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## Forms of World Literature and the Taipei Poetry Festival

Nick Admussen

In 2016, I sat in a lecture hall at the top of Taipei's palatial Eslite Book Store 誠品書店 and watched the Korean poet Ko Un 고은 (in Chinese Gao Yin 高銀) read and discuss his poetry. The event, which headlined the annual Taipei Poetry Festival, was deeply Korean—Ko Un spoke in Korean about elements of Korean history and culture—but it was also deeply Taiwanese, foregrounding Ko's experiences under Japanese occupation and his activism during Korea's long period of martial law, experiences which have strong analogues in Taiwanese cultural and political history. Additionally, the event was palpably an act of translation: Ko's interpreter Choi Mal-soon 崔末順, on stage alongside him, dominated the rhythm, tone, and quality of his communication with the audience, a communication that became two-way when the audience was allowed to ask questions. The community that came into being when Ko Un began to speak was affected, no doubt, by ideologies that accompany contemporary practices of "world" literature, but it was much more elementally shaped by the specific form of the poetry festival, the shape that world literature took in that moment. The forms through which we encounter transnational literature today are largely static: in poetry anthologies and works of literary criticism, the authority to select which literature can become "world" literature is concentrated in just a few sets of hands. When anthologies and scholarly monographs circulate texts as world literature, they often seem multivocal but they are usually structurally dominated by a single editor or theorist.

This essay contrasts those centralizations of authority with the more egalitarian and polyvocal structure of international poetry festivals. Using the 2016 Taipei Poetry Festival as an example, the essay reads the impact of the form of the festival on its audience's experience of translation, the local in the transnational, and intercultural solidarity. Because literary and social forms are constantly changing, and because scholars are key instigators in the creation of world literature, the essay then turns to a limitation of the contemporary festival form, and advocates translation into local vernaculars<sup>1</sup> as a means of avoiding audience boredom by translating foreign works into lived, dynamic languages.

### Form, Paratext, and World Community

By form, I mean the expansive definition of the concept that appears in Caroline Levine's *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network*. Levine understands literary forms as patterns that are mutually constituted with social forms. For example, as *Jane Eyre* recounts how Jane Eyre is trained by the daily rhythms of the Lowood School, the novel that bears her name reflects certain forms of social practice, reproduces them, and comments on them—all this in addition to creating a prose rhythm that also structures the experience of the reader (Levine 2015, 1–2). Literary and artistic forms have diverse, and often unrecognized, effects on social practice. One can visualize the political influence of the call-and-response tradition in African-American song, or the way that *Harry Potter's* fictive game of Quiddich has become a physical sport. Forms, Levine observes, are not monolithic systems of restraint, but dynamic structures that are most often experienced in collision with one another: the slave song was traditionally used both to resist and obey inside the structures of repetitive and dehumanizing work, and the adaptation of Quiddich into a real sport borrows rules from modern handball. By studying the work each literary and social form is most capable of doing (its

1 "Local" vernaculars here is intended to indicate *idioma* in Agamben's sense, the highly variable, predominantly oral languages learned in childhood, defined in contradistinction to transregional *grammatica* languages that are substantially influenced by their written form and accompanied by fixed sets of rules. See below.

“affordances”) and seeing form not as a totalizing unity but as a pattern in endless encounter with other patterns, Levine hopes to animate and apply the study of literature in a way that allows the swifter and more direct pursuit of radical politics (Levine 2015, 15–17). Some literary and social forms encourage, or afford, more or less equitable and just relationships between people: no pursuit of equity can matter as much as one that includes the identification and propagation of comparatively just forms.

This work is especially relevant to the task of the translator and other creators of world literature.<sup>2</sup> Crosscultural literature is comprised of the collision of heretofore unrelated forms, whether they be the English translation of Chinese tones (Manzanec 2016), the insertion of polysyllabic scientific language into Chinese formal poetry,<sup>3</sup> or the delicate problem of backtranslation that arises when already intercultural Chinese work is translated into English, where it is difficult to render the foreignness of transliterated structures from English language back to its native speakers. Seeing translation as the collision of disparate forms guides attention away from questions of fidelity and commensurability—we do not need to ask whether a translation is the “same as” the original, because we know it is not—and towards questions about the specific interaction between the form of the original and the form of the translation. Jonathan Abel identifies a way to answer these questions by applying concepts from Jean-Luc Nancy to the act of translation.

Translations do share something with the translated, but this sharing is not the communicating of one text’s message to another, the erasing of one by another, the domineering of one over another, or the embellishment of one text at the expense of the other. This sharing is the being-in-common, the standing-in-relations between two texts” (Abel 2005, 161).

Translated and perhaps lightly simplified, being-in-common means

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- 2 Indeed, Walter Benjamin’s essay ends in advocating for the form of parallel translation: his investigations of epistemology and ontology end in a decision about form.
  - 3 As in Lu Xun’s 魯迅 poem “My Lost Love” 我的失戀, from *Wild Grass* 野草.

community. Just as a child is not necessarily the servant, oppressor, or clone of the parent, the translation is not necessarily a version of the original text that has a predictable relationship to the original. Instead, the two exist in common with one another, as a family does, different but connected, defined by both their mutual difference and their shared identity. This attitude has a deep effect on the way one might write, or read, translation: Abel points out that “there is no transhistorically good translation” (2005, 153). The community built between the original text and the translation, between artists, translators, and audiences, exists in a social, political, and historical moment. As Levine argues, literary forms and social forms constantly interpenetrate. Translation, as a cooperative literary act that structures identities between texts, is a particularly apt example of this interpenetration. The being-in-common between translated and original texts provokes and reflects a being-in-common between artist and translator; those commonalities, alongside the variable relationships between original and translated texts, then connect local and foreign audiences.

This emphasis on community, and the new focus it provokes on the political impact of literary forms, reveals the location of some of the most definitive elements of world literature. The text of the average poem will in most cases not be read as a translation, or a piece of world literature. Without a paratext (textual material that accompanies the poem) or an epitext (textual material related to the poem that is read separately) that identifies it as a work of translation, any poem that includes foreign language or unfamiliar concepts can be easily read as a local work from an immigrant community, or an experimental text. In *What Is World Literature?*, David Damrosch says he “take[s] world literature to encompass all literary works that circulate beyond their culture of origin, either in translation or in their original language” (Damrosch 2003, 4). To assume that we will always know that a text has circulated across borders, even in the absence of an extratextual trace, is to obscure the way that world literature status arises from paratextual forms. In his conclusion, Damrosch points to the existence of “a few irreducibly multinational works like *The Thousand and One Nights*” (Damrosch 2003, 283). Because some of the stories in the *Thousand and One Nights* were first told by a Francophone storyteller, and because they have since

recirculated into French culture in countless ways, today there may be any number of young French people who encounter a version of the tale of Aladdin or Ali Baba as a local or endemic story, not necessarily cognizant of its original and partially erroneous identification as an Arabian story, reacting perhaps instead to the stories' affinities with European fable.<sup>4</sup> Depending upon the paratexts involved—the listing of a translator's name, or association with the title *Arabian Nights*, or the presence of an introduction—the status of the text as world literature changes.

This has been an active theoretical issue in the study of contemporary Chinese poetry ever since Stephen Owen wrote a book review titled “What Is World Poetry?” in which he argued that the work of Bei Dao 北島 was designed from the start to appeal to an imagined international audience, and was therefore not sufficiently Chinese (Owen 1990). Where it was successful, that epitext—Owen's essay—transformed Bei Dao's poetry from a Chinese text circulating internationally to a text born of a transnational cosmopolitan culture, powerless to cross the cultural border between the Westernized elite and the rest of China. The proliferation of the form of this kind of epitext, namely the assessment of an expert who determines the underlying cultural origin of a poem, has deeply shaped world literature from China. Today, there are still poets and critics who make strong claims about a particular poem's Chineseness in order to satisfy or violate the expectations of foreign readers.<sup>5</sup>

This essay will take a perspective on world literature that connects Levine's advocacy of the study of the political life of literary

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4 For more on the complex heritage of this story collection, see Bottigheimer 2014.

5 See, for example, Yu Jian's broad array of positions on the West and Chinese poetry as recorded in van Crevel 2008 (382–92). One interpretation of Yu's work is that he is attempting to appeal to poetry audiences through selectively rejecting and accepting connection to foreign cultures; another is that he is reclaiming the right to make pronouncements about Chineseness from scholars like Owen. For a darker set of interactions, one might consider the Chinese government's assertion that Nobel Prize laureate Gao Xingjian is a French author, even though much of his work was written within Chinese borders, about the lives of Chinese people, and most of it was written in Chinese.

forms with Abel's observation that literary translation creates a being-in-common between texts and people. This will provoke the examination of some basic formal qualities of the paratexts and epitexts of world literature. Cosima Bruno's 2012 essay "The Public Life of Contemporary Chinese Poetry in English Translation" represents, in many ways, the state of the art in reading paratexts: she examines the funding, publication history, and editorial politics of Chinese poetry in English translation, finding its dominant theme over the last thirty years to be a highly politicized, dissident stance that leveraged the notoriety of the Tiananmen Massacre in the Anglo-American world, as well as the presence of post-1989 exiles (Bruno 2012, 255–56). Her analysis shares much with other works attempting to move towards a sociology of world literature, or a study of its institutions.<sup>6</sup> The following sections will complement and complicate that work-in-progress by asking a formalist's question: how do the structures and shapes of moments of transnational communication of various kinds—such as the anthology, literary criticism, or the poetry festival—affect and determine the lived politics of world literature?

### **Authority and Discussability: Anthologies and Literary Criticism**

If literature becomes world literature when it travels outside its culture of origin, as Damrosch claims, then inclusion in a world literature anthology is itself sufficient to make any text into world literature. By nature of the anthology's form, the act of selecting works that will be grouped under the word "world" flows from an editorial decision. Such a structure affords a core authority that is absolute, and absolutist, and this is rarely as clear as it is in the case of world poetry anthologies.<sup>7</sup> They are, almost invariably, organized and selected by a single poet or a small group of poets, and often constructed around criteria that are neither transparent nor particularly transnational. In the *Ecco Anthology of World Poetry*,

6 See, for example, Helgesson and Vermeulen 2015.

7 More generalist, academic anthologies of world literature tend to federalize their authority, assigning different sections to specialists in the respective places and periods. This shares editorial authority and makes it less coherent, but does not decrease it.

editor Ilya Kaminsky writes straightforwardly about his selection criteria: “This book does not pretend or claim to be a representative anthology of contemporary world poetry. I had a single criterion for my selection: the quality of the poem in English” (Kaminsky and Harris 2010, xlvii-xlix).<sup>8</sup> Kaminsky’s selection depends on personal, English-language aesthetics; by repudiating the anthology’s role as a survey, he centers the power of his own taste over the shape of the anthology. Other editors couch their positions in one or another objective-sounding stance, as in the *Vintage Book of Contemporary World Poetry*, where J. D. McClatchy writes “The basis of all poetry, said Aristotle, is metaphor. Nothing can be freshly or truly seen in itself until it is seen first as something else. It is this image-making impulse that unifies world poetry, and gives it its spiritual force” (McClatchy 1996, xxvi). The content of his definition, which seems to argue that world poetry is both the reification and proof of core Western traditions of poetry, reaches its authoritarian narrowness through the power of the introduction’s form, in which the poetry editor dictates the nature of the anthology, world poetry, and poetry itself, to an audience assumed not to know.

The affordance of the form of the anthology means that inside a collection of world poetry, editors can do nearly anything, even repeal the core concepts of world literature. In *Language for a New Century: Contemporary Poetry from the Middle East, Asia and Beyond*, the “Asia and Beyond” often means various English-speaking regions, including the United States—of the sixty-eight poems by Chinese-surnamed poets in the anthology, only thirty-four poems are translations (Chang et. al. 2008).<sup>9</sup> In the anthology’s valedictory “list

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8 Although there are two editors listed on the book’s cover, the foreword establishes that Kaminsky was responsible for poem selection, and Harris for other duties.

9 Census-taking of this nature is always complex and problematic. It is especially difficult to distinguish between Anglophone poets whose primary residence is in Singapore or Hong Kong (potentially a substantial number of poets in the anthology), and whose primary residence is in Australia, the United States, or Great Britain. Some writers, however, are well-known as Anglophone Chinese-American writers—Cathy Song, Li-Young Lee, and the book’s editor, Tina Chang (the poet laureate of Brooklyn) all have poems included.



of languages,” however, English does not appear, even though it is clearly the anthology’s most common language of composition (Chang et. al. 2008, 682). Again, the particular standpoint of the anthology’s editors, in this case elaborately and thoughtfully justified in the introduction through logics of diaspora, is less important than the range of choices available to them. If editors have the power to recirculate English-language poetry as transnational literature in the communities where they were originally published, then there is no clear constitutive minimum requirement for an anthology to become a moment of world literature save for the willingness and ability of the editor to employ its tropes.

If *Language for a New Century* and other anthologies enter into any dialogue as works of world literature, they do so via paratext, either in introductions of individual artists or poems, or in introductions by the editor. The intensity and type of paratext largely determine the extent to which the specific nature of the authority of an anthology can be discussed, and hence the reader’s opportunity to situate and engage with the shape of this authority. At one end lies the method of Jeffrey Paine’s *The Poetry of Our World*, which hands over the China section of the anthology to Perry Link, Bei Dao, and Maghiel van Crevel, who together situate and contextualize the translations in question. Their subtly different positions—with Bei Dao emphasizing the historical importance of underground, *samizdat* poets like Shizhi 食指 during the Cultural Revolution (Paine 2000, 435), and Link and van Crevel emphasizing the totality of restrictions on poetic publication between the late 1940s and the 1970s (439)—visibly perform the contradictions and complexities that any editor of this material must face. It is extremely rare for an English-language anthology of world poetry to give paratextual space to a poet from another country, for to do so is to subject the authority of the editors to discussion. *The Poetry of Our World* does not feature any poems by Shizhi, but at the very least, the nature of its paratext provokes readers to ask why that is the case.

Most anthologies contain less paratextual material: McClatchy’s 1996 *Vintage Book of Contemporary World Poetry* includes a capsule biography of each poet that ends with just a single-sentence assessment of the poet’s aesthetics. The biographies connect individual poets with political contexts in a way that encourages the

kind of focus on dissidence that Bruno finds to be representative of Chinese-English translation generally.<sup>10</sup> At the other end of the spectrum, Kaminsky's *Ecco Anthology of International Poetry* has nothing but the editor's introduction as paratext, in which he reflects on the pictographic nature of Chinese and the difficulty of translating Japanese into English in a way that underlines his distance from these traditions. The introduction demonstrates that rather than determining, for example, the comparative advantages and disadvantages of including state-sponsored poets like Lei Shuyan 雷抒雁, the editor is instead trying to understand what the basic form of Chinese characters signifies. This moment, in which the editor's ability to understand the passage of poetry from Chinese to English becomes a potential topic for discussion, does not decrease the anthology's authority, because that authority is formal, absolute. Instead, it makes the shape of that authority legible and opens it to epitextual critique.

Poetry anthologies, however, provide only a limited space for the discussability of their authority.<sup>11</sup> The form of world literature that truly excels in examining authority through discussion is literary criticism. It may seem counterintuitive to think of literary criticism itself as a moment of world literature, but few other forms occasion as much translational and transnational contextualization of literature as literary criticism does. A particularly good limit case for the examination of the interplay between discussion and authority in world literary criticism is Emily Apter's *Against World Literature: The Politics of Untranslatability*, in which she reorients the undertaking of world literature around the question of the untranslatable even as she engages, as her form requires, in the repeated practice of translation and transcultural movement of literary texts. Apter's monograph is largely concerned with the translation of philosophical and theoretical terms, but she rightly

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10 For example, Shu Ting's 舒婷 biography (430) starts with her experience in the Cultural Revolution, moves to her interest in foreign literature, and ends like this: "Her poems search the emotional life for signs of what lies beneath and beyond the self."

11 *The Poetry of Our World*, which features nearly the maximum amount of paratextual material, contains nine pages of prose about Chinese poetry, and only six pages of translated Chinese poetry.

makes no distinction between the untranslatability of poetry and the untranslatability of philosophy. Indeed, she approvingly cites Derrida, who said “Poetry is at the heart of philosophy: the poem is a philosopheme” (Apter 2013, 242). And yet consistently, perhaps unavoidably, the volume traffics in the same structures of “cultural equivalence and substitutability” that it criticizes (2). Early in the discussion, for example, Apter introduces a passage from the *Communist Manifesto* with the phrase “Marx and Engels wrote:” and then reproduces the 1888 English translation of Marx and Engels by Samuel Moore (18). The Moore translation was endorsed by Engels, who could read and write English, but the paragraph Apter cites was assuredly not *written* by Marx or Engels. Why is this language acceptable in a work intended to draw attention to the lacunae implicit in the transcultural movement of texts? It is acceptable because Apter, like any other good scholar, cites her source as Moore’s translation at the bottom of the page and follows the Marx quote with a long examination by Jonathan Arac of some of the more complex valences of the original German. The form of literary criticism, in its insistence upon annotation and in its structural habit of framing and analyzing quotations, affords readers the chance to reconstruct and engage with the “cultural equivalence and substitutability” of translated passages.

The kind of contextualization, comparison, analysis of translation and intertextuality that anthologies of world poetry afford weakly and that literary criticism affords strongly—what I am here calling discussability—is not, in the final analysis, discussion. Even with the mark of five writers in one text (Apter, Marx, Engels, Moore, and Arac), it is still the monovocal production of the monograph’s author, a singular moment of authority. Even if, as Apter occasionally does, an author chooses to reproduce texts and contexts that contradict their own position, her authority remains near-total. The passage that Apter cites and examines from the English translation of the *Communist Manifesto* is this one:

In place of the old local and national seclusion and self sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal interdependence of nations. And as in material, so also in intellectual production. The intellectual creations of individual nations become common

property [...] and from the numerous national and local literatures, there arises a world literature (18).

Apter follows this quote with Arac's examination of the German word *Verkehr*, represented in this paragraph by "intercourse," arguing that the word's alternate definitions as "to turn over" or "to screw up" insinuates the inversions and disruptions of global intellectual intercourse. In fact, what seems like the unpacking and complication of the assumption of substitutability—Apter using Arac to point out not only that the English of the translation is not equal to the German of the original, but also to highlight the chaotically transformative effect that takes place when literature becomes transnational "common property"—hinges on the assumption of the substitutability of the rest of the passage. In order to believe that the passage is relevant to contemporary conversations about world literature, one might feel the need to establish that Marx and Engels' 1848 concept of *Weltliteratur* (translated "World Literature") is culturally equivalent to world literature as proposed by Damrosch and others. We could also trouble the identity between "intellectual products" in the English and "geistigen Erzeugnisse" in the German. The latter is more abstract, raising the question of whether the passage speaks of a form of concrete economic production and therefore of a blameworthy capitalist practice (as the English seems to insinuate), or speaks—in the abstract—of a type of non-economic spiritual creation, a single global ideology which prepares the ground for the global struggle of labor against capital. The situation collapses to that of the poetry anthology: not every gloss for every term can be selected, not every poem can be reprinted, and it falls to the theorist of translation just as it falls to the anthology's editor to decide what can be discussed and what will not.

In the form of the anthologist's introductory and biographical paratexts, as well as in the theorist's analysis, the leavening of authority provided by paratexts that discuss or explain world literature is ultimately fictive—not a being-in-common of the foreign author or reader with the local reader, but a simulation of such, selected and composed by an editor or theorist. Like Bakhtin's polyphony in the novel, in which one author writes a variety of independent and contradictory voices, the anthology and the critical monograph

reproduce multiple voices under the aegis of a single person or group. Individual anthologies and critical works may be more or less representative, more or less responsible, or more or less connected to foreign literary practice. Their shared *form*, however, allows them to range from a valorization of Greek supremacy to the reproduction of local work as world literature to the interlingual transparency of Marxist theory. At heart, they are monovocal. In many ways, these forms feel and act like non-parallel translations: without an empowered presence of the foreign text, they ultimately fail to give the reader tools to judge the particular quality of their being-in-common.

There are, however, occasions in both forms when cracks in these authoritative traditions become visible: Bei Dao's moment of agency in *The Poetry of Our World*, or the heterogeneous content of the works that Apter cites. If world literature is to escape domination by academic, aesthetic, political, and economic authorities, one place to start is the search for social and literary forms whose transculturality is truly multivocal, occasions in which artists and audiences from different places and language backgrounds read and discuss poetry together. International poetry festivals are just such an occasion. We will now turn to an example of that form, and ask whether and how its construction of world literature shares or distributes authority.

### The Taipei Poetry Festival

The 2016 Taipei Poetry Festival was comprised of about fifteen events, ranging from poetry readings to scholarly conversations to workshops to a dance performance. It lasted for sixteen days between October 8 and October 23. Sponsored by the Taipei city government and with a budget in excess of four million New Taiwan Dollars (more than \$130,000 USD), the festival invited nine poets from Korea, mainland China, France, Japan, Hong Kong, Myanmar, the Philippines, and Spain, as well as two scholars from Japan. Organizers estimate that the complete attendance throughout the festival, including large-scale events like the dance performance and book exhibitions, reached 27,000 people.<sup>12</sup> At poetry readings and

12 Thanks to festival organizer and literature professor Chia-hsien Yang 楊佳嫻 for details about attendance and budgeting.

discussions that I attended, crowds ranged from eighty or so up to a couple hundred. The festival was first held in 2000 and is now held annually.

There was a moment at the beginning of a panel at the festival when the panel's host, avant-garde poet and editor Hung Hung 鴻鴻, introduced the panel's participants: Korean poet Ko Un, Taiwanese contemporary literature scholar Chen Fangming 陳芳明, and author Guo Hanchen 郭漢辰. He started the discussion like this: "First, I'd like to ask... (laughs). Ah, yes. We also have our... serving as oral interpreter, but she is also a scholar, professor Choi Mal-soon" 那，我想今天就先請……哦，對，還有我們翻……當口譯的，其他是一位學者，崔末順老師……Then he asked Choi to read a short introduction to Ko's collection *Maninbo* or *Ten Thousand Lives*.<sup>13</sup> This was a delicate moment, with several layers. Although Choi was the only bilingual person on the stage as well as the only specialist in the interaction between modern Korean literature and modern Taiwanese literature (she is a professor at National Chengchi University), she was also the only translator on stage, the least famous participant in the eyes of the majority-Taiwanese audience, the only woman, and the only person on stage whose name did not appear in the program.<sup>14</sup> In print, she disappears quite easily from the discussion; during the event, the presence of her body and the primacy of her role made Hung's omission of her introduction a visibly embarrassing oversight. This dissonance was caused by the encounter between expectations about world literature and the form of the international poetry festival. As is so often the case, the demands of the form prevailed over other concerns. Any preference for the illusion that the scholars and writers present were in direct communication was overcome easily by the structural need for real-

13 At the panel 以個人記憶詩寫失血的歷史 (Using the Poetry of Individual Memory to Write a Blood-Soaked History) on October 9, 2016. This moment was recorded and is available on Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oyzTX9xjDrg>, at the two-minute mark.

14 *Taipei Poetry Festival Program* 臺北詩歌節目手冊 2016 (5). This is the small schedule and introduction of events that was available free at all readings and panels; its information is identical to the list of participants displayed at the panel (and visible on the Youtube recording). Choi appears in none of the materials.

time translation.

As Apter argues, ideologies of world literature, trafficking as they do in the identity of texts between one place and another, do not require and rarely reward a vision of the translator as creator, innovator, conceptual problem, or power broker. In Damrosch's claim that world literature is all literary works that circulate beyond their culture of origin, transnationality is something a text does, not something done to texts by the people that transmit and reproduce them. The absolute necessity of identifying Choi Mal-soon at the festival is much closer to the real role of the translator in worlding literature: without a person who is versed in Taiwanese language as well as in Korean literature, there can be no Ko Un performance in Taipei. The physical and intellectual presence of Ko Un in Taipei was wholly dependent on the presence of someone willing to interpret for him, for his hosts, and for the audience. The ability of the other speakers present to address and engage with Ko Un—a substantial honor, especially if he wins a Nobel Prize for Literature, as some at the festival were predicting—empowered the interpreter, as Professor Choi was not just the Korean-Chinese translator for Ko Un, but the Chinese-Korean translator for the other panelists present. Choi's power was not simply interlinguistic, but intercultural: in order to be able to render literary Korean into literary Chinese and vice versa, she has had to accumulate a wealth of context, history, and linguistic experience. She was therefore the natural choice to set the historical and cultural stage for *Maninbo*, further enabling and shaping the contributions of the other panelists present.

Functionally, what all this means is that while the event took place, Professor Choi's microphone had to be turned on and had to stay on. She had the ability and license to speak at any time. Unlike anthologies and works of criticism, in which the translator's agency becomes an instrument of the editor or theorist, a poetry festival cannot long survive without empowering its interpreters. This is a purely formal, and not ideological, state of affairs: when creating print forms, the festival organizers were not particularly sensitive to the importance of translators. In the festival's anthology (Hung Hung 2016), printed to provide text versions of all the poems read and discussed during the events, the majority of Ko Un's poetry (seventeen poems) are translated by Cao Yuxuan 曹玉鈞, a professional but

nonliterary Korean-Chinese translator who graduated from Chengchi University, and a minority (four poems) are translated by Jin Danshi 金丹實, who has met Ko Un and published collections of his verse in Chinese.<sup>15</sup> Neither translator has a biography or any copyright or prior publication announcement in the festival's anthology. Anthologies can, of course, include such information, but they do not have to, assuredly not in the way that the Taipei Poetry Festival had to hand the microphone over to Choi Mal-soon.<sup>16</sup>

Audiences at international poetry festivals *must*, and in fact are in attendance in order to, experience poetry in its original language. This is not true for poetry anthologies and works of criticism, even those rare examples whose translations are printed in parallel with original-language texts. Part of the reason that none of the English-language anthologies of world poetry print their works in the original language is that print work's visual organization is *nebeneinander* (side by side), simultaneous, and makes it possible for readers to skip language they don't understand. Live performance, by contrast, is *nacheinander*, one thing happening after another, and audiences choose to be present, to encounter the full original-language piece. The practice of hearing a foreign original, even if one cannot understand it, is an aesthetic experience that foregrounds the untranslatability of the physical sounds of poetry. As Wolfgang Kubin points out, this is a *Weltklang*, a world sound that should rightly be integral to world literature: although listening to an

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15 Cao's other translation credits are typified by recipe books like *Salad Notes* 沙拉筆記 and culinary stories for children like *Tidie's Present* 提蒂安的禮物. Jin is the translator of *The Spring Can Be Buried: Selected Poems of Ko Un* 春天得以安葬：高銀詩選 (2016). For more background on the relationship between Jin and Ko Un, see <https://read01.com/aLkLOO.html>.

16 An instructive example of this appears in the generally scrupulous permissions section of the *Ecco Anthology of International Poetry* (533). Zhai Yongming's translated excerpt from "Fourteen Plainsongs" appears with permission of the author and translator, but Zhang Er's "Cross River. Pick Lotus" has permission only from the poem's author, not the translator, Rachel Levitsky. My own experience and that of fellow translators suggests that many see their work anthologized without their permission.



unintelligible foreign poem is not strictly equal to understanding its original language, the practice makes art of world literature's limits (Kubin 2011). Like the presence of Choi Mal-soon, the gap between the original language of composition and the language of performance is necessarily present, as a result of the festival's form. Festivals are structured in this way for the same reason that some works of criticism include original language alongside translations, with both works welcoming, or at least envisioning, the presence of bilingual and multilingual audiences. The being-in-common they structure is not simply that of a second-language audience encountering foreign literature, but that of speakers and readers of many languages coming together to experience literary work in a context that is already transnational, not in a transnational moment uniquely created by an editor or publisher.

In the absence of an audience survey, it is hard to know how many audience members at the festival were bilingual speakers of the languages that festival interpreters were translating into Chinese. My own experience of attending events featuring the French poet Frances Combes and the English-speaking Filipino poet Conchitina Cruz<sup>17</sup> was that the experience was vastly richer when an audience member understands both the source and target languages of performance. In place of anxiety over the invisible flattening of the source language, translation from (for example) English into Chinese serves as an immediate gloss on the poetic text, layering the aesthetic and conceptual experience of the original work with the music and ideas of the translation.<sup>18</sup> Poetry festivals offer what anthologies do to their readership—the opportunity to see new work from unfamiliar foreign languages—but also give initiated audiences, including immigrants and students, a rare chance to see writers from the traditions in question outside the regions in which they usually perform. The administrators and funding agencies of the Taipei Poetry Festival are quite clear on the way that transnational being-in-common provokes the need for the being-in-common of their

17 Respectively, the events were “Postcards from France” 來自法國的明信片, October 8, 7:30 PM and 如何介入憂鬱的邊界 (Intervening Across the Borders of Depression), October 22, 4:30 PM.

18 For a theory of translation as, among other things, hermeneutic interpretation, see Bruno 2012b.

audience. In her introduction to the festival anthology, the city's cultural commissioner Xie Peini 謝佩霓 writes about the festival's twin goals:

On the one hand, it highlights the position of Taipei City; embraced by mountains and ocean, Taipei lies on the island's northern tip, linking the past and present, and has become both a transit point and a meeting point for different routes of Asia; on the other hand, the aim is also to bring literary exchange that belongs to Asia itself [...] (Hung Hung 2016, 5)

Regardless of the ideological underpinnings of these goals—which bring to mind the Taiwanese government's sub-imperial or neo-colonial relations to Southeast Asia and Japan, respectively,<sup>19</sup> or even a manner of engaging in the long diplomatic struggle for Taiwan to be recognized as something other than a renegade Chinese province—their pursuit has produced a formal arrangement in which world literature is performed collaboratively by people from many regions, and received simultaneously as product and as process by different parts of the same audience. This is a politically potent form of being-in-common: it is a single, shared moment experienced in diverse ways by a heterogeneous population.

The festival's particular shape of being-in-common is structured not around the connections between source-language texts and target-language texts, or around the encounter between a reader fluent in one language and a text brought into that language. Instead, it is a literal collocation of readers, writers, and translators from disparate cultural and intercultural spaces. By the beneficence of its form, the poetry festival allows not a fictive discussability in which one author or editor cites and organizes many voices, but a real discussion in which authors address translators, audience members ask questions, and assessments by scholars are subject to the commentary of both audience and author. The single authority of the author or editor is dissolved by the form's demand that each of the constituencies present have their own moment with the microphone and their own manner of addressing those who attend the event.

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19 These histories and ambitions are outlined in Chen 2010.

Unlike editors or authors, the organizers of the festival have little control over what is done or said during individual sessions—something that is clearly on display when an audience question goes on too long or when an interpreter encounters difficulties, and the audience starts shouting suggestions.<sup>20</sup> Because events are in real-time and not edited for consumption, the real variety of relationships between cultures in world literature is both possible and visible, including error, orthogonal interpretation, interlinguistic play, and the performance of the untranslatability of sound. The appearance of these instabilities further shifts authority away from the organizers and towards authors, interpreters, and audience members, who are tasked with performing and assessing the relationship between the source text and the translation during the performance.

The increased authority of the interpreter and the audience provided by the form of the literary festival was visible in the politics of the work selected for the festival in Taipei. Participants were invited, no doubt, on the basis of a variety of practical considerations, from availability to international reputation, but it seems clear that they were additionally selected at least in part to enliven latent or lived transnationalities in Taiwanese life. Ko Un's work—moving as it does between Japanese occupation, the military and ideological struggles of the Cold War, a culturally and politically repressive martial law, and a personal fight for democracy—has multiple, parallel connections to twentieth-century Taiwanese experience, which also began in Japanese occupation and freed itself at great cost from martial law and White Terror as the twentieth century progressed. Ko Un's tools, furthermore, are familiar to the Taiwanese: he mastered the Chinese classics as a child before committing himself to institutional Buddhism, later to leave the clergy in order to pursue democratic activism.<sup>21</sup> The descriptions of events featuring Ko Un were built around these transnational identities, turning them into direct transnational conversations. The program book reads: "Korea and Taiwan both experienced similar history. Many people protested the regime, and became victims of the autocratic government. Ko

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20 This did not happen, at least in my experience, during the 2016 festival, but it is certainly an affordance of the form.

21 This capsule biography is taken from Kim 1993.

and Taiwanese poets writing about injustice and narrative style are together to talk about how to address the wound of history” 藉由《萬人譜》作者現身說法，並邀請擅長敘事詩寫作、關懷現實的臺灣詩人參與對談，召喚對於歷史傷口的關注 (2016 *Taipei Poetry Festival Program*, 5).<sup>22</sup>

Other transnationalities structured events at the festival, including a workshop featuring Conchitina Cruz on the lives and art of Filipino migrant workers in Taipei, one that was designed “to call upon migrant workers who are interested in writing. Participants are encouraged to talk, read poetry, and write with others to share their feelings away from home” 來自菲律賓的詩人康琪汀娜，十分關注同胞在其他國家的生活，特地策劃這場詩作坊 (2016 *Taipei Poetry Festival Program*, 23).<sup>23</sup> A panel hosted by a Japanese scholar of Taiwanese literature was titled “Heteromorphism of the Island Sentiment” 島嶼抒情異相, drawing an implicit comparison between the island culture of Japan and that of Taiwan. Cross-regional sentiment was perhaps sharpest in events about Hong Kong, as in the description for the panel titled “Life in Hong Kong and Event-Recording Poetry” 香港生活與即事詩 (alternately translatable as “Hong Kong Life and the Poems It Inspires”): “Literary exchange between Hong Kong and Taiwan has most often been intimate, warm, mutually intertextual, and collaborative” 香港與臺灣的文學交流，素來緊密而熱烈，相互援引、借鑒 (2016 *Taipei Poetry Festival Program*, 21). The source of this intimacy and warmth is in plain sight for most readers from Greater China. As two regions containing citizens who struggle for autonomy from the People’s Republic, poetics developed in one region could be both legible and effective in the other.

In these and other events at the Festival, the shared project seems to be the inscription of the local in the transnational. Rather

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22 Note that the English and the Chinese, both taken directly from the program, are quite different: specifically, the politics shared by Ko and Taiwanese poets are explicitly stated in the English, and are probably so obvious as to need no explanation in Chinese (for instance, “writing about injustice” renders 關懷現實, or “caring about facts.”

23 Slightly corrected. Tellingly, the Chinese makes it clear that it was Cruz who designed the event, another small example of power-sharing between organizers and artists.

than selecting work to produce a historical survey of foreign literature, or according to the pre-existing preferences of a generalized native-language audience, the “quality of the poem in English” as in the *Ecco* anthology, the Taipei festival seemed to select works while considering both the predilections and the potential transformations of their audience: what could they learn? How would their past experiences color their reception of poems? The audience therefore exerted a much more directly transformative influence on the content of the festival. This follows naturally from the way that poetry festivals survive or collapse according to their ability to attract audiences—and thus to secure public or private sponsorship, regardless of their ideological program.<sup>24</sup> The negotiated interaction between audiences, interpreters, and artists exemplifies one of Damrosch’s core criticisms of extant world literature: citing Miyoshi and Venuti, he claims that the “postwar reception of texts from Japan or from Italy often had more to do with American interests and needs than with genuine openness to other cultures” (Damrosch 2003, 17-18). This criticism amounts to an assertion of scholarly authority over what “genuine openness” means, and seems to insinuate that “genuine” interest in foreign culture necessarily includes a repudiation of local values. But scholars have been no more successful in rejecting local values than any other reading public. Damrosch’s solution to this situation, which is to eschew “presentism” and focus on historical texts, can read as nakedly imperialistic—a local value, one must admit, still current in Euro-American scholarly institutions. Presentism, he argues,

[...] leaves out of account the dramatic ways in which the canons of the earlier periods themselves are being reshaped through new

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24 The sponsorship structure of the Taipei festival works this way: the city government, as well as twenty-four other sponsoring, collaborating, and partnering organizations, receive most of the benefits of sponsorship only if an audience arrives (whether those benefits be in the form of advertising, cultural education, or civic transformation). This is slightly different from commercial presses, which receive their benefits upon sale whether a book is read or not, and quite different from university publishers, who have a variety of ways to assess a book’s “impact” that don’t include the presence of a large audience.

attention to all sorts of long-neglected but utterly fascinating texts [...] One of the most exciting features of contemporary literary studies is the fact that all periods as well as all places are up for fresh examination and open to new configurations (Damrosch 2003, 17).

The cost of this position is spelled out in Rey Chow's essay "On Chineseness as a Theoretical Problem," which can easily expand to encompass the Western study of non-Chinese traditions:

The Western Sinologist thus joins the ranks of enlightened progressives engaged in the task of salvaging the remains of great ancient civilizations. Since it is no longer possible to interview the natives of ancient China [...] the texts left behind by them will need to be upheld as evidence of their essential ethnic difference (Chow 2013, 51).

Recourse to ancient texts as a method of avoiding polluting collocations between the local and the foreign, and the visible excitement at the "freshness" of the commodity of ancient texts, valorized as if for the first time by Western attention, are both symptoms of the centralization of authority in the target-language scholar, who can monopolize the specialization in ancient languages and who experiences traditional texts as exotic objects. This is no more genuine an interest in foreign literature than that experienced by the audiences at poetry festivals. Their authenticity comes from the perception of potential connections between their local lives and literature abroad, and their hunger to hear other traditions speak to local concerns is tempered not by a focus on pre-transnational literary history, but by the physical, ideological, and aesthetic presence of foreign and bicultural writers and thinkers. In this way, the poetry festival is one way to, as Apter says, make "comparative literature geopolitically case-sensitive and site-specific in ways that avoid reproducing neo-imperialist cartographies" (Apter 2013, 42).

Without attention to the social affordance of literary forms, Apter's request is unfulfillable. With that attention, we can see that the form of the international poetry festival affords a particular set of useful and potentially powerful intercultural interactions. Because

the form requires physical and temporal being-in-common, it empowers interpreters and subjects translation to examination, criticism and discussion—it creates a comparatively anti-authoritarian and anti-imperialist cartography. Because the form requires the performance of original texts in front of audiences of mixed language ability, festivals also formally feature the untranslatability of sound, and the “gap between the discourse on translation and the experience of it,” in Antoine Berman’s phrase.<sup>25</sup> Because individual festivals live or die according to the interest of audiences, organizers, original language authors, and interpreters must all constantly engage with local experience, building commonality between foreign literature and native life. Misprisions by the uninitiated local audience, mistaken translation, and the instrumentalization of the foreign voice for local needs are necessarily part of the process, but they are potentially checked by bilingual audience members, transnational scholars, and the artists themselves. The authority that is centralized in anthologies and literary criticism is shared among several constituencies at the poetry festival; the discussability of literary works that is simulated in anthologies and literary criticism becomes a set of real verbal exchanges during and after festival events. The being-in-common of translation at festivals is matched by physical being-in-common and sociohistorical commonality. Because the communities they form are structured by rules that are comparatively egalitarian, poetry festivals are worth careful study as moments of world literature. They are also worth questioning and improving.

### The Grammatica and the Question of Boredom

International poetry festivals are not utopian transcultural spaces, and their form also affords a particular type of monotony that limits audience size and paralyzes transformative interactions. When I attended the panel on “Hong Kong Life and the Poems It Inspires” mentioned above,<sup>26</sup> I felt something particular and unusual happen

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25 Apter citing Berman, see Apter 2013 (295).

26 Wednesday, October 19, 2016, 7:30 PM, at the Yueyue Bookstore 閱樂書店, with Yam Gong 飲江 and Chris Song 宋子江, hosted by Chiahsien Yang 楊佳嫻.

near the start of the panel. As the event wasn't recorded, this sensation is unprovable, but during the introduction and the beginning of the presentation by the Cantonese poet Yam Gong 飲江, I heard an unusual amount of laughter for an international poetry festival—and the laughter wasn't provoked by the translation of Yam's comments, but came immediately after he spoke in Cantonese. As a non-Cantonese speaker, I had the sense not only that something interesting and fun was happening that wasn't present at the rest of the festival, but also that it wasn't available to me as a Mandarin speaker. The notable and diverting presence of that fun indicates, I believe, the frequent presence of boredom and un-fun at poetry festivals and potentially at poetry events generally.

The relationship between poetry and boredom may be fundamental—that is to say, formal. Boredom may be one of the affordances of the form of contemporary poetry. American poet Kwame Davis puts it this way:

A lot of the poetry we are reading in new books, new journals, and on line, is dead boring. It is boring because the folks are writing about things that really are not interesting. I mean *really* interesting—stuff that makes us say, “Wow, I am being changed by what I am reading here!” (Davis 2010, np)

His focus on the origins of boredom in the propensity for readerly change is echoed strongly by the philosopher of boredom, Lars Svendsen, who theorizes boredom as the absence of meaning where “meaning is related to a person's goal-oriented use of the world” (Svendsen 2005, 29). Davis' “wow” moment and Svendsen's division of experience into the existentially useful and the existentially useless are two sides of the same coin: as we become able to bring change about, we also change, especially in the realm of the philosophical and spiritual that is so often affected by poetry. Alterity and novelty are not in and of themselves enough to combat boredom. Sianne Ngai argues that astonishment at the unfamiliar is often experienced simultaneously to the dulling of the senses that we experience as boredom, and calls the combination “stuplimity” (Ngai 2004, 271). She writes: “[...] when language thickens, it suffers a ‘retardation by weak links,’ slowed down by the absence of causal connectives that



would propel the work forward” (256). “Forward,” here, although not defined by Ngai, fits neatly into Svendsen’s “goal-oriented use” and Davis’ “wow”—forward towards difference in the reader, towards futurity.

Poetry has, of course, many uses, and different uses for different audiences, and Davis’ opinions about the content of poetry (paraphrased, he advocates for a poetry that records interesting or complex lives) are outside the scope of this paper, which is interested in the form of the performance of world poetry. To which uses are the structures of international poetry festivals best applied? And if there is a sensation that some events, or some moments during some events, are not interestingly useful to their audiences, can those formal structures be changed? Ngai’s observation about language thickening, drawn from twentieth-century writers like Gertrude Stein and Samuel Beckett, is clearly at play during the bilingual experience of simultaneously translated poetry. As one begins to attend to the connections between the source language and the target language, and see the multifarious influence of the interpreter, one complicates and layers the clean, directional transfer of emotion and experience that motivates some audiences to listen to poetry. The shock-effect of seeing the number of potential decisions, interventions, and occlusions that take place when a poem is translated can result in a kind of overwhelmed irritation, the mind struggling directionlessly through a network of “weak links.” The boredom this reaction can produce is that of the avant-garde poetry that Ngai studies: not a lack of meaning, but a bewildering excess of possibility through which listeners can learn to navigate. Whether or not it is pleasant, this potential for boredom is not a conceptual or political weakness. In many ways, this polyglot stuplimity matches the valuable alienness and repetition of the study of foreign language itself.

Most audience members at international poetry festivals, however, are not engaging in this layered, interlingual experience: they understand the target language of translation and not the source, not to mention that there might be multiple different sources in action. At the Taipei Poetry Festival, this meant that most audience members understood Mandarin (or Modern Standard Chinese), and not the original language of performance. Furthermore, the subset of audience members who enjoyed the Yam Gong performance the

most weren't laughing at his Mandarin translation, nor were they laughing at the interplay between Cantonese and Mandarin—they were interested in the original Cantonese, before the translation intervened. The monolingual Cantonese experience had something that the monolingual Mandarin experience, at least mostly, lacked. The formal difference between these two parts of the events is the language of their delivery.

By rereading Dante's *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, Giorgio Agamben refreshes stultified notions of the difference between "dead" languages and "living" languages. Latin, he argues, had persisted as a living language: it is a *grammatica*, a language that lives among scholars and the erudite, a language of knowledge used to unite readers and writers across time and space. It is contrasted with *idioma*, our native or primary local vernaculars, the languages in which we perform most of our personally important activity, including the learning of *grammatica*. Agamben writes that

the vernacular can follow only "use," not "art;" and it is, therefore, necessarily transient and subject to continual death. To speak in the vernacular is precisely to experience this incessant death and rebirth of words, which no grammar can fully treat (Agamben 1999, 54).

This distinction, I believe, exists inside the English language today as a matter of degree. English as it is learned in Missouri (or Perth, or Bombay) shades towards an *idioma*, and English as we write and read it in pages like these is pitched towards the *grammatica*, although there is substantial overlap in all cases. The difference between Mandarin and the other Sinitic languages is much more substantial. Because Modern Standard Chinese is, in many ways, a language that was synthesized in the early twentieth century, it has for much of its history been a native language to few, and has only weakly received the influence of those who experience it as a primary language of use. Other Sinitic languages, by contrast, often lack their own orthography, educational institutionalization, well-circulated academic grammars, fixed rules, and other qualities that would extend their reach across

time and space.<sup>27</sup> At the festival, original works and foreign-language commentaries appeared in a variety of languages, each with their own place on the continuum between grammatica and idioma. Universally, though, they were translated into the grammatica of Mandarin Chinese, rather than regional idioma like Hokkien, the native language of seventy percent of Taiwan's population. The moment of particular interest in Yam Gong's performance was a moment of the appearance of idiomatic Cantonese<sup>28</sup>—a joyous appearance of language available to the immediate “goal-oriented use” of part of the audience.

Several quality studies have focused on the political, social, and literary role of Chinese idioma, but they tend to touch only obliquely on the concrete uses of vernacular Sinitic language in individual life, what Svendsen would call the “personal meaning” of these languages. Edward Gunn points out that outside of the bonds of state suppression, local languages proliferate in popular media, and he gives a strong theoretical and political explanation, but only implies the source of the pleasure speakers take in vernacular Chinese.<sup>29</sup> Chinese idioma are languages of comedy; they are languages of wordplay; they both create and represent social bonds between individuals; they are also often languages of emotion, learned and used in the affective space of the family rather than the bureaucratic, economic spaces of school and business. They are performative, inextricable from their physical context, whether that content be gestural or regional. For their native speakers, they are *fun*; the grammatica, for all its importance, is work. At international poetry festivals like Taipei's, even though local interpreters face local audiences in a performance that is in most cases not recorded for posterity, texts are translated into a superstable language of

27 For a recent introduction to prior research into what I call Sinitic languages, but are also called *fangyan* 方言, topolects, and many other names, see the introduction to Liu 2013.

28 Cantonese does, of course, have another life as a grammatica, more so than many other Sinitic languages, but it was likely the most idiomatic language at the Festival that had a large constituency of listeners. For more on the different formalities of Cantonese, see Gunn 2006 (20–22).

29 See for example Gunn 2006 (207).

grammatica, and often projected behind the reader on a screen.<sup>30</sup> Projection—along with the festival anthology and the print program—place *nebeneinander*, side-by-side forms into the diachronic, live performance of the festival. If one does not understand their original language, the method of interacting with projected translations at the festival is much like reading them in a book: they are subjects of study. The experience of study, spoken as it is in the slowly evolving, distantly administered grammatica of Mandarin, is substantially more boring than the geographically local and temporally swift birth and death of words that Agamben identifies as crucial to *idioma*.<sup>31</sup> Vernaculars are not better than grammatica languages, but to their native speakers, they are usually more interesting. This is why they dominate popular culture, and why viewers perked up when they heard Yam Gong speak. A poem performed in the grammatica emphasizes its text, while the *idioma* is more often centered in its performance. An event dominated by the grammatica will more likely please scholars and others for whom it is the most useful language; an event that features the *idioma* will interest everyone else.

The language of performance influences, but is not reducible to, political differences. Yam Gong and Chris Song's 宋子江 panel was about poetry drawn from life: as a poet recently identified with the Occupy Central movement, Yam Gong put his Cantonese-language poetry into direct use as a cohering force to bring together allies across Hong Kong, and to assert local values in the face of putatively national interests.<sup>32</sup> Those projects are not exclusively accomplished through local vernaculars, but they are eased and afforded by performance in the *idioma*.<sup>33</sup> The Festival's emphasis on cross-

30 The Taipei festival projected translated poetry at some, but not all of the poetry readings, but did not do so for scholarly conversations. In all cases, the projected material was drawn from the festival anthology.

31 For a conceptualization of what the May Fourth generation's advocacy of a national grammatica meant for poetry, see Crespi 2009 (18–42).

32 For example, Yam Gong read at the 2011 Poetry Occupies Central reading during the public occupation: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_vz65aGLeHg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_vz65aGLeHg).

33 Crespi 2009, 67 describes how the Mandarin poetry of national salvation written during the Anti-Japanese war, an undertaking not so

regional solidarity and the echoes of experience between victims of Japanese and other occupations would have been empowered and enlivened by translation directly into the local vernaculars of the festival's audience. Whereas vernacular poetry performance in Greater China was previously associated with Communist attempts to imbue folk art and local language with ideologies of the national center, contemporary festival performance of translation in local vernaculars could provide an alternative to languages and ideas from the center, and interact with native speakers of local languages across different social classes in the immediately usable, changeable idioma of their lived experience.<sup>34</sup> In this way, world literature could more ably circumvent the dominance of globe-spanning imperial languages; and it could structure a being-in-common that reaches the whole distance from the foreign to the local, a translation that truly builds novel connections, and a performance that releases the heat and light of native idioma.

## Conclusion

This essay has pursued two separate, intertwined lines of inquiry: the study of the forms of world literature, and the study of international poetry festivals. The study of the lived forms of literary experience, especially as they pertain to world literature, is still nascent. To understand world literature as a concept, it seems additionally necessary to understand the limitations and possibilities of world literature classrooms and the diverse formal features of transnational literary prizes, and to think more deeply through the way in which the particular shape of contemporary theory and publishing serves to structure world literature for its audiences. As the above discussion demonstrates, the form of a moment of world literature can serve to centralize performative agency or distribute it; it can create discourse or simulate it; it can make translation visible or make it invisible; it

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far from Yam's, was considered to be boring and useless by some readers. It goes on to describe the struggle to entice and oblige listeners to attend poetry recitations in Mandarin, a problem that Yam's poetry does not have.

34 A recent example in print is Holton 2016, translations of classical Chinese poetry into Scots.

can excite audiences by reaching out for their native language, or bore them. The impact of literary form never replaces the importance of ideology, but it does color and situate ideology, and it has an independent effect on the experience of world literature that cannot be seen or altered by studies of world literature's many ideologies. Most concretely, an understanding of the forms of world literature allows scholars, many of whom are themselves engaged in its creation, to adapt and transform the form and, by extension, the nature of the community they produce through their efforts.

The second line of inquiry that this essay has pursued is the study of international poetry festivals. Because they bring together poets, editors, translators, and scholars, festivals influence and are influenced by other forms. Indeed, it seems likely that the Taipei Festival's use of Modern Standard Chinese is a result of the near-ubiquitous use of that language in publishing and education. Similarly, it seems likely that one major way that anthology editors come into contact with poets and translators is through shared appearances at transnational readings and events. Lists of poets in world literature anthologies may appear less arbitrary if we visualize the international flow of people and poems that festivals enable. The study of poetry festivals, which are often run with a combination of civic, academic, and business resources, may also push forward the long-term project of understanding the special qualities of art that is not produced primarily for sale, and of art that cooperates and collaborates with the state.

Underlying both of these sets of unanswered questions, I hope, there lies a sense of the potential that world literature still has, in spite of all its difficulties. When Ko Un came to Taipei, he read a poem in which a beggar couple sets out from the village of Okjeonggok, South Korea to find food, and they travel to four other villages without success before returning to Okjeonggok to try to assuage their hunger with well water, because in the season of famine, even a bowl of cold barley is impossible to find (Hung Hung 2016, 18). At the festival, the figure of that couple circulated further than anyone in their situation could have imagined; their failed attempt to find sustenance by provoking community with strangers is extended through further travel, and their cry of “can you spare a spoonful” 能否賞個一勺 (in translation) reverberates among those who may yet

respond to it. Similarly, Ko Un's struggles against occupation and for democratic representation, only sometimes reaching sympathetic ears in his home country, found in Taipei the potential not only to be aired abroad, but to be sustained and supported by another community. As we have seen, many outcomes of this type of encounter are possible. One is that those involved take their being-in-common home with them, sustentant as a sack of grain.

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