared to dream and that he can weave their names into a verse. Their sacrifice, though tragic, is deemed beautiful because they fought for an ideal: “Now and in time to be, / Wherever green is worn,” the rebels have been “changed, changed utterly” from the ordinary people Yeats once knew.<sup>50</sup> The poem concludes with the renowned paradox: “A terrible beauty is born.”<sup>51</sup>

Yang Mu’s “Sailing to Ireland” (1971) uses the Easter Rising to reflect on Taiwan’s struggle for autonomy. The poem begins with the first-person narrator envisioning himself hearing gunshots while paying homage to John MacBride, the rebel leader married to Yeats’s muse, Maud Gonne: “On Saint Patrick’s Day / I pin a shamrock on your door / but executioners’ gunshots / come back sooner or later” (聖·巴特里克

節那一天／我在你門上插一枝酢漿草／然而處決的排槍聲／終也還要回來).<sup>52</sup> He does not know how to pay tribute to MacBride, telling him that Ireland, independent as it is, still suffers from English suppression. Meanwhile, cries and arrests echo through Dublin. Yet, the narrator fears people will soon forget amid trivial distractions: “new plays are rehearsed in May / People have forgotten what happened // on Saint Patrick’s Day” (五月的新劇正在排演／人們也已經淡忘了／／聖·巴特里克節那一天).<sup>53</sup> Echoing Yeats’s concern that sacrifice breeds indifference, Yang Mu imbues the Irish poet’s famous line, “A terrible beauty is born,” with new significance by using it as an epigraph in his poem. Forgetting history grants leaders a license for repression. A similar ominous beauty may arise in Taiwan. Just as the Irish faced distractions in 1916, Yang worries that Taiwan in 1971 may forget government brutality and popular rebellion. His concern about oblivion suggests a lesson not yet learned, raising doubts about the impact of future rebellions and sacrifices.

The poem “Ireland,” composed in February 1972, serves as an elegy for the victims of Bloody Sunday, also known as the Bogside Massacre, which had occurred in Northern Ireland the same year. This event unfolded in the Bogside area of Londonderry during a protest march against the British policy of interning suspected Irish nationalists. British paratroopers fired on the unarmed protesters, resulting in the deaths of fourteen individuals. Yang Mu envisions their spirits lingering in the graveyard after their death, lamenting that “they didn’t fire a shot willingly / but created only frail cemeteries / in the bogside” (他們也並不開槍／他們只願意在水澤地裏／佈置帶傷的墳場).<sup>54</sup> They seem to be alive, however, because they remain like fragrance floating across the country: “executions are not death / but the scent of lilies” (處決也並不是死／而是百合花的芬芳).<sup>55</sup>

Yang Mu further explores the relationship between Ireland and Taiwan in three essays, “Chinese Translation and W. B. Yeats,” “Ireland in Yeats and Yeats in Ireland,” and “Poetry, Love, and Politics.” The first essay, written in 1994, traces the history of the sonnet from its Petrarchan

origins in Italian poetry to its transformation in English literature, with particular attention to modern Irish poetry. Marginalized both culturally and geographically, Renaissance England cultivated its emerging national literature through creative engagement with continental Europe. Figures such as Thomas Wyatt and Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, were central to this process. Wyatt translated and imitated Petrarch's sonnets, while Howard, influenced by the meter of Virgil's *Aeneid*, introduced unrhymed iambic pentameter, or blank verse, into English poetry. They reshaped the Italian sonnet through a new rhyme scheme organized around quatrains and a closing couplet, laying the groundwork for the English, or Shakespearean, sonnet. Yang contrasts this success with early Chinese experiments by figures such as Hu Shih and Lu Xun (魯迅, 1881–1936), whose reliance on classical Chinese forms limited their resonance with modern readers.<sup>56</sup> For Yang, the difficulty of translation derives from the need to convey another culture's ideas faithfully while simultaneously providing challenging and inspiring new forms for the target culture.<sup>57</sup> Turning to W. B. Yeats, Yang highlights how Ireland's peripheral status prompted Yeats to draw on diverse sources. While affirming Celtic traditions, Yeats incorporated Greek and Roman mythology and English Renaissance forms, producing a poetry that is at once Irish and English, classical and modern, local and global. In Yang's reading, Yeats's work crystallizes Irish collective memory and aspiration, rendering it not only a national legacy but a contribution to world literature.<sup>58</sup>

"Ireland in Yeats and Yeats in Ireland" (1996) intertwines an examination of Irish history with the biography of Yeats, suggesting that the poet carried the weight of this history within his works. In pre-Christian Ireland, the Celts possessed Indigenous legends like the tale of Cú Chulainn, whom Yeats reimagined in his poems as a symbol of resistance against foreign domination.<sup>59</sup> As early as the twelfth century CE, Ireland fell under English colonization, depriving the Indigenous Irish of governance autonomy, public office eligibility, educational opportunities, and property rights. Yang remarks, "Great Britain efficiently pushed Ireland into a dark and miserable valley, [looking indifferently at] the poor

colonized island descending one thousand meters below, into the abyss of slavery amid endless darkness” (英國徹底有效地將愛爾蘭推進黑暗愁慘的深淵，使他從一可憐憫的殖民島嶼更長墜千仞，終於進入不見天日的奴隸地獄)。<sup>60</sup> In 1858, the Irish Republican Brotherhood emerged as an underground society advocating for Irish revolution. In response, the British relaxed their stringent policies. Born into this transitional era, Yeats was raised amid escalating republican fervor.<sup>61</sup> Yang elaborates on Yeats’s engagement with Irish nationalism, culminating in “Easter, 1916,” a work that strives to “uphold the rationality and dignity of the nation in the infinite sorrow” (於無限沉痛傷感之中竭力保持民族的理性，尊嚴)。<sup>62</sup> Yeats’s allegiance to the cause was unwavering; he aligned with the Irish Republican Brotherhood in the 1890s, declined a British knighthood in 1915, and served as a senator in the Irish Free State in 1922.

The essay “Poetry, Love, and Politics” (1999) diverges from Yeats’s legacy to draw a more direct parallel between Taiwan’s situation and Ireland’s history. Here, Yang Mu considers Ireland a “holy land” (*shensheng de guodu* 神聖的國度), capable of inspiring “the modern people in other countries, like our Taiwanese people who are alert, sensitive, socially engaged, and study hard” (別的國度的現代人，比如說我們警覺，敏感，讀書涉事的台灣人)。<sup>63</sup> Yang Mu asserts that the comparison between Ireland and Taiwan originates from the eighteenth-century satire “A Modest Proposal” (1729), in which Jonathan Swift accuses the British of impoverishing Ireland and mockingly advises them to follow the example of a far-off country called Formosa, where surplus children are reportedly served up as food for the wealthy. Yang Mu intentionally misreads the original context, anachronistically aligning Swift’s Formosa with Taiwan:

Swift, inspired by a fabricated story in *An Historical and Geographical Description of Formosa* by a Frenchman named Psalmanazar, has surprisingly connected the Irish predicament with the hardship of Formosa. Taiwan was suffering repeated attacks from the Kangxi and Qianlong Emperors. After conquering it, the Qing regime soon marginalized it in terms of administration and cultural influence. Taiwan was suppressed and exploited by the local

officials and pirates. In Swift's mind, Taiwan, which was facing China's rise, might have shared a similar plight with Ireland in relation to Great Britain.

史威夫特根據一個名叫撒蠻那札的法國人的幻想，竟能將福爾摩莎的憂患與愛爾蘭的困境接起來。或許屢經康熙和乾隆兩朝用兵的遙遠的台灣，在政治和文化體制外自身自滅，只能提供官府和民間冒險家以經濟勒索，壓榨的島國，在他心目中，的確存在著與他的愛爾蘭相類似的悲慘命運，相對於興盛的中國與英國而言。<sup>64</sup>

The analogy is clear: both Ireland and Taiwan were controlled by foreign powers that distorted humanistic values and repressed cultural identities. Yang concludes that Irish literature can serve as a mirror for reflecting on Taiwan's situation and awakening its aspirations: "These aspirations will take various forms. They are the power of art" (愛爾蘭文學……可以借鏡，啟發的志向，以及開展那志向的各種模式，藝術的力量)<sup>65</sup>

In each of the three essays, W. B. Yeats confronts the question of how an oppressed people might survive foreign domination, resist colonial cultural encroachment, and preserve their own traditions. Homi K. Bhabha argues that cultural translation offers one such strategy, enabling writers to rewrite colonial discourse, assert cross-cultural identities, and refashion inherited texts in ways attuned to postcolonial conditions. In this process, something new emerges that is unforeseen by colonial logic and exceeds the "severance of tradition," replacing the desire for an imagined original purity with a "poetics of relocation and reinscription" and thereby unsettling hegemonic cultural authority.<sup>66</sup> A comparable displacement of grand discourse appears in Gilles Deleuze's concept of minor literature, defined as writing by marginalized subjects in the dominant language.<sup>67</sup> Such literature is inherently political, as it deterritorializes that language, articulates suppressed values, and generates a hybrid sensibility.<sup>68</sup> Cultural translation thus operates like a rhizome, storing energy, spreading laterally, and drawing sustenance from multiple sources. For Yang Mu, Yeats's poetry exemplifies this dynamic by weaving together English literary forms with Irish folklore

and history to resist British colonial dominance. Politically charged and reterritorialized within Irish geopolitics, Yeats's work asserts an autonomous Irish subjectivity that is hybrid and forged within the liminal space of imperial discourse.

Viewed through the lens of a poetics of relation, Yeats and Yang Mu reveal striking parallels. They reject the image of their islands as isolated or culturally deficient, instead drawing on local myths and folktales while moving beyond geographic limits in search of literary inspiration. This oceanic orientation allows them to welcome the Other and to resist the dominant discourses of England and mainland China, respectively. Both poets pursue an independent cultural identity articulated through hybrid forms. By mobilizing minor discourse as a strategic resource, they carve out distinctive temporal and spatial frameworks for Irish and Taiwanese culture under colonial pressure. Through their postcolonial writings, they situate themselves on a global stage, exceeding canonical boundaries to articulate autonomous and resilient identities. This practice of constructing localized, even oceanic, modes of time and space challenges colonial hegemony and affirms the vitality of identities that remain marginalized yet self-sustaining.

### **New Taiwanese People**

Yang Mu extended his transoceanic explorations to the island in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* in the late 1990s. His interpretation of *The Tempest* highlights the oppression endured by the island's Indigenous inhabitant, Caliban, while also underscoring the theme of reconciliation between the invader, Prospero, and his rebellious brother, Antonio. The play unfolds on a remote, ostensibly "uninhabited" island where Prospero, a sorcerer and the rightful Duke of Milan, resides with his daughter Miranda, as well as two other characters: the "monster" Caliban and the spirit Ariel. Having been usurped and exiled by his brother Antonio, Prospero orchestrates a tempest that strands Antonio and some of his associates on the island. Through a series of events, including Ariel's

revelation of Antonio's wrongdoing, Prospero ultimately chooses to forgive his brother, leading to the restoration of his title as Duke of Milan.

In Yang Mu's 1999 translation of *The Tempest*, he skillfully integrates multiple allusions and quotations from East Asian traditions, effectively relocating the play from its original context to the Taiwan of the 1990s. Tseng Chen-chen identifies several strategies of localization.<sup>69</sup> The first is his integration of diverse sources from classical Chinese literature: Yang incorporates phrases from *The Book of Songs* in the love scene between Miranda and Ferdinand (Act Three, Scene One), draws from *The Songs of the South* to depict the arrival of spirits (Act Three, Scene Three), and employs excerpts from *The Classic of Mountains and Seas* to illustrate Ariel's transformation into an avenging harpy (Act Three, Scene Three).<sup>70</sup> The second strategy Tseng identifies is Yang's incorporation of idioms and expressions from English, Japanese, the Minnan dialect, and Taiwanese Mandarin to evoke the atmosphere of a modern, multilingual Taiwan.<sup>71</sup> The name "Trinculo" is rendered as 純Q鑼 (*Chun Q Luo*), where the use of the English letter "Q" appears strikingly out of place in Yang Mu's otherwise Mandarin text.<sup>72</sup> The common English name "Kate" becomes 招弟 (*Zhao Di*), a typical Taiwanese girl's name often given by parents hoping for a son.<sup>73</sup> The word "constable" is translated as 警察 (*jingcha*), a Japanese-coined Chinese word introduced during the Meiji Restoration.<sup>74</sup> The word "coward" is rendered in Minnan as 無膽 (*bô-tánn*), literally "without guts."<sup>75</sup> Yang Mu even inserts the distinctly modern term "來不及包衛生棉的女人" (*laibuji bao weishengmian de nüren*, a woman who forgets to wear a sanitary napkin) to translate Shakespeare's coarse and antiquated description of the wrecked ship as being "as leaky as an unstanched wench."<sup>76</sup> This extensive use of diverse languages, traditions, and terminology blurs the boundaries between past and present, archaic and vernacular, and among Chinese, Taiwanese, and English cultural spheres. Yang's localization of *The Tempest* is achieved through his meticulous selection of terminology, idioms, and language. The familiar elements taken from Taiwanese, Chinese, and Japanese

traditions help readers to immerse themselves in the story and, as Tseng argues, foster an illusion that the story could be set in modern Taiwan.

The heteroglossia of Yang's translation conveys an oceanic view of Taiwan's island identity. Heteroglossia, as Bakhtin notes, consists of a diversity of voices, "social dialects, characteristic group behaviors, professional jargon, generic languages, languages of generations and age groups, tendentious languages, languages of the authorities," and so on.<sup>77</sup> In the original text, Shakespeare, like any skilled dramatist, renders a multiplicity of social voices in his depiction of characters. For him, it is mainly about differentiating characters, social rank, and gender. Yang has his own political agenda too. For example, Caliban's famous lines "Be not afraid; the isle is full of noises, / Sounds and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not"<sup>78</sup> in Yang Mu's version can be understood as referring to those sounds/dialects that were once suppressed by the KMT. Yang's point is that dialects such as Hakka, Minnan, and Indigenous languages are neither vulgar nor harmful, as portrayed by the KMT's National Language Policy, and therefore should not be stigmatized or suppressed.

Yang Mu's Taiwanese version of *The Tempest* is more than a translation in the conventional sense and should not be reduced to an imitation of the original source. It initiates a new journey within a different textual and cultural environment, realizing possibilities latent in the original. Rather than functioning merely as intertextual reference, Yang's translation opens an in-between, transitional space that accommodates heterogeneous languages, cultures, and perspectives, including those of Taiwanese islanders and Chinese mainlanders. From this perspective, Yang Mu's adaptation is oceanic. It breaks linguistic and cultural boundaries and "travels" from England to Taiwan, from the Renaissance at the beginning of European colonialism to the postcolonial present. In doing so, it opens itself to the Other and rearticulates *The Tempest* within a relational, postcolonial horizon.

In his introduction to the translation, titled "Denotations and Connotations of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*" (*Shashibiya baofengyu de waiyan*

*yu neihan* 莎士比亞《暴風雨》的外延與內涵, 1999), Yang Mu outlines a framework for reading the play in relation to modern Taiwan. He notes that from the fifteenth century onward, Europeans began to venture beyond the Mediterranean and their own coastlines. By the time of William Shakespeare, English explorers and traders had established long-distance maritime routes, entered the slave trade, founded colonial outposts, and amassed enormous wealth through overseas expansion. Immersed in the narratives generated by these ventures, Shakespeare could readily imagine an exotic, tropical elsewhere marked by abundance and leisure. As Gonzalo envisions in the play, this imagined island becomes a utopian “commonwealth,” where “[l]etter should not be known; riches, poverty, / [a]nd use of service, none; contract; succession, / [b]ourn, bound of land, tilth, vineyard, none [...] // [...] all men idle, all; / and women too, but innocent and pure; / no sovereignty” (文字學問一律廢除，富裕與平窮／之別，僱傭關係，不許存在；契約，繼承，地界，產業範圍，田畝／與葡萄園之類，取消……／／……舉國／賦閑，婦女也一樣，天真而純潔：／沒有君權統御).<sup>79</sup>

Yang Mu turns to what his English predecessor describes as the setting of *The Tempest*: an “uninhabited island” (*yi wuren dao* 無人島). Aware that Caliban inhabits the island, Yang challenges Shakespeare’s formulation, asking, “How can this island be ‘uninhabited’ [and have no humans]? What about Caliban? Isn’t Caliban a human being?” (這島怎麼可以算是無人島？卡力班是甚麼？卡力班難道不是人？).<sup>80</sup> The question is debatable. Caliban, the son of the witch Sycorax and a devil, embodies a hybrid origin. Yet such mixtures of the human and the supernatural are not unprecedented. In Greek mythology, figures like Helen, born of a divine father and a mortal mother, are nonetheless regarded as human. By this logic, Caliban, too, should qualify as human. Within the Elizabethan worldview, however, his status as a “heathen” would have marked him as illiterate, inferior, and therefore fit for enslavement. Yang Mu’s sympathies, by contrast, are unmistakable:

Objectively, although Caliban seems edgy and uneasy in the face of his master's terribly torturing magic, he is usually instinctual, simple, and frank, without humankind's malice, avarice, and timidity. His aspiration toward freedom is brave and noble. He is keen on searching for [hidden] natural resources such as springs, rich pasture, berries and peanuts, blue jays, nimble monkeys, and mussels. He is willing to share through equity and trust. He is sensitive to heavenly music. He lives and leans on it with no grudge in mind. His nerves, bones, and flesh operate in accordance with the melody. He immerses himself in music with all the senses.

客觀檢討，卡力班除害怕主子魔咒恐怖疼痛，偶然表現得緊張，不寧之外，平時凡事本能，其行為簡單率直，反而缺少人類之陰鷲，貪婪，懦弱；他對自由的嚮往與追求當然是勇敢，高尚的。卡力班更如此熱衷於尋覓失去的自然資源，他的清泉，沃原，山楂和花生豆子，他的藍鵲鳥，小猴子，鮮貝——而且樂於將這種種與人分享，在平等互信的條件之下。卡力班對天籟之聲極度敏感，生息俯仰其中而無心胸的阻隔，他的神經和骨骼血肉順其旋律運作，行止；他對音樂的領會是以全部感官，生物性的接觸，擁抱去完成。<sup>81</sup>

With the benefit of hindsight, Yang's portrayal of Caliban may appear to echo the trope of the noble savage and to stop short of fully recognizing his humanity. Yet Yang's intent is to challenge the discrimination directed at such a "monster." Although he does not explicitly address the extensive afterlives of *The Tempest* in the Global South, his Caliban is nonetheless postcolonial and resonates with analogous figures reimagined elsewhere. In *Tempests after Shakespeare*, Chantal Zabus traces the emergence of a "Calibanic genealogy" to Ernest Renan's closet drama *Caliban: Suite de La Tempête* (1878).<sup>82</sup> From Renan onward, Caliban becomes a recurring emblem of the colonized insurgent across Africa, the Caribbean, Latin America, Australia, and Québec.<sup>83</sup> Notable reworkings include Martinican poet Aimé Césaire's play *Une Tempête* (1969), Bajan novelist George Lamming's *Water with Berries* (1971), and Australian novelist Randolph Stow's novel *Visitants* (1979). Across these works, Caliban often appears as the rightful inhabitant of the island and as an Indigenous figure who

retains cultural memory.<sup>84</sup> In other cases, he is neither monster nor exemplary native but a figure through whom *modern* Latin American and African subjectivities are articulated, even when such identifications verge on anachronism.<sup>85</sup>

Postcolonial rewritings of *The Tempest* subordinate Shakespeare's play to a wide range of ideological transactions by uncovering the "repressed" palimpsestic layers of the original text."<sup>86</sup> To illustrate, Aimé Césaire in *Une Tempête* depicts Caliban as an acute thinker who sees through Prospero's tricks and recognizes what has been done to him, crying out, "[Y]ou've stolen everything from me, even my identity!"<sup>87</sup> Although Yang Mu's translation does not explicitly interpolate an anticolonial message, it subtly introduces a modern postcolonial Taiwanese context into the play. Yang's Caliban, for example, is called a "slave" (*jiannu* 賤奴) by the immigrants Prospero and Miranda, which, for Yang's readers who are familiar with his autobiography *The First Book of Mount Qilai*, recalls being labeled a "[shameless] conquered slave without a country" (*wuchi wangguo nu* 無恥亡國奴), a term used by a Chinese teacher to demean Yang and other schoolboys in the 1950s.<sup>88</sup> When Caliban complains, "This island's mine, by Sycorax my mother, / [w]hich thou tak'st from me" (這島本是我的，屬我媽媽夕可滑克絲／所有，被你奪去了)，<sup>89</sup> it is impossible for a Taiwanese audience to ignore the KMT's exploitation of their land and resources. Prospero's linguistic arrogance hints at the KMT's assimilationist National Language Policy. Caliban's cry of "Freedom, high-day! [H]igh-day, freedom!" (自由了，窪，慶祝！慶祝，自由了！)<sup>90</sup> suggests emancipation from the KMT's "slavery."

Caliban is a protean figure, and postcolonial readings of his significance cannot be confined to critiques of Western imperialism in the Global South. Through the practice of "comparison as relation" proposed by Shu-mei Shih, Caliban is equally capable of being read as a symbol of resistance to the KMT's exploitation of Taiwan. While most Global South writers understandably render Prospero as the prototypical White colonizer, Yang Mu's reading is more allegorical. Underlining how the magician forgives

Antonio for usurping his position at home, Yang argues, “*The Tempest* tells us that the ultimate vision is [a hope of] reconciliation” (《暴風雨》提示給我們的終極，最高境界是和解).<sup>91</sup> Reconciliation requires forgiveness and nonviolence, which Prospero evinces when he promises Miranda that no one, despite being punished by his magical illusions and the shipwreck, will be hurt—a metaphor for a model of transitional justice concerned not with revenge against the KMT but with redressing the harms suffered by its victims. For her part, Miranda is an allegory for the “new character and new vision” (新人格，新視野) that a democratizing Taiwan needed to avoid being derailed by past conflicts.<sup>92</sup> When Miranda encounters Antonio and others, her exclamation “O brave new world” (啊美麗的新世界)<sup>93</sup> suggests the new page of history that Taiwan needed to open, in which clashes are abandoned, and people heal from trauma and become proud of their identities and heritage. Thus, Yang Mu’s translation functions as a palimpsest,<sup>94</sup> layering the meanings of Taiwan’s contemporary social realities onto Shakespeare’s centuries-old text and transforming it through grafting and the infusion of Yang’s optimism in the late 1990s.

Indeed, it was the idea of a brave new world that encouraged Yang Mu to translate *The Tempest* as a memo for the next millennium. In October 1998, one year before Yang published his translation, Taiwanese President Lee Teng-hui delivered a speech promoting the concept of a “new Taiwanese people” (*xin Taiwan ren* 新台灣人). He declared, “All of us who grow and live on this soil today are Taiwanese people. [...] [We all] share a common responsibility for Taiwan’s future. It is a non-transferable duty for each one of us, the ‘new Taiwanese people,’ to convert our love and affection for Taiwan into concrete actions in order to open up a grander horizon for its development.”<sup>95</sup> In a later online article, “The Meaning of Taiwanese People of the New Era” (*Xin shidai Taiwan ren de hanyi* 新時代台灣人的涵義, 2005), Lee outlines the long history of foreign domination in Taiwan, first by Dutch and Spanish colonizers, then successively by Ming loyalists, the Qing dynasty, the Japanese, and by KMT mainlanders. He observes that, throughout this history, there

have been repeated clashes, even among Islanders themselves in pre-colonial times, and most recently between islanders and mainlanders, after the February 28 Incident.<sup>96</sup> The concept of a “new Taiwanese people” aims to transcend these old divisions by encompassing all the island’s inhabitants, regardless of origin, ethnicity, or date of arrival. This appeal is compelling because not only Taiwanese islanders but also some Chinese mainlanders were persecuted. The meaning of “Taiwanese people” has evolved as intermarriage between the two groups since 1949 has been common and more descendants of Chinese mainlanders have begun to identify themselves with Taiwan. In many cases, it is hard to define who is “Taiwanese” and who is not.

Shu-mei Shih observes that this vision of a new multicultural, multi-ethnic Taiwan emerged at a time when Taiwan was beginning to pursue globalization, namely international recognition of its autonomy. Each ethnic group and local community had started to communicate with global communities and form its transnational alliance. The more open Taiwanese culture that has emerged as a result of globalization is less characterized by “a specific ethnicity or community [...] [than] by ‘universal’ qualities shared by all cultures, thus becoming a true bearer of Taiwan’s multiethnic and multicultural democracy.”<sup>97</sup> Yang Mu’s translation of *The Tempest*, foregrounding reconciliation (in Miranda’s brave new world), emancipation (in Caliban’s aspiration to be free), and egalitarian democracy (in Gonzalo’s commonwealth), participated in the movement of globalization for a new Taiwan. Acknowledging the equality of each social group and ethnicity, the new Taiwan celebrates hybridity. Globally, Yang uses this translation as his passport to join those writers who also adapt *The Tempest* and share similar values in the Global South. This fosters a transnational alliance, proclaiming that we all are Caliban, the hybrid offspring feeling at home with the sea.

### **Yang Mu’s Oceanic Vision**

In the face of colonial domination, Yang Mu develops a vision of postcolonial justice through his version of archipelagic thought, which connects

Taiwan imaginatively with the Iberian Peninsula, postcolonial Ireland, and the fictional island of *The Tempest*. His serial poem, “Forbidden Games,” is a hybrid creation that draws on multiple sources: the French film of the same name, the murder of the Spanish poet García Lorca and his enthusiasm for Iberian folk song, and the parallel dictatorships of Francisco Franco and Chiang Kai-shek. For Yang Mu, the figure of Lorca is akin to the spirit of music that is free, indefinable, constantly deferred, escaping any authoritarian discourse. Yang’s emphasis on Lorca’s love of folk song also alludes to the 1970s campus folk song movement in Taiwan when students expressed a local consciousness suppressed by the KMT. Hence, Yang’s use of “forbidden” alludes to the KMT’s banning of songs and other popular expressions of dissent and, more importantly, to the KMT’s suppression of the people’s will. “Game” invokes Agamben’s concept of “play” as a form of disruption that deactivates the logic of totalitarian control, whether in Lorca’s Spain or Yang Mu’s Taiwan.

Yang’s admiration for W. B. Yeats reflects his regard for Irish colonial history and the struggle for freedom. He investigates Irish history from the pre-Christian era through English colonization and the Great Famine to the Easter Rising, arguing that Yeats’s poetry encapsulates the Irish struggle. Though located in a marginal region of Europe, Yeats affirms the value of Irish history and culture and refuses to regard the island as a passive recipient of dominant English culture. Instead, he freely draws on English traditions, as well as Renaissance art, classical literature, and Greek mythology, to create a postcolonial hybrid discourse that resonates with readers worldwide. Yang Mu’s poetics shares similar affinities with Yeats’s. They both sail on oceanic routes in search of literary inspiration. Their works are hybrid yet distinctively Irish and Taiwanese. They create local and oceanic forms of space and time perception that defy colonial epistemology and shape their own minor literatures within the Anglophone and Sinophone communities.

Many Global South writers have adapted *The Tempest* to imagine the collapse of colonial rule and assert the emergence of independent nations,

and Yang Mu participates in this trend by molding Shakespeare's text into a Taiwanese shape. His translation uses a mixture of languages, a liberationist portrayal of Caliban, and allusions to Taiwan's 1990s zeitgeist to create a hybrid allegory of democratization. He adopts classical Chinese phrases, modern Taiwanese vernacular, Japanese expressions, and English words to link Shakespeare's fictional island with modern Taiwan. Yang's portrayal of the play's characters is allegorical. At the center of his interpretation, the figure of Caliban alludes to Taiwan's struggle for decolonization. Unlike other Global South writers who see Caliban as counter-hegemonic and strip Prospero-qua-colonizer of his privilege, Yang returns to Shakespeare's old, but still urgent, emphasis on nonviolence and reconciliation. This corresponds to Lee Teng-hui's advocacy of a new Taiwanese people who will identify with the land, treat all ethnicities equally, and stand in solidarity with other Sinophone people and minorities around the world.

While the Global South resists neocolonial domination and struggles for economic and political autonomy, Taiwan has also fought, first, against the KMT's suppression and now against the CCP's intimidation in international affairs. The notion of Chineseness has haunted this island for decades. It cannot be exorcised unless people stop privileging their Chinese origin and ignoring the suppression of the White Terror, the KMT starts to apologize to the victims and help the Transitional Justice Committee discover the truth, local governments keep a wary eye on the PRC, and international institutions begin to recognize Taiwan's right to autonomy. These concerns are evident throughout Yang Mu's poetry. His works tell us that a return to Taiwan's Chinese legacy, as the KMT advocates, is not the only option for this island's literature and that a more creative, oceanic perspective is available. One can create, across time and space, an alliance of the marginalized. His works suggest that Taiwan needs to liberate itself from Chinese constraints, replace its continental narrowness with an oceanic, boundless potential, and connect with others in similar predicaments. By doing so, one can build a more equal and stronger league of justice.

## NOTES

1. Yeh, introduction to *No Trace of the Gardener*, xxiii–xxv.
2. Owen, “Traditions and Talents,” 40.
3. Owen, “Traditions and Talents,” 40.
4. Wong, *Rays of the Searching Sun*, 80.
5. Wong, *Rays of the Searching Sun*, 91–93.
6. Wong, *Rays of the Searching Sun*, 106.
7. Édouard Glissant, *Philosophie de la Relation*, 45. Quoted in Michael Wiedorn, *How to Think Like an Archipelago*, 113.
8. Wiedorn, *How to Think Like an Archipelago*, 114–115.
9. Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 11.
10. Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 18.
11. Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 19.
12. Shih, “Comparison as relation,” 7.
13. Shih, “World Studies and Relational Comparison,” 436.
14. Shih, “World Studies and Relational Comparison,” 434.
15. Shih, “World Studies and Relational Comparison,” 434–436. See also Shih, “Theory in a Relational World,” 741.
16. Shih, “Theory in a Relational World,” 273.
17. Shih, “Theory in a Relational World,” 273.
18. Yang Mu, *III*, 305.
19. Quoted in Hsiau, *Contemporary Taiwanese Cultural Nationalism*, 70.
20. Yang Mu, *III*, 307.
21. Yang Mu, *III*, 308.
22. Wong, “It Is Not So Far,” 148.
23. Wong, “It Is Not So Far,” 149.
24. Clément, *Forbidden Games*. STOP HERE
25. Yang Mu, *III*, 172. This line is retranslated and does not follow the translation in Yang Mu, *NTG*.
26. Adapted from Yang Mu, *NTG*, 99; *III*, 174–175.
27. Yang Mu, *NTG*, 99; Yang Mu, *III*, 175.
28. Yang Mu, *NTG*, 101; Yang Mu, *III*, 179.
29. Yang Mu, *NTG*, 101; Yang Mu, *III*, 180.
30. Yang Mu, *NTG*, 102; Yang Mu, *III*, 182.
31. Yang Mu, *NTG*, 102; Yang Mu, *III*, 183.
32. Adapted from Yang Mu, *NTG*, 102; Yang Mu, *III*, 183–184.

33. Yang Mu, *NTG*, 104; Yang Mu, *III*, 187.
34. Yang Mu, *NTG*, 105; Yang Mu, *III*, 1888.
35. Yang Mu, *NTG*, 105; Yang Mu, *III*, 188.
36. Yang Mu, *NTG*, 105; Yang Mu, *III*, 189.
37. Stanton, "The Poetry of Federico García Lorca," 101.
38. Hirsch, "The Duende," 13.
39. Dennis, "Politics," 189.
40. Jankélévitch, *Music and the Ineffable*, 72.
41. Taylor, "How Beautiful It Will Be"; Yang, "The History of Popular Music," 56–58.
42. The "translingual generation," a term proposed by Lin Heng-tai, refers to poets born in the 1920s under Japanese rule who grew up during the ROC era. These poets spoke Japanese and Hakka, Minnan, or Indigenous languages during childhood but were required to learn Mandarin to communicate in adulthood. This linguistic struggle delayed their literary development compared to other poets. Most of them, including Lin Heng-tai, Chen Hsiu-hsi, Tu Pan Fang-ke (杜潘芳格, 1927–2016), were members of the Bamboo Hat Poetry Society.
43. Agamben, *State of Exception*, 64.
44. Yang Mu is not the first writer to identify with Ireland. Pai Hsien-yung's 白先勇 (b. 1937) *Taipei People* (*Taipei ren* 台北人, 1971), a collection comprising fourteen short stories written in the 1960s, is influenced by James Joyce's *Dubliners*. Pai's concern, however, is not like that of Yang Mu, Chen Li 陳黎 (b. 1954), or Wu Chien-cheng 吳潛誠 (1948–1999), whose intentions are to resist China, but rather the endless melancholia of the Chinese diaspora. His works should not be placed in the same category as those of Yang, Chen, and Wu.
45. Wong, *Rays of the Searching Sun*, 183.
46. Chen and Chang, "Digging the Land."
47. Yeats, "Easter, 1916," in *The Poems*, edited by Finneran, vol. 1 of *The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats*, 183.
48. Yeats, "Easter, 1916," 183.
49. Yeats, "Easter, 1916," 184.
50. Yeats, "Easter, 1916," 184.
51. Yeats, "Easter, 1916," 184.
52. Yang Mu, *NTG*, 50; Yang Mu, *II*, 252.
53. Yang Mu, *NTG*, 50; Yang Mu, *II*, 254.
54. Yang Mu, *HM*, 22; Yang Mu, *II*, 256–257.
55. Yang Mu, *HM*, 22; Yang Mu, *II*, 257.

56. In 1908, Hu Shih began using Chinese poetic forms to translate English poems. Later, he realized the difficulty and gave up in 1918. See Chang Hsu, "Hu Shih and his translation," 1–19.
57. Yang Mu, *XV*, 71–72.
58. Yang Mu, *XV*, 81.
59. Yang Mu, *XV*, 97.
60. Yang Mu, *XV*, 100.
61. Yang Mu, *XV*, 103.
62. Yang Mu, *XV*, 108.
63. Yang Mu, *XIV*, 378–379.
64. Yang Mu, *XIV*, 379–380.
65. Yang Mu, *XIV*, 381.
66. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 225.
67. Deleuze and Guattari, "What Is a Minor Literature?" 16.
68. Deleuze and Guattari, "What Is a Minor Literature?" 16–18.
69. Tseng, "Yang Mu as a Translator," 149–153.
70. Tseng, "Yang Mu as a Translator," 149–151.
71. Tseng, "Yang Mu as a Translator," 151–153.
72. See the names of the actors in Yang Mu, *XX*, 46–47. See also Tseng, "Yang Mu as a Translator," 151.
73. Yang Mu, *XX*, 146–147. See also Tseng, "Yang Mu as a Translator," 152.
74. Yang Mu, *XX*, 172–173. See also Tseng, "Yang Mu as a Translator," 152.
75. Yang Mu, *XX*, 172–173. See also Tseng, "Yang Mu as a Translator," 152.
76. Yang Mu, *XX*, 52–53. See also Tseng, "Yang Mu as a Translator," 152–153.
77. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 262–263.
78. Yang Mu's translation is "這島上到處都是聲音，／樂曲，和甜美的歌，愉悅而不傷人。" See Yang Mu, *XX*, 182–183.
79. Yang Mu, *XX*, 122–123. "Bourn" in Gonzalo's speech sounds unfamiliar. In Shakespeare's time, it meant "a boundary between fields."
80. Yang Mu, *XV*, 249–250.
81. Yang Mu, *XV*, 252–253.
82. Zabus, *Tempests after Shakespeare*, 11.
83. Zabus, *Tempests after Shakespeare*, 2.
84. Harrell, "Caliban," 42–56.
85. Alden T. Vaughan, "Caliban in the 'Third World': Shakespeare's Savage as Sociopolitical Symbol," *The Massachusetts Review* 29, no. 2 (1988): 289–313.
86. Zabus, *Tempests after Shakespeare*, 2.
87. Zabus, *Tempests after Shakespeare*, 46.

88. XX, 90–91; *MMQ*, 114; *IX*, 187. This term was commonly used by mainlanders to suggest that the Taiwanese had been willingly enslaved by Japan.
89. Yang Mu, XX, 90–91.
90. Yang Mu, XX, 158–159.
91. Yang Mu, XV, 264.
92. Yang Mu, XV, 262.
93. Yang Mu, XX, 244–245.
94. Genette, *Palimpsests*, 5–6.
95. Quoted in Lee, *The Road to Democracy*, 193.
96. Lee Teng-hui, “新時代台灣人的涵義,” *President Lee Teng-hui Foundation*, March 3, 2005, <https://presidentlee.tw/新時代台灣人的涵義/>.
97. Shih, “Globalization and the (In)significance of Taiwan,” 146.

## CHAPTER 5

# AGAINST THE GRAND HISTORY

The first step in liquidating a people... is to erase its memory. Destroy its books, its culture, its history. Then have somebody write new books, manufacture a new culture, invent a new history. Before long the nation will begin to forget what it is and what it was.

—Milan Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*

Contemporary Chinese discourses are haunted by the history of two imperialisms: not merely that of China's own expansionism but also that of foreign imperialist invasions. The historical narrative of "Greater China," in the eyes of both the KMT and CCP, reflects the official historical discourse on imperial dynasties.<sup>1</sup> The concept of Chineseness in this discourse hinges on a Chinese vision of world order, wherein China is perpetually positioned as central and superior. This authority is derived from a narrative steeped in supernatural origins and manifest destiny, accompanied by myths of military glory, civilizational prowess, and cultural superiority.<sup>2</sup> The concepts of sovereignty, superiority, jurisprudence, and world order are unified in the image of "all under heaven" (*tianxia* 天下), conveying a unified polity guided by a shared set of cultural values.<sup>3</sup> In this discourse, the pursuit of "peace" is only

conceivable within the vision of a world ultimately united under a single ruler.<sup>4</sup>

To participate in this envisioned order, perceived outsiders, or “barbarians” (*siyi* 四夷), were expected to adhere to the tribute system. By doing so, they gained benefits exceeding their tribute investments. Over time, the term *Zhongguo* 中國 (literally “the Central States” or “the Middle Kingdom”), originally referring to the geographically central region during the Zhou dynasty (1046–256 BCE), evolved into a “super sign” encompassing all Chinese imperial dynasties, eventually shaping the modern concept of a sovereign nation.<sup>5</sup> In contrast to Western notions of sovereignty premised on equality, the Chinese understanding entails a hierarchically structured multiethnic and multinormative polity, underpinned by diverse cosmological metaphysics.<sup>6</sup> Through this framework, China’s geopolitical, ritual, and cultural centrality finds justification, forming a cornerstone of its identity and worldview.

The nineteenth-century European invasions of China loom large in Chinese historical consciousness. The prevailing narrative recounts a trajectory of decline, starting from China’s once robust state to its eventual decadence and humiliation at the hands of Western forces. This degradation commenced with the First Opium War of 1839–1842, during which the weakening Qing dynasty acquiesced to becoming a “quasi-colony” divided among European spheres of influence.<sup>7</sup> However, the most devastating blow came with the Eight-Nation Alliance invasion of 1900–1901, which resulted in the occupation of much of northern China, including Beijing, the imposition of heavy indemnities, and the establishment of “concessions,” European-controlled zones staffed by foreign troops at strategic locations. Despite aspirations for national rejuvenation and autonomy following the overthrow of the “autocratic” (*zhuanzhi* 專制) and “corrupt” (*fubai* 腐敗) Qing dynasty in 1911, China faced further challenges. Japan, once a participant in the Chinese tributary system, emerged as a formidable power. It annexed Taiwan in 1895, occupied Manchuria in 1931, and inflicted severe atrocities upon the Chinese

populace during the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945), notably in the Nanjing Massacre.

The collective weight of these imperialist indignities forms the grand frame of a historical narrative known as the “century of humiliation” (*bainian chiru* 百年恥辱), referring to a time of weak Chinese sovereignty that had to constantly “cede territories and pay indemnities” (*gedi peikuan* 割地賠款) to foreign powers. Embraced by both the KMT and the CCP, this narrative stands as the cornerstone of “modern Chinese nationalism,” uniting intellectuals of both parties under a shared “metanarrative” transcending their ideological schisms.<sup>8</sup> This historical discourse of national humiliation and regeneration underpinned the KMT’s propagation of Chineseness during martial law. By evoking a sense of humiliated yet potentially restored imperial pride, the KMT was able to cast mainland China and Taiwan in stark dichotomies: central versus marginal, superior versus inferior, civilized versus barbarian. This narrative also served to erase the positive legacies of Japan’s colonization of Taiwan from 1895 to 1945.

In addition, the KMT’s dominance in postwar Taiwan was propelled by the “exilic mentality,”<sup>9</sup> in which the lost mainland was the true homeland. Taiwan was merely a “mediate state,” a temporary refuge before the anticipated, triumphant return to the mainland.<sup>10</sup> Regarding Taiwan as little more than a base for rallying forces and counterattacking the CCP, the KMT maintained that the ROC was the sole legitimate government of both the mainland and Taiwan. Ruled under the guise of democracy, Taiwan, or to be more precise, the ROC could be regarded as “Free China” in contrast to “Communist China.” For the KMT, the ROC had liberated Taiwan from Japanese rule, produced an economic miracle, and by defending Taiwan from PRC invasion, had secured a peaceful, prosperous (but silenced) society on the island.

Although the KMT’s narrative, in the post-authoritarian era, has been deconstructed by the Taiwanese people, Taiwan has not yet been able to claim “crisis averted.” Since the 1990s, the PRC has risen as a

global superpower, intensifying pressure on several peripheral regions. Given the PRC's reliance on the "century of humiliation" narrative, it is unsurprising that a resurgent China is exceptionally sensitive about peripheral regions like Taiwan, Hong Kong, Xinjiang, and Tibet, viewing them as crucial for China's sovereignty. This stance was particularly pronounced after 1989 when the nationwide democracy movement based in Tiananmen Square compelled China to adopt a tougher stance on separatism. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, Chinese leaders perceived democratization as a threat, fearing it could spark similar movements among Tibetans and Uyghurs.

Although Lee Teng-hui had assumed the presidency in 1988, Taiwan introduced direct presidential elections through constitutional reforms in 1994. In 1995, Lee accepted an invitation to deliver a speech on Taiwan's democratization at Cornell University. China responded with military exercises that included firing missiles near Taiwan's ports. This caused panic in Taiwan and prompted US president Bill Clinton to deploy a carrier battle group to international waters off Taiwan. The 1995–1996 Taiwan Strait Crisis made it clear that China's policy toward the island had become more aggressive and inflexible.<sup>11</sup> From that point onward, Chinese officials promoted a tougher and more hawkish position on Taiwanese issues. Taiwan became everyone's "whipping boy." Echoing the historical pattern of "conceding territories and paying indemnities" to foreign imperialists, Taiwanese separatism is perceived as a form of intervention by external forces.

The utilization of history to mold national identity in the service of those in power aligns with Michel Foucault's concept of the knowledge-power nexus. He intertwines knowledge and power to comprehend how the observation, documentation, and classification of individuals and populations contribute to strategies of domination, and how these strategies exert power through knowledge.<sup>12</sup> From Foucault's viewpoint, power is neither an embodiment of an agent nor something held by an

agent. Instead, power operates through the “interplay of nonegalitarian and mobile relations.”<sup>13</sup> Similarly, knowledge is established in relation to a field of statements, instruments, practices, research programs, skills, social networks, and institutions.<sup>14</sup> Through the practice of knowledge-power, sovereignty suppresses “error and irrationality,” those statements that diverge from established methods and the regime's narrative, to establish “knowledge” as a cohesive network of truths.<sup>15</sup> This knowledge-power is disseminated through media, propaganda, education, and popular culture, and it contributes to the dominant version of history. The power of grand history inculcates in Chinese people, both in the PRC and ROC, a sense of China's proud legacy and unforgettable trauma, and it provokes feelings of superiority, anger, humiliation, and patriotism.

“Where there is power, there is resistance,” states Foucault.<sup>16</sup> Resistance can be expressed in multiple ways but is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power. It is always inside power, inside the whole system, and is always situated at “points, knots, or focuses” that “spread over time and space at varying densities.”<sup>17</sup> Inspired by Foucault's historical studies, this chapter discusses the Chinese historical master narrative and explores how Yang refashions the historical moments for resistance. Through an investigation of his works *The Story of Five Concubines* (1990) and “The Lost Ring” (2000), the chapter delves into the poet's multifaceted approach to rewriting history. These works exemplify how historical narratives can be imbued with literary elements that offer alternative viewpoints on well-known events. In the face of political authorities imposing a totalizing narrative that reinforces the illusion of unified conformity, local writers can merge present circumstances with historical events, crafting a distinct, decentralized, and localized discourse to challenge the grand narrative. Such works serve as paradigms to encourage Taiwanese individuals to critically examine authority, understand their history, reflect on their social context, and position themselves within regional and global frameworks.<sup>18</sup>

### Withdrawing from the National Narrative

During the social movements of the 1980s and 1990s, Yang Mu composed several works to express his resistance to political authority. Among them, *The Story of Five Concubines*, a deliberately unfinished closet drama written in the style of Shakespeare, shows how the situation at that time could be illuminated by looking to the past and using the past to disrupt contemporary hegemonic discourse.

In this play, Yang Mu revisits the tragic saga of the Southern Ming in seventeenth-century Taiwan, particularly the defiance of Ming loyalist Zheng Chenggong against Qing conquest. Fleeing to Taiwan, Zheng established the Eastern Capital regime in 1661. Upon his death the following year, his son Zheng Jing 鄭經 (1642–1681) assumed leadership and renamed the kingdom Eastern Peace (*Dongning* 東寧), implying its emergence as an autonomous local polity. In 1663, additional Ming loyalists and aristocrats, including Zhu Shugui 朱術桂 (1617–1683), the Prince of Ningjing (*Ningjing Wang* 寧靖王), sought refuge in Taiwan. However, the Eastern Peace kingdom's sovereignty proved short-lived, waning under the rule of Zheng Jing's son, Zheng Keshuang 鄭克塽 (1670–1707). In 1683, Shi Lang 施琅 (1621–1696), a former general under Zheng Chenggong now serving the Qing dynasty, led a naval force to Penghu 澎湖. Faced with imminent defeat, the Prince of Ningjing chose to take his own life alongside his five concubines in July of that year.

Inspired by this tragedy, Yang Mu retells the story in three parts, “She Has Foreseen Adversity” (*Ta yuzhi danan* 她預知大難), “Shi Lang Dispatches Troops from Copper Mountain” (*Shi Lang fa Tongshan* 施琅發銅山), and “Prince of Ningjing Sighs in Sojourn” (*Ningjing Wang tanxi jiqi* 寧靖王歎息羈棲), focusing respectively on the concubines in the first part, the poet-historian Shen Guangwen, Zheng Chenggong, and Shi Lang in the second part, and Zhu Shugui in the third part. In contrast to the “official” History of high politics, each character's soliloquy introduces a diversity of voices challenging the historical narrative of Han patriarchy. While it is clear that Yang Mu's approach endeavors to

distance the reader from a Sinocentric narrative and cultivate a sense of belonging to Taiwan,<sup>19</sup> it is also important to explore how he employs multiple strategies to shape his minor narratives vis-à-vis History as power, as well as how he utilizes historical materials to reinvent the story for a modern context.

In the first part, “She Has Foreseen Adversity,” Yang Mu illustrates how marginalized women can actively engage in history. In *The General History of Taiwan*, a historical account much appreciated by the KMT, the historian Lian Heng depicts the concubines as mere possessions. Appearing in the chapter on the Prince of Ningjing, they are portrayed as flat, almost silenced characters whose sole purpose is to articulate their sacrifice. They say:

My lord, if you are indomitable, how can we lose our purity? If you survive, we shall all survive, but if you are doomed to die, we shall all follow you in death. Please let us be the first to leave. Let us help you drive the fox from the grave.

殿下既能全節，妾等寧甘失身？王生俱生，王死俱死。請先驅狐狸於地下。<sup>20</sup>

It is clear that Yang Mu has relied on Lian Heng’s account because both writers mistakenly reverse the titles, Lady Grace (*Xiu Jie* 秀姐) and Madam Lotus (*He Gu* 荷姑), of the historical figures Madam Grace (*Xiu Gu* 秀姑) and Lady Lotus (*He Jie* 荷姐).<sup>21</sup>

In Yang Mu’s rendition, the protagonist Lady Grace begins by eulogizing Shen Guangwen, a poet who came to Taiwan around the same time: “He is an extraordinary person / who thinks profoundly and bears / the burden of the ancestors’ glory, humiliation, and sinfulness” (他是一個完全不尋常的人／思維深刻，擔負著先人的／光榮，羞辱，罪愆).<sup>22</sup> She remembers when Shen Guangwen once asked her, “What date is it today” (今夕何夕), to which she gave a poetic answer about how a storm devoured the gunboats: “When the full moon shines, the gory storm shouts / expanding its colossal, net-like eye, to catch gunboats like fish /

and feast on five-score flags” (月圓遍照無底，腥風颯舉／狂眼鉅大如幕，網羅鐵甲船舶／吞噬百面戰旗).<sup>23</sup> This is her metaphor for the approach of the Qing navy. She then foresees the kingdom’s downfall: “The adversity is predictable, though. / Riddles are better” (那是可預知的災難／但我寧可使用謎語).<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, although the resulting adversity of the downfall is predictable, she still turns to the beautiful Taiwanese landscape for consolation, stating that in the mild breeze and bright sun, the verdant leaves sprout, the birds chant and peck, the bees hum and collect pollen, and “the emerald fly / fights in cobwebs” (一隻青蠅／在蜘蛛網裏鼓翼掙扎).<sup>25</sup> The image of a fly struggling in cobwebs hints at the revolt of the five ladies against the hand of irreversible fate, or even the patriarchal narrative of history. After portraying how the adorable “creatures” assumed “their roles,” she praises summer:

Oh summer, so fresh and bright  
 you are a gallant stage. These creatures fit  
 their roles, they grow in the nest you have cast.  
 Let us who stand on this fastidious stage  
 thus devote ourselves to playing our part:  
 to fawn and beg, to love and lose with rage,  
 and weep this play with what’s inside the heart.

啊夏天，華麗的劇場  
 舒暢，明朗。所有的生物  
 都在安排好了的位置搭配妥當  
 成長，讓我們也在精心設計的  
 布景前專心扮演指定的角色  
 去奉承，乞憐，去嫉妒，迷戀  
 在血和淚中演好一場戲。<sup>26</sup>

Lady Grace’s monologue seems to suggest that the play is a comedy. The “stage” imagery here alludes to Jaques’s famous speech in Shakespeare’s *As You Like It*:

All the world’s a stage,  
 And all the men and women merely players.  
 They have their exits and their entrances,

And one man in his time plays many parts,  
His acts being seven ages.<sup>27</sup>

A malcontent and cynic, Jaques interacts little with other characters in the play, but his speeches provide insightful, if pessimistic, rejoinders to the joyful characters exiled in the Forest of Arden. Jaques's detachment from the action of the play and his awareness of harder truths serve as a reminder to the audience that they too are participants in the play of the world. Similarly, in "She Has Foreseen Adversity," Lady Grace, a detached figure, notices, sadly, that she is just playing a role. Like Jaques, she is a contemplative person who mostly just observes her own and other characters' destinies. However, after emigrating from China and settling down in Taiwan, she experiences tragedies that Jaques, in his comic role, does not face: the downfall of her kingdom and her own subsequent doom.

The question that arises is why Yang Mu incorporates comedic elements in a tragic historical context. His intention was not to downplay the concubines' fate but rather to mix tragic and comic elements in order to evoke a deep response in the audience or readers. Tragicomedy often evokes "intense emotional involvement" through tragic elements like Aristotelian pity and fear, Renaissance awe and astonishment, or modern horror and despair, while incorporating comic elements that prompt laughter, critical or sympathetic, an appreciation of incongruity, and a degree of detachment.<sup>28</sup> In "She Has Foreseen Adversity," this mixing of modes enables us to identify with the heroine's sweet temperament and her affirmative choice to be Taiwanese while simultaneously deploring her disproportionate misfortune. We know that she suffers tragically and yet comments pleasantly on her suffering in a monologue that is lyrically appealing and ironically detached. As a result, a feeling of sympathy and vulnerability emerges not merely for her but also for all who watch or read the scene vis-à-vis their own fates. A tragicomedy can thus be crueler than tragedy by presenting a tragic experience without Aristotelian catharsis.<sup>29</sup>

In a patriarchal society, a woman's life and body are regarded as possessions of her father, her husband, or the king. The prohibition against a concubine being controlled by a usurper, which drives these characters to commit suicide, illustrates patriarchal fetishization and hegemonic control over the female body.<sup>30</sup> Studies of nationalism have shown how nations incorporate gender roles into their strategies of body-political representation.<sup>31</sup> The concept of the purity of the female body in China serves as a metaphor for the purity of the nation.<sup>32</sup> The rape of a female body by a foreign invader symbolizes the violation of the nation by a foreign power. Women, therefore, have no subject-position and cannot share the same stage with men who fight over territory.

Just as the "creatures," in Lady Grace's words, "fit their roles" and "grow in the nest" that the summer has made, so she is subject to the omnipotent official narrative in patriarchal History. Despite this, she does not give in to pessimism even though, like Jaques, she is fully conscious of her bleak destiny. She is not an indifferent or silent observer but one who actively participates in this teleological historical discourse. In this enactment of history as masculine power, she knows her tragic position but still resolves to play her role with "what's inside the heart": "to fawn and beg, to love and lose with rage."<sup>33</sup> Lady Grace's acquiescence does not stem from loyalty or submission; rather, it signifies her adherence to professional ethics as an "actress." Her suicide should thus be perceived, not as a submission but as the *performance* of a "self-initiated act," an act through which she uses her life to protest the problem of historical narrative.<sup>34</sup> Lady Grace's insightful speech and voluntary self-sacrifice make her a pivotal protagonist in a story that has historically marginalized her. Moving from a position of gendered marginality to center stage, she gains the opportunity to stand in the spotlight and critique the repression of the nation-building process. Hers is a minor but powerful narrative, through which Yang claims for her a subject-position to destabilize patriarchal discourse.

### Scenic Rearrangement

The second part of *Five Concubines* focuses on the conflict between Shi Lang and Zheng Chenggong. Although the title “Shi Lang Dispatches Troops from Copper Mountain” describes the moment before the attack, Yang uses the episode to highlight how Shi became a turncoat who joined the Qing forces to take revenge for his father’s death. The story may have been inspired by Lian Heng’s account:

When a soldier broke the law and escaped to seek support from Zheng Chenggong, Shi Lang [who had taken an official position under Zheng in Taiwan] arrested him. Zheng commanded not to kill, but Shi did it anyway. Zheng got furious, intending to catch Shi, so he captured his family and killed the father and other elders. [...] Zheng offered rewards for information. Desperately wanting him, Zheng said, “If I do not get him, he will make trouble for me.”

有標兵得罪逃於成功，琅禽治；馳令勿殺，竟殺之。成功怒捕琅，逮其家，殺琅父及顯。……成功購琅急，曰：「此子不來，必貽吾患。」<sup>35</sup>

In Yang’s version, the story is told by Shen Guangwen, who opens his account with a question and a prophecy: “Do I hear the day of this warring storm, / at last, approach me? Perhaps not, but yet / my mind remains locked to an augury. / I foresee that they shall rise as we fall, / so spins the great wheel” (這個狂風暴雨的日子好像／終於，終於好像近了？或許／也未必。可是易象瞭若指掌：／征伐克服的預言，剝復損益／我消彼長).<sup>36</sup> He then recalls how, twenty-two years earlier, Zheng Chenggong “drove the Dutch from their fort, and earned heaven’s approval / to sow a crop of Ming in its pure soil” (血戰熱蘭遮，天意爲／大明衣冠保留一塊淨土以完髮生息).<sup>37</sup> He notes that, when Zheng expelled the Dutch from Taiwan, the Qing emperor on the mainland was still just a child; by then he had grown up, becoming “solemn and stronger than his forebears” (果斷鷹揚，剛盛猶過乃祖).<sup>38</sup> Conversely, in Taiwan, after Zheng’s death, the remaining Ming courtiers had grown

dull, insolent, and greedy, while foolishly deriding their Qing competitor as “a dwarf who never grows up” (永遠長不大的侏儒).<sup>39</sup>

In contrast to the deluded Ming royalists, who imagine the “old immense mainland rotting in isolation” (舊國廣袤將不腐自爛), Shen notes the perseverance of Shi Lang, who still remembers retribution: “Who could have known that gray, long-haired Shi Lang, / who does not forget his father still unavenged, had been / appointed General Peacemaker of the Ocean [by the Qing emperor]?” (孰不知施琅早掛靖海將軍印／爲報殺父之仇，歲月悠久／白髮蕭蕭，他不曾一刻或忘).<sup>40</sup> At this point, Shen narrates the earlier episode in which Zheng Chenggong had few qualms about killing Shi’s father, thereby sparking the current military conflict. Shen’s soliloquy ventriloquizes Zheng: “Shi Lang was my brother once, / now he seeks retribution. Our hate is / mutual. Though he committed the greatest mistake and I am entitled to hate him, I still own my regrets” (施琅與我／情同手足，棄我去乃是爲父仇／不共戴天；縱使大過在他／仇恨終屬於我).<sup>41</sup> Shen concludes that the spirit of the Southern Ming kingdom has become flickering and dim, which gives Shi Lang a chance to attack Taiwan.

The piece reconstructs Lian’s account with a heightened emotional tone and more realistic details, portraying the ignorance of the courtiers, the persistence of Shi, the guiltlessness of Zheng, the worry of Shen, and the imbalance of martial spirits on both sides. Shen’s monologue is composed like a Russian matryoshka doll. The poet (Yang Mu) writes a history in which another poet (Shen Guangwen) talks about an earlier event, often using other people’s words. Layering history in this manner grants Yang the poetic license to construct a “fictional” yet “real” account of events. This arrangement strategy can be further elucidated by examining three aspects: the in-between position, the nonlinear narrative, and minimization.

The first aspect is contingent upon the sole narrator, Shen Guangwen, widely regarded as the pioneer of Taiwanese literature. He depicted the diasporic experience and offered some of the earliest accounts of

Taiwanese Indigenous life, as well as descriptions of its tropical flora, climate, and topography in written Chinese. Shen was among the earliest Chinese immigrants to establish permanent residency on the island. His writing utilizes classical Chinese to convey and connect expressions of both the fading traditional world and the tumultuous clashes of the emerging new world. These conflicts include struggles between European and Chinese empires, Indigenous peoples and Han settlers, as well as between the official language (Mandarin) and local dialects (or mother tongues).<sup>42</sup> Analogous to the real historical figure, Shen in Yang Mu's play occupies an in-between space of heterogeneous, clashing cultures: the Qing dynasty versus the Kingdom of Eastern Peace, foreigners versus locals, and a rising power versus a declining regime. Speaking from this in-between position allows Shen to discern the power disparities between the two parties.

Tellingly, Shen's soliloquy does not follow the chronology of the original events. The plotline opens in the historical present, with Shen indicating the imminent arrival of the "storm." His speech, however, proleptically anticipates Taiwan's defeat: "I foresee that they shall rise as we fall, / so spins the great wheel." Next, Shen uses flashbacks to contextualize the conflict by contrasting Zheng Chenggong's triumph over the Dutch army with the concurrent immaturity and weakness of the Qing emperor in China, and to relate how, from Shen's perspective, as the emperor grew up and grew stronger, Zheng passed away and the remaining Ming loyalists became ineffectual. Then Shen's account takes the narrative back to another moment before the current scene, the pivotal moment when Zheng ruthlessly murdered Shi's father.

These structural and rhetorical features, including the flashbacks, the reversal from good to bad fortune, the pitiable past, the predictable, frightening future, and the suggestion of a tragic flaw of Zheng Chenggong's tragic flaw of ignorance, are reminiscent of Greek tragedy, particularly of Sophocles's *Oedipus the King*. Against this backdrop, Shen resembles *Oedipus's* prophet Tiresias, who speaks of the past while warning in the

present and foreseeing the tragic, inevitable downfall to come. Zheng's reputed heroism is intentionally downplayed here. Yang leaves out Zheng's other achievements that are usually celebrated in Taiwanese history. He makes Shen, in his flashbacks, choose scenes that depict Zheng's mistakes as well as the vanity of the Ming loyalists, scenes often left out of historical narratives.

Yang's emplotment strategy brings together the heterogeneous temporalities, goals, means, interactions, and circumstances of the historical conflict in a configuration that resembles Ricoeur's "discordant concordance," a strategy of including pitiable and fearful incidents, sudden reversals, recognitions, and violent effects within the complex plot.<sup>43</sup> The temporal disorder of the events in Shen's narrative, however, is articulated for a purpose: to present the conflict more thoroughly and make the overthrow of the state more intelligible and credible than it is in the "official" historical accounts. Yang Mu's emplotment of "discordant concordance," rather than a mode in which multiple historical incidents are arranged as a stable, chronological literary story, produces both a literary and realistic perspective, thereby challenging the official historical discourse.

Historically, Zheng's image was appropriated by Qing, Japanese, and KMT governors for their own reasons. After the Mudan Incident (*Mudanshe shijian* 牡丹社事件, 1871–1874), a punitive expedition launched by Japan in retaliation for the murder of Ryukyuan sailors by Indigenous Taiwanese, Zheng's image as a Ming loyalist was glorified on the advice of Shen Baozhen 沈葆楨 (1829–1879), the Qing official who reformed the administration of Taiwan after the Mudan Incident. The hope was that Zheng would become a unifying nationalist figure whom Taiwanese people could rally around against the threat of Japanese invasion. When Taiwan eventually fell to the Empire of Japan in 1895, the new Japanese overlords appropriated Zheng as Japanese. Official historical accounts emphasized his maternal Japanese roots, and his temple in Tainan was converted into a Japanese Shinto shrine.

The temple reverted to its original purpose under the KMT, which redeployed the Qing strategy and further enriched Zheng's nationalist credentials with a Confucian aura of "loyalty, filial piety, chastity, and righteousness" (*zhongxiao jieyi* 忠孝節義). This grand narrative naturally stressed Zheng's role in expelling the Dutch and regaining the "lost" land of Taiwan. It also highlighted his loyalty to the Ming dynasty and his anti-Qing sentiments to blame the Manchu Qing for destroying Chinese traditions. The KMT used the historical discourse on Zheng to shape the rhetoric of triumph over Japan (and other foreign powers such as the Dutch) and to help justify the slogan "retake the mainland" (casting the PRC as an illegitimate regime like the Qing dynasty).<sup>44</sup> The implicit connection between the PRC and the Qing can be perceived in the KMT's main addition to the decor of Zheng's temple. To prop up the KMT's anti-Communist discourse, the temple's entrance arch was adorned anachronistically with the KMT emblem, whose inscription, "loyalty and chivalry" (*zhonggan yidan* 忠肝義膽), was devised by the republican loyalist General Pai Chung-hsi 白崇禧 (1893–1966), a decorated veteran of the Chinese Civil War.

Against these official narratives aiming to induce the Taiwanese people to accept the agendas of the Qing dynasty, the KMT, and the Empire of Japan, Yang Mu subverts the story of Zheng Chenggong by showing the hero's flaws. In Yang's play, Zheng comes across as an ignorant leader who plays only a minor, almost invisible, role in the poet Shen Guangwen's monologue. This strategy provides more space for the thoughts and sentiments of other characters who are more connected to Taiwan's tragedy: the concubines, the poet, and the resigned prince.

### **Dramatization of Emotion**

The third part of *Five Concubines*, "Prince of Ningjing Sighs in Sojourn," portrays the prince as a fatally flawed tragic hero rather than the tough, stoic, and unemotional aristocratic figure of official history. In Lian Heng's narrative, the Prince of Ningjing is confident and gallant in the face of death:

I have encountered misfortune. I will keep my hair uncut and wear my royal garments when I die. I feel no compunction in front of my ancestors and parents. My life comes to its end and my conscience is unsullied.

時逢大難，全髮冠裳而死，不負高皇，不負父母。生事畢矣，無愧無作。<sup>45</sup>

Yang Mu's version problematizes this idealizing narrative. He stresses the vulnerability of the prince by, among other things, avoiding his royal title, instead referring to him by his real name, Zhu Shugui. More significantly, Yang builds toward a violent emotional outburst in the prince's monologue. From the outset, Zhu acknowledges the discrepancy between the softness of his own psyche and the masculine exterior expected by society:

Soaked with sweat,  
my only face badly damaged and humiliated  
my brows, merely an exterior semblance,  
belie, in dim flesh and blood, my cold drooping  
soul, regal spirit of mountain and river.

[...]

My false exterior  
in years of solitude wrestles with waves  
of ignorance, pride, bluster.

汗水濕透了  
我僅有的顏面，殘缺，羞辱  
這眉目器宇只能算是些表相  
一顆心在陰暗的血肉裏冷切  
枯槁，無限江山凝聚的靈異  
[...]

一具虛假表面的形相  
在孤寂的歲月裏和海濤爭持  
抵抗無知，驕縱，狂傲——<sup>46</sup>

He chooses to follow his emotions, disregarding social expectations and embracing the raw authenticity of his feelings, even as they lead him down unpredictable paths:

Raise a sigh,  
if a sigh, groan or yelp  
will rend your sealed chest  
and make eternal shame and rage  
overflow from the spine of your spirit and flood.

歎息吧  
假使歎息，或者嗚咽，或者嚎啕  
能教你封閉的胸懷就此迸裂  
讓時間累積的羞辱和憤怒  
從你精神的背面溢出，或者傾瀉<sup>47</sup>

Crying, he acknowledges, is often stigmatized as a sign of weakness and undesirable sensitivity within the confines of official heroic discourse. It remains taboo within the lexicon of male self-presentation, where vulnerability is often misconstrued as fragility and emotional expression is confined to narrow expectations of stoicism and strength:

We will raise a sigh heavy as overlapped clouds  
in sultry weather that may accumulate, swell  
and quiver, but never squeezes out a single raindrop.

我們都將大聲歎息，如層疊的  
烏雲在悶熱的空氣裏團聚，鼓盪  
始終擠不出一滴雨水<sup>48</sup>

Finally, he reaches a crescendo of passion, akin to a tempest unleashed upon the world. Every fiber of his being resonates with the echoes of ancient grievances and untold sorrows, a primal roar that reverberates through the depths of his soul:

Then raise a sigh,  
a groan, a cry! Let the universe's grudges  
swell and explode, let the vaulted sky tremble

let a roaring storm quiver my sanctuary, this southeastern island  
 let it terrify a thousand rivers and mountains  
 whip the splitting earth, and make for our ancestors  
 a swamp of the last generation.

歎息吧  
 嗚咽，嚎啕，讓宇宙的怨憤  
 膨脹，爆炸，將穹窿搖撼  
 將狂風暴雨震動我逃生的  
 東南半壁，將千山萬水懷悚  
 鞭打龜裂的大地，為祖宗  
 創造末代的沮洳<sup>49</sup>

In contrast to the patriotic, strong, ambitious image of the Prince of Ningjing in official discourses, Yang Mu's prince is, like Shakespeare's King Lear, helpless, vulnerable, and emotional. He loses his temper, feels ashamed in front of his royal ancestors, gives up his kingdom, and even wishes to demolish the universe. As Zhang comments, "This royal descendant, previously acclaimed as a composed and fearless national hero [by the KMT], is suddenly deprived of his sainthood. [...] [H]e feels so lonely [...] and [...] what he can do only is to sigh, sob, or cry loudly."<sup>50</sup> Zhang calls the scene wholly "embarrassing,"<sup>51</sup> but it is also possible to think of Yang Mu's portrayal of Zhu as vivid and human, an engaging and sympathetic portrayal of an ordinary man facing a catastrophe. Zhu's feelings of exasperation, shame, fear, wrath, resentment, and frustration can thus be seen as a bifurcated account that brings to the surface what has been underrepresented in the linear evolutionary dimension of History. After Zhu's final lines, Yang Mu seeks to subvert the national myth by "staging a dynastic annihilation."<sup>52</sup> Zhu's urge to let go of the kingdom is, symbolically, a plea for "liberation from the national narrative."<sup>53</sup>

Yang Mu's literary approach to historical materials is reminiscent of how Shakespeare takes imaginative liberties and mixes historical facts with poetic fiction for dramatic effect. Shakespeare's historical plays were designed to bring history back to life, provide Elizabethans with role models from the past, and produce a version of historical truth

that addressed contemporary political concerns.<sup>54</sup> This historical-literary approach also highlights the necessity of connecting with specific historical contexts to forge a common foundation that propels us into the future.<sup>55</sup> Much like Shakespeare's works, Yang Mu's play breathes life into history, offering role models from the past and shaping a version of historical truth that speaks to modern readers. He presents a view of cultural identity as constructed from the bottom up, through the use of alternative historicity. In contrast to the KMT's "singular" and "unitary" version of history,<sup>56</sup> in which heroines and heroes are one-dimensional characters without personal anguish, Yang Mu provides multiple versions of history that constitute "different ways of imagining time."<sup>57</sup> He diversifies gender narratives and emphasizes the characters' connection to the land after immigration, creating an alternative, complex, and humanistic local version of history. Taiwanese history is retold in a tragic tone, emphasizing local points of view, national pride, and a dignity that can withstand the humiliation and repression of the KMT.

The last question related to bifurcated history concerns the representation of the tragic story in *Five Concubines*, a configuration that is contrary to what Paul Ricoeur, for instance, asserts about forming a narrative. Ricoeur contends that a narrative should unify the sequence of events into a coherent whole, imparting a "sense of an ending" and establishing a logical progression from past to future along the "arrow of time."<sup>58</sup> Yang Mu's play, however, refuses such linearity; its characters represent themselves in a few lines and then "disappear into a foggy horizon," becoming unknown again.<sup>59</sup> The foggy horizon is the approaching "storm" repeatedly mentioned by Yang's characters throughout all three parts, a metaphor not merely for the approaching Qing navy but also for the power of grand history. The poet's duty is to rescue the local figures submerged by this storm.<sup>60</sup> Yang explores these minor narratives, as delineated in Prasenjit Duara's concept of "dispersed history."<sup>61</sup> The "dispersed" history of suffering calls for narrative, and the mission of the writer is, in the words of Paul Ricoeur, to "save the history of the defeated and the lost" and to rescue history from the nation.<sup>62</sup>

Yang's play shows his desire to unearth lost and bifurcated Taiwanese histories and to give these histories new meanings through the medium of poetry. By situating historical events and figures in a wider context, Yang Mu's works from the late 1980s and early 1990s coincide with the loss of legitimacy of the Kuomintang regime following the lifting of martial law in 1987.<sup>63</sup> Yang's poetry is part of an increasing chorus of voices challenging the KMT's exilic mentality, which regards Taiwan merely as a provisional base for a counterattack against the CCP. Yang Mu seems to appreciate the renaming by Taiwan's Southern Ming kingdom (1662–1683) of its capital from Eastern Capital to Eastern Peace in 1664 as a sign that the Ming immigrants had decided to settle down and give up the idea of counterattack against the Qing dynasty.

In this "peaceful" kingdom, Lady Grace, Shen Guangwen, and Zhu Shugui consider Taiwan their home. For them, therefore, the invasion by the Qing army does not merely signal the political collapse of the kingdom but also the erasure of their home, a place where they had refashioned their identities, no longer exiles but locals, decentered and belonging to the grassroots. Yang defies the exilic mentality that dominates the KMT's historical narrative. He rewrites Taiwanese history from a local perspective.

### **Alliance of the Oppressed Countries**

Yang's poem "The Lost Ring" (2000) is an example of a work that challenged the idea of Chinese homogeneity at a time when China was becoming a global power with ambitions of regional hegemony. Taiwan held its direct presidential election in 2000, a democratic innovation that caused much political alarm in China. Concerned that the Taiwanese people might choose a president who favored independence, China, in December 1999, signed a joint statement with Russia, which had been fighting a separatist movement in Chechnya, pledging to combat so-called separatism and extremism together and to stand up for each other in safeguarding national unity. As part of this pact, Russia supported China's aim of reunification with Taiwan and denounced the idea of a state-to-

state relationship between China and Taiwan. In return, China reiterated its position that the Chechnya issue was purely an internal Russian affair and supported the Russian army's 1999 invasion of Chechnya to crack down on separatist forces. In the spring of 2000, just a few weeks before the Taiwan election, China released the white paper "One-China Policy and the Problem of Taiwan" (*Yi ge Zhongguo de yuanze yu Taiwan wenti* 一個中國的原則與臺灣問題), which reasserted that Taiwan was inseparable from China, and launched a series of military maneuvers in an effort to influence the election.

"The Lost Ring" tells the story of a soldier in the Second Chechen War (1999–2009) who becomes committed to independence after learning of his sister's death. A young man who lives with his sister in Grozny is separated from her after the outbreak of war. The sister, Heidi,<sup>64</sup> flees to the mountains while her brother joins the army but promises to find her in the mountains after he completes his military service. During the siege of Grozny, as he hides in the now-deserted city, his thoughts turn to Heidi's situation:

Heidi Ivana, my sister, I am always thinking of you  
Yet when a lone trooper passes by, I am ready to pull the trigger

Snowflakes, maybe—I guess you must have reached  
the highlands at the border.

海蒂伊安娜我的姊姊我總想到你  
但散兵踱過我扣板機毫不遲疑

或是雪花——想你必然已經  
到達邊境的山區了<sup>65</sup>

In his imagination, Heidi has already reached the mountains:

Heidi Ivana, my sister, has already crossed  
rocky ranges one by one, amid sporadic explosions of land mines  
and reached Alkhan-Kala before nightfall

After this shot I shall climb the mountains to meet her

海蒂伊安娜我的姊姊已經越過  
層層疊疊的丘陵，在斷續地雷聲中  
到達了阿爾坎喀喇，天黑以前  
發完這一槍我上山去會她<sup>66</sup>

He remembers how she blessed him before departing:

Heidi Ivana, my sister, declared: "A future fighter,  
a fighter for the independence of our fatherland!"  
Waving goodbye in the spring breeze, "A brief separation,"  
she said, "so that you will return a fighter for the fatherland."

海蒂伊安娜我的姊姊，她說：  
「未來的戰士，祖國獨立的戰士」  
揮手送行在春風中。短暫的分別  
她說：為了歸來是祖國的戰士<sup>67</sup>

He recalls the ring, engraved with the abbreviated name H.D., that his sister wears and, at that moment, encounters a group of Russian soldiers and kills one of them. Approaching the body, he sees his sister's ring on the soldier's index finger and realizes that she has been robbed and killed:

H.D., I recognize the ring. O Heidi  
Ivana—even if I sank deep into deadly corrosive water  
*sans yeux*, I would intuit it  
and identify it, Heidi Ivana

H.D., even if I were locked in a burning  
crucible, *sans oreilles*, my concentration  
would let me hear our suffering nation cry out for help  
and let me respond, H.D. Heidi Ivana

H. D., even if they release their howling troops  
to trample our country till the end of time  
Grozny, *sans bouche*, my vocal cords would proclaim  
independence and prophesy rebirth in spring

H.D.，我認識那指環，啊海蒂伊  
 安娜——即使深陷腐蝕的死水心  
 我以盲目的直覺認知，並且  
 辨認它海蒂伊安娜

H.D.，即使禁閉我於烈焰的  
 銅火爐，我聾聵的專注  
 也將聽見祖國厄難對我呼救  
 回應H.D.，海蒂伊安娜

H.D.，即使他們放縱兵馬  
 呼嘯，踐踏至末日我們祖國  
 果羅茲尼，我暗啞的聲帶提示  
 獨立，將春天預言再生的訊息<sup>68</sup>

Here, Heidi emerges as a symbol of a nurturing motherland that bestows blessings upon her soldiers. Her demise foreshadows the impending devastation that Chechnya will endure in its struggle for independence.<sup>69</sup> Despite its toll in lives lost and cities destroyed, the war fails to extinguish the spirit of rebellion. The enjambment of “independence” in the final line not only implies a humanitarian dedication to the principle of national self-determination but also serves as a reflection on Taiwanese independence, especially considering Yang Mu’s deliberate comparison of Chechnya to Taiwan.

To clarify his intent, Yang appends a “home letter” (*jiashu* 家書). At the outset, Yang Mu describes a prolonged period of rain, casting a “melancholy mood” over the streets and alleys. This somber atmosphere, combined with mudslides in the highlands of Central and South Taiwan, defines the “whole reality of winter” (*dong zhi zhenshi* 冬之真實).<sup>70</sup> This scene evokes memories of mid-February in New York, where the “reality” (*zhenshi* 真實) was similarly palpable, though characterized by a “biting cold” that was “clear and unambiguous.”<sup>71</sup>

While in New York, the poet followed a daily routine of getting up and immediately heading to the street corner to buy a newspaper to follow a particular news story while in New York. He remembers learning from the newspaper that after four months of attacks, Russian troops were eager to announce their capture of Grozny, the capital of Chechnya. However, *The New York Times* was “skeptical” (*weiyán jièshèn* 危言戒慎) of this “claim.”<sup>72</sup> Due to the military’s control over media coverage by Moscow and the local siege commander, the newspaper exercised extreme caution in its reporting, which read like an “epic” (*shìshī* 史詩) by Virgil, both “tragic” (*beizhuàng* 悲壯) and “distant” (*yaoyuán* 遙遠).<sup>73</sup> By this time, Grozny had been devastated by bombings: buildings, roads, communication facilities, and essential supplies were all obliterated. A city that once housed over three hundred thousand people was now reduced to fewer than three thousand Chechen resistance fighters and countless civilians hiding in basements.

Yang Mu continues to describe an incident he read in mid-February. A few Chechen women who had fled Grozny returned to the ruined city. Unfortunately, they encountered a group of Russian soldiers and were shot. A young woman named Heidi was not actually wounded but pretended to be dead. The Russian soldiers looted the women’s belongings, and one soldier tried to remove a ring from Heidi’s finger. When he could not, he was about to cut off her finger with a knife, but the ring finally came off. The soldiers then piled the bodies on some mattresses and attempted to set them on fire. However, the rain-soaked mattresses would not ignite, so the soldiers left hastily. Heidi escaped death and recounted her experience, which spread worldwide.

Yang Mu provides background information about Chechnya, noting its location between the Caspian Sea and the Black Sea, north of the Caucasus. Chechnya is twice the size of Taiwan and is believed to have rich reserves of oil and natural gas. It was part of the Soviet Union, and during Stalin’s reign, Chechens were deported en masse to Siberia, only to be allowed to return home under Khrushchev. After the Soviet Union’s

collapse, Chechnya demanded independence. Yang Mu also mentions that in the nineteenth century, a young Tolstoy, the humanitarian novelist, was stationed on the Chechen border during his military service. Additionally, historical records from China's foreign relations mention a "Chechen Khan" (*Chechen han* 車臣汗), though this refers to a region between Mongolia and Manchuria unrelated to modern-day Chechnya. There is also a legend that Zhang Qian 張騫 (195–114 BCE), during his second-century BCE journey to West Asia, visited Chechnya. Yet, Yang Mu states, "this seems baseless, as no such record can be found in *The History of Han*" (惟《漢書》無記載，存疑).<sup>74</sup>

This home letter suggests the dialectic between falsity and truth, the historical master narrative and minor local history, as well as dominance and revolt, all of which the poem symbolically explores. The concept of *zhenshi* 真實 (rendered as "reality" in *HM*'s translation, but which can also mean "truth," or "being truthful") plays a role in Yang's narrative. The "melancholy mood," the "mudslides" in Taiwan, and the "biting cold" in mid-February New York are all components of the *zhenshi* schema. On the western edge of Asia, Russian troops relentlessly attack Chechnya. This is also part of *zhenshi*. However, the troops control the media and "declare to the world that they have seized Grozny." The one-sided discourse asserted by Russia may not be "truthful," and hence it is not accepted by *The New York Times*. The journalists choose to report with more caution, which reminds Yang of Virgil's historical accounts. Even if the seizure of Grozny is the truth, however, Yang Mu would rather point out another cruel dimension, one suppressed by Russia. He describes the devastated lives of Chechen civilians who hide in their basements while resistance fighters attack the Russian invaders, all waiting for the order to withdraw to the mountains. All such descriptions constitute minor narratives, alternative versions of history excluded from the historical accounts of victorious invaders.

The story of the survivor also illuminates the concept of truth/reality, which may be manipulated by superpowers. Her testimony, published in

*The New York Times* on February 6, 2000,<sup>75</sup> is truthfully paraphrased by Yang. Afterward, he incorporated the Chechen news with his Taiwanese concerns to create the poem, as he stated in an interview in 2003: “Only when I wrote about Chechnya did I consciously identify it with Taiwan. In that particular case, I feel that though the *history* of the two places is quite different, there is the same underlying urge, which I understand well.”<sup>76</sup> In Yang’s version, the woman has a younger brother, and her death strengthens his commitment to independence. This half-truthful, half-fictional treatment of the story provides the meaning of resistance for Taiwanese readers who experience the threat of China.

The last part of the home letter sketches three perspectives on the grand discourse of China and Russia. First, Yang connects Chechnya to Taiwan geopolitically. Chechnya’s location and resource richness suggest its strategic importance. The mass deportation of Chechens ordered by Stalin in 1944 foreshadows both the search for sovereign autonomy and the need to fight against external dominance. These circumstances are analogous to those of Taiwan. Geographically, Taiwan is part of the first island chain standing in the way of the Pacific expansion of the PRC. Economically, it is comparatively wealthy and has abundant natural resources that could be exploited by the PRC. Historically, it was colonized by several foreign regimes and is now being pressured by a larger and more powerful neighbor.

Second, to avoid self-serving bias, Yang Mu offers a perspective from the Russian side. Witnessing how Imperial Russia waged a war to ethnically cleanse the Caucasus and incorporate the territory into the empire, Tolstoy criticized the brutality, hypocrisy, and indifference of the Russian invaders while praising the bravery of the Chechen people in his historical novels *Hadji Murat* and *The Cossacks*. The two works endorse the struggle for Chechen freedom and independence, but Russian politicians seem to have missed this and read the texts as explorations of the peculiarities of Chechnya.

Finally, Yang Mu debunks the myths, embraced by the CCP, that the “Chechen Khan” of Chinese history bore any relation with Chechnya or that Zhang Qian on his journey to the “West” reached modern-day Chechnya. Similarly, one of several Sinocentric myths propagated by the CCP holds that China has owned its entire historic territory continuously for five thousand years; this is false.<sup>77</sup> The modern idea of China was invented in the late Qing dynasty, and throughout Chinese history, its borders have changed with each successive dynasty. The same myth is used to justify the long-sought annexation of Taiwan:

When China is weak, as in the Ming, foreigners, the new history had it, such as the Dutch, could seize Taiwan, exploit the people, and wound China by blockades and opium sales. Taiwan therefore was eternally Chinese.<sup>78</sup>

The official Chinese state narrative is based on unchallengeable assertions, a condescending and imperious gaze, and a claim to absolute power. Yang Mu reverses and nullifies these pretensions by providing an alternative narrative that is bottom-up, peripheral, and local. Highlighting the plight of other ethnic groups in his text, Yang Mu provides an empowering version of minor history. By crafting a moving fiction out of real events, Yang Mu allows Taiwan and Chechnya get to speak in their own voices and present what they deem their own version of history.

### **The Force of Minor Histories**

Hegemonic Sinocentric discourse, whether purveyed by the KMT or the CCP, always highlights the wholeness and continuity of China, as well as the humiliations caused by foreign powers. The myth of wholeness and cohesion is buttressed by a concept of world order in which China, seen as inherently superior, enjoys the privilege of dominating peripheral regions, whether by a tribute system, assimilation, or so-called peacekeeping wars. The idea of “peace” always demands submission to China. At the same time, the humiliations inflicted by the two Opium Wars, the invasion by the Eight-Nation Alliance, and the two Sino-Japanese Wars have haunted

modern Chinese memory, making Chinese culture paradoxically both self-abased and conceited. The contradiction has shaped both the KMT's and the CCP's metanarratives and fomented Chinese nationalism among the people. In the case of the KMT, the "exilic mentality" has framed Taiwan as merely the base for an eventual triumphant return to the mainland. This myth weakened in the 1980s, even as the PRC emerged as a new hegemon in East Asia, promoting narratives of ancient Chinese unity and post-"century of humiliation" restoration to justify claims to Xinjiang, Hong Kong, Tibet, and Taiwan, regardless of historical facts. Both the KMT and the CCP have based their claims to legitimacy on grand mythic historical narratives that exclude bifurcated local narratives.

Yang Mu's *The Story of Five Concubines* challenges the KMT's narrative of Ming loyalism by asserting a locally grounded Taiwanese historical identity, with each section centering on a different historical figure. In "She Has Foreseen Adversity," Yang highlights the figure of Lady Grace who, in the dominant historical narrative, is always presented as a minor character subject to the Prince of Ningjing. In her monologue, the lines give rise to the question of genre and its function. Appropriating the text from Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, Yang neither mocks the historical women's suicides nor creates pure comedy. Instead, this tragicomedy evokes sympathy with which readers can identify. This form proves more affecting for readers who are aware of patriarchal violence and find Aristotelian catharsis inadequate. Moreover, Lady Grace's speech suggests an awareness of her position on the stage of patriarchal history. Foreseeing the kingdom's defeat and knowing her destiny, she still plays her role. Her suicide should thus be seen not as submission but as an assertion of agency.

The second part of the play, "Shi Lang Dispatches Troops from Copper Mountain," employs chronological rearrangement: the poet Shen Guangwen imagines the rise and fall of the kingdom. This double voicing—one poet (Yang) ventriloquizing an earlier poet (Shen) speaking about history—creates a playfully mediated but historically grounded poetic

authority. Although Shen's narrative unfolds in his present, he uses flashback and prolepsis to recount the conflict between Shi Lang and Zheng Chenggong and predict the irreversible disaster. Like Sophocles's prophet Tiresias, Shen revisits the past, admonishes the present, and foresees the tragic future. Zheng Chenggong is deliberately minimized in Shen's soliloquy. Zheng has been appropriated by competing powers: Qing officials invoked him to rally anti-Japanese sentiment; Japanese colonizers emphasized his Japanese heritage to legitimize their rule; the KMT valorized his anti-Qing resistance and expulsion of the Dutch for anti-Communist propaganda. Resisting these hegemonic discourses, Yang Mu depicts the Shi-Zheng conflict to reveal Zheng's grief, his courtiers' conceit, and Shi's revenge, which Yang presents as justified. By downplaying Zheng's importance, Yang challenges the grand discourses of the Qing, Japanese, and KMT regimes.

The third part of *The Story of Five Concubines*, "Prince of Ningjing Sighs in Sojourn," resists the grand narrative through the dramatization of emotion. In the standard historical accounts, the Prince of Ningjing faces defeat and death with a lofty, undaunted demeanor. In Yang Mu's version, however, the prince freely expresses his frustration and sorrow and weeps over the fall of his kingdom. To underscore his depiction as an ordinary man, he is called not by his noble title but by his given name, Zhu Shugui. Like Shakespeare's King Lear, Zhu displays a progressive emotional collapse: from frustration and indignation through rage and shame to total despair. This anti-heroic display, culminating in the renunciation of his role as leader of the kingdom, can be seen as a metaphor for liberation from the official narrative.

"The Lost Ring" describes Chechnya's conflict with Russia. The appended "home letter" further underscores the political significance Yang sees in the Chechen freedom fighter's story for Taiwan. After recounting how a newspaper report on a Chechen survivor inspired his fictional reworking, Yang turns in the home letter to a factual account of Chechnya's geostrategic importance and its colonization by a vast

imperial power. He traces the Chechen people's experiences of war, ethnic cleansing, exile, and forced resettlement, and recalls Leo Tolstoy's nineteenth-century critique of Russian brutality in *Hadji Murat* and *The Cossacks*. Yang then pointedly addresses the Chinese historical myth of the "Chechen Khan," dismantling the claim that it refers to modern Chechnya or that Zhang Qian ever traveled there. This act of demystification constitutes both a refusal of the grand historical narrative and an affirmation of Chechnya's autonomy and the legitimacy of its local histories. The parallel with Taiwan's situation vis-à-vis China is unmistakable.

In the face of hegemonic master narratives, alternative versions of history function as a form of liberation. As Yang Mu demonstrates, engaging such narratives allows writers to reclaim agency over form, perspective, and affect: to decide how stories are told, which emotions are foregrounded, and how events distant in time or space can speak meaningfully to the present. Across his historical writings, Yang challenges the authority of dominant historiographies that reduce Taiwan to a derivative or provisional entity within larger imperial frameworks. By rejecting both the KMT's exilic mentality and the CCP's myth of a singular, sovereign "One China," he articulates a vision of history grounded in locality, attachment, and lived experience. In doing so, Yang destabilizes grand narratives that claim universality and instead affirms the political and ethical force of minor histories. These alternative narratives do not merely supplement official history; they affirm marginalized perspectives, reimagine historical belonging beyond imperial constraints, and write back.

## NOTES

1. Hsiau, "Narrating Taiwan," 94.
2. Colás, *Empire*, 26. Quoted in Hsiau, "Narrating Taiwan," 97.
3. Lewis and Hsieh, "Tianxia," 27. It is notable that the concept of "all under heaven" is more popular in the PRC than in the ROC. However, although the ROC did not directly adopt the concept, it created a Chinese cultural milieu to convince people in Taiwan that they were the rightful heirs of the "Middle Kingdom."
4. Lewis and Hsieh, "Tianxia," 28.
5. Liu, *The Clash of Empires*, 75–80; Carrai, *Sovereignty in China*, 28.
6. Carrai, *Sovereignty in China*, 29.
7. Hsiau, "The Emergence of De-Exile," 181.
8. Hsiau, "The Emergence of De-Exile," 181.
9. Hsiau, "A 'Generation In-Itself,'" 1–31.
10. Hsiau, "Narrating Taiwan," 94.
11. Friedman, "China's Changing Taiwan Policy," 129.
12. Rouse, "Power/Knowledge," 114.
13. Foucault, *An Introduction*, 94.
14. Rouse, "Power/Knowledge," 113.
15. Rouse, "Power/Knowledge," 106.
16. Michel Foucault, *An Introduction*, 95.
17. Foucault, *An Introduction*, 96.
18. A version of this chapter was previously published as Li, "Transgressing Hegemonic Discourses."
19. Zhang, "Historical Imagination," 68.
20. Lian, vol. 3 of *The General History of Taiwan*, 821.
21. The correct names of the five concubines and the related gender issues can be found in Lei, "How Can I Still Be Alive?" 43–89.
22. Yang Mu, *IV*, 470.
23. Yang Mu, *IV*, 470–471.
24. Yang Mu, *IV*, 471.
25. Yang Mu, *IV*, 471.
26. Yang Mu, *IV*, 471.
27. Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, ed. Dusinberre, 2.7.140–144.
28. Foster, *The Name*, 14.
29. Foster, *The Name*, 199.

30. Wong, "Taiwan, China, and Yang Mu's Alternative," 5.
31. Yuval-Davis and Anthias, introduction to *Woman-Nation-State*, 6, quoted in Duara, *Rescuing History*, 11.
32. Keith Schoppa's view quoted in Duara, *Rescuing History*, 11.
33. Yang Mu, *IV*, 472.
34. Wong, "Taiwan, China, and Yang Mu's Alternative," 5; emphasis added.
35. Lian, vol. 3 of *The General History of Taiwan*, 857.
36. Yang Mu, *IV*, 473.
37. Yang Mu, *IV*, 473.
38. Yang Mu, *IV*, 474.
39. Yang Mu, *IV*, 474.
40. Yang Mu, *IV*, 474.
41. Yang Mu, *IV*, 475.
42. Liao, "Sinophone Literature," 138.
43. Ricoeur, vol. 1 of *Time and Narrative*, 65–66.
44. Tsai, "The Image of Zheng Chenggong," 99.
45. Lian, vol. 3 of *The General History of Taiwan*, 822.
46. Yang Mu, *IV*, 476–477.
47. Yang Mu, *IV*, 477.
48. Yang Mu, *IV*, 477.
49. Yang Mu, *IV*, 477–478.
50. Zhang, "Historical Imagination and Cultural Identity," 67.
51. Zhang, "Historical Imagination and Cultural Identity," 67.
52. Wong, "Taiwan, China, and Yang Mu's Alternative," 6.
53. Wong, "Taiwan, China, and Yang Mu's Alternative," 6.
54. Southgate, *History Meets Fiction*, 3.
55. Southgate, *History Meets Fiction*, 127.
56. Wong, "Taiwan, China, and Yang Mu's Alternative," 2.
57. Wong, "Taiwan, China, and Yang Mu's Alternative," 6.
58. Ricoeur, vol. 1 of *Time and Narrative*, 67.
59. Ricoeur, vol. 1 of *Time and Narrative*, 75.
60. The image of history as an approaching storm recalls the apocalyptic wind that destroys Macondo at the end of Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. As Aureliano Babilonia deciphers Melquiades's parchments and realizes that the fate of the Buendía family has long been inscribed, a biblical wind rises and obliterates the town, erasing it from human memory. See Márquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, 399.
61. Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation*, 233.

62. Ricoeur, vol. 1 of *Time and Narrative*, 75.
63. Wong, "Taiwan, China, and Yang Mu's Alternative," 6–7.
64. *HM* uses the spelling "Heidi" instead of the original "Hedi" printed in the newspaper. My analysis follows *HM*'s spelling.
65. Yang Mu, *HM*, 140; Yang Mu, *V*, 105.
66. Yang Mu, *HM*, 141; Yang Mu, *V*, 106.
67. Yang Mu, *HM*, 142; Yang Mu, *V*, 108–109.
68. Yang Mu, *HM*, 144–145; Yang Mu, *V*, 114–115.
69. It is worth noting that there is an incongruity between the release from national discourse in "She Has Foreseen Adversity" and the restoration of women to national discourse in "The Lost Ring." Heidi becomes a signifier of national difference and encourages men to fight for the sake of "women and children." She is also depicted in a supportive and nurturing relation to her brother when he risks his life to join the guerrilla fighters. See Yuval-Davis and Anthias, introduction to *Woman-Nation-State*, 9–10.
70. Yang Mu, *HM*, 138; Yang Mu, *V*, 115.
71. Yang Mu, *HM*, 138; Yang Mu, *V*, 115.
72. Yang Mu, *HM*, 138; Yang Mu, *V*, 116.
73. Yang Mu, *HM*, 138; Yang Mu, *V*, 116.
74. Yang Mu, *HM*, 1339; Yang Mu, *V*, 117.
75. Gordon, "Rights Group Says Russians."
76. Yang Mu, "Frontier Perspectives," 27–36; emphasis added.
77. Friedman, "Chineseness," 59.
78. Friedman, "China's Changing Taiwan Policy," 120.



## CHAPTER 6

# I'LL TELL YOU MY STORY

We are slaves, deprived of every right, exposed to every insult, condemned to certain death, but we still possess one power, and we must defend it with all our strength for it is the last—the power to refuse our consent.

—Primo Levi, *If This Is a Man*

*Mythos* (μῦθος), the ancient Greek word from which English derived the term myth, originally referred to any kind of discourse, narrative, or speech. It later evolved to denote a “story,” specifically a “narrative with events in dramatic form,”<sup>1</sup> shaped into a plot with a beginning, a middle, and an end,<sup>2</sup> and featuring a protagonist who is usually a god or demigod.<sup>3</sup> Despite the divine or semi-divine protagonists and the generally fanciful nature of mythic plots, myths are not purely products of fantasy. They often draw from real historical people and events but embellish the “facts” to meet a society’s need for meaningful explanations of its origin, identity, or destiny.<sup>4</sup> In this sense, a myth functions as a “form of knowledge,”<sup>5</sup> acknowledged as truth if it elucidates the experiences of its audience and validates the practical purposes they hold.<sup>6</sup>

Although myths are often associated with primitive societies, they permeate modern life. Any metanarrative that functions to explain a

society can be regarded as a form of myth. The myth of the predestined party, for example, is often promoted by a self-styled “revolutionary avant-garde” proclaiming its historical duty to awaken and guide the otherwise lethargic masses.<sup>7</sup> The unification myth of the PRC concerning Taiwan, Tibet, Hong Kong, and Xinjiang, the Soviet Union’s myth of homogeneous brotherhood, the myth of the sun that never set on the British Empire, American exceptionalism, and the myths of the Aryan race and thousand-year Reich have all been ideologies to justify tyrannical policies, including genocides and other mass crimes, as necessary for the sake of the “people, party, or the leader.”<sup>8</sup> To convince its people, the authority also develops the leader’s heroic charisma, employs mythic symbols of death and resurrection, promotes mysticism around national origins and pride, and holds highly choreographed mass gatherings and rituals expressing collective strength and unity.<sup>9</sup> The purpose of such mythmaking is to create a bond between the authority and its subjects and also between the past, present, and future of the people or nation. It simultaneously builds solidarity and justifies the actions of the authority and the obedience of the people.<sup>10</sup>

Like any authoritarian regime, the KMT used political myth to consolidate its rule. It is true that the KMT’s ethnic agenda, unlike Nazi Germany’s antisemitism, did not promote the purity of a specific ethnic group but supported all peoples thriving under the frame of Chinese nationality, as reflected in the slogan “prosperity of the five races” (*wuzhonghe* 五族共和) is described in Republican China. However, one cannot ignore how nationalism and anti-Qing sentiments were motivated by Sun Yat-sen’s 孫中山 (1866–1925) words “expel the Manchus and restore China” (*quzhu dalu, huifu Zhonghua* 驅逐韃虜 · 恢復中華) and how the KMT conceitedly argued that it was the KMT and Chinese mainlanders that protected Taiwanese islanders from the invasion of the CCP and Taiwanese islanders should be thankful. The KMT cast itself as an absolute good in the face of the CCP’s absolute evil. Within this mythic framework, Chiang Kai-shek was elevated as a salvific figure, celebrated as a “savior” (*jiuxing* 救星), a “great man” (*weiren* 偉人), the “lighthouse of

freedom" (*ziyou de dengta* 自由的燈塔), the rightful heir to Sun Yat-sen, and the symbolic patriarch of the Chinese nation.<sup>11</sup> Anxiety concerning the legitimacy of Chiang's right to govern Taiwan caused him to associate himself with the historical hero Zheng Chenggong. Chiang's tactical retreat to Taiwan in order to fight an illegitimate mainland regime was mythologized and drawn as a parallel to Zheng's choice of Taiwan as his base against the Manchus.<sup>12</sup> This equation, as Jeremy Taylor argues, enabled Chiang to claim some of the "glory with which mythical or historical figures [were] traditionally associated" and present himself as the "natural [heir] to political or ideological lineages."<sup>13</sup>

Moreover, Chiang was portrayed as a figure who transcended historical time and space. At the same time, he was portrayed as a man whose spirit had been molded by the landscape of his home in Zhejiang 浙江 Province, China.<sup>14</sup> He was not just a state president but a leader who personified five thousand years of Chinese history.<sup>15</sup> He was the representative spirit of China, a lofty spirit relocated only temporarily to Taiwan, and was represented there through a chain of political practices such as the propagation of iconography, the erection of statues, the naming of streets, parks, schools, and institutes in his honor, and the celebration of his life through textbooks and public events. The stories in the textbooks, for example, depicted Chiang as someone who floated above the "chaos of modern history." These stories were set in a hazy pre-Republican age before the "year zero" of the 1911 Revolution, and Chiang was presented as a leader "possessing wisdom that was timeless."<sup>16</sup> Through this personality cult, he was depicted as a leader who "never aged" and whose tenure was "permanent and unchanging."<sup>17</sup> His image was a fixture in all state rituals, and its significance was equivalent to that of the national flag and anthem.<sup>18</sup> Once Chiang was identified with the nation, criticism of Chiang and his family became tantamount to treason.<sup>19</sup>

Chiang's personality cult cannot be isolated from the myth of the ROC's creation. The strategies of political mythmaking involve three broad categories of myth: foundation myth, sustaining myth, and eschatological

myth.<sup>20</sup> A foundation myth fabricates the story of a country's or people's origin. In the ROC's foundation myth, Sun Yat-sen, the founding father who inherited the virtues of Confucius and the great ancient kings, terminated a thousand years of absolute monarchies, revived the Chinese nation, and brought liberty and equality to the people. To formalize the rebirth of China, the new state introduced "nationalized" year notations known as *minguo* 民國 (literally "people's state"). Thus, 1912 became Year 1 of the new China, marking an absolute break with the final year of the Qing dynasty.<sup>21</sup>

The ROC's sustaining myth, articulated as a central motif in cultural iconography, employed various devices, including maps depicting a national territory that encompassed the whole of mainland China, Mongolia, and even the Tyva Republic of the then Soviet Union.<sup>22</sup> Like a brand logo, these maps, reproduced and posted everywhere in Taiwan, penetrated deeply into the popular imagination.<sup>23</sup> The eschatological myth was founded on the renaming of the streets, villages, and schools. Names such as *guangfu* 光復 (literally "recovering China"), *fluxing* 復興 ("revival"), *jianguo* 建國 ("building a nation"), and *guoguang* 國光 ("national glory") suggested the country's destiny, promising the defeat of the CCP and a return to the mainland. The three types of myth comprehensively embodied the KMT's hegemonic discourse of past, present, and future. Insofar as the people of Taiwan internalized the myths and their values, the KMT created a collective Chinese identity on the island. This legitimated its hold on power and made its rule appear permanent and unalterable.

In response to this hegemonic political mythology, Yang Mu creates personal myths to confront the existential crisis it engenders. This chapter revisits Yang's Hualian poems and reflects on how the personal mythical themes in these works can serve as minor narratives in opposition to the KMT's grand mythology. To comprehend the intensity of the conflicts between the political myths and Yang's personal stories, this chapter focuses on the creation myth in "Bring You Home to Hualian" (1975), the

unspeakable lacunae depicted in “Hualian” (花蓮, 1978), and the survival story in “Gazing up—Mountain, 1995” (*Yangwang—Muguashan yi jiu jiu wu* 仰望——木瓜山一九九五, 1996).<sup>24</sup>

### Creation Myth

“Bring You Home to Hualian” is a creation myth intentionally set against Chiang’s personality cult and the KMT’s Sinocentric narrative by focusing on the poet’s attachment to his Taiwanese hometown, which Yang describes as the center of the world. The same sort of consecration is foreshadowed in an earlier poem “Manuscript in a Bottle” (*Ping zhong gao* 瓶中稿, 1974), a work in which Yang for the first time dwells on nostalgia for his birthplace after having lived abroad for a decade. In “Manuscript in a Bottle,” he describes feeling haggard as he stands by the sea in Westport, Washington, and asks “if the surging waves miss / Hualian’s sandy beach” (洶湧而來的波浪／可懷念花蓮的沙灘).<sup>25</sup> He imagines the waves rolling, like him, from the western edge of the Pacific Ocean to Seattle and adds, “But I know that every breaker / begins at Hualian” (但知每一片波浪／都從花蓮開始).<sup>26</sup> For a person who has a spiritual life, space is not always homogeneous because there is a space that can be considered a fixed point, or a center. This place, usually named the *axis mundi*, is sacred and enables one to orient one’s life toward sacredness. If Hualian is akin to the *axis mundi*, Yang deduces that his birthplace is a place of sacredness, of spring and origin. He then imagines himself as a breaker returning to the holy place where he belongs:

Maybe I should be a breaker  
 swiftly reversing in the backwash  
 plunging into the peaceful sea  
 and brimming over the sandy beaches  
 of Hualian

也許還是做他波浪  
 忽然翻身，一時迴流  
 介入寧靜的海  
 溢上花蓮的

沙灘<sup>27</sup>

This evocative image of metamorphosis allows him to transcend the boundaries of space and time, moving from the foreign to the native, from the outside to the inside, and from the physically constrained present toward a spiritual infinity.

The sacredness of home is underscored by a psychological paradox: he remains a stranger in the place he immigrates to, and yet, for his homeland, he is an alienated stranger as well.<sup>28</sup> In a foreign land, Yang Mu expresses mixed feelings toward his native land. He longs to return to Taiwan, yet if the island has changed beyond recognition, returning home would itself feel like another journey into foreignness. In the latter case, he is like an outsider with a fresh viewpoint, able to perceive merits and defects in the environment that is no longer visible to its residents.

This freshness of perspective is central to “Bring You Home to Hualian,” which narrates the act of bringing a new bride home. In the first few lines, the male narrator describes how his bride was born among blooming cherry trees in the freshest time of the year: “You were born in the grace of cherry trees / March’s coyness, April’s passion” (你以櫻樹的姿態出生／三月的羞澀和四月的狂烈).<sup>29</sup> His worldview is transformed not only because a long sojourn has made his hometown seem different to him, but also because he sees it anew through his new bride. Hualian thus appears different and alien, yet paradoxically familiar and sacred:

This is my hometown  
 The river’s name is unchosen (*if you let me*  
*I will call it by your pet name*  
*and recognize it. A thousand lilies)*  
 You will probably appreciate a myth  
 Of course you are our myth

This is my hometown  
 The mountain’s name is unchosen (*if you let me*  
*I will call it by your pet name*  
*and recognize it. Ten thousand butterfly orchids)*

The Surveying Expedition will draw a new map for our compass  
 Would you design the map's scale  
 —one centimeter to two hundred  
 meters—and paint the elevation?

[...]

Let us glide to the farms in the valley  
 to witness genesis, and work  
 at opening this gentle land. I cannot  
 hear that absolute sound, nor see  
 those absolute eyes. Let us claim the beginning of  
 our people as farmers and readers  
 Let us settle down, and propagate,  
 and sing with diligence

Allow me to compare you to the coolness of the ocean  
 turning in summer—an emerald handkerchief  
 with white lace, embroidered not with six warships  
 but six fishing boats (like Muxi's "Six Persimmons")<sup>30</sup>  
 Allow me to compare you to the distant wintry mountain  
 and the cool blue-jade air that purely and cleanly  
 cherishes the silent birds flitting  
 across dewy [rice straw]. Let us  
 glide down the valley to the farms. Allow me  
 to compare you to the birth of a cherry tree  
 March's coyness, April's passion  
 A garnished parasol opens  
 Let us glide down the harvest valley  
 This is our hometown

這是我的家鄉  
 河流尚未命名（如果你允許  
 我將用你的小名呼它  
 認識它。一千朵百合花）  
 你也許會喜愛一則神話  
 其實你正是我們的神話

這是我的家鄉

山岳尚未命名（如果你允許  
 我將用你的小名呼它  
 認識它。一萬朵蝴蝶蘭）  
 深入的勘察隊將為四方繪製新圖  
 你為我們設計圖例好嗎  
 決定二萬分之一的比例尺  
 在高度表上着色

[...]

讓我們一起向種植的山谷滑落  
 去印證創生的神話，去工作  
 去開闢溫和的土地。我聽不見  
 那絕對的聲音，看不見  
 那絕對的眼色。去宣示  
 一個耕讀民族的開始  
 去定居，去繁殖  
 去認真地歌唱

容許我將你比喻為夏天回頭的海涼，翡翠色的一方手帕  
 帶著白色的花邊，不繡兵艦  
 繡六條捕魚船（如牧谿的柿子）  
 容許我將你比喻為冬季遙遠的山色，青玉的寒氣在懷裏  
 素潔呵護着一羣飛鳥無聲掠過  
 多露水的稻草堆。讓我們  
 一起向種植的山谷滑落。容許  
 我將你比喻為櫻樹的出生  
 三月羞澀和四月的狂烈  
 多飾物的陽傘在眼前打開了  
 讓我們向收穫的山谷滑落  
 這是我們的家鄉<sup>31</sup>

In the last stanza, the narrator's mythic, animistic view enables him to see the landscape as a living thing in which his bride is embodied everywhere: in the "coolness of the ocean turning in summer" (夏天回頭的海涼), the "distant wintry mountain" (冬季遙遠的山色), the "cool

blue-jade air” (青玉的寒氣), the “flying birds” (飛鳥), and the “dewy rice straw” (多露水的稻草堆). This holistic, premodern perception implies intricate relationships between humans, nonhuman beings, and natural phenomena, resulting in what the First Nations scholar Leroy Little Bear calls a symphony of “balance, harmony, and beauty,” and an emphasis on the values of “strength, sharing, honesty, and kindness.”<sup>32</sup> Similarly, the narrator sees his home as a place where weapons can be abandoned and warships replaced with fishing boats: “an emerald handkerchief / with white lace, embroidered not with six warships / but six fishing boats” (翡翠色的一方手帕 / 帶着白色的花邊, 不繡兵艦 / 繡六條捕魚船).<sup>33</sup> In the closing lines of the poem, he repeats the comparison with which he began, creating a cyclical pattern akin to that of the seasons: “Allow me to compare you to the birth of a cherry tree / March’s coyness, April’s passion / A garnished parasol opens / Let us glide down the harvest valley / This is our home” (容許 / 我將你比喻為櫻樹的出生 / 三月羞澀和四月的狂烈 / 多飾物的陽傘在眼前打開了 / 讓我們向收穫的山谷滑落 / 這是我們的家鄉).<sup>34</sup> This structural recurrence, paired with images of natural seasonal cycles, suggests that time is not progressive but divinely repetitive. This experience of time is embodied in the seasons of the year, the migration of animals, renewal ceremonies, songs, and stories. Since mythical time is circular and always renewed, this place is an everlasting blessed land.

Yang’s depiction of his home is founded on a sacred-profane dichotomy. Beliefs, myths, dogmas, and legends form an integrated system of representation that articulates the nature of sacred entities, their attributed powers and virtues, their histories, and their relationships with one another and with worldly forces.<sup>35</sup> Human beings tend to regard their homeland as the “center of the world.”<sup>36</sup> Human minds are hardwired to a specific sense of local topophilia, the love of a familiar, local place. This ties human affections to home environments and differentiates space accordingly: here and there, we and they, sacred and profane, center and periphery, the home estate and the common range.<sup>37</sup> In “Bring You Home to Hualian,” Hualian is depicted as a place rich with mythical qualities

that are yet to be discovered by its own people. The poet draws on both ancient myths and his own symbolic imagery to frame and reinterpret the contradictions that shape ordinary experience.

Yang's topophilia arises from a relationship with the land, embodying moral paradigms such as peaceful coexistence, reciprocity, honor, harmony, and equal interrelationships across all creation. The poem follows the conventions of a creation myth, a narrative about how the world was created and how people first came to inhabit it. The narrator and his bride are analogous to the world's parents, a primordial mother and father who create the world and become the symbols of earth and sky in mythology. The new world is unnamed and uncultivated. The primordial father imposes order on the state of amorphousness: designing the map's scale, drawing the elevation, and assigning proper names. If he symbolizes the sky, then the primordial mother is the incarnation of the earth and a universal mother. It is thus not surprising that rivers and mountains are named after her as if her femininity serves as a cosmic model, the figure of Terra Mater. Earth is where the repetitive processes of creation occur: seasons, cycles of plant life, bird migrations, and so on.<sup>38</sup> The primordial mother brings forth life and gives birth to the first race of mortals, the "people as farmers and readers." The image of reading suggests that the author has a contemporary worldview because Indigenous cultures are largely based on oral transmission, not on written texts. This also implies that the poem is not an Indigenous poem but one that uses mythical elements and contemporary perceptions to construct a personal narrative. In the eyes of the narrator, all things are animate, cyclical, and interrelated, harmoniously constituting a sort of totality, namely, Hualian, or, embodied in female form, his bride .

The poem recalls the utopian tradition, whose foundational *ur*-text is *Utopia* by Thomas More. Yang's utopian vision demonstrates how myth can continue to function as a means both of imagining ideal politics and of contesting an unsatisfactory reality. The contemporary theorist Jean-Luc Nancy defines utopia as an imaginary place, usually a small

island, with a “contemporary meaning that is active within language and thought.”<sup>39</sup> For him, this imagery can be traced back to ancient Mediterranean archipelagic cultures such as that of the Phaeacians in the *Odyssey*, the isles illustrated by Euhemerus, or the Islands of the Sun mentioned by Diodorus Siculus. While the Greek etymology of “utopia” suggests a non-place, or an outside-place, the prefix *ur* in *ur-topia*, which means “primitivity” in German, also suggests a “place of origin, of a new and pure origin.”<sup>40</sup> Moreover, utopia is a place of a “possible, verisimilar, and recognizable reality.”<sup>41</sup> It should appear not “unrealistic” but “hyperrealistic.”<sup>42</sup> As Nancy argues, “utopia does not simply set up its non-place in the imaginary, but rather, in a polemical negation of the real, a negation that, in and of itself, represents the reality—or the ‘hyperreality’—of necessity (of justice).”<sup>43</sup> Like Mediterranean utopian texts, Yang’s non-place is an island. It is also an *ur-topia* in that Hualian’s landscape is depicted as mythical and still unnamed; he and his bride, like the world’s parents, will cultivate the land and raise the next generation. Yang’s poetic depiction is thus both political and “hyperrealist” in Nancy’s sense.

Yang’s utopianism also has a Chinese genealogy. In addition to Western texts, the influence of Chinese utopian texts, particularly Tao Yuanming’s 陶淵明 (365–427) “The Peach Blossom Spring” (*Taohuayuan ji* 桃花源記) and Laozi’s “Small State with a Small Population” (*Xiaoguo guamin* 小國寡民), can also be discerned. Tao Yuanming’s and Laozi’s works were composed during the upheavals of the Six Dynasties and the Spring and Autumn periods, respectively. Laozi’s text calls for a world in which all weaponry has been laid aside: “Let weapons of platoons and brigades be unused” (雖有甲兵，無所陳之).<sup>44</sup> If, in Laozi’s non-belligerent world, weapons are kept but never used, Yang’s Hualian is a place where warships have been *replaced* by fishing boats: “an emerald handkerchief / with white lace, embroidered not with six warships / but six fishing boats” (翡翠色的一方手帕 / 帶着白色的花邊，不繡兵艦 / 繡六條捕魚船).<sup>45</sup> In Tao’s story, the ancestors of the utopian citizens “had fled the disorder of Qin times and taken refuge here with wives and children

and neighbors, and never ventured out again” (先世避秦時亂，率妻子邑人來此絕境，不復出焉)。<sup>46</sup> Analogous to this escape from political instability, Yang’s idyllic village is free from KMT tyranny: “I cannot / hear that absolute sound, nor see / those absolute eyes.” In this sense, Yang’s utopia is an *ec-topia*; it enjoys democracy and justice and has expelled the weapons and the absolutist values of Chiang’s dictatorship, neither of which belong in this place. The poem conveys political discontent and rejection of the status quo, intertwined with hope of overcoming an oppressive actuality and constructing a just society. Yang’s utopia represents a new community that is no longer, in Nancy’s terms, “the body or the conglomeration of a family or an empire.”<sup>47</sup>

Yang’s ideal place is not remote and otherworldly. Hualian may be sacred in a mythological sense, but it is simultaneously mundane. Yang’s point is that freedom and justice in Taiwan are not remote ideals but practical goals that can be realized soon. The poem was composed three months after the death of Chiang Kai-shek in April 1975.<sup>48</sup> After Chiang’s death, his final testament was made public, calling on his supporters to recapture the mainland from the CCP: “My spirit will be always with my colleagues and my countrymen to fulfill the Three Principles of the People, to recover the mainland, and to restore our national culture” (中正之精神，自必與我同志同胞，長相左右。實踐三民主義，光復大陸國土，復興民族文化)。<sup>49</sup> The aftermath of his death was marked by solemn commemorations, including funerary rites, the switching of television broadcasts from color to black and white, the display of banners across the island bearing the slogan “always remember our leader” (*yonghuai lingxiu* 永懷領袖), and the establishment of the Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall.<sup>50</sup> His body rests in the mausoleum in Cihu 慈湖, awaiting repatriation to his hometown in Zhejiang Province after the ROC retakes the mainland. The site was chosen for its topographical similarities to Zhejiang, underscoring the ideological links between Taiwan, Chiang, and mainland China, as well as reinforcing the idea that Chiang “was not simply the leader of China, but was himself [a personification] of the country.”<sup>51</sup> Moreover, for most Taiwanese people,

who do not have connections with China, the psychological distance from the mainland was overcome by presenting Chiang as a leader who lived beyond the confines of space. Unlike leaders such as Lenin and Mao, who are commemorated primarily as physical beings and whose remains therefore became the key objects of commemoration, the posthumous commemoration of Chiang focused on the immaterial qualities of the generalissimo: his virtues and wisdom.<sup>52</sup> While lying in provisional rest in Taiwan, Chiang was praised as a “moral paragon” who was “distant in death as in life” rather than as a physical being.<sup>53</sup> The personality cult attempted to transform him into a “quasi-mythical” figure in order to replace the “transience and recentness of Chiang’s rule on Taiwan [with] a façade of permanence.”<sup>54</sup>

Yang Mu’s personal experience diverges from the image promoted by Chiang Kai-shek and the political myths of the ROC. In defiance of the KMT’s dominant discourse, he seeks alternative ways of constructing Taiwanese reality and develops a mythic epistemology of his own. By foregrounding a localized sense of belonging, Yang articulates a countermyth grounded in topophilia. This attachment to place underwrites a minor discourse that challenges the hegemonic, Sinocentric narratives advanced by the KMT and, more recently, the CCP. The assumption that the mainland constitutes the center of the Chinese world underlies both the ROC’s and the PRC’s use of terms such as the “Middle Kingdom,” the “Central Plains” (*zhongyuan* 中原), and “all under heaven” (*tianxia* 天下).<sup>55</sup> Shaped in part by Buddhist cosmology, traditional pan-Chinese imaginaries depict a circular world ordered around the Kunlun Mountains as the axial peak, with the Central Plains imagined as China’s fertile core.<sup>56</sup> Within conventional Chinese historical discourse, this center is posited as the birthplace of a civilization deemed inherently superior to surrounding “tribal” cultures. Cultural value is thus understood to diminish with distance from the center, with peripheral populations ranging from assimilable barbarians to irredeemable savages.<sup>57</sup> In Ban Wang’s words, the concept of *tianxia* refers to “a system of governance held together by a regime of culture and values that transcends racial

and geographical boundaries.”<sup>58</sup> Through cultural transformation and assimilation, the “Kingly Way” (*wangdao* 王道) extends its authority over peripheral regions. In defiance of this ancient, centralizing logic, Yang reimagines the small and remote town of Hualian as his personal *axis mundi*. By doing so, he challenges the KMT’s postwar discourse, which casts Taiwan as merely an intermediate station on the path toward reunification with the presumed civilizational center. If, within this outmoded framework, China figures as civilization and Taiwan is relegated to the status of the tribal, the savage, or the marginal, Yang instead embraces and reclaims Taiwan’s so-called “barbarity.” He celebrates a local world saturated with narrative, grounded in mythical epistemology, decolonial consciousness, and practices of resistance. Against the hegemonic, centralizing discourses of the KMT and the CCP, Yang affirms a Taiwanese knowledge that is local, self-reflexive, and reciprocal, one that foregrounds the intimate bond between place-based identity and the stories through which it is lived and sustained.

### **Unspeakable Lacunae**

Some people unconsciously create myths and live reflectively according to the myths they have created. By this logic, the poet depicts a carefree land in the countermyth of “Bring You Home to Hualian.” This, however, may be too naïve and idealistic in that it fails to consider the disaster of the White Terror. “Hualian,” composed three years later in 1978, can be read as a revision of the Hualian imagined in “Bring You Home to Hualian.” In this subsequent poem, Yang attempts to reflect on the “thickness” of Taiwanese history and to comprehend why the terror came and caused tragedies. “Hualian” was composed soon after Yang met his second wife, Hsia Ying-ying, and returned with her to his hometown. The poem is an imaginary dialogue between the poet and the deified figure of the Pacific Ocean. Like the poet, the Pacific is imagined as “born on the eve of the War / at the end of the Japanese occupation” (出生在戰爭前夕／日本人統治臺灣的末期), a birth dated to the Year of the Dragon.<sup>59</sup> In addition to being the same age, they “share the same temperament

and keep some of each other's unimportant secrets" (性情相近，保守着／彼此一些無關緊要的秘密).<sup>60</sup> The poet, sleepless, listens to the ocean recounting "what he's felt and thought since they parted" (別後種種心事和遭遇).<sup>61</sup> Yet these experiences prove too horrific and too "unreal" for Yang's wife. Consequently, at the end of the first verse paragraph, he whispers to her: "I didn't wake you up / I let you sleep, sleep peacefully / Tomorrow I'll pick the more interesting / and touching ones to tell you" (我沒有喚醒你／我讓你睡，安靜睡／睡。明天我會撿有趣／動人的那些告訴你).<sup>62</sup>

In the poet's eyes, the Pacific Ocean is not only more powerful than he but also enduring and eternal: "His heart is immense / his understanding deeper; he is better than me at / controlling [his] changing moods and thoughts" (他的心境廣闊／體會更深，比我更善於／節制變化的情緒和思想). The ocean speaks to him both as an almighty god and as an intimate comrade: "Come here, I have something / something to tell you" (你來，我有話／有話對你說). Their conversation centers on political taboos and unfolds in the absence of Yang's wife. While she sleeps innocently, the poet gives voice to his dejection, rooted in the suffering wrought by the KMT's post-1945 violence following its takeover of Taiwan:

In the bopomofo we learned after the War<sup>63</sup>  
with a Taiwanese accent— speaking slowly, comfortingly  
to a Hualian native who suddenly sheds tears

"Don't be sentimental," he says  
"tears should fall for others not for yourself"  
The waves thrash the rocky shore, autumn is always  
like this, always. "You must be  
as immense as I am, and understand more deeply:  
The War didn't change us, so  
you mustn't be discouraged by any setback"

同我在戰後一起ㄅㄆㄇㄏ的  
臺灣國語——黯黯地撫慰地

對一個忽然流淚的花蓮人說

「你莫要傷感，」他說：  
 「淚必須為他人不要為自己流」  
 海浪拍打多石礁的岸，如此  
 秋天總是如此。「你必須  
 和我一樣廣闊，體會更深：  
 戰爭未曾改變我們，所以  
 任何挫折都不許改變你」<sup>64</sup>

For the narrator, the Pacific appears as an intelligent being, one that understands Taiwanese political history yet remains unconsumed by negative affects such as desperation and melancholy. The ocean encourages the narrator to cultivate compassion and understand people's adversity. The Second Sino-Japanese War and the White Terror need not undermine his integrity or extinguish his passion. He should know his place in this tragic history, learn from the immensity of the divine model—the Pacific Ocean—and become more compassionate and sympathetic.

The Pacific calls the poet's attention to the fraught question of language. The phonetic Bopomofo system is a transliteration system for Mandarin developed by the Committee for the Unification of Pronunciation (Duyin tongyi hui 讀音統一會) in 1913, promulgated in 1918 in China, and introduced to Taiwan after the KMT took over the island.<sup>65</sup> Whereas the PRC switched to the Hanyu Pinyin romanization system after 1958, the KMT continued to use this older system to compel Taiwanese people to speak Mandarin and supposedly promote mutual understanding between Taiwanese islanders and Chinese mainlanders. Instead, the policy accelerated sinicization, imperiling Taiwanese dialects and accents, which were viewed as vulgar and inferior. In schools, children who spoke their mother tongues, such as Hakka and Minnan, were punished and discriminated against.<sup>66</sup>

The Pacific complains that, under KMT rule, he is required to speak Mandarin (but cannot hide his Taiwanese accent). Although he has been interpellated by the KMT to conform to its policy of sinicization, he has

found a way to mimic those in power. As a witness to World War II and the subsequent White Terror, he speaks undauntedly of governmental repression and the horrors of recent Taiwanese history with a local accent, a strategy entirely different from the typical Taiwanese recourse to silence. The Pacific's lyrical tone, "tears should fall for others, not for yourself," appeals to a higher goal: to remember historical suffering and speak for the people. In a gesture of resistance against the KMT's silencing of dissent, the poem concludes with words that can only be spoken using the Minnan dialect: "you are the fairest / the *most* fairest bride of our hometown" (我們家鄉最美麗／最有美麗的新娘就是你).<sup>67</sup>

The poet regards the Pacific as not merely natural but divine, insofar as divinity manifests itself through the structures of the world and through cosmic phenomena. His task, then, is to detach himself from profane experience and orient himself toward superhuman, transcendent, and divine models. He can truly become a man only by learning from the myths, that is, by imitating the gods. Such imitation enables him to cultivate grace and mercy, to sympathize with and love strangers, and to reintegrate his fractured self. By assuming these godlike virtues, the poet ultimately arrives at a form of salvation.

While conversing with the Pacific, Yang enters a field of infinite responsibility reminiscent of Martin Buber's "I-Thou" intimacy or Emmanuel Levinas's "vis-à-vis" experience of encountering the Other.<sup>68</sup> For Levinas in particular, the self is defined not by agency but by passivity, obligation, and burden. The Other precedes the self's choice; one is chosen before choosing. Commanded to and by the Other, the subject becomes a passive hostage, summoned into an infinite responsibility for others. Against this backdrop, the sea god commands Yang Mu not to be "sentimental [...] [because] tears should fall for others, not for yourself," as in the Christian commandment to "love your neighbor." The order of unconditional responsibility shapes Yang's sensibility, vulnerability, and susceptibility, as if this ethical demand were itself a form of accusation or persecution issued by the Other. Levinas's account of the emergence of the human

subject can thus be read as a conceptual footnote to Yang's sense of responsibility toward the sea god as Other, and by extension, toward those who suffer. As Levinas writes: "Vulnerability, exposure to outrage, to wounding, passivity more passive than all patience, passivity of the accusative form, trauma of accusation suffered by a hostage to the point of persecution, implicating the identity of the hostage who substitutes himself for the others: all this is the self, a defecting or defeat of the ego's identity."<sup>69</sup>

Like "Bring You Home to Hualian," "Hualian" cannot be read without remembering the victims of the White Terror. Describing the oppression of the 1950s in his autobiography *The First Book of Mount Qilai*, Yang writes: "We heard about many cases of people being shot or disappeared. [...] Some hid out in the banana groves, Aboriginal villages, and mountain ravines, and their relatives paid bribes to have them declared dead" (我們聽聞了許多槍殺和失蹤的事……有人露宿香蕉林中，番社裏，山坳谷底，親人為他們行賄贖死)<sup>70</sup> The unbearable grief, whether individual or collective, can precipitate a loss of language, insofar as it resists straightforward articulation for those who do not share the experience. Yang brings this unspeakable grief to the foreground by offering personal myths that speak not only for himself but for the Taiwanese people, and that therefore possess the capacity to displace the KMT's political myth. His personal myth seeks both to render suffering intelligible and to address the spiritual longings that emerge from it.

Reading the testimonies of Shoah survivors Primo Levi and Elie Wiesel, Giorgio Agamben notices that, for Levi and Wiesel, survivors like themselves are not true witnesses: those who did not survive the experience are the "complete witnesses," or the "drowned," but can never tell what truly happened. By contrast, the survivors speak only in place of the dead, by proxy, as if they were "pseudo-witnesses."<sup>71</sup> The Shoah is thus an "event without witness"<sup>72</sup> in the double sense that no one can be like the "drowned" and bear witness from the "inside of death," while the survivor, as an outsider, is by definition "excluded from the event."<sup>73</sup> If

the survivors may bear witness to the experience of the “drowned,” their testimonies nevertheless must contain “lacunae.”<sup>74</sup> These lacunae are like “secret words” or “background noise,”<sup>75</sup> unspeakable and incomprehensible. The language of the survivor’s testimony is a language that “no longer signifies” and thus “advances into what is without language, to the point of taking on a different insignificance—that of the complete witness, that of one who by definition cannot bear witness.”<sup>76</sup>

Agamben’s explanation of the lacunae can help clarify why the narrator in “Hualian” does not share his secrets with his readers. Yang Mu may be considered either a second-hand witness or a direct witness who fortunately survived. The disappearance and execution of the complete witnesses make it impossible to bear witness in the full sense because those who truly encountered death cannot speak for themselves. Although the horrific stories of the dead are not mentioned in this poem, “Hualian” can be still considered a testimony of survival. It contains unspeakable lacunae, reflecting the author’s inability to speak for the dead and for their grief; Yang uses mythmaking to imagine himself speaking with a god about “some secrets.” These “secret” stories are embodiments of trauma but have never been externalized or confided to his wife or even to readers because of both internal psychological difficulties and external political terror.

As an imperfect testimony, “Hualian” articulates the possibility of literary speech through the very impossibility of assuming the role of complete witness. Yang acknowledges the cognitive impenetrability of the White Terror and of the resulting grief, the magnitude of the disaster, the lack of knowledge, and the unprecedented nature of what occurred. Since literature seems to be the only way to approach reality and understand the silence of political repression, Yang’s poetry is a testimony of the “remnants” and reflects their lacunae and the impossibility of adequate representation through speech. As Agamben writes, citing Paul Celan’s poetry, “the poetic word is the one that is always situated in the position of a remnant and that can, therefore, bear witness. Poets—witnesses—

found language as what remains, as what actually survives the possibility, or impossibility, of speaking.”<sup>77</sup>

### Survival Story

Mythmaking addresses broad concerns of identities, which are influenced by a complex mix of individual predispositions and life experiences, culturally implicit messages, and images that arise from the unconscious mind. Like the imaginary encounter with the Pacific in “Hualian,” an analogous strategy in Yang’s “Gazing Up,” composed in 1996, transforms his sociopolitical experience into a mythological narrative that reflects on the post-authoritarian era. At the beginning of the poem, Yang imagines Papaya Mountain, located southwest of Hualian city, as a god with a gleeful spirit, everlastingly youthful, defying the flow of time:

The sharp, hard features of the mountain, covered forehead  
 never losing its precipitous, youthful spirit, though  
 piercing wind and rain, when I am here or when I am not  
 have gone and come again, the smoke  
 of gunpowder from the drills of landing and  
 repelling in war surges at times up to its eyes and eyebrows,  
 the same  
 with its temples, at the same level as the layered forest edges  
 evenly matched, verdant and luxuriant  
 And though the dotted lines deep in the crust of our earth  
 have collapsed in turn, with a certain effect  
 to the shock of the heart, long apart—  
 “With your hair parted in the middle  
 You make a good mate for me.” Facing the sublime  
 tranquility, I sit by the window for a long time  
 watching the bluish clouds in the great stillness at dawn  
 saunter leisurely  
 [...]  
 I imagine the dew condensing like extinguished lanterns  
 bird beaks, bear paws, wild boar tusks, thunderclaps  
 and lightning, their voices and countenances, real and unreal  
 It cut in once, ever so timely in my dream in a foreign land—

a loving nightmare—woke me.

山勢犀利覆額，陡峭的  
 少年氣象不曾迷失過，縱使  
 貫穿的風雨，我在與不在的時候  
 證實是去而復來，戰爭  
 登陸和反登陸演習的硝煙  
 有時湧到眉目前，同樣的  
 兩個鬢角齊線自重疊的林表  
 頹頹垂下，蔥蘢，茂盛  
 而縱使我們的地殼於深邃的點線  
 曾經輪番崩潰，以某種效應  
 震撼久違的心——  
 髭彼兩鬚  
 實為我特。我正面對著超越的  
 寧靜，在這裏窗下深坐  
 看大寂之青靄晨光中逍遙  
 閒步  
 [...]
 想像露水凝聚如熄滅的燈籠  
 鳥喙，熊爪，山豬獠牙，雷霆  
 和閃電以虛以實的聲色，曾經  
 在我異域的睡夢中適時切入——  
 多情的魘——將我驚醒<sup>78</sup>

The young mountain god's hair, growing beside its "temples, at the same level as the layered forest edges / evenly matched, verdant and luxuriant," signifies a process of eternal return and rejuvenation. The mountain appears to be "in length and breadth, never changed" (山勢縱橫不曾稍改).<sup>79</sup> It has survived the "wind and rain" (that is, the destructive power of repeated typhoons), the "collapse" of the earth (earthquakes), and the "smoke of gunpowder" (an allusion to US bombing during the Pacific War). The experiences of earthquakes, typhoons, and the Pacific War also constituted Yang's childhood, as illustrated in the first three chapters of *The First Book of Mount Qilai*. In these chapters, Yang describes how he was protected by the surrounding mountains when a typhoon came and how his family hid in the mountains when US airstrikes targeted the

small town of Hualian.<sup>80</sup> These bitter experiences persist as “nightmares” that haunt the poet. Now, however, he is old, while the mountain remains young and unscathed. Neither natural nor human-made calamities have affected its godlike presence. The mountain’s everlasting youth and “tranquility” invite the narrator to “sit by the window” and gaze up at the “god.”

In Yang’s formative years, the Pacific War and the White Terror were too unbearable and horrific to be confronted directly. He may therefore have sought solace and shelter in mountain deities, imagining himself, in a gesture of affective transposition, as the mountain god’s female lover. This feminine devotion to a male divinity is articulated through a quotation from *The Book of Songs*: “With his two tufts of hair falling over his forehead, / He was my only one” (髡彼兩髦／實維我特). The speaker of the poem is a female narrator who adores a worthy mate, yet whose love is disapproved of by her mother.<sup>81</sup> Yang figures himself as analogous to this female lover, one who suffers not from parental prohibition but from external calamities, namely political denial and discrimination, and who now waits to be rescued by his (or her) beloved:

Then I closed my eyes....  
Even though I hesitated, unable to proceed  
how could you refuse to come, your heartbeat and pulse exact?

然後兩眼閤上.....  
縱使我躊躇不能前往  
你何嘗，寧不肯來，準備的心跳  
脈搏？<sup>82</sup>

There is a suggestion that the poet may once have harbored resentment toward the youthful mountain god: “Even though I hesitated, unable to proceed / how could you refuse to come [...]?” This moment intimates a sense of grievance born of hesitation and abandonment. In the post-authoritarian era, however, the mature Yang arrives at a different understanding. He comes to appreciate the mountain’s eternal composure, a changelessness that exceeds not only the finitude of human life but also

the temporality of political terror and historical suffering. In “gazing upon eternity” (仰首看永恆), the poet apprehends the mountain’s enduring spirit, and any earlier resentment is ultimately dissolved.

As in “Hualian,” overcoming the nightmare of childhood experience in “Gazing Up” entails an identification with the absolute Other, namely a divine temporality that is cyclical and nonlinear. This process is underscored through repetition. One striking example is the image of the mountain’s “sharp” forehead and “precipitous, youthful spirit,” which later reappears as a description of the poet’s own body: “caressing me on the forehead / just as sharp, precipitous, bright and clean / youthful spirit upholds a broad / accord and semblance” (輕撫我一樣的／犀利，一樣陡峭，光潔的額／少年氣象堅持廣大／比類，肖似).<sup>83</sup> Through this mirroring, the mountain’s physiognomy is internalized and corporeally reinscribed. Similarly, the formulaic phrase “never changed” is first applied to the mountain and then repeated to articulate the poet’s sustained effort to emulate this unchanging ideal: “Its prevailing spirit, which I have emulated for years, never / changes” (我長年模仿的氣象不曾／稍改).<sup>84</sup> Such redeployments signify, defer, and differentiate meaning while cultivating a robust and vigorous subjectivity that seeks to defy the political nightmare. The suffering individual can transcend the impermanence of political upheavals by imitating the eternity of the God of Papaya Mountain.

In the final lines of “Gazing Up,” the narrator imagines a relationship of mutual understanding and intersubjectivity by portraying the mountain casting a glance back at him:

it looks back at me with a clear, beautiful glance  
at how I stand with respect, silent and alone  
aging and weak, like a willow tree

正將美目清揚回望我  
如何肅然起立，無言，獨自  
以倏忽蒲柳之姿<sup>85</sup>

The poet's identification with the divine evokes the notion of an eternal return to the sacred source, through which human existence may be rescued from death and nothingness even as the inevitability of aging is acknowledged. Aging, however, is no longer experienced as a source of anxiety. It becomes something that can be transcended through identification with the vigor of the mountain spirit. The description of the "willow tree" (*puliu zhi zi* 蒲柳之姿) derives from a historical anecdote recorded in *A New Account of the Tales of the World* (*Shishuo xinyu* 世說新語). Gu Yue (顧悅) was the same age as Emperor Jianwen (簡文), yet his hair had turned white earlier. When Jianwen asked, "How is it that you have turned white first?" Gu replied: "The character of rushes and willows is to shed their leaves as they approach autumn, whereas the nature of pines and cypresses is to grow ever more luxuriant amid frost and snow" (蒲柳之姿，望秋而落；松柏之質，經霜彌茂).<sup>86</sup> This response suggests that even when one appears aged, one may still retain robustness and vitality, both physically and spiritually.

In "Gazing Up," Yang Mu reworks this classical anecdote to produce a new ethical and political meaning. The willow's apparent softness, embodied in its supple branches, is precisely what enables it to survive storms. Though shaken by violent winds, it only seems weak; in truth, it partakes of a different form of strength, one aligned with the divine, the infinite, the eternal, and the powerful. Humanity, the poem ultimately suggests, can endure political repression in much the same way—not through rigidity, but through resilient suppleness that absorbs violence without breaking.

Inspired by Li Bai 李白 (701–762) and Edward Gibbon, the poem's title and epigraph hint at the motives behind its composition. The full title "Gazing up—Papaya Mountain, 1995," is inherited from Li Bai's "Gazing at Mount Quince" (*Wang Muguashan* 望木瓜山, 754 CE), a work that describes the sourness and sadness of a sojourn.<sup>87</sup> Li's poem is as follows: "I wake up and watch the sunrise / I see birds return home at dusk / A sojourner's heart feels slightly sour / Now feels worse when gazing at

Mount Quince” (早起見日出，暮見棲鳥還。客心自酸楚，況對木瓜山)。<sup>88</sup> Li Bai gazes at the mountain and talks of how its name, suggestive of the sourness of the fruit, is a metaphor for his feelings.

The epigraph of “Gazing Up” quotes Edward Gibbon’s words written after he completed the last volume of *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. He recalled:

It was on the day or rather the night of the 27th of June 1787, between the hours of eleven and twelve, that I wrote the last lines of the last page in a summer-house in my garden. After laying down my pen, I took several turns in a berceau or covered walk of Acacias which commands a prospect of the country, the lake, and the mountains. The air was temperate, the sky was serene; the silver orb of the moon was reflected from the waters, and all Nature was silent. I will not dissemble the first emotions of joy on the recovery of my freedom, and perhaps the establishment of my fame. *But my pride was soon humbled, and a sober melancholy was spread over my mind by the idea that I had taken my everlasting leave of an old and agreeable companion, and that, whatsoever might be the future date of my history, the life of the historian must be short and precarious.*<sup>89</sup>

Feeling released at last from the monumental project, Gibbon walked among the mountains near Lake Geneva and contemplated the eternity of nature. The moment of composure was ephemeral, however, yielding to, in Gibbon’s words, a “sober melancholy” as he reflected on his release from the “sweet burden” of the work and foresaw with apprehension the religious outcry and reproach of indecency that the final volume, like the previous volumes, would receive, reproach he knew would continue even beyond his own “short and precarious” life.<sup>90</sup>

Alluding to Li’s bitter exile and Gibbon’s mystical identification with the mountainous landscape, Yang Mu felt in exile in Hong Kong while establishing the School of Humanities and Social Science at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology from 1991 to 1994. After the project succeeded, Yang returned to Hualian and felt relieved and

content. Seeing Hualian's mountains again, he remembered the political upheavals he had survived: the bombings of the Pacific War, the KMT takeover of Taiwan, the February 28 Incident, the Baodiao Movement, the death of Chiang Kai-shek, the Dangwai Movement, the Formosa Incident, and finally the lifting of martial law and the turn to democracy.

The individual, he reflects, may feel old, weak, and small, knowing his life is short, limited, and traumatized by the clamor of the present and past, but these mountains seem eternal and untroubled. They look down on the turbulence of human lives with everlasting sympathy. He recollects how the mountains have weathered battles and typhoons and provided solace for a sensitive youth who escaped the clamor. These mountains are immense and eternal, transcending the limits of ordinary human life and political terror.

Yang's mountain imagination is vividly illustrated in his autobiography *The First Book of Mount Qilai*. In this book, he recalls that he heard the mountains "speak" in his early childhood: "I could hear the mountains speak; far away and high above, they narrated myths from time immemorial to me and told me secrets that no one else knew about. I seriously stored those secrets in my heart" (我是聽得見山地言語的，遠遠地，高高地，對我一個人訴說著亙古的神話，和一些沒有人知道的秘密。那些秘密我認真地藏在心底)。<sup>91</sup> The mountains have been associated with animistic beliefs, in which their animals, plants, and rivers are perceived as "articulate and at times intelligible subjects, able to communicate and interact with humans for good and ill."<sup>92</sup> Through this mythmaking, Yang has seen himself as an "animistic subject" with an identity that cuts across and dissolves the human/nonhuman divide.<sup>93</sup> From his childhood, he has seen the mountains not only as tutelary deities—*genii locorum*, bulwarks against the disturbance of typhoons, war, and oppression—but also as a separation between home and other places:

I have always seen them as male deities: Mount Sangbalakan, Mount Qijiaochuan, Mount Baituolu, Mount Liwuzhu, and Great Tailuge Mountain. Even higher and more distant were the ones

that could not be made out with the naked eye but were the constant protectors of my soul, day and night: Mount Dumou, Mount Wuling, Mount Nenggao, and Mount Qilai.

我向來判斷那些盡屬雄性之神明，桑巴拉堪山，七腳川山，帕托魯山，立霧主山，太魯閣大山，還有更遠更高的，不是我肉眼所能辨識，但又為我心靈嚮往日夜的守護系列，杜銓山，武陵山，能高山，奇萊山。<sup>94</sup>

In Yang's personal mythology, mountains provide shelter whenever he feels vulnerable in the face of the KMT regime's authoritarian violence. A sense of being surrounded by mountain deities enables him to confront episodes of ethnic conflict or to withdraw from otherwise unbearable realities. From childhood onward, their eternity has allowed him, in imagination, to transcend history and humiliation.

Nevertheless, the mountain gods are sometimes silent and remote, refusing to provide solace. At school, when a mainlander principal extolled the beauty of Mandarin while denigrating Taiwanese as vulgar, the Taiwanese teachers and students exchanged angry glances. In that moment, the young poet turned his gaze toward the mountains:

The major northern peak of Mount Qilai stood 3650 meters high, to the north of which stood Mount Dabajian, and was matched in the south by Mount Xiuguluan and Jade Mountain. From far away it looked down on our square, where a person with a foreign accent humiliated our mother tongue. His voice was piercing, his spit flew, and he had two pens thrust in his garment with many pockets. [...]

[...]

The national flag, that bright and pure flag, fluttered in the beautiful morning light, unfurling in the sea-scented breeze. Mount Qilai, Mount Dabajian, and Mount Xiuguluan all turned their eyes on us, glancing at our bodies and me with strength and

affection. The sadness and suffering would then finally begin, never to find solace.

奇萊主山北峰高三千六百零五公尺，北望大霸尖山，南與秀姑巒和玉山頹頹，遠遠俯視我們站在廣場上聽一個口音怪異的人污辱我們的母語，他聲音尖銳，口沫橫飛，多口袋的衣服上插了兩隻鋼筆。……

[...]

國旗在飄，在美麗的晨光裏，在帶著海洋氣味的風裏招展，鮮潔的旗。奇萊山，大霸尖山，秀姑巒山齊將眼神轉投我們身上，多情有力的，投在我身上，然而悲哀和痛苦終將開始，永生不得安寧。<sup>95</sup>

When nature becomes remote, the helpless child is left to experience sadness and suffering alone. Discrimination at school, followed by violence, the White Terror, and other brutal political realities, interrupts Yang's mystical connection with the mountain gods. At such moments, he no longer experiences himself as an "animistic subject"; nature has fallen silent, shifting, in Manes's terms, "from an animistic to a symbolic presence, from a voluble subject to a mute object."<sup>96</sup>

"Gazing Up" is a mythological poem in which Yang seeks to combine and transcend opposing emotions and perspectives. In the past, he failed to comprehend why his ability to communicate with the mountains was at times suspended, why they appeared remote and silent and refused to lift him out of the political swamp. He struggled with this abandonment, caught between traumatic entrapment and victimization. Now, however, he comes to understand that silence and remoteness did not signify indifference. The myth articulated in "Gazing Up" registers a movement from misunderstanding to understanding, from resentment to happiness, and ultimately toward the overcoming of political terror. Set against the mountains' eternity, political clamor appear ephemeral and insignificant. Through identification with the mountains, the poet can sustain faith and patiently await a better future.

### Counter-Myth and Ethical Renewal

Chiang's and the KMT's political myths still haunt Taiwan. This haunting was constructed by, and rooted in, the propagation of Chiang Kai-shek's political myth through the display of memorials, the use of official portraiture in public spaces, and the commemoration of Chiang's birthday and death. Against Chiang's authoritarian, idealizing political mythology, Yang's mythology is his alternative, minor discourse that expresses the poet's psychological, social, and spiritual needs. The three personal myths discussed here follow a trajectory in which old political myths give way to new, alternative versions. "Bring You Home to Hualian" is a creation myth composed right after the death of Chiang. As an alternative to the KMT's political myth, Yang in this poem focuses on Hualian as the center of his world and depicts it as a pure, sacred, harmonious land. In the poet's imagination, Hualian remains untainted by the KMT. There, he and his (fictional) partner are the world's parents who name the mountains and rivers and give birth to new generations who will read books and cultivate the land. The poet's partner in this enterprise is a Mother Earth figure, embodied in the Hualian landscape with its free-flying birds, dewy hay, cool air, and blooming cherry trees. In this place, everything coexists and is interconnected. Time is circular and everlastingly present, and death is always followed by rebirth.

Ultimately, however, this myth proves too innocent and unrealistic. It fails to confront the reality of political terror and is therefore superseded by the figure of the God of the Pacific, who enables the poet to address the demands of remembrance and responsibility. In the poem "Hualian," Yang recalls how the authorities arbitrarily stripped people of their rights and disposed of their lives. Entering into dialogue with the God of the Pacific, he encounters a form of immensity that allows the god to transcend the people's suffering while remaining attentive to it. This encounter recalls Levinas's notion of the *vis-à-vis* experience of the Other, in which the self is rendered passive and ethically bound to respond to the Other's call. When the sea god declares that "tears should fall for others, not for

yourself,” the poet’s response becomes a commitment to unconditional responsibility for the Taiwanese people.

The poem “Gazing Up—Papaya Mountain, 1995” completes the revision of the myth by transcending political upheavals. The image of the mountain god is closely connected to *The First Book of Mount Qilai*, a work that recounts the poet’s childhood experiences and his personal, as well as collective, traumas. In this autobiographical text, Yang recalls how mountain gods were once imagined as powerful spirits who protected Hualian from typhoons and bombing raids. He remembers hearing the voices of the mountains, only to lose this connection after the ROC takeover. Subjected to discrimination by mainlanders, he was unable to understand why the mountains appeared distant and unresponsive. Now, in the post-authoritarian era, this sense of grievance is finally resolved through his re-encounter with the God of Papaya Mountain. Feeling aged and weakened, Yang recognizes the limits imposed on his perception by a lifetime shaped by social upheavals and political violence. By contrast, the mountain god remains eternally youthful, transcends historical clamor, and gazes upon the poet with boundless sympathy. Through this realization, Yang is humbled and comes to understand that it is possible to overcome the sadness engendered by violent political oppression.

Against the KMT’s political mythology, Yang’s oeuvre offers sustained and incisive insights into the White Terror, and the significance of his writing extends well beyond realistic representation. Mythmaking constitutes Yang’s primary strategy for bearing witness to the KMT regime’s political violence, confronting the unspeakable sadness it engendered, and working through the horrors of the colonial and authoritarian past. His mythic narratives of survival are not static; rather, they undergo continual revision, moving from an initially naïve utopian imagination toward the gradual working through of trauma. The articulation and reworking of these myths have been Yang Mu’s mode of being, surviving, and resisting, not only on a personal level but also on behalf of the collec-

tive and for later generations, including my own, who did not directly experience the terror yet bear an ethical responsibility to remember the suffering, blood, toil, and tears of those who came before us.

## NOTES

1. Tudor, *Political Myth*, 137.
2. Tudor, *Political Myth* 137.
3. Segal, *Myth*, 5.
4. Tudor, *Political Myth*, 138.
5. Segal, *Myth*, 38–39.
6. Tudor, *Political Myth* 138.
7. Sviličić and Maldini, “Political Myths and Totalitarianism,” 731.
8. Sviličić and Maldini, “Political Myths and Totalitarianism,” 731.
9. Sviličić and Maldini, “Political Myths and Totalitarianism,” 731.
10. Kıbrıs, “Political Myths as Tools,” 2.
11. Chiang appropriated Confucian precepts of piety and loyalty around the image of the paterfamilias to inspire respect. See Fenby, *Generalissimo*, 225–226.
12. Taylor, “The Production of the Chiang Kai-shek Personality Cult,” 104.
13. Taylor, “The Production of the Chiang Kai-shek Personality Cult,” 104.
14. Taylor, “The Production of the Chiang Kai-shek Personality Cult,” 105.
15. Taylor, “Recycling Personality Cults,” 349.
16. Taylor, “The Production of the Chiang Kai-shek Personality Cult,” 107.
17. Taylor, “The Production of the Chiang Kai-shek Personality Cult,” 106.
18. Taylor, “The Production of the Chiang Kai-shek Personality Cult,” 106.
19. Taylor, “Recycling Personality Cults,” 349.
20. Barner-Barry and Hody, “Soviet Marxism-Leninism,” 616.
21. Leitner and Kang, “Contested Urban Landscapes,” 220.
22. Leitner and Kang, “Contested Urban Landscapes,” 220.
23. See Benedict Anderson’s discussion of the function of maps in Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 175.
24. This chapter is largely based on my previous articles on Yang Mu; see Li, “Hualian Mythology in Yang Mu’s Works”; Li, “The Spirit of Mountains”; and Li, “The Idea of Sacredness in Yang Mu’s Hualian Poems.”
25. Yang Mu, *NTG*, 77; Yang Mu, *II*, 145.
26. Adapted from Yang Mu, *NTG*, 77; Yang Mu, *II*, 144.
27. Yang Mu, *NTG*, 78, Yang Mu, *II*, 146–147.
28. Chen, *Postcolonial Taiwan*, 220.
29. Yang Mu, *HM*, 29; Yang Mu, *II*, 436.

30. Muxi (Muqi 牧谿), also known as Fachang (法常), was a Zen Buddhist monk and painter of the Song dynasty. He encountered political difficulties and retreated to a monastery. He painted a still life entitled *Six Persimmons*.
31. Yang Mu, *HM*, 29–30; Yang Mu, *II*, 436–439.
32. Little Bear, “Jagged Worldviews Colliding,” 79.
33. Yang Mu, *HM*, 30; Yang Mu, *II*, 439.
34. Yang Mu, *HM*, 30; Yang Mu, *II*, 439.
35. Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms*, 34.
36. Tuan, *Space and Place*, 149.
37. Tuan, *Topophilia*, 15–16.
38. Little Bear, “Jagged Worldviews Colliding,” 78.
39. Nancy, “In Place of Utopia,” 3.
40. Nancy, “In Place of Utopia,” 5–6.
41. Nancy, “In Place of Utopia,” 7.
42. Nancy, “In Place of Utopia,” 7.
43. Nancy, “In Place of Utopia,” 7.
44. Laozi, *Daodejin*, 165.
45. Yang Mu, *HM*, 30; Yang Mu, *II*, 439.
46. Adapted from J. R. Hightower’s translation of “The Peach Blossom Spring” by Tao Yuanming, in *From Antiquity to the Tang Dynasty*, edited by Minford and Lau, 155.
47. Nancy, “In Place of Utopia,” 8.
48. Tseng, “Analysis of Yang Mu’s ‘Bring You Home to Hualian.’”
49. *The New York Times*, “Chiang Kai-shek Is Dead.”
50. Taylor, “The Production of the Chiang Kai-Shek Personality Cult,” 109.
51. Taylor, “The Production of the Chiang Kai-Shek Personality Cult,” 106.
52. Frederic Wakeman, Jr., quoted in Taylor, “The Production of the Chiang Kai-Shek Personality Cult,” 106.
53. Frederic Wakeman, Jr., quoted in Taylor, “The Production of the Chiang Kai-Shek Personality Cult,” 106.
54. Taylor, “The Production of the Chiang Kai-Shek Personality Cult,” 106.
55. Tuan, *Topophilia*, 37.
56. Tuan, *Topophilia*, 37.
57. Tuan, *Topophilia*, 37.
58. Wang, “Introduction,” *Chinese Visions of World Order*, edited by Ban Wang, 1.
59. Yang Mu, *NTG*, 128; Yang Mu, *III*, 332.
60. Adapted from Yang Mu, *NTG*, 128; Yang Mu, *III*, 332.

61. Adapted from Yang Mu, *NTG*, 128; Yang Mu, *III*, 332.
62. Yang Mu, *NTG*, 128; Yang Mu, *III*, 333.
63. The term “bopomofo” ㄅㄆㄇㄉ, the nickname of the *zhuyin* spelling system (*zhuyinfuhao* 注音符號), is missing in the *NTG*’s translation: “in the Mandarin we learned after the war.”
64. Yang Mu, *NTG*, 128–129; Yang Mu, *III*, 334–335.
65. Chang Cheng-nan, “Zhuyin Spelling System.”
66. Shih and Chen, “Taiwanese Identity,” 96.
67. Yang Mu, *NTG*, 129; Yang Mu, *III*, 336. In the English translation, the “*most fairest bride*” is not a grammatical error but is intentionally rendered to catch the untranslatable expression “最有美麗的新娘” (*zuiyou meili de xinniàng*) in the Minnan dialect. Yang Mu rarely spoke Minnan and used it primarily to communicate with his parents. His mother spoke only Japanese and Taiwanese, while his father had a working knowledge of Mandarin. His two wives were Chinese mainlanders, and the primary language used at home was Mandarin, with occasional English when speaking to his son during their time in Seattle. The use of the Minnan expression “最有美麗的新娘” in the poem signals pride in a local identity that had long been suppressed. The unconventional English translation preserves this tension between linguistic marginalization and cultural affirmation. I am grateful to the reviewer for highlighting the significance of the Minnan expression and for drawing attention to Yang Mu’s linguistic background.
68. Buber, *I and Thou*.
69. Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 15.
70. Yang Mu, *MMQ*, 98; Yang Mu, *IX*, 165.
71. Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 34.
72. Dori Laub, “An Event without a Witness,” 35.
73. Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 35.
74. Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 33.
75. Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 38.
76. Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 39. Cathy Caruth also points out the necessity of a literary way to express traumas, which demand our witness but at the same time defy it. Traumas cannot be “asked in a straightforward way” but must be “spoken in a language that is somehow literary.” This sort of literary language that represents traumatic experiences always “defies, even as it claims, our understanding.” See Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 5.
77. Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 161.

78. Adapted from Yang Mu, *HTM*, 108–109; Yang Mu, *IV*, 434–436.
79. Yang Mu, *HTM*, 109; Yang Mu, *IV*, 437.
80. Yang Mu, *MMQ*, 1–40; Yang Mu, *IX*, 18–73.
81. “Peh Chow,” in Legge, *The She King*, 74.
82. Yang Mu, *HTM*, 109; Yang Mu, *IV*, 436–437.
83. Yang Mu, *HTM*, 109; Yang Mu, *IV*, 436.
84. Yang Mu, *HTM*, 109; Yang Mu, *IV*, 437.
85. Adapted from Yang Mu, *HTM*, 109; Yang Mu, *IV*, 437.
86. Liu, *Shih-shuo Hsin-yü*, 60.
87. The homonymous fruit *mugua* 木瓜 in Li’s work is a Chinese quince, not a papaya, because the latter was introduced to China after the European Age of Discovery.
88. Li Bai, *Annotation of Li Bai’s Complete Works*, 1483.
89. The italics are used to set off what Yang Mu quotes as an epigraph. Gibbon, *Edward Gibbon*, 180.
90. Womersley, *Gibbon and the “Watchmen”*, 176–177.
91. Yang Mu, *MMQ*, 15; Yang Mu, *IX*, 36.
92. Manes, “Nature and Silence,” 15.
93. Manes, “Nature and Silence,” 15.
94. Yang Mu, *MMQ*, 229; Yang Mu, *IX*, 362–363.
95. Yang Mu, *MMQ*, 112; Yang Mu, *IX*, 184–185.
96. Manes, “Nature and Silence,” 17.



## CODA

Poetry refuses to compromise. It persists.

詩是堅持，不是妥協。

—Yang Mu

### **A (Post)colonial Survival Guide**

The history of the twentieth century is, for Taiwan, a history of tragedy. From 1895 to 1945, the Japanese government enforced policies of assimilation, compelling Taiwanese to adopt the Japanese language, attire, and lifestyle while subjecting them to discrimination, exploitation, and expropriation. Following the Second Sino-Japanese War, Taiwan's occupation by the KMT regime initially held promises of liberation, freedom, and equality. However, this hope was completely shattered by the military crackdown that followed in 1947. During the White Terror period, when freedom of speech, press, and assembly were prohibited, most Taiwanese, fearing for their lives, opted for obedience. In so-called “democratic” elections, Taiwanese citizens were restricted to voting for corrupt KMT candidates, who, if elected, could retain lifelong positions in the National Assembly.

Nonetheless, the modern history of Taiwan is also a history of rebellion. Japanese colonialism ignited public discontent and sparked numerous uprisings, ranging from the short-lived Republic of Formosa (*Taiwan minzhu guo* 台灣民主國) in 1895 to the Tapani Incident (*Xilai'an shijian* 西來庵事件) in 1915 to the Musha Incident (*Wushe shijian* 霧社事件) in 1930. The postwar KMT regime's oppressive measures prompted the

February–March 1947 uprising, a topic forbidden for discussion during martial law but secretly remembered by the populace, inspiring further acts of resistance in diverse, often creative, forms. The *Free China Journal* (*Ziyou Zhongguo* 自由中國), edited by Hu Shih and Lei Chen, criticized Chiang Kai-shek's and the KMT's ineptitude in the 1950s. The Baodiao Movement in the early 1970s, the Zhongli Incident in 1977, and the Formosa Incident in 1979 challenged the KMT's authority and spurred growing participation in resistance activities. Tragic events such as the Lin Family Massacre in 1980, the death of Chen Wen-cheng in 1981, and Cheng Nan-jung's self-immolation in 1989 further galvanized opposition to the KMT, emboldening people to condemn its violence and demand change. Finally, in the 1990 Wild Lily Movement, young Taiwanese protested for universal suffrage in National Assembly elections, and Lee Teng-hui accepted the activists' agenda. Shortly after the movement, Lee terminated the Temporary Provisions Effective During the Period of Communist Rebellion in 1991. Consequently, a century of injustice, spanning from 1895 to 1991, encompassing Japanese imperialism and KMT internal colonization, appeared to halt.

Suppression cannot stop writers from expressing their political discontent. Under Japanese rule, Taiwanese writers crafted realistic works to depict the anguish of the colonized and the arrogance of the colonizer. Meanwhile, others, influenced by French and Japanese surrealism, penned surrealist pieces to articulate political grievances. Chinese modernists who migrated after 1949 sought to innovate art forms exploring themes of life and death, dreams and disillusionment, and imprisonment and freedom, after being disillusioned with nationalist propaganda. From the 1960s to the 1970s, a new generation formed poetry societies, emphasizing the sociopolitical implications of their works and exploring alternative identities. In the 1980s, postmodern writers employed literary techniques such as collage, metafiction, intertextuality, irony, and wordplay to challenge the Chinese literary canon and rediscover Taiwan's mythology and history. Following the lifting of martial law, literature in the 1990s took on a carnivalesque character. Feminist writings, queer art, and postcolo-

nial works proliferated. For Taiwanese writers, their works consistently reflect political revolt and discontent. If the modern history of Taiwan is a history of rebellion, Taiwanese literature is also one of rebellion.

Yang Mu's personal history intertwines with Taiwan's collective experience across its authoritarian past, postcolonial present, and democratic future. From enduring Japanese rule to witnessing the KMT's rule, the White Terror, and the eventual dawn of democracy, Yang Mu, akin to defiant protesters, consistently challenged authority and affirmed Taiwanese identity. He chose not to adopt any visible or explicit strategy, such as marching, petitioning, or entering politics, but preferred instead to explore the intellectual, psychological, and emotional experiences of the colonized Taiwanese people through the medium of literature.

In other words, a writer does not have to get involved in sociopolitical movements and contribute all their efforts to the struggle against oppression. Like Yang, writers can apply what they learn by observing events and producing work that captures the struggles of the people, anatomizes the social justice issues they face, articulates their hopes, and imagines a better future. Yang's social lyricism not only reflects and critiques the spirit of his time but also serves as a model of nonviolent resistance and a resolute rejection of the semi-democratic ROC, the totalitarian PRC, and even the ostensibly democratic US, which launched the Vietnam War. Through his poetry, Yang champions spiritual freedom, comprehensive political engagement, and social equality. His work engages with social dilemmas and aspirations, condemns injustice and violence, articulates constructive resistance, and transcends temporal and spatial boundaries to draw inspiration from Taiwan's past, present, and imagined future. It speaks to anyone who comprehends, appreciates, and is driven to fight for their homeland.

Yang's literary resistance was implicit in his works from the 1960s and 1970s, a period when the KMT sought to impose Chinese culture and literature upon all Taiwanese. While Yang fully acknowledged the beauty and values of Chinese tradition, his poems from this period rejected the

KMT's Sinocentric agenda, which sought to assimilate Taiwan without acknowledging its own cultural heritage and strengths. Instead, Yang's poetry delves into a complex space of discontinuities and resistance, exploring the interplay between difference and identity, past and present, and inclusion and exclusion. In this liminal space, the subject recognizes themselves as a product of cultural hybridity. Yang challenges the notion of purity, admits his roots in the Chinese mainland, and embraces the plurality and multiplicity that emerge from the inevitable blending of cultures.

Hybridity also nurtures minor narratives, which defy the singular, official narrative employed by authorities to legitimize their domination. In essence, a minor narrative offers alternative, localized interpretations of a society's histories and mindsets. Yang Mu's dramatic monologues embrace such minor narratives, employing strategies of performativity, mimicry, and ambivalence to undermine official historical myths. He rewrites Chinese classical works and refashions previously canonized literary characters, creating a liminal space to express suspicion, dissent, and, most importantly, resistance. The claimed authenticity and Sinocentrism of the official discourses are dissolved by Yang's hybrid incorporation of Taiwanese elements. His minor narratives celebrate localization by repurposing Chinese source texts to challenge their role in hegemonic discourse.

As diplomatic pressures, growing popular resistance, and internal contradictions began to undermine the KMT's legitimacy, Yang Mu's literary resistance became explicit and assertive. The Formosa Movement and the massacre of the Lin family stirred intense feelings of compassion, grief, and anger that demanded expression. Yet Yang did not yield to despair or nihilism. Through poetry, he transformed his pain and rage into an aspiration to realize justice, equality, and democracy in the future. His emotions were transitional. He used them to think critically about the structures of power, privilege, and violence, demand change, and imagine alternative communities. In these envisioned communities,

individuals would have the freedom to express themselves openly, transcend dominant narratives, and know the real history of Taiwan, including the stories of the silenced, persecuted, and suffering. Yang's vision, however, does not seek revenge against oppressors. Instead, his poetry from this period underscores the importance of respecting all individuals, whether Taiwanese islanders or Chinese immigrants from the mainland. He illustrates how Taiwan, despite its small size, is a mosaic of diverse influences, including Chinese, Hakka, Minnan, Japanese, Western, and Indigenous cultures.

Hybridity extends beyond acknowledging cultural diversity; it serves as a strategy to uncover narratives from other locales that can inspire resistance in Taiwan. In Yang's poetry, this potential emerges through his exploration of oceanic connectivity, which enables his work to transcend a continental mindset and embrace archipelagic perspectives across diverse spatiotemporal contexts, including islands and peninsulas around the world. He envisages Taiwan no longer living under the shadow of Chinese power but developing its own arc to connect itself to the rest of the world and to international friends, particularly in the Global South and on other small islands marginalized by colonialism and internal oppression. Their realities, liberation struggles, and literatures, Yang realizes, can be mirrors through which to understand Taiwan's situation. To survive under colonial subjugation, these locales resisted assimilation into the hegemonic discourse of their colonizers. They found ways, often through literature, to celebrate notions of deterritorialization, nomadism, errantry, and detour, and through these, to create new representations of time and space that connect to their own stories and lands, transcend the closed, authoritarian discourses imposed on them, and reimagine the possibilities of freedom and democracy. Yang Mu adopts a similar strategy to confront the KMT regime, utilizing the concept of oceanic connectivity to align Taiwan with other postcolonial or post-authoritarian locales in an alliance of justice.

Authority typically promotes an interpretation of historical events that legitimizes its power, often by fomenting feelings of nationalism and irredentism that, in colonial situations, marginalize local and Indigenous peoples. To problematize such grand history, a writer can employ reframing as a strategy to foreground local stories that have been dispersed, repressed, or overlooked by the knowledge-power nexus of the regime. Analogous to a historian who borrows literary genres and devices to shape their interpretation of historical events, a literary artist can utilize the privilege of poetic license to adjust setting, plot, tone, character, and narrative, thereby reinterpreting the past for contemporary readers. This approach is vital in a postcolonial context, where the objective is neither to evoke nostalgia nor to advocate for a return to a golden, precolonial idyll nor to promote a postcolonial identity that excludes “outsiders.” Instead, the aim is to “remember” the history of a place from the bottom up, foregrounding local, sometimes creative, perspectives that create space for diverse historical possibilities. This historical pluralism reflects on and recovers what has been distorted, silenced, or lost by the ruling administration.

Authoritarian historical discourse typically relies on self-serving political myths, extolling a leader’s heroic charisma, noble ancestry, glorious national origins, racial pride, ancient territorial claims, and choreographed mass gatherings and rituals. However, over time, such myths often become increasingly far-fetched, tiresome, or incompatible with a people’s postcolonial sense of identity. Writers like Yang Mu, therefore, begin to seek alternative myths to address the emerging contradictions in their society or their existential crises as postcolonial artists. This personal myth serves as a guiding force for individual development and addresses spiritual yearnings akin to the way cultural myths function for entire societies. Rooted in personal fantasies, these unofficial myths represent utopian or minor narratives that contradict the dominant political myths. In the frame of real-world complexity, these personal myths also address individual grief or the social problems caused by authoritarian violence. This “private” mythology reshapes

and reincorporates local culture and its tragic history, confronts trauma honestly, and finds a balanced position to live and keep faith without downplaying what remains unbearable.

Performativity, mimicry, ambiguity, in-betweenness, hybridity, nonviolence, transitional grief, oceanic literacy, nomadism, minor narratives, historical pluralism, and personal mythology—Yang Mu employs all these strategies of resistance against the assimilation promoted by the KMT's hegemonic discourse. His methods are never aggressive or hawkish but always implicit, flexible, and adaptable to diverse social realities. This survival tactic shielded the poet from political persecution while simultaneously granting him the freedom to subvert prevailing power structures. The need to tread carefully was palpable. Many writers were imprisoned or executed during the White Terror. Yang Kuei (楊逵, 1906–1986) was imprisoned from 1949 to 1961 for co-authoring the “Declaration of Peace” (*Heping xuanyan* 和平宣言), appealing for a peaceful resolution to conflict after the February 28 Incident. Po Yang (柏楊, 1920–2008) was imprisoned from 1969 to 1977 merely for introducing the American comic strip *Popeye the Sailor*, which was, ludicrously, interpreted as a criticism of Chiang Kai-shek's regime. Yeh Shih-tao (葉石濤, 1925–2008) spent 1951–1954 in jail for allegedly harboring communist agents. Chu Tien-ren (朱點人, 1930–1951) was executed for espousing “leftist” ideology. Yang's cautious approach, if this literary rebellion can be likened to political revolt in China, is not analogous to the radical self-immolation conducted by Tibetans but more akin to the dictum “Be water” of Hong Kong's Anti-Extradition Law Amendment Bill Movement, although both approaches deserve respect. Yang's water-like survival strategies, to use Foucault's terms, constitute a form of resistance not from outside but from within the power-knowledge system, spreading like points or nodes over time and space at varying densities.<sup>1</sup> This “swarm of points of resistance” implicitly engages with “certain points of body, certain moments in life, [and] certain types of behaviors” and ultimately traverses “social stratification and individual unities.”<sup>2</sup>

### **Toward a Happy Life**

Since *Taiwanese Face, Chinese Masks*, particularly chapter 3, draws heavily from Agamben's concepts of the coming community, the state of exception, bare life, and whatever singularity, it is essential to also consider his final concern—the form-of-life or the happy life—to conclude this argument. According to Agamben, the happy life cannot be a “naked life that the sovereignty posits as a presupposition so as to turn it into its own subject” or the “impenetrable extraneity of science and of modern biopolitics that everybody tries in vain to sacralize.”<sup>3</sup> It should not be imagined as merit or something that an individual deserves or is deemed worthy of.<sup>4</sup> Nor should it be well-defined or, from a utilitarian perspective, claimed as “a measurable ideal, an end to which [we] need to aspire.”<sup>5</sup> All these notions fail to capture the essence of human existence, as a human being can never be reduced to a necessity or rule. “Happiness is not something that can be deserved,” Agamben asserts.<sup>6</sup>

A happy life should be conceptualized in relation to potentiality, a potentiality that is neither a potential to do something nor a status that awaits actualization. It is instead a “potential to not-do, [a] potential not to pass into actuality.”<sup>7</sup> When one says, “I can,” the possibilities of “being able to” and equally “being able not to” are both necessarily implied.<sup>8</sup> This “potentiality-not-to” does not denote inability, impossibility, or mere passivity, but rather a decisive mode of potentiality.<sup>9</sup> It signifies a form of resistance against and refusal of power. When the operations of dominant agencies such as laws and politics are deactivated, these become “gateways” that can lead to “a new happiness.”<sup>10</sup> In this “happy life,” people can attain the “perfection of [their] own power and [their] own communicability,” over which state sovereignty no longer has any hold.<sup>11</sup>

It is no surprise that the notion of the “potential to not-do” serves as the final argument in *The Coming Community* and is explored in relation to the Tiananmen Square protests.<sup>12</sup> This potential to not-do is synonymous with resistance—a gesture applicable to all possibilities and all refusals to accept an agenda provided by authorities. Similar protests

against authority can be observed in the histories of many Sinophone communities—in Tibet, Hong Kong, Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia, and other regions. In all these cases, the protesters refrained from resorting to violence, especially against individuals, not out of abhorrence of the use of force, but because force must be the last resort. These public, nonviolent political actions challenge authority simply by demanding justice, freedom, and equality. They do not appeal to principles of personal morality, self-interest, or religious doctrines but rather invoke resistance to violence and, consequently, enhance people's awareness of the limits of state power.

Sharing the quality of potentiality-not-to with protesters, poetry can also be flexible and responsive to a political climate, providing a space for in-depth and nuanced reflection. Regardless of the specific poetic form employed to resist authority—whether written or oral, cohesive or fragmentary—the underlying principles are civil disobedience, persistence, and noncompromise. This sentiment is echoed by Yang Mu, who states, “Poetry refuses to compromise. It persists.”<sup>13</sup> This dictum, uttered in 1986, one year before the repeal of martial law, not only reflects how his lyrical poetry corresponds to the social events of the 1980s but also argues for a universal essence of poetry in times of upheaval. This attitude is evident not merely in Yang's works but also in those of other poets who employ paradigms such as modernism, surrealism, translingual practice, postmodernism, and postcolonialism, as well as in the works of the post-authoritarian generation of Taiwanese poets and in the work of many other international and local poets. Poetry, Yang implies, is inimical to any authoritarian discourse.

Agamben refuses to define his concept of a happy life, and Yang Mu similarly resists depicting it conclusively in his poetry. Poetry cannot ensure a happy life, but it can nevertheless act as a guide by demonstrating how individuals should respond to authoritarian power and by imagining how the notions of justice, democracy, equality, freedom, and joy might

be realized. When poetry expresses its rebellion, it strides forward toward a happy life.

**NOTES**

1. Foucault, *An Introduction*, 96. See also chapter 5 of Li, *Taiwanese Face, Chinese Masks*.
2. Foucault, vol. 1 of *The History of Sexuality*, 96.
3. Agamben, *Means without Ends*, 114.
4. Marijsse, "Agamben's Happy Life," 143.
5. Marijsse, "Agamben's Happy Life," 140.
6. Agamben, *Profanations*, 20.
7. Agamben, *Potentialities*, 180.
8. Marijsse, "Agamben's Happy Life," 144.
9. Kevin Attell, "Potentiality/Impotentiality," 160.
10. Agamben, *Profanations*, 76.
11. Agamben, *Means without Ends*, 114–115.
12. Agamben, "Tiananmen," 84–86.
13. Yang Mu, *SVP*, 526.



## TIMELINE OF EVENTS

The following timeline illustrates the relationship between Yang Mu's works and key historical events. While some of these works were composed shortly after the events they reference, others were written much later after the occurrence of the events and are retrospective reflections. "MC" refers to *Metaphor and Configuration* (*Yinyu yu shixian* 隱喻與實現), and "FBM" denotes *The First Book of Mount Qilai* (*Qilai qianshu* 奇萊前書).

**1661–1662: Siege of Fort Zeelandia in Taiwan**

→ Yang Mu's work: "Zeelandia"

**1683: The Battle of Penghu in Taiwan**

→ Yang Mu's work: *The Story of Five Concubines*

**1874: The Japanese punitive expedition to Taiwan**

→ Yang Mu's work: "Fragment"

**1878: The Kaliawan Incident in Taiwan**

→ Yang Mu's work: "Sakura: Sakor"

**1895: Taiwan was ceded to Japan**

→ Yang Mu's work: "To a Nineteenth-Century Lumberjack"

**1910: The death of Lev Tolstoy**

→ Yang Mu's work: "Solitude, 1910"

**1916: The Easter Rising in Ireland**

→ Yang Mu's works: "Sailing to Ireland," and "Ireland in Yeats and Yeats in Ireland" (in MC)

**1917: The October Revolution in Russia**

→ Yang Mu's work: "St. Petersburg"

**1922: The Battle of Volochayevka in the Russian Civil War**

→ Yang Mu's work: "Bohori (Khabarovsk, 1994)"

**1936–1939: The Spanish Civil War; the death of Federico García Lorca**

→ Yang Mu's works: "Forbidden Game," "Spain, 1936," and "Ballad: On the 40th Anniversary of Lorca's Death"

**1939–1945: World War II**

→ Yang Mu's works: "Pine Garden," "The Flames of War Burn in the Distant Sky" (in *FBM*), and "Close to Xiuguluan River" (in *FBM*)

**1945–1949: The Chinese Civil War**

→ Yang Mu's work: "Some Real and Some False Taboos" (in *FBM*)

**1945–1987: The ROC took control of Taiwan; the February 28 Incident; the White Terror**

→ Yang Mu's works: "Hualian," "Stupid Winter" (in *FBM*), "Some Real and Some False Taboos" (in *FBM*), "Wild Chinese Olive Trees" (in *FBM*), "Love, Beauty, and Rebellion" (in *FBM*), "Resolved on Doubt" (in *FBM*), "A Great Fictitious Age" (in *FBM*), and "That Age" (in *FBM*)

**1951: The East Rift Valley earthquakes in Taiwan**

→ Yang Mu's work: "An Inkling of Poetry" (in *FBM*)

**1955–1975: The Vietnam War**

→ Yang Mu's works: "Boston, 1970," "Etudes: The Twelve Earthly Branches," "The Spirit of Berkeley," and *Tree Rings*

**1954: Sinking of Tai Ping Destroyer Escort by CCP's Torpedo Boat in Taiwan**

→ Yang Mu's work: "Cheng Chien-hsiung and Poetry and Me" (in *FBM*)

**1956: The Hungarian Revolution**

→ Yang Mu's work: "That Age" (in *FBM*)

**1964: Free Speech Movement at UC Berkeley, USA**

→ Yang Mu's work: "The Spirit of Berkeley"

**1966–1976: The Cultural Revolution in China**

→ Yang Mu's work: "Difficult is the Journey"

**1970–1974: The Baodiao Movement protested US plans to give Japan administrative control of the disputed Senkaku Islands. Meanwhile, in 1971 the UN recognized the PRC as the sole representative of China, removing the ROC**

→ Yang Mu's works: "In Memoriam: Einstein," and "Washington, DC: The Falling Cherry Blossom in the Rain"

**1971: The Indo-Pakistani War of 1971; crop failure in India, 1972–1973, due to low rainfall**

→ Yang Mu's work: "An Indian"

**1972: The Bogside Massacre in Ireland**

→ Yang Mu's work: "Ireland"

**1974: Anti-Japanese demonstration in Seoul**

→ Yang Mu's work: "Hanseong, 1974"

**1975: The death of Chiang Kai-shek in Taiwan**

→ Yang Mu's work: "Bring You Home to Hualian"

**1975: The death of Francisco Franco**

→ Yang Mu's work: "Forbidden Games"

**1976: Canada barred the ROC's name and flag from the Olympic Games; the ROC withdrew**

→ Yang Mu's work: "The Daisy Incident"

**1977: Kaohsiung damaged typhoon Thelma, July 25th**

→ Yang Mu's work: "Kaohsiung, 1977"

**1977: The Zhongli Incident in Taiwan**

→ Yang Mu's work: "The Departure of 1977"

**1979–1980: The Formosa Incident and the Lin Family Massacre in Taiwan**

→ Yang Mu's works: "Seven Turns of the Coast," "Embark," and "An Elegy in Lin Yi-hsiung's Stead"

**1979–1989: The Soviet-Afghan War**

→ Yang Mu's work: "Panjshir Valley"

**1983–1985: Taiwan's 1983 electoral fraud; Taipei Tenth Credit Cooperative scandal**

→ Yang Mu's work: "Someone Asks Me about Justice and Righteousness"

**1985: The birth of Tenzin Ösel Hita, considered the reincarnation of Thubten Yeshe**

→ Yang Mu's work: "Lama Reincarnated"

**1987: Lifting of martial law in Taiwan**

→ Yang Mu's work: "Leaving a Banquet Early in Summer Heat"

**1989: The Tiananmen Square protests**

→ Yang Mu's works: "In Front of a Squadron of Tanks" and "You'll Come Back Alive"

**1990: The Wild Lily Movement in Taiwan**

→ Yang Mu's work: "The Day after Easter"

**1991–1997: Hong Kong's last few years before its handover**

→ Yang Mu's work: *Propositions of Temporality and Ventures*

**1998: Lee Teng-hui proposed idea of "new Taiwanese" people**

→ Yang Mu's work: Translation of *The Tempest*

**1999: The Jiji Earthquake in Taiwan**

→ Yang Mu's work: "The Eighty-first Day after Earthquake in Dongshi"

**1999–2001: The insurgency in the Preševo Valley, after the Kosovo War**

→ Yang Mu's work: "Isaac the Scout"

**1999–2009: The Second Chechen War; Taiwan's 2000 presidential election**

→ Yang Mu's work: "The Lost Ring"



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