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Writing Allegory: Diasporic Consciousness as a Mode of Intervention in Yang Mu's Poetry of the 1970s

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Literature has always been allegorical. To some critics, this is particularly true of the literatures of the "third" world. The Three Worlds Theory, as explicated by Jameson, dissects the globe by "the fundamental breaks between the capitalist first world, the socialist bloc of the second world, and a range of other countries, which have suffered the experience of colonialism and imperialism."[1] Although postcoloniality has already destabilized the tripartite worldview, Jameson's notion of "national allegory," heavily qualified by a political allegorization of the third world, still demands critical attention in the discussion of postcolonial literature.[2] Jameson's conception rests on the assumption that "a certain nationalism is fundamental in the third world" and these third-world cultures are in one way or another ensnared in "a life-and-death struggle with first-world cultural imperialism" (Jameson 1986: 65-8). To him, a study of national allegories in third-world literatures necessarily entails an allegorical reading of the first world.

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[1] Jameson's observations, which are mainly derived from his reading of fiction, are applicable in this discussion of poetry because modern poetry has played a significant role in the nation-building project and identity construction in postcolonial Taiwan (Jameson 1986: 67).

[2] In Jameson's formulation, "All third-world texts are necessarily . . . allegorical, and in a very specific way: they are to be read as what I will call *national allegories* . . . particularly when their forms develop out of predominantly western machineries of representation, such as the novel . . . Third-world texts . . . necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory: *the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society*" (Jameson 1986: 69).

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Subsequent debates initiated by Jameson's essay rally attention to the complexities of the intertwined colonial and postcolonial discourses. Aijaz Ahmad finds Jameson's "essentially descriptive" characterization of "third-world literature" an "epistemological impossibility" (Ahmad 1987: 5). "National allegories," in Ahmad's opinion, are products of ideological aberration by which some nations are alienated as objects of history and their experiences are homogenized as the unitary experience of national oppression. Under this coercive inclusiveness, "the enormous cultural heterogeneity of social formations within the so-called third-world is submerged within a singular identity of 'experience'" (Ahmad 1987: 10). In contrast to Ahmad's negative appraisal, Madhava Prasad considers a national framing of third-world literature justifiable under specific historical circumstances. Allegories facilitate such framing and serve to highlight the emergence of a nation.[3] To substantiate this argument, Prasad cites Craig Owens's formulation of the historicist function of allegory, which is

> to produce image upon image of the present *in terms of* the classical past. This relationship was expressed . . . structurally, through a radical condensation of narrative into a single, emblematic instant . . . in which the past, present, and future, that is, the *historical* meaning, of the depicted action might be read . . . Syntagmatic or narrative associations were compressed in order to compel a vertical reading of (allegorical) correspondences. (Owens 1984: 209)

From Prasad's point of view, allegorical correspondences help to fabricate a readable narrative in the service of historicism. As a result, the contours of a nation can be clearly delineated. Nevertheless, there is always a subversive potential latent in this self-alienating nature of allegory. Owing to "allegory's capacity for including (self)critical layers of discourse," the allegorical impulse has to be repressed or the

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[3] In Madhava Prasad's words, "The greater visibility of the national frame of reference in Third World literature may be a function primarily of the historical conditions under which these nations came into being" (Prasad 1992: 78).

allegory has to be suppressed in order to allow for unity. Yet, Prasad notes that

> [T]he very idea of a text being free of "allegory" and therefore "individualistic" is an idea that only arises with the division of the aesthetic from the theoretical/critical functions. An important consequence is the isolation of the aesthetic function from the political. The compulsive collective mediation of individual utterances that is characteristic of this condition of postcolonial competitive nation-statehood may prove to be a suitable point of departure for a global cultural critique. (Prasad 1992: 80)

An erasure of mediation by a total aestheticization of a text is an impossibility in the postcolonial condition. The complicity between the "collective" mediation of "individual" utterance and postcolonial nation-building proves that the assumed division of the aesthetic and the political is merely a fake. Indeed, the discursive potential of the allegorical impulse demands critical attention.

Common to the newly liberated nations is a struggle to dismantle colonialism in order to provide for a new order. Narrative is often taken as an effective apparatus in developing a national culture against cultural obliteration.[4] In her study of postcolonial Francophone novels, Lisa Lowe finds that

> Postcolonial Francophone literatures of North Africa and Southeast Asia are not only symptomatic sites of the struggles and contradictions . . . the literatures also offer narrative allegories of these struggles and contradictions. . . . each novel posits allegories of Fanon's third alternative: a strategic practice which neither reinforces the structure of colonial domination, nor appeals to an essentialized precolonial order, but which—in the nomadic unsettling of the model of colonialism and nativism as polar opposites—troubles the very logic of binarism, and queries the notion of structured rule itself. (Lowe 1993: 44-5)

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[4] Narrative here does not refer to a genre-bound concept. Instead it is taken as a novelistic tendency which can frequently be detected in the discursive formation of national and cultural identity.

While Jameson's homogenization of the third world into a unitary experience of colonial oppression results in a "national allegory," which is an over-valorization of a nationalist response in literature, Lisa Lowe's application of allegory destabilizes this oppositional logic of cultural imperialism. While models of colonial rule and precolonial order tend to be equally essentialist, allegorical writings are new sites for negotiating alternatives to the bipolar discourse.

The Greek roots of the word *allegory* are *allos*, "other," and *agoreuein*, "to speak." Thus, allegory allows the "other" "to speak" or lets one "speak" from the position of the "other." Allegory is never an ontological enunciation of a self-identifying act. It is fiction writing on a narrative basis, which designates another simultaneous structure of events or ideas. Allegorical reference is intermittent and an ironic tone is often embedded. Similar to the way an allegory works, a diasporic consciousness operates in its distance from, as well as its link to, a structured correspondence. Diaspora is defined and interpreted in terms of the myth of origin. As William Safran has written of "diaspora":

> *the Diaspora* had a very specific meaning: the exile of the Jews from their historic homeland and their dispersion throughout many lands, signifying as well the oppression and moral degradation implied by that dispersion . . . I suggest that . . . the concept of diaspora be applied to expatriate minority communities whose members share several of the following characteristics: 1) they, or their ancestors, have been dispersed from a specific original "center" to two or more "peripheral," or foreign, regions; 2) they retain a collective memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland—its physical location, history, and achievements; 3) they believe that they are not—and perhaps cannot be—fully accepted by their host society and therefore feel partly alienated and insulated from it; 4) they regard their ancestral homeland as their true, ideal home and as the place to which they or their descendants would (or should) eventually return—when conditions are appropriate; 5) they believe that they should, collectively, be committed to the maintenance or restoration of their original homeland and to its safety and prosperity; and 6) they continue to relate, personally or vicariously, to that homeland in one way or another, and their

> ethnocommunal consciousness and solidarity are importantly defined by the existence of such a relationship. (Safran 1991: 83)

These conceptual characteristics of diaspora suggest that a diasporic consciousness is a space-clearing imperative that allows the interplay of roles in a self-alienating act. Compared with allegory as an alibi whose distance from itself is a site for manipulation, diasporic consciousness is an alibi that denies itself. Allegory as a diasporic consciousness is always already distanced from identity with an ambivalence between revelation and concealment. In Paul de Man's conception,

> Whereas the symbol postulates the possibility of an identity or identification, allegory designates primarily a distance in relation to its own origin, and, renouncing the nostalgia and desire to coincide, it establishes its language in the void of this temporal difference. (de Man 1983: 207)

A diasporic consciousness, manifested as the significatory act of writing allegory, is a mode of intervention in the postcolonial condition since it is constituted by a double consciousness which operates in an oscillation between the society of residence and the society of origin. Like allegory, a diasporic consciousness renders the totalization of correspondences in a symbolic mode impossible by a discovery of temporal and spatial predicament. Allegories are supplements that defer the closing up of a narrative with a difference. If diasporants are supplements to a national narrative, they defer its closure by their distance from it. Their detention in another place punctures a coherent, self-sufficient portrayal of the origin.

In identity politics, the language of identity is always figural. The discursive formation is based on a contractual practice by deploying metonymic images from a referential system such as place of birth, race, ethnicity, class, gender, language and religion. The nation-building impulse calls for narrative associations of these images to fabricate a coherent identity. Diasporic consciousness, like allegory, is a deconstruction of such a referential system of identity and a substitution for it by a new referential system based on "the

pathos of a temporal predicament in which man's self-definition [in this context, a man's identity] is forever deferred" (de Man 1979: 199). It is the myth of homeland that defines the diasporic consciousness and at the same time determines its allegorical fictionality.

The diasporic consciousness underlines much of modern Chinese literature. An "obsession with China" not only characterizes the dominant themes of modern novels, but also sets the major tone for other genres of Chinese writing in the twentieth century. Many Chinese writers, living and working in diaspora, bemoan the loss of home and yearn for the return to a cultural origin in ancient China. Despite the fact that Jameson developed the notion of "national allegory" out of the novel, the predominant literary form of the West, many elements derived from his notion and the subsequent discourses related to it can be applied to the investigation of modern Chinese poetry[5]. The dilemma baffling the lyrical self in many modern Chinese poems can be considered an epitome of the collective cultural experience of national resistance or nation-building. The national, realist demands on modern poets at different historical contingencies, as shown in the identity construction schemes in numerous literary debates, reflect such a political dimension in the writing and reading of poetry. A parallel between individual and national destiny is drawn so that the national character of the creative work can be safeguarded.

Significant literary debates on the national character of modern Chinese poetry were staged in the 1970s in Taiwan. In the early 1970s, the thirst for nationalism was aggravated by successive historical events such as the Tiao Yu Tai Incident in 1970, Taiwan's withdrawal from the United Nations in 1971, Richard Nixon's visit to Peking and the termination of official relations between Taiwan and Japan in 1972, etc. These diplomatic and political setbacks had a traumatic impact on the people of Taiwan. Set in this historical scenario, the Modern Poetry Debate (1972-74) was thickly colored by zealous nationalism and anti-Westernism. The subsequent "Hsiang-t'u

釣魚臺

鄉土文學運動

[5] The concept "obession with China" was first advanced by C.T. Hsia (Hsia 1971: 533-36) and has more recently been connected to Jameson's "national allegory" by Christopher Lupke (Lupke 1993).

wen-hsueh yun-tung" [Native soil literature movement] for promoting a realist and nationalist literature in opposition to the avant-garde experimental literature was a disguised protest against imperialistic influences from the West in aspects other than the literary.

As one of the few prolific native Taiwanese poets, Yang Mu (penname of Wang Ching-hsien) has been a focus of critical attention since 1960s. His early poems, under his first penname Yeh Shan, have been highly commended for their lyrical quality. However, at a time when anti-imperialism was in vogue in the 1970s, he became a target of criticism from many realist, nationalist critics who regarded his works as alien and antagonistic to Taiwanese readers. The poet was considered a Westernized writer lacking in national and social concerns.

楊牧

葉珊

It is against the specific political and literary background of the 1970s that I would like to investigate Yang Mu's participation, or lack of participation, in the identity politics of Taiwan. In practical terms, there is no doubt that Yang Mu is a diasporant, as he has studied and then taught in the US since the mid-1960s. His residence in a foreign nation is more a choice than a necessity. As a Taiwanese poet, he is geographically displaced from the specific cultural origin of mainland China, and being born in Hualien positions him on the periphery on the island, too. As a contemporary poet, he is temporally distanced from Ch'ang-an, the imperial center figured in classical Chinese poetry, while on the geopolitical map, he is physically away from the political and administrative centers, Peking and Taipei. In view of his being temporally and spatially distanced from those traditions, Yang Mu can be considered a Taiwan poet writing in Chinese in the diaspora, in the 1970s in particular. Nonetheless, it is due to this diasporic condition that Yang Mu is allowed to explore controversial identity issues in Taiwan from a distance.

花蓮

長安

Writing Allegorically from the Outside

One is always outside. Poetry is an outside, so are writing and language. Yang Mu is always self-conscious of this irony of writing. This "outsidedness," as claimed by the poet, is a humane, liberal and realist attitude to life. One can be an *out*sider *in* a baseball game. The important thing is that this kind

右外野的浪漫主義者
葉珊散文集

of "outsidedness" on the periphery is allowed by the rules of the game. This is the way Yang Mu fashions himself in "Yu-wai-yeh te lang-man chu-i-che" [The right-fielder of romanticism], the preface to *Yeh Shan san-wen-chi* [Essays of Yeh Shan] (Yeh 1977: 1-11). This preface is often regarded as a definitive or self-defining manifesto of Yang Mu's pursuit of romanticism. The poet frames the preface with opening paragraphs depicting a youth's sweet loneliness in playing the role of right-fielder, and with concluding paragraphs on Yeats. Book-ended between the two right-fielders is a discussion of the different meanings of romanticism, all explicitly numbered. According to the author, the romantics' accommodation of discrepancies and their courage to think and do otherwise are exemplified by Yeats, who is often called "the last romanticist," and who should be read as "the romanticist to the very end." In the last paragraph, Yang Mu captures the gist of romanticism in "Yeats's problems."

> Through an overview of Yeats's life, I find that he is a lonely person all along. Among his Irish friends, he was a discriminated right-fielder, a lonely outsider, chewing a blade of grass picked from the earth—that should be shamrock leaf—looking at his friends inside the game conversing about slaughters, about creating "a terrible beauty" with flesh and blood. I believe that Yeats surely loved Ireland no less than MacBride and others did, but he had chosen a completely different path. I can imagine, if Yeats were there in the crowd watching his teacher anatomize a pigeon, at the moment the blood spilled he would certainly turn away and force his way out, to go to a corner, feeling lost.
>
> I am still pondering over Yeats's problems. (Yeh 1977: 11)

Yang Mu's centering on Yeats, an outsider to his revolutionary, nationalist Irish contemporaries, in his thoughts on St. Patrick's Day in 1977, in Seattle, is a gesture that admits to and installs his own national-cultural position in a complex allegorical grid reference. Written at the time Yang Mu was criticized for being an outsider to "Chineseness" by the realist critics, this preface can be read as a timely response.

Echoing his confessed outsidedness, Yang Mu uncovers the ideological aberration in the avowed claims for insidedness. Contrary to what the title of his book, *Po-k'e-lai ching-shen* [The

柏克萊精神

Spirit of Berkeley] may suggest, Yang Mu has no intention to appropriate the discursive claims of social activism on paper. One is and can only be an outsider in writing. Despite one's great compassion, one can only observe and report from the outside. To strip off pretensions of being inside is a more authentic and realistic approach to showing concern for different social groups.

> *It is said that we should presume to know how the rural laborers* feel. For example, when we see the lights of the fishing boats, it is said that we must not praise these lights as poetic but ought to think about the hardships suffered by fishermen . . . If we always observe life with great compassion—presumably great *compassion—we would become a perfect outsider. Yet, I wonder* if we cannot but remain just an outsider.[6]

To the poet, admitting to outsidedness is not pernicious to his social participation; instead, an allegorical distance from the subject of concern allows for positions of enunciation and illumination.

At the critical moment when modern Chinese poetry was debated in the polemical rhetoric of cultural imperialism versus literary nationalism in the 1970s, Yang Mu's writings stood out as an anacoluthon. Yang Mu does not construct a cultural identity with a national imaginary of Chineseness, or create a cultural sense of belonging to the immediate time and place. He shows his concern via refraction by directing attention to people and places other than those of China or Taiwan. He talks about Ireland, about an Indian in the West and about Spain. The Irish and Spanish themes, as well as the concern for diasporants, are incongruous with the prevailing nationalist, native soil discourses in Taiwan. This conscious turn from the discursive mainstream is representative of Yang Mu's mode of intervention.

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[6] The essay under discussion is "Shan-ku chi-tsai" [Observations in a valley] written in June 1976 (Yang Mu 1977: 39). Yang Mu's discussion of "outsidedness" is intended to be a dialogue with the writers of Native Soil Literature. In January 1978, Yü T'ien-ts'ung wrote an essay, "Yü-huo yü shuang-ch'ung jen-ko" [The lights of the fishing boats and the double character], as a response to Yang Mu's essay and dismissed the notion of "outsidedness" in a moralistic way (Yü 1981: 70-71).

山谷記載

尉天驄
漁火與雙重人格

"My nostalgia is 'Irish' "

龍族

Yang Mu's contributions to *Lung Tsu* [Dragons poetry quarterly] are conspicuous examples of this allegorical approach to identity discourse. Among the five poems published in the magazine, three deal with "foreign" subject-matter (two about Ireland and one about an Indian). The other two are apparently about "the Chinese" (one on Tu Fu and the other on a Chinese hermit)—in tune with the manifesto of *Dragons Poetry Quarterly*, a "national" literary magazine which aims to play "Dragon music" and perform the "Dragon dance."[7] The presence of three "foreign" poems in such a place is worthy of critical attention.

杜甫

航向愛爾蘭
現代文學
我們也要航行
愛爾蘭

The Irish theme was actually foregrounded in three poems by Yang Mu in 1971-72. The first is "Hang-hsiang Ai-er-lan" [Sailing to Ireland], written on 20 March, 1971, and published in *Hsien-tai wen-hsueh* [Modern literature]. Then, "Wo-men yeh yao hang-hsing" [We want to go sailing too] and "Ai-er-lan" [Ireland] were both written in 1972 and published in *Dragons* in January and December of 1974 respectively. The first two poems, about sailing, and evidently in imitation of Yeats's "Sailing to Byzantium," are selected for the present discussion.

Sailing to Ireland

A terrible beauty is born
—Yeats

On Saint Patrick's Day
I hang a shamrock leaf on your door
And yet the sound of the executioner's gunshots
Keeps reaching here. Here
Where, after a shower, the breeze
Flies over the withered expectation of
The apple trees—my nostalgia is Irish

As nostalgic as an Irish winter evening
When God passes by the graveyard of the revolutionaries
And wonders what he can properly do to John MacBride

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[7] The *Dragons Poetry Quarterly* uses the dragon as a cultural emblem for Chineseness and has, as mentioned in the Manifesto, the mission of "playing our own gongs, beating our own drums" and "performing our own dance of the dragon."

Who violently bled, and died
Daffodils have not bloomed yet
The call to arms is still clear; moreover
There are many others jailed in the city

So they will not even wait till Easter
To knock down my shamrock with their bayonets
And trample it. Now that spring is here
And the clouds play easily over the sea
The salmons multiply rapidly in the mountain creeks
The new play of May is being rehearsed and staged
And people have finally forgotten what happened

On Saint Patrick's Day (Yang 1975: 292)[8]

"Sailing to Ireland" is subtitled "A terrible beauty is born," a quotation from Yeats's poem "Easter 1916." The central mood of nostalgia is characterized as "Irish." The poem recounts the pathetic death of the Irish nationalist activist, John MacBride, in the Easter Uprising of 1916. The commemorable event illustrates how the demand for Irish Independence was brutally suppressed by the British troops. Neither the guardian angel of Ireland, Saint Patrick, nor the Irish cultural emblem of the shamrock leaf, served to protect those who exhibited patriotic sentiments for their homeland. In the poem, even God was bewildered, wondering what he could properly do to this "terrible beauty" born of Easter. The lesson, nationalist or religious, is remembered (and forgotten) now on Saint Patrick's Day, 17 of March every year. A clear political tendentiousness is shown as the persona, "I," travels in Ireland, talking sympathetically to "you," the Irish people, while criticizing "they," the British troops. "Sailing to Ireland" is a tribute paid to the Irish struggle for a national cause, even though the national emblem, the shamrock, is knocked down. "My nostalgia is Irish" sets the allegorical narrative against a historical event, in a nomadic movement to the contested site in Ireland. Viewed as a displaced diasporic consciousness, the Irish nostalgia reveals a Taiwanese poet

[8] This and all subsequent translations from chinese in this article are my own.

meditating on the nationalistic cause at home. Taiwan's national cause is hyphen-nated to an off-shore Chinese master-narrative as Ireland's is to an English one. The complexities of having a cultural heritage immersed in political conflicts create great difficulties in identity formation. When juxtaposed against the prevailing anti-Western/colonial discourse in Taiwan at the historical juncture of the early 1970s, Yang Mu's "Irish" nostalgia shows his reaction against the over-simplified discursive equation of self and other to the Chinese and the West.

The second poem on the Irish theme, "We Want to Go Sailing Too," further investigates the issues of the Irish nationalist cause for independence, which also bears a close resemblance to the political situation of Taiwan. The dominant anti-imperialist sentiments, as exhibited in the Modern Poetry Debate, take Chinese national identity as the unique, ultimate locus for positioning a poet's identity. In the poem, the tension between an unyielding audacity for the cause and the ambivalence concerning the direction one should take dramatizes the cultural and political dilemma of intellectuals at that historical moment.

> Such a palm, so thin, so delicate
> An obscure constellation I don't think I can read
> (Whether you go east or west
> It is the same misery that awaits you
> To find yourself finally lost)
> Footmarks are playing on the wall
>
> (Yang 1975: 285-86)

In this poem, the wish to set sail is persistently brought to the fore by a seafarer's audacity and colored by a dark green that is almost blue. Green is the color for Ireland and greenish blue is the color of the sea for migrants. "We" set off on a voyage, with a "parabolic audacity turning straight," while in the last refrain, this audacity becomes delicate and almost incomprehensible. What consistently sustains the wish to set sail is the audacity, despite the possibility of a parabolic swirl in the itinerary and the risk of being taken as obscure. The inhibiting hesitation is ascribed to the uncertainty of direction. Both the East and the West are traps where only the misery of being lost

awaits "you," the seafarer. Inscriptions cannot be deciphered. Palmistry offers no reliable indications, nor can one read the star atlas for a clue. Footmarks, which are traces of one's ancestral and cultural origin in Native Soil poetry, are now dislocated on the wall, on the border between the inside and the outside. The dilemma of being caught between the East and the West reflects the poetry debates of the 1970s—undecidability concerning which course to take, despite the unyielding audacity to commit to a cause. Here, Yang Mu's strategic intervention into this East-West dichotomy unlocks the simplistic one-to-one matching of either a nationalist or a comprador with either direction. To him, many of the most thoughtful and socially concerned intellectuals are involved in more sophisticated meditation on their positioning in the in-between.[9]

References to the anxieties inherent in the Irish struggle for national independence, as indicated in "Sailing to Ireland" and "We Want to Go Sailing Too," constitute an allegorical supplement to the national narrative in the Modern Poetry Debate in Taiwan. The intertextual link with Yeats's skepticism in the perception of "terrible beauty," born at the zenith of nationalist fervor, illuminates a parallel obsession in the "Chinese" context. The ideological make-up of the Modern Poetry Debate displays a similar nationalist preoccupation. At such a moment of identity crisis, Yang Mu's fashioning of the hesitation concerning which direction to take and his premonition about easily getting lost bespeak a need for a more rational, objective reflection on the matter. In "Yeats and Decolonization," too, Edward Said sees ambivalence in contextualizing Yeats's position as a great poet in the postcolonial cultural mapping.

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[9] This perplexing East-West dilemma has appeared in a number of Yang Mu's works in the 1970s. For example, in his prose work, "Kuei-hang chih-erh" [Flying home II], written in October 1975, Yang Mu writes, "To return to the east from the west, the plane goes west instead. This is certainly baffling . . . Deep in thought, I wonder why returning to the east, the plane goes west instead . . . The summer vacation is about to end. Having been home to visit their relatives, overseas students are on their way to the west, even though their planes go east instead" (Yang 1977: 11). 歸航之二

> For Yeats the overlappings he knew existed between his Irish nationalism and the English cultural heritage that both dominated and empowered him as a writer were bound to cause *an overheated tension, and it is the pressure of this urgently* political and secular tension that one may speculate caused him to try to resolve it on a "higher," that is, non-political level. Thus the deeply eccentric and aestheticized histories he produced in *A Vision* and the later quasi-religious poems are elevations of the tension to an extraworldly level. (Said 1990: 80)

Aware of a cultural heritage transplanted from a neigboring island of a different history, Yeats's need for a national signature underlines his decolonization project. This postcolonial predicament can be resolved by a trajectory of retrospective decolonization: an imaginary recovery of the land, a redevelopment of the native language and an attempt at myth-*making "by which the land was seen . . . in a state that* antedated its alienation by imperialism" (Said 1990: 78). Said regards Yeats "as an Irish poet with more than strictly local Irish meaning and applications," and "as someone whose poetry warned of nationalist excesses" (Said 1990: 87-9). There is a lot in common between Yeats's tense cultural relation to the British tradition and Yang Mu's cultural bearing with the Chinese. The nostalgia is "Irish," but not strictly in the nationalist sense, because in the poems Yang Mu depicts not only the heroic deeds for a nationalist cause but also the terror born of "nationalist excesses." External imperialism should not empower the native with a monologic, coercive tyranny of nationalism that leads to internal colonialism. Liberation should be a liberating *social consciousness that allows alternatives beyond a national* consciousness. The audacity to set sail needs to be checked by a thorough consideration of the direction to be taken. Yeats writes in "The Second Coming": "The best lack all conviction, while the worst/Are full of passionate intensity." Yang Mu's preoccupation with Ireland has its political dimension when considered as a dialogic response to the dominant nationalist identity discourse in Taiwan.

The reference to Yeats does not simply invoke the difficulties in situating the cultural identity of the poet; it points to *a more complex problem: the construction of cultural identity* itself in a postcolonial situation.

> [D]espite Yeats's obvious and . . . settled presence in Ireland, in British culture and literature, and in European modernism, he does present another fascinating aspect: that of the undisputedly great national poet who articulates the experiences, the aspirations, and the vision of a people suffering under the dominion of an offshore power. From this perspective Yeats is a poet who belongs to a tradition not usually considered his, that of the colonial world ruled by European imperialism now—that is, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—bringing to a climactic insurrectionary stage, the massive upheaval of anti-imperialist resistance in the colonies, and of metropolitan anti-imperialist opposition that has been called the age of decolonization. (Said 1990: 69-70)

When Said tries to "associate a major strand in Yeats's poetry both with the poetry of decolonization and resistance, and with the historical alternatives to the nativist impasse," he iterates the complexities in locating a point of departure for the decolonization project. In this very early stage of the discourse on cultural identity in modern Taiwan poetry of the 1970s, Yang Mu interrogates the binary enclosures of identity in the name of the East against the West, or a national "Chineseness" versus the Western cultural imperialists. The insertion of the Irish question into the "Dragon discourse" creates an allegorical point of departure for re-thinking "Chineseness" from the peripheral Taiwanese perspective.[10] In this light, Yang Mu's Irish theme in the 1970s is a forerunner of the nativist project of othering "Chineseness" in the early 1980s.

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[10] Yang Mu's interest in Yeats and the Irish question has constituted a consistent theme in his academic and poetic career. In 1997, he published *Selected Poems of W. B. Yeats*, a rendition of Yeats's poems into Chinese, after fifteen years of translation work. In the Introduction, to the surprise of many literary critics, Yang Mu stresses Yeats's political and historical contributions to Irish history, rather than his poetic achievements. This special way of relating poetry to politics and history can be viewed as an alternative path for evaluating a poet's cultural identity, in accordance with the Taiwanese social activists' realist poetics (Yang 1997: v-xvi).

"His Brahman Smile, I Believe/Has Evolved from Misery"

Jameson's notion of "national allegory" and Safran's concept of "diaspora" are both built on a home-bound consciousness. Writing in these senses is a representation of a collective memory or vision of the homeland and the correspondence between vehicle and tenor is direct. However, in Yang Mu's treatment, as seen in his poems on Irish themes, the vehicle and tenor are situated at a diasporic distance from the Chinese setting. The home-bound consciousness is located in the story of a displaced persona's homesickness in a host society. "I-ko In-tu-jen" [An Indian], published in the *Dragons Poetry Quarterly* 13 (1975), is an example of this theme of diaspora fashioned in a spatial displacement.

一個印度人

In "An Indian," Yang Mu captures the image of his protagonist in the moment of his reading an aerogramme from home, on a terrace carpeted by fallen leaves in late autumn. The image of the Indian becomes increasingly clear when his three appearances are rendered in a long shot, a medium shot and finally a close-up.

An Indian

An Indian, sitting on the stairs
Read a letter, an aerogramme
That was in late autumn last year
Floating on his face were
The Brahman smile
And misery too

Hunger turns into new songs

He is still sitting
On the stairs of late autumn last year
A thin and dark Indian
Is reading a letter, an aerogramme
Yellow leaves gather on his
Introduction to Economics

Turns into new songs

He sits on the stairs carpeted with fallen leaves
An Indian, barely twenty
He has the look of someone from the banks of the River Ganges
He is reading a letter; the words on the aerogramme
Have evolved from Sanskrit, I believe
His Brahman smile, I believe
Has evolved from misery

He is a "diasporant," studying economics in a foreign country. His national identity is given in the title and stated as the subject of the opening line. His cultural identity is first seen in his facial expression—a smile tinged with sadness, reminding one of a Brahman.[11] His racial identity emerges when his skin color is mentioned in the second appearance. Then, a close-up focuses on his "look" bearing the imprints of his origin and on the letter written in a distinct script "evolved from Sanskrit." The two short refrains separating his three appearances point to social and economic problems back home. The national / cultural identity of "an Indian" is thus built up by his birthplace, race, religion and language. Through references to "hunger," "misery," and the youth's studying *Introduction to Economics* abroad, a brief national history is written.

The diasporic consciousness of this Indian student is marked by his thoughts of home. Images of the ancestral homeland and the present postcolonial nation are superimposed on each other to create a myth of India. Hunger and poverty surface as soon as he finishes reading the letter; they are transformed into "new songs." These songs suggest the Indian's preoccupation with what he anticipates he can probably do for his nation in good time, with *Introduction to Economics* now in his hand. The transcendent Brahman smile evokes the Hindu attitude to life, inherited from a national culture originating in the River Ganges, the cradle of Indian civilization. The prominent theme of this poem is a diasporant's obsession with his nation.

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[11] In Hinduism, a Brahman is a member of the highest of the Hindu castes; the term is a cognate of Brahma, the eternal spirit from which all beings originate and to which they will return.

India travels through space via airmail, and through time, from the ancient civilization at the River Ganges to the modern academy of the West, to accompany the Indian as an integral part of his college life in a foreign country. Because of the diasporic distance, there is room for new songs, for new hopes and expressions, which the Indian student can aspire to in a smile.

There is neither "Dragon music" nor "Dragon dance" in this poem. What one can find is the depiction of the characteristics of Indian culture, the Hindu attitude to life and, most important of all, the new songs. These new songs are not yet composed nor nationalized, but committed to the restoration of prosperity of Home, which fills the ethno-communal consciousness of an oriental student in the West. The encounter with this Indian, mediated through the gaze and the language of a Chinese person, evokes possibilities for new songs. They are yet to be articulated, but in the process of articulation, tensions between national Indian objectives and the denationalizing power of global capitalism arise. Impending problems of cultural identity and economic imperialism are issues to be negotiated. If this story of an Indian student is a national allegory of postcolonial India, the presence of this Indian theme in the *Dragons* has special meaning: the Chinese diaspora is displaced to an Indian cultural site. The Indian's anxieties echo those of the Taiwanese in the 1970s.

Taboo Games: Intervention of "An Incomprehensible Great Romance"

禁忌的遊戲

The title of Yang Mu's seventh book of poetry, *Chin-chi te yu-hsi* [Taboo games] introduces the Spanish theme the poet worked on in 1976, on the 40th anniversary of the Spanish Civil War. Besides the title poem "Taboo Games," written in the same period were "Hsi-pan-ya" [Spain 1936] and "Min-yao—Lo-erh-ka ssu-nan ssu-shih chou-nien-chi" [Ballads: On the 40th anniversary of Lorca's death]. The phrase "Chin-chi te yu-hsi" [Taboo games] is a Chinese translation for the title of a piece of classical Spanish music for guitar, *Romance Anonimo*, also widely known as *Juegos prohibidos* in Spanish and *Jeux*

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interdits in French.[12] The poem is distinctly set in Lorca's hometown, Granada, at the historical juncture of the Spanish Civil War. The persona's concern is to let a kind, curious girl learn about the history of a tormented country through its Spanish setting, its music and poetry. These signifiers of Spanishness are invoked to recount a suppressed history of the struggle against tyranny and to raise the historical consciousness of the girl. On the allegorical level, these signifiers are deployed to articulate the poet's historical concerns of another place, another time.

As a prelude to the Spanish theme, "Taboo Games 1" begins with the leaves swaying in the afternoon breeze, accompanied by guitar music. The thoughts of Granada, and together with it the taboo themes in Lorca's *Gypsy Ballads*, concern desire and its repression. A similar theme is expressed in sexual terms in Lorca's *Gypsy Ballads* poem no. 5, "The Gypsy Nun" (alluded to in the first stanza of Yang Mu's poem):

No. 5 The Gypsy Nun

The Church growls in the distance
like a bear on its back.
How well she sews! What needlework!
But dearly would she embroider
the flowers of her fantasy
on the straw-colored cloth.
. . . . . .
In the eyes of the nun
two horsemen come galloping.
A last inaudible sign
loosens her tight chemise,
and, seeing clouds and hills

[12] The title of Yang Mu's poem is translated as "Forbidden Games" by Joseph R. Allen in *Forbidden Games and Video Poems* (1993) and it was later adopted by Michelle Yeh in *No Trace of the Gardener* (1998). I render the title as "Taboo Games" given the poem's close intertextual links with Lorca's *Romancera gitano* or *Gypsy Ballads*, which Yang Mu translated into Chinese in 1966; both poems share the theme of taboo.

in the desolate distance,
her heart of sugar
and verbena breaks.
Oh, what an exalted plain
with twenty suns above!
And what upstanding rivers
does her mind's eye see!
But she keeps to her flowers,
while above her, in the breeze
the light plays chess
on the window's jalousie.[13]

In Yang Mu's "Taboo Games," the Spanish guitar music is a prelude introducing a portrayal of the nun:

Taboo Games 1

Afternoon
Outside the screened window, leaves are softly swaying
swaying a sentiment, an incomprehensible great romance
(The G chord is difficult to master, she says. Her hair slides to
the left.)
She looks down at her ring finger
with difficulty pressing down the wind of Granada
A nun at the window says her rosary; by chance she looks up
Faraway a wanderer's horse slowly passes by
The horse is really slow
She has already finished counting the twelve beads
The wanderer disappears on the horizon. As Lorca says . . .

The tension between spiritual and carnal love suffered by the nun is the focus there. Yang Mu's description of the nun's repression of erotic desires by chanting the rosary echoes Lorca's treatment of the gypsy nun's sublimation and erotic catharsis seen in the act of embroidery.[14] The confrontation with

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[13] The English translation of Lorca's *Romancero gitano* is quoted from Robert G. Havard's translation (Havard 1990: 59).

[14] For a detailed discussion of this idea of sublimation, see Robert G. Havard's "Introduction" to *Gypsy Ballads* (Havard 1990: 16-17).

with the taboo is displaced through a substituting act. This poem is a taboo game: to admit the taboo and to deal with it. Repression and sublimation through allegorization precipitates a political catharsis. The mourning for Lorca reveals regret for the kind of life led in white terror, in Spain of 1936 and in Taiwan in the late 1970s.

The G chord of the piece of guitar music conjures up the scene of Granada, the Gypsy's romance, Lorca's poetry and his murder.[15] In *Gypsy Ballads*, the turmoil and torture imposed by interdiction is crystallized into a "bitterness," a recurrent motif in many of the eighteen poems. Similarly, the flavor of Spanish music is infused with notes of bitterness in Yang Mu's work. The opening poem, "Taboo Games 1," sets the tune for the entire suite, as can be seen in the following:

> Chinaberries pass perpendicularly through the stave—moment
> after moment, dot after dot, lower and lower, bitterer and bitterer
> one dot lower than another, one dot
> bitterer than another—the sounds
>
> Finally fall onto the ground. She looks up
> and sees me melancholically listening to the inaudible leaves
> softly softly swaying outside the screened window—afternoon

The melody of *Romance Anonimo* is interspersed with staccato gunshots. The fall of Lorca is superimposed upon the montage of the fall of pots of viola, the fall of Chinaberries from the trees, and the fall of the musical notes from the stave, all amid a cluster of low, bitter sounds.

Many motifs in "Taboo Games 3" correspond to poem no. 4 of Gypsy Ballads, "Somnambular Ballad." In the ballad, Lorca paints his gypsy portraits in green. As the green coloration radiates from the girl of green flesh and green hair awaiting someone on a green veranda, it characterizes her overwhelming youth and the bitterness of unripe fruit. Her powerful attraction is, paradoxically, indicative of bitter love. Here is Havard's translation:

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[15] Lorca was murdered in 1936, most probably for his dissident views against the tyrannical Spanish government under Francisco Franco (1892-1975).

No. 4 Somnambular Ballad

Green how I want you green.
Green wind, green branches.
The ship on the sea
and the horse on the mountain.
With shadow round her waist
she dreams on her veranda,
green flesh, hair of green
and eyes of cold silver.
Green how I want you green.
Under the gypsy moon
things are staring at her
things she cannot see. (Havard 1990: 53)

In "Taboo Games 3," Granada is a color and a language, connoting both Spanish joy and pain. The green coloration in Yang Mu's poem is used on the wind and the horse, creating a picture of hope and freedom on a Spanish meadow.

Try to remember
the great care, in Granada
Try to remember your language and pain
green wind and green horse, your
language and happiness—

However, the pursuit of wish fulfillment against taboos always causes anxiety and injury. "Somnambular Ballad" mentions the stairs, which the father and the young horseman climb to reach the green girl at the green veranda:

Now the two friends climb
toward the high veranda.
Leaving a trail of blood.
Leaving a trail of tears. (Havard 1990: 55)

The young horseman, bleeding, seeks to fulfill his last wish: to meet the bitter girl. And the father, the mourning owner of the house, laments the loss of self and home: "But I am no longer myself / nor is my house my house." The premature death of the

girl renders futile the effort spent to reach her; the blood and the tears are wasted.

In "Taboo Games 3," Yang Mu suppresses the tragic plot of the source text in which the girl dies, by introducing a kind and curious girl. This girl learns to play the Spanish guitar and speaks a polysyllabic language. The persona wishes to deliver this girl into the hands of St. Michael so that she can be taught about Granada, about history and about the great compassion. However, the sense of futility remains: it is presented in the death of a youth under the fig trees. The youth wears a clean cap and leaves his home on Sunday, probably on his way to a church. He knows Lorca's poems well but his premature death caused by political persecution deprives him of the chance to serve his community either as a peasant or a soldier. "In tears, in blood" in "Taboo Games 2" is borrowed from Lorca as a refrain lamenting Spanish history and Lorca's fate, like a choral commentary in a Greek tragedy. Violence and bloodshed, as well as insecurity and melancholy, hover above "Taboo Games."

"Taboo Games 4" ends with a concluding note, as if a conclusion can be obtained from the Spanish lesson. When the persona ponders over Granada, he comes to the conclusion that when music and love are gone, life can still continue and fulfill itself.

> When music is lost (say, now)
> the story is still there, the hero alive
> . . . . . .
> even if he is killed in alien land

"Alien land" can be the homeland that is now alienated by a terrible "Irish" beauty, or a "Spanish" white terror. The owner of the house sighs, "But I am no longer myself / nor is my house my house," because the guitar is replaced by guns, the donkeys are taken over by the cavalry, and the music of romance is finally drowned in the staccato shooting. Such is the white terror caused by the state apparatus in Spain and in Taiwan. Such are the taboo games played by the poets, Lorca and Yang Mu. The invocation of the interdiction and the temptation to overstep the threshold create the tension in the midst of which "Taboo Games" is played. The poem is a game played to celebrate

Lorca; it is played to protest against the Spanish fascist regime in particular, and against all totalitarian rule in general. The persona is pondering over not only Granada, but also all marginalized places under oppression. The poignant contemplation can thus be related to the local setting of Taiwan.

Another poem on the Spanish theme, "Spain—1936," offers a less dramatic, but more meditative, approach to the same issues. This poem appeals to the world to account for the death of Spanish poets and philosophers in 1936.

Spain—1936

In the memories of olive trees, wishing to grasp
the philosophy of Miguel De Unamuno[16]
That must be 1936, before we
were born, in a place faraway
Miguel De Unamuno died; he died
in the existence of existentialism. That is 1936
In the memories of fig trees, a poet
died too; he did not exist in our existentialism
Federico Garcia Lorca

How does a nation make sense of
the death of poets and philosophers?
In 1936. How does a people
mourn for those hovering in the air
those souls that won't go away? I ask
"Can you answer me?" I search in your eyes
only to find a frustrating, cynical look
I wish to stay away, so once again I dash into
the mist

The murder of poets and philosophers in an age of existentialism demonstrates a denial of their existence, which is defined by their choice of and commitment to political beliefs. Under totalitarian rule, to those who have the courage to think and act otherwise, death is not final. The poem confronts the usual irresponsible, cynical attitudes of intellectuals who are good at explaining away guilt with their instrumental rationality. In retrospect, this poem, speaking against the white terror,

[16] A Spanish philosopher (1864-1936).

foreshadows the imminent KMT crackdown on nativists in the late 1970s. When men die for a cause in times of political persecution, they leave behind a question that demands an *answer.* It will return continually to punctuate and puncture subsequent history writing. Narratives of a nation and her people cannot be easily concluded; they confront and make sense of the deaths in "Spain—1936," in "Mei-li-tao—1979"—and in events of a similar kind throughout human history. 美麗島

Conclusion

With the Irish and Spanish themes, with the Indian and Chinese diasporas, Yang Mu interrogates the nationalist, *essentializing rubrics of the identity discourse in the 1970s by* joining a people and a home to world history. Dwelling in another place, speaking from a borrowed position of enunciation, the poet addresses the issues by a re-envisioning of the immediate present through re-contextualizing it in the past and the foreign. In the poems discussed, the nostalgia is "Irish," the political protests are "Spanish," and the postcolonial diasporic consciousness is "Indian." Yang Mu's writing is allegorical, moving across cultures and on the peripheries within a culture, composing a composite cultural identity which is at once local and global, one that is difficult if not impossible to nationalize. In so doing, Yang Mu's poems negotiate a cultural positioning in an ambivalent relationship with both the cultural China of the mainland and the ruling party in Taiwan. This precarious location of the site of identification in an interstice, in contrast to the binarism exhibited in the Modern Poetry Debate in the early 1970s and the subsequent Native Soil Literature Movement, pioneers the nativist discourse on internal otherness played out in the following decades. The nostalgia which Yang Mu has fashioned in an allegorical displacement is not a nostalgia for an epic heroism of an originary culture. It is the yearning for a site—"an-other" context where the pressing issues of the present can be situated and raised in a trove of awakened possibilities, which are otherwise foreclosed.[17]

[17] These allegorical attempts at discoursing identity politics, notably employed by Yang Mu in the 1970s, have been carried on in other sites of his writing. Besides *Selected Poems of W. B. Yeats*, his

Unlike the fable in which "one reads the moral back into the narrative" to contain a reader's experiences in a closure, allegory enables one to read the narrative in an inflexible form with self-reflexivity (Stewart 1991: 79). Allegory is a narrative attempt to bridge the incommensurability between vehicle and tenor that is always self-defeating for its self-definitive distance. Distance lends perspective and leaves room for comparison. Writing allegory, just as living in diaspora, allows the flight into exile to be followed by a re-conception of home from a distance, with a detached artistic posture. Yang Mu's poetic approach to Taiwanese identity politics in the 1970s entails an allegorical reading of the inside from the outside. This diasporic distance offers a global perspective to reflect on the "local" national discourse from the outside. By re-staging the suppressed histories of various foreign "national" precedents, his poems open up possibilities of re-reading a historical event from a new critical point of view. Writing allegory does not allow one to bypass local political controversies; it engages them more intensely in global historical contexts.

An Anthology of T'ang Poetry, published in 1993, shows conspicuous political and cultural concerns. T'ang poetry, representative of the Chinese poetic culture which the poet takes as the ultimate cultural referent, is re-configured in his "revised" edition. There is an additional perspective from the south. For example, to counteract the biased northern representation of the south as a squalid, barbaric place, he selects poems depicting the flora of the south, such as "coconut trees." The complexities Yang Mu discerns in the Taiwanese negotiations for a national/cultural identity are revealed in his answer to the question why he translated Yeats's poetry. "Yeats is Irish; he writes Irish poetry in English. I am a Taiwanese; I write Taiwan poetry in Chinese. Chinese culture is certainly the ultimate referent, but I hope to help Taiwan poetry find a form, a tradition" (Yang 1996: 4). To Yang Mu, apart from writing poetry, translating and editing can also permit allegorical participation in the re-conceptualization of identity.

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