

# In Search of Taiwanese-ness in Modern Taiwan Poetry

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## *Introduction*

Speaking of modern Taiwan poetry in the 20th century involves not only the question of what can be classified as modern poetry, but confronts one even more with the problem of defining Taiwan literature in general. Is there such thing as a distinct modern Taiwan poetry? What justifies to distinguish it from modern Chinese poetry? In short, what makes Taiwan poetry Taiwanese? Approaching these questions from the basis of the island's literary history, the following paper shall try to sort out possible criteria for the definition of the 'Taiwaneseness' of modern Taiwan poetry. Considering the different influences that shaped its development in regard to formal, linguistic and thematic matters, we shall look into the different phases of Taiwan's history beginning with the Japanese colonial period and moving into post-war Taiwan in the second part. In a short summary, three proposed criteria will be discussed in more detail against the background of the historical developments.

## *Early Influences—The Japanese Colonial Period*

While important literary and linguistic movements took place in early 20th century China, Taiwan had already become part of the Japanese colonial empire.

The island's cession to Japan in 1895 not only sealed its break with the Chinese motherland, but also with its various developments. Japanese language education became compulsory and Japanese the only means of communication where public life was concerned.

Despite those measures and because of restricted entrance to Taiwan's universities, some Taiwanese attended higher education in China into the early 1930s. By this means, Zhang Wojun 張我軍 (born Zhang Qingrong 張清榮, 1902–1955) came into contact with the ideas of the New Literature Movement (*xinwenxue yundong* 新文學運動) during his studies at Peking Normal University in the early 1920s. The movement, ignited by Hu Shi's 胡適 (1891–1962) article Preliminary Propositions for a Literary Reform (»Wenxue gailiang chuyi« 文學改良芻議) in 1917, culminated in the May Fourth Movement (*wusi yundong* 五四運動) in 1919. Following especially Hu Shi's rejection of the written classical style (*wenyanwen* 文言文) and his demands to write in the new vernacular (*baibhua* 白話), Zhang Wojun fervently advocated not only a new Chinese literature in Taiwan that breaks with any classical tradition, but also supported the idea of Taiwan literature as an integral part of Chinese literature in general. His articles A Letter to Taiwan's Youth and The Terrible Literary Scene of Taiwan ignited a twofold debate on classical and vernacular literature (*Xinjiu wenxue lunzhan* 新舊文學論戰) as well as on the choice of language (*Taiwan huawen lunzhan* 臺灣話文論戰) for the proposed new poetry. Arguing that any other vernacular than Hoklo 福佬<sup>1</sup> would only create an alienating effect like classical Chinese did because no one in Taiwan was actually familiar with the new vernacular forming in early 20th century China, voices advocating a literature written in Hoklo arose. Though both debates were fervently pursued, they never moved far beyond theoretical issues and the actual literary output remained quiet small. The outbreak of the second Sino-Japanese war in 1937 hence put an end to those issues by prohibiting Chinese language publications on the whole.<sup>2</sup>

But not only China saw a reform and rethinking of literary traditions and practices. As early as the 1910s Japan's literary scene had been strongly influenced by Western ideas and modernist movements. The first Japanese avant-garde

- 1 The language of the people whose ancestral home was in the south of Fujian province and who spoke *Minnanhua* 閩南話, often also referred to as 'Taiwanese'. Since the latter is ambiguous, the term »Hoklo« is used in this article.
- 2 Faye Yuan Kleeman, *Under an Imperial Sun. Japanese Colonial Literature of Taiwan and the South* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2003), 148–149; Michelle Yeh, »Frontier Taiwan: An Introduction«, in *Frontier Taiwan: An Anthology of Modern Chinese Poetry*, ed. and tr. by Michelle Yeh and Göran Malmqvist (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 14.

poem was published in 1915 and was the vanguard of a wide range of European modernist currents, such as dadaism, surrealism, futurism or expressionism. Just like studying abroad in China, a younger generation of Taiwanese, who received their education exclusively in Japanese, attended universities abroad in Japan. Not only through the current developments within Japanese poetry but also through translations of European authors, Taiwanese students came into contact with modernism in Japan.<sup>3</sup> Due to those influences, modernism made its way to Taiwan in form of poetry in the Japanese language. In April 1924, Xie Chunmu 謝春木 (1902–1967) published a sequence of four modernist poems under the pen-name of Zhuifeng 追風.<sup>4</sup> More important with regard to literary developments, however, became the poetry society »Le Moulin« (*Fengche* or *Fūsba* 風車, depending on the Chinese or Japanese reading), established in 1933 by, among others, Yang Chichang 楊熾昌 (1908–1994) and Lin Yongxiu 林永修 (1914–1944). Among its members were also Japanese poets, and it devoted its activities to surrealism and symbolism, the two main currents in modern Japanese poetry. All of its members had been active in Japanese literary circles and published their works in various literary magazines. Just as in European and later in Taiwanese modernism, the main emphasis was put on expressing the inner world and the individual as such. A notable feature in Lin Yongxiu's poetry is the treatment of Taiwan's landscape, which created a distinction from their Japanese and European models. Besides being a new form of expression, modern poetry also constituted a refuge granting freedom of expression and expressing protest, as Yang Chichang stated later on:

There are many techniques and methods of literary creation, but realism was sure to invite a cruel incarceration of letters by the Japanese, I thought. And so we introduced the method of »surrealism«, which was showing progress at the moment in France, and thus glossed over the exposure of the heart.<sup>5</sup>

- 3 Ch'en Ming-t'ai 陳明臺, »Modernist Poetry in Prewar Taiwan: Yang Ch'i-ch'ang, the »Le Moulin« Poetry Society, and Japanese Poetic Trends« [»Yang Chichang—Fengche shishe he Riben shichao zhanqian Taiwan xinshi xiandaizhuyi zhi kaocha« 楊熾昌——風車詩社和日本詩潮戰前台灣新詩現代主義之考察], tr. from Japanese by Robert Backus, *Taiwan Literature* no 2 (1995), 94–95.
- 4 Michelle Yeh, »Frontier Taiwan«, 15.
- 5 Yang Ziqiao 楊子喬, »Chaoxianshizhuyi de changdao zhe—fangwen Yang Qichang« 超現實主義的倡導者——訪問楊熾昌 [Advocate of Surrealism—An Interview with Yang Qichang], *Taiwan wenyi* 臺灣文藝 no 102 (1986), 113; quoted from Ch'en Ming-t'ai, »Modernist Poetry in Prewar Taiwan«, 100.

I was of the opinion that only a literature for literature's sake could evade the diabolical clutches of the Japanese police.<sup>6</sup>

Similar motives can be found amongst the poets of the 1950s and 1960s. This is how Lin Hengtai 林亨泰 (b1924) presented the situation in retrospect:

What the Taiwanese poets craved the most at that time was to be permitted the freedom of autonomous expression in full. The poets unintentionally sought a current of literary thought that would offer them a freer universe; it was a natural tendency.<sup>7</sup>

Just as Zhang Wojun's promotion for a new literature was opposed by advocates of traditional writing, modernist poetry in the Japanese language was strongly criticized by a literary Taiwan marked by realism. Though not fully agreeing with the harsh critique that was voiced at that time, Ch'en Ming-t'ai still observes the striking similarities between Taiwanese authors and their Japanese models which sometimes go as far as copying full verses. He also regrets that only two of the European modernist currents found their way to Taiwan. The influence of »Le Moulin« has altogether been very marginal. The literary association's journal was published only four times and had a low circulation, so that it hardly reached a broader audience. Moreover, Taiwan's retrocession to China after World War II and the drastic political and social changes of made it impossible for this group of poets to exert any influence on post-war literature in Taiwan.<sup>8</sup> It would take another two decades for Taiwanese authors to reexamine the roots of modern poetry in colonial Taiwan.

These parallels not only suggest how closely Taiwan modernist poetry and the island's history are interwoven, but also offer hints to continuities within Taiwan's modernist poetry.

6 Lin Peifen 林佩芬, »Yong bu tingxi de fengche« 永不停息的風車 [The Ever-Turning Windmill], *Wenxun yuekan* 文訊月刊 9/1984, 298; quoted from Ch'en Ming-t'ai, »Modernist Poetry in Prewar Taiwan«, 100.

7 Lin Hengtai, *Jianzhe zhi yan* 見者之言 [Words of a Witness] (Zhanghua: Xianli wenhua zhongxin, 1993), 243; quoted from Ch'en Ming-t'ai, »Modernist Poetry in Prewar Taiwan«, 117.

8 Ch'en Ming-t'ai, »Modernist Poetry in Prewar Taiwan«, 115–116; Silvia Marijnissen, »From Transparency to Artificiality: Modern Chinese Poetry from Taiwan After 1949« (Ph.D. thesis University of Leiden, 2008), 26.

*Post-war Taiwan—Propaganda and Tradition*

With the end of the World War II as well as half a century of colonial rule, Taiwan entered a new phase of history. Defeated by the Chinese Communist Party on the mainland, the Guomindang (GMD) ultimately retreated to the island in 1949. Already six months after its retrocession, Taiwan had become subject to systematically implemented ‘de-Japanization’ measures, including the National Language Movement and the ban of Japanese publications.<sup>9</sup> Due to these developments, authors born within the colonial period became quasi illiterate. Having been educated exclusively in Japanese, they were without any proficiency of the new national language and therefore lacked any medium of expression. It would take them decades to master the Chinese language well enough to participate in literary discourse again. Lin Hengtai designated poets who achieved the language shift at one point or another, the ‘translanguagual generation’ (*kuayue yuyan de yidai* 跨越語言的一代). Michelle Yeh subsequently proposes the term ‘silent generation’ for those who simply ceased to publish at all.<sup>10</sup>

Only few poets accomplished the change of language quickly enough to become an integral part of the literary scene as early as the 1950s and 1960s. Examples for those exceptions are the aforementioned Lin Hengtai, as well as Wu Yingtao 吳瀛濤 (1916–1971) and Jin Lian 錦蓮 (b1928). The literary vacuum was, however, primarily filled with writers who came as refugees from the mainland. Some of them, such as Ji Xian 綴弦 (b1913), had been actively involved in literary circles and magazines in mainland China, others again consisted of soldiers who had followed the GMD. A large percentage was comprised of students. They nevertheless shared their position outside the cultural establishment.<sup>11</sup>

The official discourse at that time was coined by anticommunist propaganda and an emphasis on traditional values and writings. Publications by writers, who had remained on the mainland and were therefore denounced as communists,

9 Hsiao A-chin, *Contemporary Taiwanese Cultural Nationalism* (London [etc.]: Routledge, 2000), 54–58; Michelle Yeh, »Frontier Taiwan«, 19.

10 Michelle Yeh, »Frontier Taiwan«, 20–21.

11 Alain Leroux, »Poetry Movements in Taiwan from the 1950s to the late 1970s: Breaks and Continuities«, *China Perspectives* no 68 (2006), 5 <[chinaperspectives.revues.org/3113](http://chinaperspectives.revues.org/3113)> (last retrieval Oct 25, 2010); Marijnissen, »From Transparency to Artificiality«, 41; Michelle Yeh, »Frontier Taiwan«, 26.

were banned under GMD rule, so that authors in Taiwan saw themselves not only deprived of their Japanese heritage, but also of any connection to literary developments that had taken place in China since the New Literature Movement. For many scholars, this isolation constitutes the reason why Taiwan's modern poets turned towards Western currents.<sup>12</sup> Chang Sung-shen cautions readers to attach too much importance to this fact.<sup>13</sup> She argues instead that following Western ideals should be seen in the broader context of a trend towards westernization in the 1960s. Greatly beneficial to the construction of an official discourse was the controlling and censoring of the media as well as the establishment of literary committees and associations, which promoted nationalistic literary works.<sup>14</sup> Awards which included prize money and the prospect of being published made many modern poets join the official discourse, though one should not forget that those who came to Taiwan followed the GMD from conviction. As Ji Xian himself stated: »I need not deny nor feel humble about it: a kind of patriotic anti-communist emotion has always directed my poetic works.«<sup>15</sup> But being consistent with state interests also meant to refrain from any political and socio-critical issues. Poets did as a result follow Western modernist currents and turned towards their inner world of thoughts and feelings (ibid. 37).<sup>16</sup>

*Poetry in Post-War Taiwan—Modernism and the Struggle for Identity*

One of the most active and important poets in the first two decades after Taiwan's retrocession was Ji Xian. Besides his activities as editor of several literary supplements and journals, the foundation of the journal *Modern Poetry Quarterly* (*Xiandai shi jikan* 現代詩季刊) and the poetry society *Modernist School* (*Xiandai pai* 現代派) in February 1956 may be considered his main contributions to the history of modern poetry in Taiwan. In the 13th issue of

12 Cf. Leroux, »Poetry Movements in Taiwan«, 11.

13 Chang Sung-shen, *Modernism and the Nativist Resistance: Contemporary Chinese Fiction from Taiwan* (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 1993), 7.

14 Michelle Yeh, »Frontier Taiwan«, 28; cf. Marijnissen, »From Transparency to Artificiality«, 34–35.

15 Ji Xian in Julia C. Lin, *Essays on Contemporary Chinese Poetry* (Athens; London: Ohio University Press, 1985); quoted from Marijnissen, »From Transparency to Artificiality«, 35.

16 Ibid., 37.

Modern Poetry Quarterly he announced the following six guidelines of his society:

- 1) We are a Modernists' group who further develops the spirit and elements from all poetry schools that have newly risen since Baudelaire and discard what is not useful. [...]
- 2) We believe that New Poetry is a horizontal transplantation, not a vertical inheritance. This is our general opinion, our basic point of departure in both theory and practice. [...]
- 3) We explore the new continent of poetry, develop the virgin land of poetry. We express new content, create new forms, discover new means, and invent new techniques. [...]
- 4) We emphasize intellect. [...] A main feature of modernism is to resist romanticism. To emphasize intellect and to exclude the expression of feelings. What use is it to rely solely on unrestrained emotions? [...] Composedness, objectivity, profundity make use of a high degree of reasoning to engage in abstruse expression. A new Poem must have a solid and beautiful construction, the writer of a New Poem must be an outstanding engineer. [...]
- 5) We pursue purity of poetry. [...]
- 6) We love the country, are anti-communist and advocate freedom and democracy.<sup>17</sup>

Apart from the last point, which to Marijnissen »rather seems lip service to the government policy«,<sup>18</sup> though even that might be questionable regarding his self asserted nationalistic stance, all points refer mainly to structural aspects. This tendency could also be found in Hu Shi's propositions for New Poetry. For Ji Xian, prose-style poetry (or 'prose poems', *sanwenshi* 散文詩) were the only possible form for New Poetry. He discarded any regulated verse that could be found in traditional poetry, arguing that Western literature such as poetry and drama had long since ceased to be versified.<sup>19</sup> How influential Ji Xian and the Modernist School actually were can be seen from the number of poets who followed his call. 115 poets joined the society.<sup>20</sup> For Yeh, those two institutions, founded by Ji Xian, their theoretical framework, as well as their activities were

17 Ji Xian, »Jianli xin minzu shixing zhi chuyi« 建立新民族詩型之芻議 [Modest Proposals for Establishing National Poetic Forms; 1956]; quoted from Marijnissen, »From Transparency to Artificiality«, 40.

18 Marijnissen, »From Transparency to Artificiality«, 42.

19 Ibid., 25.

20 Ibid., 40.

the most influential during the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>21</sup> But Ji Xian's notion was devoid of criticism. Especially the second point of his guidelines became cause for the first open debate about modern poetry in Taiwan.

Shortly after Ji Xian published his first edition of *Modern Poetry Quarterly*, and in reaction to the same, Yu Guangzhong 余光中 (b1928), Qin Zihao 覃子豪 (b1948) and three other poets founded a rather loose literary salon called Blue Star (Lanxing 藍星).<sup>22</sup> The objections to Ji Xian's proposals became especially pronounced over his opinion of New Poetry being rather a horizontal transplantation than a vertical inheritance. In 1957, Qin Zihao published his article *Where is New Poetry Going?*—criticizing at least partly Xian's manifesto and provided his six Correct Principles of the Current Direction of New Poetry as follows:

- 1) Poetry is rooted in human life. It should not comply with an 'art for art' approach, nor should poetry serve human life. Its meaning is more philosophical and lies in the observation of life itself in all its forms, and in the expression of the whole realm of human life. It nourishes and illuminates mankind;
- 2) Poets should not only write for their personal pleasure and write in obscure and chaotic imagery. They have to be considerate of the reader and make the reader enter the spiritual world of the poet. One should strive for a balance between the wishes of reader and poet;
- 3) Poetry is in essence about purity, richness, authenticity, and carries the main existence of the author. It is a living thing; from a realization or awareness towards life, which is the embryonic motive for the author, it grows to be a living product of blood and flesh through the thoughts and feelings of the author;
- 4) One has to search for the ideological root in poetry. Poetry has to have a philosophical background and in an indirect, unconscious way pursue universal truth;
- 5) New expressions can be found in precision. Only when poetry is precise can it reach the highest attainments of profoundness, compactness, deepness, implicitness and vividness;
- 6) Style is not an imitation of something, of Western literature, but is a personal, unique creation.<sup>23</sup>

21 Michelle Yeh, »Introduction: From the Margin«, 24.

22 *The Isle Full of Noises*, ed. and tr. by Dominic Cheung (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 10; Leroux, »Poetry Movements in Taiwan«, 16.

23 Qin Zihao, »Xinshi xiang hechu qu?« 新詩向何處去? [1957], in Qin Zihao, *Lun xiandai shi* 論現代詩 [About Modern Poetry] (Taizhong: Cengwen, 1982), 126–138, here 130–138; quoted from Marijnissen, »From Transparency to Artificiality«, 41.

Especially Ji Xian's proposed 'horizontal transplantation', which was understood not only as a complete break with Chinese tradition but also as pure imitation of Western models, met with strong opposition as Yu Guangzhong stated:

He [Ji Xian] wanted to transplant contemporary poetry into Chinese soil, and we were totally against that. Even though we may not have considered our mission to be perpetuation of the Chinese poetic tradition, that does not mean that we were willing to blindly carry out his horizontal transplantation.<sup>24</sup>

Though the members of Blue Star did not envision themselves as preservers of traditional Chinese poetry, they nevertheless seemed to object to breaking completely with the past. Even though this debate is described as one between the Modernist School and Blue Star in many Western publications, it was carried out between individuals, who are often seen as representative for either group. One should not forget that a lot of poets published their works in more than one literary magazine and that even within the societies themselves there were fervent debates on the topic of modern poetry.

Regarding the official policy of introducing literature and arts into the military since 1950s it is hardly surprising that in 1954 the three navy officers Ya Xian 痙弦 (b1932), Luo Fu 洛夫 (b1928) and Zhang Mo 張默 (b1931) founded the poetry society Epoch (Chuangshiji 創世紀). Their guidelines, published in the first issue of their magazine, Epoch Poetry Quarterly (*Chuangshiji shi kan* 創世紀詩刊), were strongly influenced by the official discourse.<sup>25</sup> But only two years later, a deeper interest for poetry as such was manifested by the group. In their article Our Views on Establishing a New Model for National Poetry (»Jianli xin minzu shi xing zhi chuyi« 建立新民族詩型之芻議), published in 1956, they emphasized the following two characteristics of new poetry:

Artistic—not a purely rational explanation, nor a straightforward representation of pure emotions, but an expression through images. Imagery is most important, artistic conception the highest.

With a Chinese favour and an Eastern taste—using the specific nature of the Chinese script to express the particular inclinations of the people's life in the East.<sup>26</sup>

24 Yu Guangzhong, »Di shiqi ge danchen« 第十七個誕辰 [17th Anniversary], *Xiandai wenxue* no 46 (1972); quoted from Leroux, »Poetry Movements in Taiwan«, 5.

25 Michelle Yeh, »On Our Destitute Dinner Table": "Modern Poetry Quarterly" in the 1950s«, in *Writing Taiwan: A New Literary History*, ed. by David Wang Der-Wei and Carlos Rojas (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2007), 119.

26 Xiang Ming 向明, »Wuling niandai shi de huigu yu xingsi« 五零年代詩的回顧與省思 [Review and Reflection of the Poetry from the 1950s], *Lanxing* 藍星 no 45 (1988), 96; quoted from Marijnissen, »From Transparency to Artificiality«, 55.

When the Modernist School was discontinued in 1959 because of financial problems, they changed their course. Withdrawing their model for a new national poetry they now dedicated themselves to Western currents. Besides translations of Western authors like Rainer Maria Rilke (1875–1926), Paul Valéry (1871–1945), T. S. Eliot (1888–1965) and Charles Baudelaire (1821–1867), more and more surrealist works by authors including André Breton (1896–1966), Paul Éluard (1895–1952), Louis Aragon (1897–1982) and Jules Supervielles (1884–1960) were introduced to the reader. Even to Lin Hengtai and Xiang Ming it seems as if Epoch had taken up the former position of Modernist School. Many of its old members changed to this society.<sup>27</sup> But not only the mobility within the poetic circles, but also Epoch's tendency towards experimental poetry relates the two groups.<sup>28</sup>

That those poetic societies might be seen as a unit, in spite of internal differences and debates, only becomes clear in the following years when modernists had to face criticism from outside their own circle for the first time. Two main debates arose at the end of the 1950s. In 1959, Su Xuelin 蘇雪林 (1897–1999) published an article entitled Li Jinfa, Initiator of the New Poetry's Symbolist Movement (»Xin shi tanxiangzhengpai chuangshizhe Li Jinfa« 新詩壇象徵派創始者李金髮), criticizing Li Jinfa 李金髮 (1900–1976), as well as symbolism and the obscurity of New Poetry which made impossible to understand it. Ji Xian and Qin Zihao attended to defend Li Jinfa and Taiwan poetry in general. Its symbolism, they argued, was more than a pure copy of mainland currents. Through the incorporation of different influences, it developed an independent form. An unidentified author of letters to the editor of *Ziyou qingnian* (Free Youth) identifying himself as Menwaihan 門外漢 ('laymen') further elaborated Su Xuelin's point of view.<sup>29</sup> She or he argued that the poets had to make concessions to the audience in order to warrant their understanding. Ji Xian and Qin Zihao on the contrary called for an active reader, who contributes to the interpretation of New Poetry.<sup>30</sup>

The second debate arose over a series of articles entitled Chatting about New Poetry (»Xin shi xianhua« 新詩閒話) published by Yan Xi 言曦 (1916–1979)

27 Marijnissen, »From Transparency to Artificiality«, 55–56.

28 Dominic Cheung, *The Isle Full of Noises*, 12.

29 *Ziyou qingnian* 自由青年 22,6 (Sep 16, 1959) and 22,8 (Oct 16, 1959). For bibliographical details and the unidentified status of Menwaihan, I refer to Chen Zhengyan 陳政彥, »Zhanhou Taiwan xiandai shi lunzhan shi yanjiu« 戰後臺灣現代詩論戰史研究 [The History of Debates on Postwar Modern Taiwan Poetry] (PhD dissertation National Central University, 2007), 68n8, 294.

30 Marijnissen, »From Transparency to Artificiality«, 59.

in *Central Daily News* (*Zhongyang ribao* 中央日報). He also criticized Western influences, especially from French symbolism, for the obscurity and nihilistic stance of New Poetry in Taiwan, and demanded instead to return to classical structures in verse and metrics. Yu Guangzhong, who had been strongly criticized, participated most actively in this debate. He argued that Taiwan never fully broke with Chinese tradition, since it had always been part of the historical development from traditional literature to the New Literature Movement in mainland China until modern times. Qin Zihao further reasoned that poetry should be evaluated on the basis of creativity only. What is remarkable about the two debates is the unity formed across the so diverse society. They also show how little New Poetry had been accepted and how highly traditional literature was still valued.<sup>31</sup>

In the 1960s, New Poetry reached its lowest point. In 1963, the leading figure of Blue Star, Qin Zihao, died and the society discontinued its publications from 1965 to 1971. In 1964, *Modern Poetry Quarterly* was ultimately shut down while *Epoch Poetry Quarterly* had only been published once a year in 1961-63. Protesting against the elitism and surrealist tendencies of *Epoch*, Lin Hengtai and Bai Qiu founded a new poetry society named Bamboo Hat (*Lishishe* 笠詩社) in 1964.<sup>32</sup> In the first issue of their *Bamboo Hat Poetry Journal*, they expressed the following aspirations:

Although the poetry scene is somewhat lively, many poetry journals have not reached a satisfactory level. First, the selection of creative work is affected by personal connections; the sacred criterion of selection based on the work not on the author, is yet to be established. Second, flattery and name-calling have taken the place of proper criticism and hampered progress on the poetry scene. In view of these weaknesses, we have decided to come forward resolutely to organize a serious, high-quality poetry journal in order to address the corruption on the poetry scene.<sup>33</sup>

Similarities in their view on experimental writing and their efforts to introduce Western modernist currents through translations led scholars to label them as a replacement of the Modernist School. The most prominent aspect that distin-

31 Ibid., 59-61.

32 Ibid., 74.

33 Zhao Tianyi 趙天儀, »Cong jingzi de tujing zou chu lai: "Li" 100 qi de huigu yu zhanwang« 從荊棘的途徑走出來：《笠》100 期的回顧與展望 [Emerging from the Thorny Path: Retrospect and Prospect of the Journal »Bamboo Hat« on the Occasion of Its Issue No 100], in *Taiwan jingshen de jueqi* 臺灣精神的崛起 [The Rise of the Taiwanese Spirit], ed. Zheng Jiongming 鄭炯明 (Gaoxiang: Wenxuejie zazhi, 1989), 390-399; quoted from Michelle Yeh, »Frontier Taiwan«, 29.

guishes both societies however is the origin of their members. Bamboo Hat was solemnly comprised of local, or so-called *bentu* 本土, writers such as Wu Yingtao 吳瀛濤 (1919–1971), Huang Hesheng 黃荷生 (b1938) and Du Guoqing 杜國清 (b1941).<sup>34</sup> Those writers had in previous years never been explicitly excluded, but their linguistic background made it impossible to actively take part in the literary scene. Another important feature of this society is closely related to the origins of its members. Being educated in Japanese, and therefore proficient in this language enabled them not only to translate Japanese poetry as well as Western works translated into Japanese, but also to access the early Japanese roots of modern poetry in Taiwan. Thus it was a member of Bamboo Hat, Huan Fu 桓夫 (b1922) who first traced back modern Taiwan poetry to Chinese and Japanese roots equally. Even though Bai Qiu denies any intention to deliberately raise nativist consciousness, Bamboo Hat, however, marked the beginning of a new era in literary Taiwan.<sup>35</sup>

With the beginning of the 1970s, Taiwan experienced another politically agitated period. The USA did not only decide to return the Senkaku-Islands to Japan rather than Taiwan, who also claimed authority of the territory, but also withdrew their support for the Taiwanese seat in the United Nations, which led to the exclusion of Taiwan in favour of the admission of China in 1971.<sup>36</sup> Those events generated anti-Western sentiments, which then also became perceptible within Taiwan's poetry scene. In 1972–73 John Kwan Terry (Guan Jieming 關傑明, b1937), professor at the Singapore National Normal University, and Tang Wenbiao 唐文標 (1936–1985), professor at the University of Illinois-Urbana, published several articles criticizing modern poetry in Taiwan as a product of 'cultural colonialism'.<sup>37</sup> Like earlier critics, they blamed the poets for blindly imitating Western currents, which resulted in the obscurity and incomprehensibility of their poetry. They furthermore ordered them to return to the Chinese traditions, which they had left too far behind, in order not to lose their identity. Another strongly criticized feature of modern poetry was its lack of any social function, and its inability to represent the daily life of the Taiwanese. Those failings have pushed modern poetry to margins of modern society.<sup>38</sup> Demanding a literature with social function and the subject of Taiwan

34 Marijnissen, »From Transparency to Artificiality«, 74.

35 Michelle Yeh, »Frontier Taiwan«, 30–31.

36 Hsiao A-chin, *Contemporary Taiwanese Cultural Nationalism*, 68.

37 Michelle Yeh, »Frontier Taiwan«, 32.

38 Dominic Cheung, *The Isle Full of Noises*, 16–17; Marijnissen, »From Transparency to Artificiality«, 62–63; Michelle Yeh, »Frontier Taiwan«, 32.

itself should be the forerunners of the nativist's debate and Nativist Literature Movement in the late 1970s. However, Michelle Yeh remarks some discrepancies in the line of argument of those critics.<sup>39</sup> They were mostly referring to poetry that was below the average standard of that time and, more importantly, did not make any distinction between structure and contents of the poems. It is thus a mistake to believe that only because modern poetry did not follow realistic patterns it was not able to deal with reality. Such misjudgments become very clear in the light of interpretations of individual poems.<sup>40</sup>

In the following decades, however, a tendency towards realistic poetry can be found. Several poetic societies were founded and dedicated themselves to the simplification of poetic language as well as a thematic shift, which enabled a broader audience to access those works. Neoclassicism and political issues were further directions pursued not only by a younger generation of writers. Marginalized groups within the society such as aborigines or homosexuals in later years became the subject of literature. Besides those developments the democratization of Taiwan and the subsequent loosening of censorship enabled poets moreover to approach historical issues, such as the February 28 Incident in 1947 (*ererba shijian* 二二八事件).<sup>41</sup> All things considered, Taiwan's literary scene became much more diverse in the 1980s and 1990s with different tendencies coexisting.

#### *Summary—Attempt at a Definition*

As we have now seen, Taiwan's modern poetry has been subject to various influences during the last century. The question of whether there is such a thing like a distinct Taiwan modern poetry and what features it would display, still remains. In order to find a sufficiently satisfying definition, we shall in the first place examine the reasons for distinguishing modern poetry from Taiwan from Mainland Chinese poetry.

Assuming that modern poetry in Taiwan could only—like in the West—emerge in a modernizing society, it is thoroughly legitimate to question the state of modernization on Taiwan at the beginning or even middle of the 20th century. Chiu Kuei-fen points out that the technical aspects of linguistic and visual

39 Michelle Yeh, »Frontier Taiwan«, 32.

40 Cf. Marijnissen, »From Transparency to Artificiality«, 69, for a critical analysis of the criticism on Yu Guangzhong's *Shuangrenchuang* 雙人床 [Double Bed; 1966].

41 Michelle Yeh, »Introduction: From the Margin«, 18.

strangeness that people experience during the time of modernization play an equally important role in their development.<sup>42</sup> The cultural and linguistic shift the Taiwanese had to meet with during and after the colonial period made the island even more multilingual than it had been before. The increasing influence of the United States with American soldiers spending their holidays in Taiwan made at least Taipei a multicultural site. In addition to that, Taiwan's film industry started to grow rapidly in the 1950s, and more and more movies from Hong Kong and the US flooded Taiwan's cinemas. Chiu Kuei-fen calls this the »Taiwanese (alternative) modernity« and regards this as evidence that Taiwan's modern poetry came into being as a reaction to the island's own modern circumstances.<sup>43</sup> Even though the Japanese heritage might only have been recognized later on by Taiwanese poets themselves, they nevertheless weaken the argument of its being a pure copy of Western or Chinese modernism. Based on the assumption that it is fully justified to speak of a distinct modern Taiwan poetry, we shall now examine the proposed criteria for a definition of the 'Taiwaneseness' in Taiwan modern poetry.

### *Language*

What in other cases seems to be most prominent feature of literature, proves to be one of the main problems when trying to define Taiwan poetry. It is the language used to compose it. When speaking of English or German literature, it is understood as talking of literature in the corresponding language and even of literature originating in a specific place (more so in the case of languages that are not as widely spread as English or even German); but when it comes to Taiwan's literature, one is sure to encounter misunderstandings or at least different concepts about role of the language in which it is written. The term 'Taiwan literature' itself is an indication of the difficulties which go along with the term to denote it. Conventionally, literature from Taiwan would be called Taiwanese literature, as in the cases mentioned above. 'Taiwanese' as such however is discriminating in itself, referring usually to the main dialect on the island, so-called Hoklo language or *Minnanbua*. It excludes minority languages as Hakka or any aboriginal language as well as the national language *guoyu* 國語 or, for simplicity's sake, termed Chinese in this paper. The exclusion of those languages which are beyond doubt part of Taiwan's multicultural reality seems unjustifiable. Another important aspect are the Japanese roots of modern poetry in Taiwan.

42 Chiu Kuei-fen, »Treacherous Translation: Taiwanese Tactics of Intervention in Transnational Cultural Flows«, *Concentric. Literary and Cultural Studies* 31,1 (Jan 2005), 57.

43 *Ibid.*, 58-59.

Are those to be accepted for the sake of a monolingual definition? Looking at translated compilations of modern Taiwan poetry, one cannot but remark that most of the works included are originally written in Chinese. Western scholars in general appear to ignore early Japanese works of Taiwanese poets in favour of poetry written by immigrants from mainland China. Since both Japanese and Chinese have been oppressively implemented foreign languages in the respective period, it seems not very logical to exclude one or the other on the sole basis of language.

#### *Authors' Origin*

If a definition of Taiwan poetry on the basis of its medium does not lead to sufficient results, an examination of the authorship might help to further specify its particular features. By defining the work of an author as Taiwan poetry based on his origin, one includes not only the so-called *bentu* 本土 authors such as Lin Hengtai and Bai Qiu, but also Yang Chichang, who published his works in Japanese. Regardless of the language an author might use, the fact of his birth in Taiwan would be sufficient to classify his works as Taiwan literature. Such a definition clearly excludes a large number of poets who not only have been born in mainland China and have followed the GMD to Taiwan, but who have also had great influence on the development of Taiwan's literature (i.e. Ji Xian or Yu Guangzhong). It thus remains questionable if the origin of the author can hold as a criterion for a definition of modern Taiwan poetry.

#### *The Contents*

Since language and authorship are not salient enough to define Taiwan poetry, we shall in a third place look over the contents as an appropriate feature for a definition. Already in 1930, Huang Shihui 黃石輝 (1900-1945) asked Taiwanese writers during the first Nativist Debate not only to write in Hoklo, but also dedicate the contents of their work to the daily life of the island and its inhabitants.<sup>44</sup> Arguing along the same line, Tang Wenbiao and John Kwan Terry in the 1970s promoted a literature which through the subject matter of daily life, related more easily to its audience. Those two debates can be termed 'Nativist Debate'. Since at least in the second debate the so-called nativists strongly opposed modern poetry, it seems rather unreasonable to define Taiwan poetry by features that have been called for by its critics. Such a definition would in a closer sense exclude all aforementioned poetry, since only a few of the poems composed explicitly dealt with Taiwan itself. Furthermore I argue that even

44 Hsiao A-chin, *Contemporary Taiwanese Cultural Nationalism*, 39-40.

though modern poetry did not directly refer to the island's reality or, even in an abstract form, the expression of feelings of authors living in Taiwan, this can be understood as a treatment of the circumstances and reality they encountered. In this respect, most modern poetry written in Taiwan deals with the subject of the island itself. Such a blurry definition of the 'Taiwanese-ness' of modern Taiwan poetry seems, however, barely satisfying.

Considering the three criteria elaborated above, it appears impossible to exactly define modern Taiwan poetry. None of the discussed perspective seems to be sufficient in itself to provide the characteristics in question. It cannot be denied, however, that there is such a thing as modern Taiwan poetry, and it seems to be legitimate to include the works and authors discussed in this paper. Looking at the criteria for defining Taiwan literature in Huang Deshi's 黃得時 (1914–1999) Preliminary Remarks to Taiwan Literary History, one discovers that his main emphasis lies on the origin of the author and his work.<sup>45</sup> Most suitable to be included in his history of Taiwan literature are, according to Huang Deshi, the authors as persons themselves, works composed in Taiwan or that have been created on the island or by authors who have been living there long periods of their life. He nevertheless acknowledges that even if of minor importance, works that have either been written outside of Taiwan but deal with the island itself, or whose authors only spent a short time in Taiwan, may be included.<sup>46</sup> Criteria of such a wide and therefore loose range would therefore not only include Taiwanese authors, even those who wrote their poetry in Japanese, but also authors who came as refugees from the mainland and who spent the rest of their lives on Taiwan.

Following Huang Deshi's criteria for the definition of Taiwan literature, I argue that the differences in language, origin and subject matters may, albeit not representative on their own, stand combined for the 'Taiwanese-ness' of modern Taiwan poetry. This is exemplified through the Japanese language and the mainland origin of some authors that stand as a symbol for Taiwan's reality in all its historical and linguistic dimensions.

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45 Huang Deshi, »Taiwan wenxueshi xushuo« 臺灣文學史序說, in *Taiwan bungaku* 台湾文学 3,3 (1943), tr. by Ye Shitao 葉石濤, *Wenxue Taiwan* 文學臺灣 no 18 (1949); repr. in *Ye Shitao quanji* 葉石濤全集 [Complete Works], 23 vols. (Tainan: Taiwan wenxueguan, 2009), 23: 4.

46 Ibid.