

IDENTITY AND SUBJECTIVITY IN WAI-LIM YIP'S POETRY

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Before I go any further, it seems appropriate that I should clarify my topic a little bit, and also point out what theoretical props I will arm myself with. First and foremost come place and space, i.e., Wai-lim Yip's native town/city, the localities he often writes about, and even the historicity by which he is able to make value judgments. Yip fled mainland China on the eve of the Communists' taking it over, around 1948-49 and came to Hong Kong (then a British colony) to receive his secondary school education before he came to Taiwan/ROC to pursue his undergraduate studies at National Taiwan University, and then his MA degree in English from National Taiwan Normal University, both in Taipei. Here I immediately draw in Dominic Cheung, first pen-named as Ngo Ngo (翹翹) (for his first four collections of poetry) and then as Zhang Cuo (張錯) for his other over ten collections up to the present), a native of Portuguese-controlled Macau before he moved to stay in Hong Kong and to receive his secondary school education there. As Yip before him, Cheung too came to Taiwan to major in English, not at Taiwan University, but at a less prestigious institution of higher learning called the National Cheng-chi University/Taipei, in 1963. As a matter of fact, Yip and Cheung had already started their literary ventures to some extent in Hong Kong before they literally plunged themselves into the careers which would eventually come to earn them world-wide renown, particularly in Chinese communities.¹ Thus we can presume the embryonic stage of their nurture in Hong Kong to be decisive and important, at least as a point of departure. Moreover, Hong Kong, for all its oddities/ atrocities and unique position as the last British colony in the Orient, has served as a showcase of colonization against which Chinese literati in general, and poets like Wai-lim Yip and Zhang Cuo in particular, can cast their resentment and animosity. It is against this very background and up-bringing, for better or for worse, that I would like to situate and foreground their poetry. Anyone familiar with the Chinese

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literary arenas in Taiwan, China, and Chinese communities elsewhere (or so-called World Chinese literature[s]), will have long known that Yip and Cheung, in particular, are rather important poets in Taiwan and China, they will likewise know that these two poets, for some very practical and obvious reasons, have claimed Taiwan as their second home country, one, to a very large extent, more important than their home towns/cities, Zhongshan County in Guangdong and Macau (Aomen) respectively. However, by the turn of the century, Yip and Cheung had already variously experienced and voiced their anxiety and apprehension of being downplayed and de-canonized as the tide of nativism and particularly de-sinification has been adversely manipulated by pro-independence politicians in Taiwan since the early nineties of the last century.²

236 Again, a few words regarding my usage of the two key terms *identity* and *subjectivity*. As is so often been pointed out, the concepts of these two words are intrinsically related to the very notion of *self*. Whereas Westerners inevitably look for the “self” in one’s very being, the Orientals, particularly the Chinese, are more inclined to considering the “self” in relation to other people (Hsu 33). As Kwok-kan Tam has put it, “[self is] a psychosomatic process of socialization involving both body and mind” (96). Identity, or “rentong 認同” in Chinese, as is conceived by Erik H. Erikson the psychologist, covers the concepts of both “self-sameness” and “sharing certain characteristics with other people” (110). To keep it as a viable notion in this paper, I have to refer my audience to Wang Gungwu’s classic statement that Southeast Asian Chinese *identity* is often multi-dimensional and fluid (particularly 1-2, 10-11). There is also the stark fact that most Thai Chinese and Philippine Chinese have long been admirably assimilated, and thus have shed almost all of their original ethnic traits. Singaporeans, on the other hand, may have already succeeded in developing their own notions of ethnicity (birth, lineage, and physical features as “ethnic markers” (Chen & Tang: 20, 23). I also want to mention a Singaporean sociologist’s recent hypothesis that a new kind of Chinese diasporas, with the so-called Chinese cosmopolitans as its core, is on the rise. What characterizes the identity of this new group are three key notions: *multiplicity* as regards their mental matrix, *hybridity* as regards the combination of their cultural and lived experiences, and *positionality* that appears as a natural outgrowth of the previous two attributes (Chen 17, 19). Finally, there is the notion of *subjectivity* which I presume to be as elusive as the notion of identity. When I employ this notion to investigate the works of Yip and Cheung, I want to argue that their subjectivity is fluctuating, fluid, and multi-dimensional. We can even argue that their subjectivity(ies) are hybridized and even tactically *positional*. An investigation of our two poets’ identity and subjectivity, in relation to diasporic literature in general, and the Chinese diasporas in particular, not only can showcase the shift of dominance in the Taiwan literary arena—from modernism, grass-rooted localism to post-modernism/post-colonialism, but also intensify our apprehension and appreciation of their artistic virtuosity.

Wai-lim Yip, one of those pioneering overseas Chinese students who “went back” to Taiwan/ROC to receive their tertiary education, has distinguished himself not only as an important poet/critic in the literary world but also as a world-renowned comparatist affiliated with the University of California, San Diego since September 1967. His academic and literary achievements when taken together and compared with other overseas Chinese of his kind are second to none.³ He came to Taiwan in 1955 to spend his six formative years here at colleges, and to experiment with writing avant-garde poetry as well as to translate Western literatures into Chinese. Later he went to study for his MFA degree in Iowa with Paul Angel. By that time, he had already made himself known as a young modernist poet of some stature. Taiwan was certainly a very important nurturing ground for Yip as he headed towards success. *Xiandai wenxue* 《現代文學》 (*Modern Literature*, started in 1954) and *Ch’uangshi ji* 《創世紀》 (*The Epoch Poetry Magazine*, started in 1954), the two avant-garde literary magazines which offered Yip many chances to experiment with writing, were run by his novelist-classmate Hsien-yung Pai and his fellow poet-friends such as Lo Fu and Ya Hsien respectively. The opportunity to acquire such friendships with these peer poets all in all proved to be tremendously beneficial and encouraging. Also, his marriage in 1961 to his classmate, Tzu-mei Liao (慈美廖), served, as he himself has put it, as “a stabilizing force, felt not only in person but also leaving some obvious traces in [my] poetry” (*Sanshinian shi* 617). I perceive all of these to be important ingredients which quietly went into the shaping of his identity and subjectivity.

237 Yip and his classmates such as Hsien-yung Pai and Wang Wen-hsin, as well as his fellow *Epoch* poets such as Lo Fu, Ya Hsien and Chang Mo, were all fervent practitioners, promoters, and staunch advocates of modernism in Taiwan since mid-fifties. Admittedly, modernism seems to have become their entrenched faith, the realization of which was a glaring assertion/manifestation of their subjectivity(ies). Unfortunately, their praxis and faith, albeit only a small aspect of their move toward implementing their dream of becoming poets, were then taken as a resistance movement; they were at odds with the dominant establishment’s official promotion of Fangong wenyi (反共文藝) [Anti-Communist Literature] or Zhandou wenyi (戰鬥文藝) [Battling Literature]. It was doubly unfortunate when John Kwan-Terry, a Singaporean professor of English, ignorant of Yip’s and his coterie’s efforts to clandestinely challenge that dominance and thus to assert their subjectivity, launched his assault on their efforts, collected in Yip’s translation entitled *Modern Chinese Poetry 1955-1965* (1970), on the ground that their poems lacked not only traditional values and something like “Chinese spirit” (or what we might now term “Chineseness”), but also robustness and social/moral integration. All of these were the very elements which, to Kwan-Terry, come to make good poetry (1972a: 12 & 1972b: 192, 197-98, 199). With the wisdom of hindsight, we should acknowledge that Kwan-Terry’s diatribe against Yip and his coterie maliciously misfired, for he knew too little about the social and political milieus under which their particular texts were produced.

Since the publication of his first collection of poetry entitled *Fugue* 《賦格》(1963), Wai-lim Yip has altogether published over twenty collections of poetry to date, not to mention his nine prose works, ten criticism books, a ten-volume set of collected works, and seven other books in English (one creative work, two scholarly studies, and four translations). My concern in this paper here is only with the evolution of Yip's poetic career pitched against the time-spirit and socio-political milieu of Taiwan from the mid-fifties all the way through to the early 21st century where the shift of dominance took place. It is only through an appreciation of such a sweep of time that we can foreground and do justice to his poetic achievements.

Yip's early poetry embodies almost all of the characteristics of Western high modernism: obscurity, discontinuity, estrangement, alienation, anxiety, loneliness, indeterminacy, paranoia, schizophrenia, stream of consciousness, and a very strong sense of loss (most of which are now taken as "labels" featured in diasporic literature). To sympathetically grasp his work against his epoch, milieu, and endeavor, we cannot but to allow that his early poetry had already embedded all of these qualities. Yip's "Hexiang" <河想>, one of his frequently quoted poems from *Fugue*, contains these following lines:

A cloud descends while a drum beat rises, Oh sun!
Why enter my body to brew up your streams
Why be wingless flight soaring towards you?
The rootless just stand still, the eyesight-less
Just catch hold of the loftiness and the two banks
Open just for my body to enter.
Mine enters an inner space, the central part.
Which inner space and which central part?
(107: ll. 1-8; unless otherwise credited, all translations are mine)

These strikingly sublime lines gradually unfold under the speaker's stream of consciousness. Needless to say, they are directional, perspectival, imagistic and even surrealistic images under the gaze of an intentional act. On the one hand, the bright sun, a symbol for consciousness or even Time itself, is evidently a mighty force which ruins and levels things. On the other, it seems that the poet is questing for some coordinate/origin amidst the mutations and permutations of the phenomenal world in a deconstructive manner. Obviously, the subjectivity of the speaker/poet is not a stable one, or else why would he want to deconstruct his intentional act?

After skipping four lines where the poet ruminates on his physical actuality and his nativity, we come to the rest of the third stanza as follows:

Since people began ushering in festivals and constructing cities (by their footsteps),
Lofty layers of clouds have sloped downwards over and over and drumbeats have risen,
over and over.
The sea has used its boundless trembling to sustain us,
And its invisible extension to revolt against the arrays of curious eyes.
Oh, sun! As you sink behind the mountain ranges, shameless girls
Jingle their breasts to wash those winds,

And reveal their private parts to nature.

(107-08: ll. 13-19)

In a phenomenological manner again, the poet/speaker seems to bring his consciousness to bear on whatever he comes across. Stream of consciousness seems to be the only logic through which we can grasp that he often over-stretches the language until its syntax and even diction are on the verge of breaking down into unintelligibility. Hence there have been critics' accusations of his obscurity, discontinuity, estrangement, reverie, over-contrivance, mannerism, committing linguistic suicide, etc. (for instance, Kwan-Terry 1972b: 190, 192, 197 & 198). And where is the poet's subjectivity as he rambles on? Is it a stable one, a hybridized one, or just a fluid one? Perhaps already aware of the risk of straying away too far, and so in a kind of aside, he immediately offers us the following four lines to serve as a ballast to keep his subjectivity intact:

People come and go.
The self-same person,
The self-same I.
People come and go.
(108: ll. 20-23)

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The last four lines of the poem are then offered here after a series of negations:

Oh, sun! Since I cannot drink myself dry,
Tell me then how I can look into my own eyes,
How I can never become a river—
That, that rushing river which does not flow?
(109: ll. 30-33)

We cannot by any means suspect the speaker/poet's effort to keep his self and subjectivity intact. But the tone of the last few lines indicates that he remains indecisive, and never comes to a halt or resolution.

Yip's early poetry, generally speaking, features most of the oddities and obscurity outlined above, and sometimes more. The command of these devices seems to be taken as essentially inevitable. Otherwise, we might take it as a misappropriation of the modernism then prevalent in Taiwan. As one of those difficult poets in Taiwan, Yip's "difficulty" can be attributed to both his technique and his (mis)appropriation—the outcome of deliberate "borrowing"?

In view of his many references, citations, and translations, we ascertain that Yip's sources of studies and appropriation at that time were Baudelaire (1821-1867) Mallarmé (1842-1898), St. John Perse (1887-1975), and T.S. Eliot (1888-1965), particularly the last one, for Yip had both written an M.A. thesis on the very methodology of Eliot's craft of writing while at Taiwan Normal University in 1961. He had also published a translation of *The Waste Land* in *The Epoch Poetry Magazine* in that same year. If "Hexiang," the poem we have just analyzed, has not illustrated the features of Yip's obscurity/difficulty very adequately, then "Fenhui de Nuoton' zhi shijie" <焚

毀的諾噠)之世界” can certainly do that. This latter poem which is almost a recasting of “Burnt Norton” (the first quartet of Eliot’s *Four Quartets*), where the imitator follows rather closely the steps of his spiritual “mentor” in ruminating on Time itself and its effect on things and human beings, is as fraught with obscure images as the piece that originally inspired it. This makes reading both of them rather difficult. We discover also that the only notable deviation/variation from Eliot’s original poem is the deliberately fragmented and elliptical structure which again makes reading Yip’s poem an arduous task of guesswork. If “Hexiang” has not already contained too many of those diasporic features, this particular poem does: loneliness, desolation, anxiety, extinction, veering toward extinction, death, etc. There are virtually too many of these elements for us to mention. As the first three lines indicated, the speaker “I” in this poem is a self-reflexive and indeterminate persona: “It seems that I cannot catch hold of [anything], / in an act of invisible stretching, / endlessly stretching” (61: ll. 1-3).

240 If Eliot’s *Waste Land* was intended as an attack on the desolation, the spiritual emptiness and moral/social disintegration of a certain Western city, say, London, then Yip’s “Cheng-wang” <城望> can be viewed as a criticism of some Eastern city, say, Taipei or Hong Kong. The “we” in this poem can be some wanderers or tramps or passengers through whose mind-screen past scenarios/memories and the present panorama of city life are telescoped. The city-dwellers lead a life of living death, downcast, anxiety-ridden, like some straw men wandering in Limbo. In this piece, we can find some of the characteristics of diaspora sensitivity as follows: wandering, anxiety, alienation, aimlessness, rootlessness, a sense of loss, etc. Perhaps what most strikes the audience is the enormous sense of anxiety, the “we” all the while experience in this modern age in general and among the people in particular. The following nine lines excerpted from the second stanza can at once characterize and adumbrate what is to follow:

Life in anxiety
Amid the anxious people;
In an anxious time
There are beasts supporting circus manager for life:
To expose the whole world as a substitute,
They explicate methods of kissing and assassination
And perform stunts we have never seen before.
(4-5: ll. 27-33)

People in the modern world are perceived as “beasts,” while the circus where the beasts perform acrobatics and stunts is viewed as the whole world in miniature. But what strikes us most in this particular poem is the pronoun “we” which pinpoints the poet’s subjectivity in an indeterminate state of ever wandering without any specific purpose and end! Here, as in “Fugue” and some other of Yip’s pieces, we see Yip launch his attack on short-sighted cultural pedants and the dross of Chinese culture as well. Compared with Lo Fu’s *Death in the Stone Cell* <石室的死亡> (1965),

which is fraught with all sorts of esoterica and surrealist mannerisms, Yip’s *Fugue*, as I understand it, is not that unintelligible and un-wholesome.

What predominates as its leitmotifs are just these following: the city’s sordidness, bleakness and desolation, the burden and pressure of Time and history on humans, dislocation and lifelessness of local culture, all of which can in one way or another account for the grand narrative of the wasteland per se. To identify the diasporic elements in Yip’s modernist period is easy enough, but to really pin down his identity and subjectivity is another story, for as we can witness in the case of Dominic Cheung and some other overseas Chinese young writers, Yip was still fluctuating. He was still learning his craft and fighting his way out as an undergraduate and then as a graduate student.

Choudu 《愁渡》 (1969), Yip’s second collection of poetry (about half of which recollecting from his first volume), serves as some sort of border crossing.⁴ New additions such as “White Death,” “A Wanderer’s Words,” and “Manhattan” still adhere to his old rut/ route whether as regards tone or technique. Only perhaps “Cloud,” which is a sequence of five poems, signals some kind of transformation to come with shorter and plainer lines and faster tempo and rhythm. And then we find ourselves with Yip’s third volume entitled *Xing zhi bianyuan* 《醒之邊緣》 (1971) which features a new Yip freed from all those high modernist oddities such as over-contrivance, and mannerism, and instead armed with naturalness, the techniques of the splash of ink and nature poetry which he had acquired from classical Chinese poetry. This “new” mode can be accounted for by at least two factors: Yip’s natural poetic growth resulted from his pursuit and advocacy of a Taoist school of aesthetics and response to socio-politico-cultural changes. The first endeavor is in actuality a combinational one: to both juxtapose and let images act themselves out (the montage technique he acquired from Shanshuishi 山水詩 [or nature poetry] in classical Tang period), and to project the force and quick lively tempo into the lines (a technique he acquired from the Projective Verse of Charles Olson (1910-1970) and Robert Creeley (1926-)) (Ting 2-4, 15-18). With respect to the second factor, this time Yip, unlike in the early sixties when he and his coterie were leading a literary movement, was just sort of aligning himself with the literary Xiangtuwenxue yundong (鄉土文學運動), a campaign launched against the background of major political setbacks encountered in Taiwan/ROC during the early seventies. We did not want to just write blurred and ambiguous poetry without any distinctive voice or a firm subjectivity. Instead, we wanted our poetry to be more concerned with the land which has been feeding us and its people. Under these circumstances, we had to face a very awkward situation: to challenge the dominance—the pallid and escapist type(s) of poetry practiced/empowered by such establishments as *The Epoch Poetry Magazine* and *The Blue Stars Poetry Quarterly*.

Most of the poems included in Yip’s third volume had been intended for either improvisation, setting into music, or multi-media performance. To experiment with collaborative efforts between composer, painter and dancer to produce these poems on the stage was certainly a daring and pioneering move then, but here it would

be a digression to consider how successful such intra-cultural media performances may have been. What I want to emphasize here is the fact that Yip, perhaps under the impact/impetus of native-turfed localization, began to write poems like "Yongle District Variation <永樂町變奏>," a set of four poems about the evolution of this earliest/ancient district of Taipei along the northern bank of the Tamsui River (淡水河). Through the poet's vision, co-mingled with his identification with the land, landscape and history act themselves out in a rather lucid discourse. The district in question has been envisaged and impersonated as a "she," a "mother" with whom generation after generation of people (the "sons" in the poem) can identify themselves as these following three lines demonstrate:

Oh, Mother, Mother!
As all the wind and waves have been blocked by the estuary,
We are already resting in your soft bosom.
(54: ll. 24-26)

242 Yongle District, the very origin of modern Taipei City and also the birthplace of his spouse, is inevitably a place/space that Wai-lim Yip is used to identifying himself with. Our audience can also sense how the poet safely anchors his subjectivity here. By and large, Taipei in particular and Taiwan in general can thus be taken as Yip's second home city. And as we shall see later, his identification here seems to be much more genuine, profound, and stable than with his native town Zhongshan County in Guangdong Province.

In the wake of *Xing zhi bianyuan*, Yip published another two volumes of poetry in the seventies: *Yehua de gushi* 《野花的故鄉》(1975) and *Huakai de shengying* 《花開的聲音》(1977). As a matter of fact, we can simply skip *Huakai de shengying*, for it is just a re-issue of Yip's first two early volumes in the form of a "collected work" (see back cover caption) under a different title. *Yehua de gushi*, albeit with eight poems (five travelogue poems and three performance poems) re-garnered from his second and third volumes, whether from the length of lines or from the much smoother rhythm and tempo, is more in keeping with the stylistic configuration he had just acquired. This style was also in vogue with literary establishment at the time. It is against these two coordinates that I would like to discuss a couple of Yip's poems so as to highlight the dominant features of his work during this period.

So far as the development of Taiwan's modern poetry is concerned, the so-called nativistic [xiangtu] literary movement was instrumental in ushering in a literary terrain where a "new" realism was able to assault and finally supplant modernism as the new dominant style during the seventies. From this perspective, if Yip's earlier "Yongle District Variations" just under discussion had prefigured his mutation to a new mode, then the following two poems, "Nuannuan kuangqu de ximu <暖暖礦區的夕暮>" and "Budaizhen de zaochen <布袋鎮的早晨>," included in *Yehua de gushi*, can attest more fully to Yip's new tendency toward employing shorter lines and creating smoother rhythm and tempo.⁵ More importantly, what we cannot stress

too much is Yip's change toward writing more realistically. On the surface, these two poems might give the readers the impression that they are mere landscape poems, one about a rainy coalmine region in Northern Taiwan (south of Keelung) whereas the other one about a rustic countryside in the southwestern part of Taiwan famous for its agricultural produce and harvest of salt. However, no sooner does one try to delve deeper than one detects profounder significance in these two poems. While pitched against their time of production and mediated by the dominant literary trends, we might say that they were first and foremost intended as some sort of declaration of the poet's prime concern for the working class in Taiwan, north and south. This kind of genuine concern was something Yip had never attempted before. Had it not been for the emergence of the so-called Xiangtu Literary Movement, he might not have been spurred to do so at all. In this vein, we might easily say that Yip fell prey to the dominant "constraints" of a "new" realism. To write *realistically* was a fetish of the seventies in Taiwan; Yip simply could not refrain from trying his hand at it and following suit.⁶

Specifically, "Nuannuan kuangqu de ximu" was written as a sort of dramatic monologue where the implied reader has been led to witness the occurrence of the tragic story which so often plagues the coalmine region. What strikes the audience is a lingering sense of doom made salient by contrasting the following binary images: dark [night]/dawn, black(ness)/moonbeam, moldy moist air/bright spring, etc. In other words, what hovers invisibly over the heads of the miners is their preordained fate: life without any shimmering of light or hope, nor even the minimum expectations. That is why when asked about the possibility of welcoming some sort of short-lived and moldy-smelling daybreak and even the expression of having an excursion to some famous lake region, the speaker "I" falls short of grasping the query by retorting: "Daybreak? Spring? Oh! All too far-off!" (94: l. 20). And eventually when asked about their deep love and concern for their beloved wives and children ("something" very mundane and down-to-earth), the speaker, after responding that their kin could never be elated by "some expressions of triumph," nor could they be taken "as some end-note struck/immobilized on the keyboard" (95: ll. 26-27), proceeds to strike the following finale:

This, I do not know; I know only that
In the long, black, recurring weather flows,
In the crevices between the incalculable irresistible
Explosions, collapses, and burials
They are the only stuff of my dreams.
Their reticent waiting
Is the entirety of our history and poetry
If poetry, as you just said, is so great and sublime!
We have a guest, A Chun you serve the food!
Come try our home-made salted fish, and dry turnip-pickles.
(95: ll. 28-37)

To be hauled into the deep, warm and moist pits or galleries to excavate coal had been the only life possible for most people living in the mountainous region of Northeastern Taiwan before its economies began to boom in the early eighties. What Yip tries to capture here is the plight and agonies of this large group of people who were living under the shadow of death. That their pathetic plight is intertwined with their folksy simplicity and hospitality is something deliberately presented to both earn the audience's sympathy and to disclose the poet's profound attachment to the Taiwanese people. In no way whatever can we suspect Yip's identification with the folksy people embodied in this poem here of being insincere.

244 In addition to the special significance outlined above, I should also stress the chronological, developmental, and pioneering meaning the previous two poems had cast in the poet's career as well. And this should primarily be attributed to the earlier dates of their publication and inclusion in *Yehua de gushi* (all in the year 1975). As such, they should be taken as the herald of a new category of poems in Yip's life—poems mainly about the paddy field and farmhouse, mountain and river, village and landscape, etc., in Taiwan, and particularly in mainland China.⁷ In a very rigid sense of the term, this category of poems, and in reality a large category, can by all means be dubbed “the nature poetry” (which gradually evolved to become a special *strain*) in Wai-lim Yip's corpus. On the surface value, these poems seem to be a natural outgrowth of the previous two poems under analysis. However, once when we probe deeper, we will immediately perceive that they seem to be capped or endowed with something more; they are the externalization of something immanent, or the acting out of the very essence of Tao by means of natural imagery. Indubitably, while writing these poems, the poet must have been guided by the cinematographical art of montage, through which the images are juxtaposed primarily for the purpose of acting themselves out without any conceptual interference. That they have been managed to such a high terrain where the vehicle (images) corresponds closely to the tenor (the signifieds) is simply a means to obliterate the boundary, if any, between man and nature. Consequently, if we still want to identify and to pin down the poet's identity and subjectivity via these *special* Yipean, and Taoist “nature poems,” we will soon discover that they are either too submerged or too attached to nature images to defy or nullify any of such effort.⁸ It seems that any in-depth analysis and reading of Yip's nature poetry entails a separate paper by itself for which the disclosure of the empowerment of the Self and subjectivity will not matter at all.

Before we can go any further to deal with Yip's two poems about Hong Kong in *Yehua de gushi*, a very special poem emerges to catch our attention. This special poem, entitled “Daxi laoren zuihou de shiji <大溪老人最後的事跡>” seems to be rather pivotal in this collection. Obviously, it must have been written to evince Yip's nostalgia for a fading generation. As such, I suggest that it should be regarded as a wistful inscription of the 800,000 veterans who were evacuated from mainland China to Taiwan under the leadership of the late President Chiang Kai-shek in 1949. Whereas the façade Yip tries to inscribe in this representative Daxi veteran looks

blurred, the last mission of this ancient warrior, paradoxically and symbolically like the Fisher King in Eliot's *Waste Land*, is to pray for the incoming summer shower to rejuvenate the vegetable world. The very involved rhetorical questions in the first part of the poem eventually turn to focus on his cause, while the tempo and thrust of the poem likewise quicken to the following incantation in the last nine lines:

Oh, old man of Daxi!
You are as emaciated
As a long, narrow deserted street.
As a thin, black shadow
Set against the dead stillness with the moon above,
Fluttering now and again
Like a bat with broken wings
Following the faint sounds
Groping its way up the blurred, undulating hill top.

(199: ll. 11-19)

As the reader tries to read between these incantational lines, he can scarcely miss the implication(s) that this veteran's last move is a symbolical quest for the revitalization and welfare of his fellow people. Nor will the reader fail to feel the poet's deep concerns for Taiwan's people, albeit here represented by an ancient character. And here it seems appropriate that we should pursue things a little further by stating that we do not have any reasons whatever not to accept Yip's concern and love of Taiwan as *genuine*; he himself even wanted to label Taiwan his “first” hometown to replace his original Zhongshan County in Guangdong Province.⁹ Erickson's definition of “identity” certainly finds a fitting avowal in Yip the poet himself, if for no other reason than his familiarity with things Taiwan as he shares it here.

As a corollary, and also as a supplement, to the above argument that Yip's deep concern and affection are slanted toward Taiwan, it is imperative here that we probe into his identification and subjectivity as disclosed in his twenty-five poems about Hong Kong, his second hometown. The first two of these twenty-five poems, namely “Yijiu qisan nian wanchun keci Zhongguoren de Xianggang <一九七三年晚春客次中國人的香港>” and “Xianggang sumiao sanshou <香港素描三首>,” are included in *Yehua de gushi* 《野花的故事》. That Yip has assumed a rather ambivalent attitude toward his second hometown (Hong Kong) needs little explication. What really matters is perhaps this: How *ambivalent* was his attitude when examined against his identity and subjectivity?

First and foremost, I don't think that any keen reader of Yip's huge corpus will ever stop wondering why Yip wants to publicize his antagonism and almost morbid phobia of his second hometown. This is especially so after reading of his feelings as first verbalized in a chronological table attached to his fifth collection of poetry entitled *Huakai de shengying* 《花開的聲音》 (1977). The most venomous words he has ever leveled at this onetime British colony/stronghold in Southeastern China run as follows: “As regards Hong Kong, I am wordless in speech. Chinese enslaved Chinese.

Chinese deceived Chinese....What else can I profess as regarding Hong Kong?" (199) The three long lines I deliberately left out are wordy and their significance is almost opaque, thus I indeed find it more appropriate to fill in with some terser lines Yip wrote elsewhere in sort of a similar context; however, with a much stronger cutting edge:

[Hong Kong is a place where] people eat people, presumptuous Chinese tortured true Chinese purposely with a burning eyeball. The hurt ones stand paralyzed as if suffering a stroke. Unrest spread piercing through people's organs, veins, pores, tiptoes, etc. Oh, then, things I perceived were all bitingly pathetic. (*Jingchi* 2-3)

As things Yip witnessed had been piercingly pathetic before Hong Kong was restored to mainland China in 1984, his feelings towards this metropolis were complex. First and foremost, his designation of the Hong Kong people as "compatriots" clearly indicates his Chinese identification. However, in spite of a small minority of "brave new Chinese" whose endeavors were for a "Chinese conscience" and future breakthroughs, most Hong Kong people he saw then (1982) were still living in a "distorted society" devoid of any sense of [Chinese] nationalism (all from *Jingchi* 3). They had been completely estranged and alienated by a materialistic society. Last but not the least, Yip's above observation(s) were made after being filtered through a business trip he took to mainland China a year earlier after an interval of over thirty years!

Notwithstanding the obvious proclamation of Yip's self implicated in the title, this earliest Hong Kong verse "Yijiu qisan nian wanchun keci Zhongguoren de Xianggang" is a cityscape of Hong Kong deliberately enunciated in a detached tone. Perhaps thanks to this sly intentional maneuver, what the reader can perceive in this poem is only a rather superficial assemblage of images—of entering tourists set against towering skyscrapers. What permeates the whole poem are the colors of gray and black and a sense of blockage mapped out to voice the poet's protest and diatribe against the colony. The three "Hong Kong Sketches," also written in the same year, resort to the same voice, but this time by means of employing theatricals. The poet pushes the third-person used in the first sketch aside and embarks on the first- and second-person in the other two sketches. Very obviously, these sketches are set to expose the dark sides of Hong Kong. In contrast to the images of excrement, tabloids dumped here and there ready to be used for various purposes, tired and pallid complexions of lower class people, etc. embedded in the first poem, the second poem seeks to dramatize an ironic exchange of the most mundane and the most spiritual kind. The third sketch, however, is a mock enactment of a modern Virgil leading a modern Dante through a sunken pit (Hong Kong), the purpose of which is to disclose love and light to the beleaguered maddening crowd. In short, what characterizes these four short poems is the poet's discontent, bitterness and even "sorrow" (*Yehua* 188) with this so-called second hometown of his. Probably thanks to these reasons, his self, identity and subjectivity are submerged to the degree of being almost "non-existent."

The other twenty-one poems, written in 1980-81, witnessed the elapse of some seven to eight years where the poet had not written anything about Hong Kong. Generally, most of them can be categorized as *picturesque*. One third of them (those six poems contained under the title "Jingchi (驚馳) and "Chen'an! Xianggang (晨安! 香港)"), however, seem to pursue most of the features embedded in the previous four poems just discussed. What is peculiarly set here is the sense of diaspora characterized by the following: loss, sorrow, loneliness, wanderings, pessimism, darkness, extinction, and death. What is most in tune with the previously discussed four poems is "Chen'an! Xianggang":

Dull
Morning
Unfolds along
With a cup of
Steaming coffee and
A newspaper
Let yesterday's love-affair murders
And displays of multifarious sex
Season
This utterly tasteless
Ham and macaroni
"Your own tastes?"
Any way
Being accustomed to the dead,
Every day still
They make up for death
And all for
Two simple words:
To live

(*Jingchi* 131-132)

Irrespective of the opaqueness of the phrase "簡單=simple" in the last second line, the tone and even the scene captured in this poem are purposefully *ironic*. What a Hong Kong "morning" could welcome the reader with in the early eighties was nothing to feel "happy about" and thus there was no feeling "good" things such as vivacity, vitality, hilarity or trans-nationality; on the contrary, what he or she could feel were only these: inertia, murders, sex displays, and even death itself. In other words, Hong Kong people were then leading a life of living death. The conjuring up all of these is indeed well in tune with Yip's persistent castigation of British colonialism in Hong Kong. And hence we can say that when it comes to talking about Hong Kong under British colonialism, Yip's criticism of it always comes first, and his subjectivity and identification with it is either mute or submerged.

While staying in Hong Kong during the academic years of 1980 to 1982, Yip had an opportunity to make a business trip to his native land, mainland China, in 1981. The harvest of this special trip was a series of twenty-one poems to make up the fourth section of *Jingchi*.¹⁰ For the purpose of our discussion, they can serve as a very

good contrast to Yip's Hong Kong poems in terms of disclosing the poet's subjectivity and identification with both his second hometown and his native country. As shown in the poet's Hong Kong poems, here again *picturesqueness* predominates. The very strong sense of diaspora which permeates most of his Hong Kong poems seems to have receded to the background and is displaced by a nightmarish anachronism, an admixture of love and hatred intertwined in the "Marxist" whirlpool of history, dreams and reality as lived experience, the sacred sentiment/mission of being a Chinese, and the sprouting up of new thoughts sadly intervened and delayed. What creeps underneath all of these themes tacitly discloses Yip's profound concerns of things Chinese and even his hybridized identity. A light stroke like the following few lines from his first poem about mainland China entitled "Shenye di Guangzhou mouqu <深夜抵廣州某區>" shows more than anything one can express in words:

248 Spring is coming late!
You can almost hear
The patter of its footsteps
Resonating now and again in the air
Its helpless history
Like that long-abandoned ancient pool
Waiting for the plop
Of a leaping frog?

(ll. 8-15)

Out of one-third of the lines that the poet has put down about his first impression of his native country after the lapse of some thirty years, we can still feel the deliberate self-control regarding things he saw in Guangzhou Province. However, his eagerness for change is gradually laid bare by the first four lines quoted above, especially by the mention of the belated arrival of "spring." Then in the second four lines quoted above comes the mention of a "helpless" history and the "ancient pool." Any cautious reader might immediately catch the clue that it is not Chinese "history" that is really "helpless," it is the people that are "helpless," because they had been tortured, persecuted and even slaughtered by the Communist regime. In this vein, history in China seems to have been put to a halt from the 1950s up to the 1970s of the twentieth century.

When we pursue a little further, what we immediately need to ask is this: What sort of history? And whose history? Indubitably, the horrible history of power-struggle, killing, faction, murder and bloodshed, though fading, is still resounding in the air. That it is deeply engrained in the onlookers' (the "we's") mind is beyond question. However, the arrival of spring, though belated, certainly offers hope. And then here comes the second question: Whose history? In addition to the "we" quoted above, the following two lines ("I still remember this ancientness, this simplicity / which seems so familiar..." ll. 20-21) can more than anything else affirm our premise/argument that the poet's subjectivity is either submerged or attached to what he is seeing and delineating. As this is the case, then the "helpless" history of purgation and bloodshed is every Chinese's (the poet included)!

In addition to the poet's deep concerns for the Chinese people, one thing which cannot escape the acute reader's attention in the non-picturesque poems is Yip's criticism of history, most of which is executed in an ironic way. For instance, the following nine lines taken from a poem entitled "Huangbu-jiang tou <黃埔江頭>" can serve as a good example:

Oh, Whaompo River!
You roll angrily!
You flow angrily!
Because every wave
Was once our blood,
Every wave
Has borne our shame and grief,
Every wave
Might this also be our helplessness?
(Jingchi 193-94, ll. 35-43)

Again, the poet's identification with the personified roaring Huangbujiang as well as his implied attachment to the Chinese people in these nine lines is too plain to need any explication. What is particularly ironic about his identification is this: As the speaker has already been able to roar against shame and blockage, how is it that these roars should have to be executed in a "helpless" manner? What I can argue about this peculiar transaction is the poet's tactic and *ironic* criticism of contemporaneous affair(s): The Shanghai people, in order to promote tourism, have almost forgotten old shames and sacrifices that their parents/relatives have undergone at the hands of foreigners in the past. And herein lies the *irony* of history, particularly as Yip critiques it.

As the tense and almost repressive atmosphere of Mainland China has gradually yielded to open-door policy proclaimed/propagated under the umbrella term *socialist "free" market*, and especially after the horrific Tiananmen Incident (天安門事件) in 1989, Wai-lim Yip has had more chances to visit his first native country. However, his keen observation and sharp criticism have not in the least abated, although he has become more mellow, placid and mild in mood. A bit of "mental turn" also seems to have crept in: he now seems to have become more nostalgic—nostalgic for what has occurred in his native country, both past and present. The four poems included in the fourth section of his *Binghe de chaoyue* 《冰河的超越》(2000) have embedded all the elements mentioned above. The heading of this section "Zai-jian guguo <再見故國>" is particularly indicative of his identification: His second encounter with his *native* land. In addition to literally indicating that the four poems are the harvest of this second trip to Mainland China, the heading also adumbrates something new and more that is to come. The cropping up of a very thick sense of nostalgia tinged with a sense of loss, and also the steering of his criticism toward the very trendy ecological problem in this globalizing world are just two of the most prominent of these "new" things. Before coming to specifics, we indeed have to say that out of these four

poems three are a kind of parody, which targets Li Po 李白, Cui Hao 崔顥, and Li Po again. For the purpose of scrutiny, I want to start with the last nineteen lines of the first poem “Zhaoci Baidicheng” <朝辭白帝[城]> which are as follows:

Has some tactless decree of Heaven on High
Blocked their way and broken their bridges
Thus resolutely plunging them
Into the blind flow
Towards distant lands?
At the very end of the Three Gorges mist
Between the bursting capitalist free market
And the brutish totalitarian system
Are their seeking
Some tiny bits
And leftovers
Of the golden future?
Heavily-loaded steamboats
Are swaying between the shores now bereft of the cry of apes
At the foot of bleak Wu Mountain
Along the Yangtze River whose waves soar as high as the sky
What the steamboats carry
Is it the splendor of the Three Gorges mountains and rivers
Or the bleakness of life felt deep in my heart?

(*Binghe de chaoyue* 96-98, ll. 58-76)

Before going into details, I want to propose that the themes embodied in “Zhaoci Baidi” and the two other parodic poems are just continuity of what the 21 poems had earlier executed. Unlike most parodic poems which usually parody or ridicule most features of the earlier targets, Yip’s three parodies here echo only portions of the earlier titles, lines and images. His primary objective is not just to turn things topsy-turvy, but to criticize society. Obviously, they are used only to serve as a kind of departure. The key concern of this poem is “盲流,” the blind stream of unemployed rustic young people who “flow” to the urban areas (particularly to metropolises like Beijing, Shanghai or Guangzhou) to look for a job. Their dogged determination seems to be irrevocable, as if plunging into the blind flow is their only salvation, oblivious to any considerations of probable (double) exploitation and other consequences. Under these circumstances, the poet’s appreciation of the sublime beauty of landscape is in odd proportion to the Chinese people’s agonies. Indeed, Yip’s subjectivity is indubitably attached to the pathetically bleak fate of this huge group of Chinese working class.

Though without any indication of the dates of their authorship, these four poems (included in *Binghe de chaoyue*) were probably written in mid-1998 when Yip had been invited to attend an academic symposium to mark the centenary of Peking University’s establishment.¹¹ And then after an interval of four years, Yip again found himself in a lecture and poetry-reading tour in August 2002, visiting Beijing and four other cities.¹² What he had reaped from this trip are some twelve poems included in

Yu de weidao 《雨的味道》(2006) under the section heading “Xunzhao Zhongguo” (尋找中國), which forms the second largest group of poems about his native country. The section heading is again clearly indicative of his quest for identity.

As I remarked earlier, Yip’s mood had turned to become more mellow and placid at the close of the 20th century. These twelve poems can again confirm my above observation. Under the sugar-coating of picturesqueness and swift rhythmic tempo, the poet continues to blast out-of-the-way capitalist maneuvers or developments in various parts of mainland China. What we discern from underneath the imagery is downright twisted humanity. A typical scene like the following few lines about a sizzling summer day in Beijing is replete with the sense of irony and criticism of capitalist practice in China:

In the thick haze of smoggy air
Shooting into the sky are tombstone-like buildings of transnational business
The flickering shadows of river and hill sprites
Have succeeded in surrounding
The massive ornate balustrades weighing a thousand catties
And the ponderous memories weighing a thousand catties.
(“Bayue Beijing (八月北京),” *Yu de weidao* 143)

The phrase “tombstone-like 墓碑的” definitely is a rejection and attack on the construction of so many of those towering buildings in Beijing, for they evoke no sense of symmetry and beauty, rather presenting a scene like tombstones erected in the graveyard. Again, the synesthetic imagery of sight and smell can evoke only a sense of revolt, not attraction. Last but not least, the emergence of the river and hill sprites is at odd with the environment of the Palace Museum, not to mention their weird acts of encircling delicately-engraved beams and people’s memories. What I want to emphasize here is that the poet, instead of calling our attention to both the beauty of the landscape of Beijing and also its invaluable Palace Museum, employs defamiliarization to challenge our usual expectations when visiting Beijing. And herein lies the poet’s special poetic intention of directing us to the unpleasant side(s) of capitalist development in Beijing. Immediately after the previous six lines, we are brought to another cultural center to face the miseries of a foreign poet, a wanderer just returned from abroad, and a disabled young poet, all of which are deployed in the suffocating atmosphere of Beijing. Had it not been for Yip’s concern for his native land, he should not have had to apply his energy to the castigation of out-of-the-way situations here and there.

Among these twelve poems, what distinguishes Yip’s effort and identification most is this “Yu zhong zhushi (雨中駐思) — Qinhua rijun Nanjing datusha yu-nantongbao Nanjingjinianguan (侵華日軍南京大屠殺遇難同胞南京紀念館).” The poet takes it as his duty to expose the atrocities inflicted by Japanese soldiers on the inhabitants of Nanjing, over 300,000 of whom died in the famous massacre. The poem is autobiographical; it is definitely a lived experience. The poet took himself as an eyewitness (because he was born in a small village in Southern Guangdong Province in 1937,

the very year when the Japanese warmongers started their project of assault and subjugation of China) to delineate all the outrageous deeds of the massacre—killing, raping, torturing, massive live-burial, bio-chemical suffocation, etc. By conjuring all those massacred phantoms in front of him, the poet announces: "All your outrages and traumas suppressed, silenced, and buried deep / They are all to be released in mingling with this afternoon's rain/teardrops" ("Yuzhong zhushi," ll. 24-25). "The call of blood" ("Yuzhong zhushi," l. 47), indubitably Yip's salient point, is issued amidst sound and fury indeed.

In concluding the paper, I would like to call our audience's attention to a poem entitled "Zao'an, Taipei <早安·台北!>" contained in the same volume *Yu de weidao* where the poet's sense/mood of peace and steadiness reigns. We have to take particular note of the following two lines: "This is the first time I feel my heart leap / And the step of my feet firm on ground" (ll. 22-23). They brim over with the mirth of his return to Taiwan and the cherishing of the land. The merry mood is more than anything he can ever show to his second hometown. Certainly they are indicative of his identification with Taiwan where he can find the sense of "homecoming," a refreshing of his fond memories of longstanding friendship and of his falling in love. The stability (what he terms as the "stability force [定力]") and true love his spouse has always bestowed upon him after marriage¹³ are all very precious things he can never find elsewhere. That the fusion and unification of all these sentiments can firmly solidify his identity with Taiwan is beyond doubt. However, if to attach Yip's identity and also his subjectivity to a particular place is a practical impossibility. What we should say is that they are fluid, or hybridized as the poet moves from place to place. What his individual poems demonstrate is virtuosity, and supreme artistic achievement, but not anything else. In Taiwan, regardless of how we view him, Yip should be considered one of the few poetic giants, now and for generations to come. What one should not forget is this point: he has also become famous in mainland China where his complete works (a set of ten volumes) were published by Anhui Educational Publishing House in 2004.

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ENDNOTES

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1. See the paper I read at an international symposium named "Shi-hua wen-xue guoji yantaohui" 世華文學國際研討會, hosted by Professor Tu Kuo Ching at UC/Santa Barbara, 26-27 August 2000. The revised version of this paper was published in *Jiaofeng half-yearly* #492 (2005): 102-115.
2. In a poem like <Budaixi 布袋戲>, Cheung answers in a rather succinct and dramatic manner people's queries about his professed identification with Taiwan on the grounds that he does not know the Taiwanese language (53-54). In prose works and in an interview, he almost lays bare his anxiety and misgivings as regards the marginalization of his identity as a perpetual wanderer rather than an *unadulterated*, politically-corrected Taiwanese. For this, see his preface "Binlanghua <檳榔花>" to his *Binlanghua* (*Betel Palm Flowers*): 19-20, and his interview with Hu Yannan 胡衍南 entitled "Qingting liulangzhe zhi ge <傾聽流浪者之歌>": 71-72.
3. Here, perhaps, with the exception of Nobel laureate Gao Xingjian. However, in the area of academic scholarship we cannot put the two on a par.
4. Wai-lim Yip himself translated the title into "The Crossing" in his *Modern Chinese Poetry 1955-1965*: 90.
5. Wai-lim Yip himself has provided a "psychological" rationale for this *tendency* toward employing shorter lines and more concise imagery, in an interview where he told the interviewers that at the end of the sixties a pretty large portion of his stomach had been removed. He attempted to explain why he contracted the malady by saying it resulted from his previous undue worry and "pathological fixation" over the adverse social and political unrest on both sides of the Taiwan Straits. He has since begun to allocate more time to relax himself, hence even the change in the stylistics of his poetry. See Liang, Tan & Xiao Ke, "Yu Yeh Weilian tan xiandaishi de chuantong he yuyuan <與葉維廉談現代詩的傳統和語言>": 564.
6. In addition to these two particular poems, the reader will also discover that "Yijiu qisan nian wanchun keci Zhongguoren de Xianggang <一九七三年晚春客次中國人的香港>," "Xianggang sumiao sanshou <香港素描三首>," and "Daxi laoren zuihou de shiji <大溪老人最後的事跡>," also from *Yehua de gushi* (1975), belong to this same category of "realistic" poetry which the poet published in the seventies in Taiwan as a consequence of the so-called *Xiangtu* Literary Movement.
7. In total, some seventeen poems are devoted to treating things and places in Taiwan. These constitute the second and third sections of Yip's sixth volume of poetry entitled *Songniao de chuanhuo* 《松島的傳說》(1982). The three other sections, mainly landscape poems depicting Toronto, Niagara Falls, and Kyoto, are of the same category. Yip's sixteen poems about mainland China, also of the same category, started to appear in another collection released entitled *Jingchi* 《驚馳》 released in the same year. They are travelogues from when he was allowed to return to visit his hometown in May 1981

after the interval of about 32 years.

8. Yip's "findings" and his advocacy of a close correspondence between the vehicle and the tenor of a poem were to a very large extent derived from Fenollosa's study of the Chinese ideograms as well as his study of Eisenstein's cinematographical montage theory. This can be traced back to his dissertation done at Princeton University in 1967 and then published by its university press as *Ezra Pound's Cathay* in 1969. In a very perceptive analysis of Yip's poem "Xiaokongli de liuquan <簾孔裏的流泉>," included in *Yehua de gushi*, Ye Si, after demonstrating very convincingly the close connection between the images and their signifieds without any discursive interference, concludes that Yip the poet will never be stifled or even strangled by only employing the so-called "pure experience" method, for he will turn to other appropriate techniques as the occasions necessitate. For reference, please read his article in the *United Daily News*, July 6, 1977.
9. Yip once wrote very passionately about his profound concern for and love of Taiwan. The metaphor for his highly-treasured "return" to Taiwan every summer vacation is a sailor who has been straying away from Taiwan for too long. This is the *only* occasion, to my knowledge, that Yip declared Taiwan to be his second or even his "first" (quotation marks his) home place. For this piece of information, please read his Preface to *Jingchi* (2).
10. Out of the twenty-six poems that make up the third section of *Jingchi*, only seven of them are indicated as written in Hong Kong. Out of these seven poems, with the exception of "Chen'an! Xianggang" under discussion above, only the last one, about the borderland barrier deliberately set up to separate Hong Kong people from Mainlanders, embroiled itself with Hong Kong.
11. In the "Chronicle of Life" attached to *Yu de weidao* 《雨的味道》, Yip documented this special occasion and his traveling around to Caishiji 采石磯 (牛者) to pay homage to Li Po and so on. See *Yu de weidao* 276.
12. Ibid. 277-78.
13. For Yip's confession of his anxious need to come back home to Taiwan like a sailor bounding home, see "Jinghui wuyou yu ai <境會物遊與愛>" *Youyi de tielu* 《憂鬱的鐵路》: 8; his remembrance of old friends, see "Wei youqing xizhou <爲友情繫舟>," Ibid: 67-84; for his feel of homecoming, his fond memories of old friends and falling in love, and the stability his wife has bestowed on him respectively, see *Yu de weidao* 58, 57, 59 & 66-68.

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