

Poetry Blogs and the Posthuman in Postcolonial Taiwan

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Abstract

This article engages the use of poetry blogs in light of the critical writings of Alain Badiou, Jodi Dean, Cary Wolfe, Katherine Hayles and others who shed light on how posthuman autopoietic relationality forms means of conceptualizing how postcolonial subjects may overcome the oppressive legacies of outside rule and restore a sense of sovereignty through transnational networks. These Taiwanese poets—Chiau-Shin Ngo (吳昭新) and Kueishien Lee (李魁賢)—present work in Mandarin, Taiwanese, Japanese and English translation speaking to issues of politics and aesthetics in contemporary Taiwan. Their poetry blogs are shown to continue to reorient the legacies of occupying regimes that excluded Taiwanese from positions of power until the late 1980s. This paper explores how poetic form and the blog medium provide an extension of uses of poetry in posthuman prosthetic networks to form tactics aimed at displacing the KMT apparatus while serving as tools of decolonization and the renegotiation of international affiliations.

Keywords: Postcolonialism, Taiwan, posthumanism, poetry by Taiwanese, social media, Taiwanese politics

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This essay explores the use of blogs and social media by two elderly Taiwanese poets who post poems and prose in Mandarin, Taiwanese, Japanese and sometimes English translations that often include reflections on local and international politics. By using new media to reach out to audiences around the world, they seek sympathetic understanding for the visions for Taiwan they assert as well as readers for their poetry. As their positioning depends on the prosthetic and networking possibilities blogs afford, this text situates their poetry in light of the work of Jodi Dean, Alain Badiou and various posthuman theorists. Though postwar generations were educated to be citizens of the Republic of China, time continues to flow for these poets from a longer view of history in Taiwan, a view distinct from that of mainland China, which indeed existed apart from Taiwan during the period of Japanese rule. For these poets, time flows from a colonial past, with all its ambiguities, uncomfortable ironies, and inherent inequities still visible to them in a complicated postcolonial present. Both Ngo Chiau-Shin (吳昭新) (in Taiwanese, Wu Jau-Shin in Mandarin), who also uses the penname Ōbō Shingo オーボー眞悟 in Japanese (b. 1930), and Lee Kuei-shien (李魁賢) (b. 1937) depend on international affiliations as poets to broaden their audience, influence, and support received for their poetry and political positions. Each poet to varying degrees includes historically contested and politically controversial commentary in their poetry, often circumspectly engaging core questions regarding the unresolved status of Taiwan as both de facto an independent nation and an alternative China (ROC, not PRC). In short, both poets are patriotic Taiwanese reaching out to international others to embody a richer diversity of possibilities than the binary cross-Strait relationship would seem to allow. The blogs are shown to continue to reorient the legacies of colonialism, including not only Japanese rule but also the takeover of Taiwan by “Chinese of other provinces” 外省人 after the KMT army retreated to Taiwan in 1949. Both occupying regimes excluded Taiwanese from sitting in positions of power until the late 1980s, and both poets lived through these eras so that attendant events remain part of their lives (not historical abstractions).

One may recall that within years of being liberated in what is known as the Retrocession of Taiwan (台灣光復), Taiwan was occupied by the national government of the Republic of China as ruled by the Generalissimo and leader of the Kuomintang (KMT), Chiang Kai-shek (蔣介石), after his forces lost the Chinese Civil War. Though the ROC promoted the memorization of the writings of Sun Yat-sen (孫逸仙), notably the “Three Principles of the People” (三民主義), Taiwanese obtained no democratic rights until 1987. Both Ngo and Lee had been born into a colony of the Japanese Empire as it aggressively expanded in Asia, a time when Taiwan had become saturated with the sounds of military

marches, banners and newspapers filled with war propaganda. Upon living under martial law, the poets would live within yet another regime that suppressed democratic movements and parties. Now each poet proudly and unabashedly writes about their hopes for Taiwanese sovereignty as well as recalls past historical events that would have at various times been subject to censorship and official distortions of history (especially regarding the national and exemplar affective status of the period of White Terror in its representations in art and media, as well as in official speeches, documentation, and textbooks). Both poets refer to and re-situate historical events while reflecting on contemporary Taiwan and its international relations—sometimes based on experiences while traveling abroad—and mediating modalities of Taiwanese consciousness.¹ Their work thus may be situated as playing the role of recording living memory in digital postcolonial archives that blogs inevitably become: open historical records taking stakes in Taiwan's futures.² As such, blogs present both a redefinition of postcolonial Taiwan within a narrative of liberation and democratic progress towards sovereign self-rule and a posthuman overcoming of centralized disciplinary rule by the KMT. The blog form itself reiterates the difference of the country—where Taiwanese are rooted in the land of Taiwan—and the metropole of Taipei, where the KMT ruling apparatus has been ensconced. Yet it is the blog form that allows the connection with others. As Jodi Dean writes, “Blogging responds to the problem of finding what one wants by offering something like a relationship, a connection” (44).

Both Ngo and Lee were educated under first Japanese and then ROC systems—national entities once at war with one another. Ironically, in both regimes they would have been politically reduced to muted subservience to leaders assuming sovereignty from abroad, until Lee Teng-hui (李登輝) took office in 1988. Adding to the confusion, the non-Taiwanese “outside-province persons” were at least in part to see themselves not as Taiwanese but rather as “guests” preparing to “retake the Mainland.” Yet, for the KMT today, rapprochement with the Mainland may be understood as a desperate measure to maintain the pseudocolonial privilege of one-party rule of the past by transforming Taiwan into a dependent

¹ See Ching, especially Chapter 3, for an introduction to Taiwanese colonial and postcolonial cultures and their relationship to consciousness in the postwar era.

² My approach to colonial archives intends to emphasize not the point of view and labor of the colonizer, whether Japanese or the pseudo-colonial KMT regime, but rather a collective memory produced at least since the 1960s through the present by Taiwanese, especially those who identify primarily as Taiwanese. Thus my use of “archive” should not be conflated with works on the archive in postcolonial studies of India (see Nayar). Rather, it resonates with the approach to an open archive of and by the oppressed (see Povinelli).

(or even puppet) of the PRC rather than have a Taiwanese majority assume power as opposition parties gain sophistication and win the trust of voters. For older Taiwanese with families going back before WWII and others identifying as Taiwanese, unification is a betrayal of Taiwan and ideals of hard-fought democratic struggles that continue today in the Sunflower Student Movement. Thus the form of governance in the PRC is often perceived as an objectionable barrier to serious negotiations.

Though complications surrounding both the history of who has ruled Taiwan and who should rule it is beyond the scope of this paper, it would be fair to say that the subject-positions and predispositions of elderly Taiwanese with some experience of Japanese rule that suggest other possibilities for Taiwan (both desirable and undesirable models) that remain in circulation in Taiwan by way of their memories (not, as Chinese propagandists claim, through Japanese instigations and propaganda). When contemporary members of this aging generation turn to Japan with a favorable bias, it is based not at all on current Japanese propaganda but rather on several primary factors I will briefly enumerate. First, upon comparing life under KMT rule and Japanese rule, some elderly Taiwanese would prefer the colonial masters to the pseudo-colonial ones, even though Taiwanese are at least culturally Chinese. (Taiwanese may be differentiated from Mainland Chinese due to the fact that only Chinese men were originally permitted to immigrate to Taiwan, so that Taiwanese integrated with the lower plains tribes that now have been completely assimilated.) Second, members of this generation also engage in attacks on the KMT ruling apparatus in its former and present incarnations due to the inexcusable actions of not only routine exclusion from positions of power, but the exercise of state terror, imprisonment and summary execution of anyone perceived of holding dissenting views. Third, their views may also derive from their pro-independence convictions and love of Taiwan that engenders a will to enlist Japan (as well as the US) as allies in a common cause. Fourth, they were indoctrinated by Japanese in their impressionable youth and raised as Japanese during the Second Sino-Japanese and Pacific Wars, a period of intense war propaganda that may bequeath residual nationalist sentiment.

This otherness of memory provided a different standard of comparison that later generations—born into martial law or after—may find difficult to appreciate in detail; however, a vague affinity with Japan through projections of shared colonial nostalgia has recently manifest itself in the extreme popularity of films predicated on such themes.³ These poets' markedly different range of

³ Such films include *Cape No. 7* 海角七號 (2008) and *Kano* (2014). See Chang.

historical experiences as subjects under multiple regimes provides an impetus for wanting to share, transmit, and disseminate a vision of Taiwan borne of a larger view of its place over time. Their vision for Taiwan is not limited to political sovereignty of Taiwan as a nation per se, but also includes an important place for contemporary cultural production rooted in place as defined by emphasis on “the public” (公眾) and containment of corruption, two ideals associated for this generation with the period of Japanese rule in contrast with perceptions of the era of KMT rule.

One can situate this process of cultivating affiliations by way of Internet blogs, Facebook, YouTube readings of poetry and political speeches as a post-humanist extension of the fragile aging bodies preserving their wealth of creative and affective energies over many decades in the present and into the future. To all of us coming of age before the popularization of personal computers and the Internet, this technology is more obviously prosthetic and takes on a digital life of its own and forms a dynamic archive ticking with blog counters and new posts of poems and prose photos of the poets’ social activities. The medium of the web affords a sense of self-projecting functionality in web-page assemblages that provide the means for potentially influencing others—producing new affect based on an understanding from the point of view of one born in the 1930s—so that the conveyed disposition may alter public understanding of Taiwan in and beyond its borders.

Blog Assemblages in Postcolonial Taiwan

One may recall that poetry in journals such as *The Bamboo Hat* 笠 (1964–) (in Mandarin and Taiwanese) and *The Taipei Tanka Association* 台北歌壇 (1966–), now called *The Taiwan Tanka Association* 台灣歌壇 (in Japanese), both assert a Taiwanese identity in resistance to the imposition of pseudo-colonial rule by the Chiang dictatorships (1949–1988). The blog medium provides an extension of such uses of poetry as tools of decolonization and the renegotiation of alternative affiliations. These blogs become measures of influence with respect to relations with mainland China, Japan, Europe, and the Americas, and explore how recognition of Taiwan is articulated in terms of diplomacy, threats of military force, historical precedents, local and international cultural events, and news and opinion concerning the future of Taiwan.

The data these poets integrate in their works form what Alain Badiou calls the objective appearance of artistic or “cultural configurations” (28, 589) presenting elements that alter both aesthetic and political assumptions: they

write not only in Mandarin but Taiwanese (Lee) and Japanese (Ngo)—and assume that political sequences should follow a narrative of Taiwan's long struggle for democracy, not a Hong Kong trajectory. Their long view of the history of Taiwan's struggle for democracy now includes expectations of a right to self-determination through a public referendum to decide the future of Taiwan. Thus they reflect what Elizabeth Povinelli calls "the dream is that . . . the postcolonial archive will create new forms of storage and preservation and new archival spaces and time, in which a social otherwise can endure and thus change existing social formations of power" (153).

Approaching blogs from a broader perspective of questions concerning their politically enabling and psychologically incapacitating effects, Jodi Dean writes: "What's in a post? Anything. Blogging subjectivity isn't narrativized. It's posted. It's not told as a story but presented in moments as an image, reaction, feeling, or event. The post is a form that expresses mediality as such" (47). Indeed, Ngo and Lee exhibit a focus on humanistic poetic production of Romantic subjectivities—political passions—that in the posthuman context of the Internet form what Dean sees as "media capture [of] their users in intensive and extensive networks of enjoyment, production, and surveillance" within what she calls "communicative capitalism" (3-4). Through this "capture" both affective intensities find expression and containment within corporate-based networking services and industries. The drives in the production and consumption of blogs feed the multifariousness of multi-media posts and supplement the creative imagery and ironies of the poems themselves so as to form unique mappings of postcolonial nostalgia, longstanding complaints over past injustices and how they are memorialized or forgotten, and longings for Taiwanese sovereignty personalized in the poets' historical perspectives.

Dean, however, also explores "how communicative capitalism fragments thought into ever smaller bits, bits that can be distributed and sampled, even ingested and enjoyed, but that in the glut of multiple, circulating contributions tend to resist recombination into longer, more demanding theories" (2), suggesting that communication gives way to the sort of uncertainty that makes the distinction between truth and lies vanish—"a collapse of symbolic efficiency" (112). Nevertheless, these poets' blogs present living memories of postcolonial Taiwan, projecting from the past into a contemporary network as well as an archiving process that can perhaps best be understood as posthuman both in its prosthetic and networking relationality. Their works form "bodies" in Badiou's sense in *Logics of Worlds*, when he writes that we "can define the body: the set of elements of a site . . . which entertain with the resurrection of the inexistent . . . a relationship of maximal proximity" (466). A blog post of poems treated as a

body may convey a strong sense of an ontological refiguring and rescaling of the importance of various events and values that have been felt or, as in the case of Taiwan, anticipated (democracy, sovereignty), and projected into the future while criticizing the past and unfolding continuities with authoritarian styles of decision-making behind closed doors (which sparked the Sunflower Student Movement). The blog assemblages attempt to overcome the Ma-era attempts to direct Taiwan into closer ties with the PRC while rendering hopes of sovereignty “inexistent.” This fusion of postcolonial—with respect to the KMT apparatus—and the posthuman as a radicalized reconfiguration of intentionality and subject-control from a distributed network of affiliations linked by prosthetic interfaces.

That most of Taiwanese society necessarily lives once-removed from these elderly poets’ lived experiences suggests that their poetry and blogs form a post-human digital repository of their affective sensibilities and struggles as well as existing in a live network that may provide support and hope to younger activists. Moreover, their blogs might encourage others to emulate such work that either serves as a record of struggles as well as a nexus of political antagonisms present amid contemporary historical tensions. Yet, who knows if such poets are not the heroic materials of film, and may gradually reach a wider audience, through the people they reach out to internationally? In Judith Butler’s discourse on recognized life as being “grievable,” she argues that “grievability is a condition of a life’s emergence and sustenance” and that “the future anterior”—recognition, regarding a given life, that it “will be a life that will have been lived”—“is the presupposition of a grievable life, which means that this will be a life that can be regarded as a life, and be sustained by that regard” (15). These poets engage in such tactical presentations of past events that demand not only visibility and grievability of the lives of Taiwanese marginalized by the KMT apparatus in the past, but also a reconfiguration of “Taiwan” and its local and international politics in the unfolding present.

Chiau-Shin Ngo and the Posthuman in Postcolonial Haiku

Chiau-Shin Ngo is not only active in haiku composition, criticism and education, but also in the promotion of the use of a Taiwanese phonetic script (resembling the *bo-po-mo-fō* used in Mandarin education). By profession, he is a medical doctor with a PhD and has blog pages on liver diseases and other medical issues. As many Taiwanese born during the period of Japanese rule, Ngo exhibits a degree of melancholic nostalgia for Japanese rule, no doubt in part due to the White Terror that followed “liberation from the Japanese.” Having received a

Japanese education until the age of fifteen, it was only then that he began to study Mandarin. Illustrative of his dry wit, he thus dubs himself one “of a generation of ‘mother-tongue-less people’ in Taiwan” (台湾の「無母語人」の世代) (Ngo, *Ōbō Shingo no tanshi-shū*, n.p.; my translations). Yet, in terms of politics, Japanese haiku does not serve to any great degree as a maternal connection to Japan so much as a means of connecting Taiwan to the world through the inclusion of political haiku in the process of sharing haiku internationally. Ngo regularly updates his blog with impassioned critical appreciations of haiku composed in Japanese.

Many of his haiku and *tanka* reflect his keen wit, observations that are not particularly political, yet exhibit his consciousness of social conditions, conventions, history, and local legends associated with names. In other verse, his passion for Taiwan and political issues comes through in such provocative examples as these:

There are countries where they say there are no countries where there are countries
 国あって国で無いてふ国のあり (10・04・05)
Kuni atte kuni de naite fu kuni no ari

The nightmare began the day the war ended and our country was gone
 国失くし悪夢始まる終戦日 (10・08・15)
Kuni nakushi akumu hajimaru shūsen-bi

With slogans of virtuous one-man rule
 the good citizens fell into a trap, a nation
 清廉やワンマン政府のスローガン国家の罠にはまる良民
Seiren ya wanman seifu no surōgan kokka no wana ni hamaru ryōmin

(Ngo, *Ōbō Shingo no tanshi-shū* n.p.; my translations)

The first poem, a haiku (without a season word, so that one may be tempted to call it *senryū*, if the poet had not already categorized it a haiku), mocks those who would deny Taiwan exists—at least de facto—as a country, albeit one not recognized by many international organizations or states. It particularly points to the People’s Republic of China, which has expended great energy in convincing other countries that it is in their best business interests to follow their demand that Taiwan be seen as a “Province of China.” The second poem, also a haiku, bears a bold reversal of the entire idea of the Retrocession (or ceding back) of Taiwan as an event (and holiday) to celebrate the liberation from Japanese colonial rule. This sentiment reflects bitterness toward the human rights abused under the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) and their rule by martial law, which made even the Japanese colonial masters, for all their racial hierarchies and exclusions, seem more benign. The third example, a *tanka* (31-

mora modern version of a classical form that is arguably the foundation of Japanese literature, dating back more than 15 centuries), argues in two-steps that Chiang Kai-shek in official media for decades was presented as a benevolent, upstanding pillar of goodness and fighter of corruption; however, with the support of “good citizens” (or simple “good people”) who followed the party propaganda out of fear and intimidation, the “nation” itself materialized *against their best interests*. Along these lines, one often hears today how Chiang’s biggest strategic error, as official international recognition shifted to the PRC in the 1970s, was maintaining the *imaginary* of the ROC when it would have been the best moment—at least in retrospect—to declare the independence of Taiwan. In effect, Ngo suggests that in preserving the ego of the authoritarian father figure, the “good people” gave up their hopes of sovereign rule. Ngo, like Lee (born seven years later), suggests similar longings for a future Taiwan that would embody native rule as a sovereign, separate land and political body.

For all Ngo’s humor and humanist ideals, he exhibits a reified poetics of allusion also rooted in poetic “matrix of words and consumer items that replaces the classical matrix of limited poetic words (situated by conventions of seasons, poetic places, love cycles, etc.)” (Brink, “Sustaining *Jouissance*” 648). This formalized typological intertextuality functions by way of substitutions and transformations that allow for dense poetic figurations, which may indeed displace the heroic poet-actor as conscious performer; his language forms discursive affiliations suggesting historical perspective for readers to appreciate and sympathize with politically as he dramatizes his grasp of postcolonial ironies in Taiwanese history. Reaching out by way of haiku blogging thus sustains a dramatic tension in that it invokes systems beyond its control, both of a political variety as well as the typological intertextuality of haiku—with its requisite seasonal words as well as general associative matrix of the classic poetic words, and modeling of such classical intertextuality to engage contemporary interests of any discourse (Brink, “Cheerful”). To borrow from David Roden, the drama of Ngo’s haiku suggests relational entanglements that simply could not exist before the age of the Internet: “A real-world system existing under urgent time constraints” and concentrating “on essential tasks like keeping important data in working memory and ensuring that its sensory feedback conforms to expectations generated by its action emulators” (99); the mediation Roden describes applies to poet-bloggers and readers as well as computers.

As Katherine Hayles points out, in addition to memory ordering, “mastery through the exercise of autonomous will is merely the story consciousness tells itself to explain results that actually come about through chaotic dynamics and emergent structures” (288). She gives the example of Edwin Hutchins’ examination

of the posthuman “interactions within an environment that includes both human and nonhuman actors” (288), that of maintaining and navigating a ship. It is precisely such a multiplicity of functionality and messaging that helps us appreciate how these politically-oriented poetry blogs form complex relations in networks and interdependencies:

Performance is embedded in real human relationships. Every action is not only a piece of the computation [of ship navigation and functions], a bit of the task completed; it is also a social message. Building and maintaining good social relationships becomes an important motive for competent performance. In order to do the computation, the members of the team must interact. (Hutchins 224)

Ngo and Lee present their blogs in just such a vulnerable yet robust way: they rely on others to read and respond with comments and upticks on their blog and Facebook posts, while readers rely on them for aesthetic inspiration and political direction and support. This leads to one more point in this intersection of poetry and Badiou, blog theory and posthumanism. In a way this echoes Badiou’s own claims for impersonal artistic configurations, namely that they index worlds in poems by presenting objective measures of existents and inexistents (generally unknown or unrecognized elements) in light of unfolding events; however, as Cary Wolfe emphasizes, the presence of a multiplicity of environments and autopoietic systems exist in “a shared environment, sometimes converging in a consensual domain, sometimes not, by autopoietic entities that have their own temporalities, chronicities, perceptual modalities” (Wolfe xxiv). Badiou’s concept of poetic configuration entails a degree of intentionality and suggests fidelities to events (such as the historical memory of 2.28) and discourses (such as narratives of the progress of democracy in Taiwan), while Wolfe’s “autopoietic entities” are situated to allow recognition of human subjects and decision-making processes as distributed, decentered processes relegated to nonhuman media and affective networks linking humans.

Ngo also maintains—with the help of Anthony Wu—an additional haiku and *tanka* blog in English where the political takes obvious forms. In a post titled “TANKA-4” (a fourth installment of *tanka*), Ngo includes the following two verses in which the first is clearly political and the second politically evocative in light of the context created by the first poem as well as a photo (see Fig. 1) from Nagasaki, which invokes both the swirling power of the atom and atomic destruction:

TANKA-4

- 1) The 228:
thousands of elites suffered massacre

without the remains
 the assailants try to wipe out the history
 the students stand up to preserve the facts of the history
 * The 228 Incident: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/228_Incident

2) Look at
 the road I have walked
 on the cloud
 as I have gone
 nothing remain[s] (Ngo, *Dr. NGO's*; Engl. in orig.; note in orig.)



Fig. 1. “Nagasaki (Japan) 1995” (Ngo, *Dr. NGO's*).

The first poem recites some historical facts concerning the 2.28 Incident, characterized by mass arrests and disappearances of intellectuals and anyone viewed as too Japanese, often with the excuse of trumped charges of communist leanings. The 2.28 events blur into the period of martial law or White Terror (which lasted 38 years). Ngo’s poem emphasizes that it was the elite Taiwanese educated under Japanese rule who “suffered massacre” and who were rendered invisible, with their bodies never returned to families, or left dumped off a cliff in the mountains (one elderly Taiwanese man and his wife told me during an interview concerning the fate of his teacher during the 2.28 period).⁴ The supporter of the perpetrators of this massacre—the KMT—would downplay it and even erase it from history, yet students and activists continue to stand up and not forget the senseless murder of intellectuals and others. Ngo lends his voice of support, extended by way of the popularity of haiku in English, to an interna-

⁴ This interview appears in *Horizons of the Rising Sun*.

tional audience.

The second poem is more aesthetically ambiguous, not reducible to a purpose or function or even a clear political referent. Yet it repeats the word “remains” of the first poem in the blog entry (referring to 2.28 victims) so as to suggest either that he, like most everyone in Taiwan, not only suffered the terror of the martial law for nearly forty years, but even suggests that he *had* to suppress his own memories and world of the colonial period and talk the talk (having “walked / on the cloud”), conforming to survive. At the same time, through the image of the monument it invokes the suffering of Japanese at the end of the Pacific War, emphasizing the victimhood following two unconscionable nuclear attacks. This common suffering suggests a bond between Japan and Taiwan as both suffered unjust losses at or following the end of the war. Japanese suffered atomic devices while Taiwanese suffered the pseudocolonial invasion of a defeated army—the KMT government—as they retreated from the Chinese Civil War to an island never intended to serve as the capital: an island in fact abandoned by China in the Ching Dynasty (upon loss of the First Sino-Japanese War, often attributed to the incompetence of leadership unable to modernize its defenses). What is fascinating here is how Ngo adopted the point of view that both Japanese and Taiwanese were victims of WWII. One must also note in passing that like many Japanese, he in effect is using victimhood to efface responsibility in Japanese wars of aggression against China, Asia and across the Pacific and Taiwan’s assistance to these imperial ends.⁵

The following *tanka* from 2015 turn attention to contemporary politics in ways yet tied to his long view of Taiwanese history and his longing for a world in which voting would be based on informed decisions:

TANKA-3

1) A dictator’s
 fraud and deception
 burst forth at last
 holding back their tears
 people could not weep with grief

2) Dreaming to be
 held by the handsome man
 in his arms
 voted on paper for him
 only to become unemployed (Ngo, *Dr. NGO*; Engl. in orig.)

⁵ See Seaton (esp. 30-31) and Tanaka.

The first *tanka* seems to allude to the death of Chiang Kai-shek, but is certainly about the fall of Ma's regime—evidenced not only in low ratings but in student demonstrations that challenged him as he kept selling out Taiwanese autonomy to PRC business and political interests. Here, increased cross-Strait economical dependency of Taiwan on the PRC takes nearly identical form as neoliberal mechanisms of “free trade” serving the interests of large corporations and at the expense of Taiwanese workers and smaller companies. Ngo conveys a sense of betrayal of Taiwanese interests on many levels. He achieves this through innovative syntax and semantics pivoting on two senses of “burst[ing] forth”—the sense of both something exposed (“fraud and deception”) and pent-up emotions. The object of evidence of betrayal incites complicated feelings of anger, it would seem, at themselves for having voted for Ma.

The second *tanka* is complex and satirical. It is often said that women voted for Ma because of his looks, so that implicitly women are “dreaming to be / held by the handsome man / in his arms” out of romantic fantasies. Yet the closing lines add to the irony by suggesting that voting for Ma while “in his arms” was to sign away one's own gainful employment. By opening to free trade to China, much larger of course than Taiwan, and allowing investment in Taiwan, the Taiwanese economy has suffered: most notably, real estate prices have skyrocketed due to opening the market to Chinese speculators, and jobs were lost, while prices of daily expenses have also risen. The image (see Fig. 2) adds to the irony, as the arm imagery in the poem now maps onto the Nagasaki statue (The Statue of Peace Prayer [和平祈念像]), which is located under the site of the historical atomic explosion. One arm points to the explosion overhead and another gestures to stop, as in “no more.” Perhaps the juxtaposition forms a protest against Ma's statecraft, suggesting that it resembles a nuclear explosion, and must end.



Fig. 2. “In Nagasaki (Japan) 1995” (Ngo, *Dr. NGO's*).

To better understand Ngo's own thoughts on the role of the Internet in his devotion to haiku and its relation to politics or simply the possibilities of thought, consider this blog post, an abridged translation by the author and Anthony Wu of a book-length essay originally composed in Japanese. The English title is "A foreigner's thought on 'HAIKU' and 'Japanese haiku.'"

Since the internet, convenient but dissolute media has come to daily use for 16 or 17 years, and "HAIKU" and "Japanese haiku" have become the objects of being able to express anyone's own opinion freely without stopping, regulation, censorship, and complaint, irrespective of age, gender, social standing, occupation, party, and education. Nowadays, we can observe and hear various kinds of thoughts which one can not think of solely by oneself, and begin to . . . consider the future of the haiku.

(Ngo, "A foreigner's thought")

The essay argues not only that haiku is conducive to self-expression, but stimulates emulation of, in his words, other "thoughts which one can not think of solely by oneself." This need for the other can be conceived as double-edged. On the one hand it implies a sort of Bakhtinian heteroglossia typical of postcolonial situations in which one may encounter and participate in heterogeneous languages and dialects (Bakhtin "Discourse in the Novel"). In postcolonial Taiwan—especially for someone born during the period of Japanese rule—which language one chooses to use implicates one socio-linguistically and politically. This carries over into poetry, shaping aesthetic predilections and preferred affiliations. On the other hand, it also invokes how one chooses at a given time one language at least as the frame for a more minute mixing of other languages. As such, it thus suggests an intertextual form amenable to haiku, which requires relations with other texts, whether of a more conventional matrixial form, as with season words and their complex abstract associations, or with particular echoes of themes found in other haiku (famous or of one's local haiku association, old or new) (see Brink, "Japanese Imperialism" esp. 341-3). Thus, one is reminded of de Certeau's definition of a tactic as "a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus" (37). With the exception of Richard Wright's haiku (Brink, "Richard Wright's Search"), the haiku form is not often associated in English criticism with political issues; nevertheless, the form has potential for both political and avant-garde productivity as intertextually-oriented, networked poetry that inherently stands apart from bourgeois literary models of the autonomous lyric (see Brink, "John Ashbery's"). Haiku *force* its improvised configuration to serve as a provisional locus. It serves not as the final word, but rather as a rupture that functions by means of its entanglements within an open typology of intertextual possibilities. The very discourses intertextually invoked suggest political, ethical, and affective orientations in the poetic configurations.

It should be mentioned that Ngo's treatment of haiku is rooted in an understanding of both Japanese haiku and world haiku in other languages. The scope of issues raised—given that he writes in Japanese himself—far exceeds most treatments of haiku available in English (simply because they usually, almost by convention, fail to bridge an adequate understanding of world haiku in relation to Japanese haiku).⁶ Thus Ngo's account (especially the more fluent original Japanese version) can be read as a compelling albeit brief guide for haiku enthusiasts. When writing "HAIKU" in capitals letters, he means non-Japanese haiku: "haiku composed in [a] foreign language." "Haiku," in his usage, means "the commonly known Japanese short poems of fixed-form [5-7-5-mora phrases] which should include a seasonal word" composed in Japanese. He conveys his appreciation of the rich variety of types of haiku available to Japanese haiku poets, including:

"free style haiku" and "no seasonal word haiku", or according to its content, feature, character, social back ground as: "new trend haiku", "social haiku", "avant-garde haiku", "proletarian haiku", "war haiku", "human being search haiku", "root haiku", "popular haiku", "molding haiku", "art haiku", "international haiku", and "world haiku" etc.

(Ngo, "A foreigner's thought")

He also asks why haiku—not *tanka* (with classical origins, being poems of 5-7-5-7-7-mora phrases without an obligatory season-word) or *senryū* (satirical haiku)—has spread worldwide. His answer is that foreign haiku—whether in Chinese or English or Spanish—is inherently short and imposes *incompletion* (what he calls "uncompleted integrity"), and leaves "blanks to be appreciated by the reader according to his/her own experience." Thus "the appreciation of the haiku is left free to the reader's own thinking. With all these conditions, it is natural and certain that the HAIKU will be welcome and accepted worldwide" (Ngo, "A foreigner's thought"). Moreover, he very reasonably advises that haiku in each language not necessarily conform to the 5-7-5-mora phrasing (often lineated unnecessarily in three lines in English). Rather, he writes that "it is good enough just to be suitable to the musicality of each language." That Ngo and Anthony Wu thought it good to translate parts of this essay itself speaks to their interest in promoting haiku not from a Japanese perspective perse, but from a self-reflexive interest in exploring how international haiku arose and what it means.

For Ngo, this incompleteness—being a well-known feature of "mountain-

⁶ Western haiku criticism tends to reduce haiku to a Buddhist metaphysics. See Brink, "John Ashbery's '37 Haiku'" as well as "Richard Wright's Search" for details and references.

water” (山水) Chinese landscape painting as well as haiku—suggests not a return to a orthodox world of literati, whereby haiku would serve as a means to display one’s comprehension of a vast typology of associated words and conventional affective responses (a matrix of associations) (see Brink, “Japanese Imperialism” 331-4). Rather, for Ngo a more open intertextuality and inter-discursive typology suggest haiku mediate and navigate complex postcolonial conditions that are also posthuman: they position themselves as nodes of jointly accessed intertexts forming assemblages in Badiou’s sense of configurations and Wolfe’s sense of autopoietic entities. As such, haiku extend their shifting boundaries and relations to suggested affiliations and historical issues not directly presented *intratextually*, but rather by way of their relation to intertextual and interdiscursive supplements that inform them.

In terms of actual influence and interest, this English-language blog—which includes both the above-quoted political poems and the essay—has a much smaller audience than his Japanese and Chinese blogs. If we examine blog visit counters (given that stats are unreliable, often including automated spam-program figures), visits to Ngo’s main blog homepage, which is multilingual (English, Japanese and Mandarin and Taiwanese) and contains links to most of his sub-blogs, are tallied at 3,540,526 (since 1 Jan. 2008, as of October 2015). Not all are haiku visits, since Ngo also has many sub-blogs related to medicine and other issues. *Dr. Ngo’s Haiku Note* in English had received 2,216 hits, while his Japanese-language haiku blog, (オーボー真悟のブログ) (虹ノ松原-唐津), received 13,576 hits, with an additional “Flag Counter” visit counter lists 1,329 Japanese, 1,032 Taiwanese, and 793 US visitors (as of October 2015). If one measures influence of these blogs and re-postings by conducting Google searches of the blog titles (placed in double-quotes), one derives the following figures (inclusive of links to the blogs themselves) as of January 14, 2016: “オーボー真悟のブログ” (439 search results); “*Dr. Ngo’s Haiku Note*” (666); “*Shingo*” (95); and for “*Shingo*” alone (1,310, though this figure includes many non-related results). A search of Ngo’s name, (吳昭新), yields 4,980 search results. These estimates, based on selected websites, give an idea of the reach of his blogs.

Kuei-shien Lee and the Political Topographies of Transnational Posthuman Networks

In Kuei-shien Lee too, a longing for international recognition and sovereignty of Taiwan prominently appears in his poems, even to the extent that

these affective orientations or predispositions seem to provide one impetus for his poetry, blog activities, and transnational networking in general. In terms of Lee's own perception of the relationship between his blog, politics and poetry, he emphasizes that he started to type on a computer after retirement, and now uses one blog, 名流書房 (lit. Celebrity Library, which as of October 2015 had received 34,861 hits). In a Google search it yielded 3,710 results (as of January 14, 2016). He also uses other social media and web sites (including 李魁賢檔案 [Lee Kuei-shien Files], 6,635 hits as of October 2015) to share poetry as an alternative to book publication or reprinting. On his blog and his Facebook presence one finds announcements of events such as international poetry festivals and conferences, including one he organized in 2015. Concerning poetry and politics, he writes, "I always use poetry to convey my political consciousness, ideals, or attitudes. Actually politics is a basic part of one's life; a poet does not just exhibit linguistic skill, but should also express opinions, as long as it takes the form of poetry." He added that as Movimiento Poetas del Mundo Vice Chairman for Asia, and Taiwan Ambassador to the association, he is pleased that members come from "125 different countries." He emphasized that the organization is based on principles of "equality, liberty and fraternity" so as not to be prejudiced by nationality, color of skin, language used or religion, and "not be swayed by the world hegemonic power, but rather by the poets who exhibit the best poetic temperament" (Lee, Personal communication; my trans. from Mandarin).

Indeed, in several lines the poet's longing for a proper, universally accepted nationhood for Taiwan forms an emotional dimension in these poems extolling the unique characteristics of various nations in Latin America as he experienced them in his travel and friendships made there. I will examine two poems in his series *Twenty Love Poems to Chile* (給智利的情詩20首), presented on his blog in both Taiwanese and Mandarin, which itself is an affirmation of Taiwanese culture. I will read only the Mandarin versions presented here in my translations. The second poem in this series is explicit in its political implications, titled: "I Should Have My National Flag (我應該有一面國旗). The first stanza establishes the Chilean space as being for Lee utopian simply in having national flags flying everywhere:

National flags in red, white and blue
 with the silvery morning star
 wave here and there with the wind
 high up on roofs of schools, homes and offices
 wave to the people in a language everyday
 alive with a sovereign spirit

without a sound, moving. (Lee, *Twenty Poems*, n.p.; my translation)

That they present “a sovereign spirit” is an indication that the reason for his accolades for the mere presence of a national flag relate to what they symbolize: self-rule. That they “wave to the people in a language . . . / alive . . . / without a sound, moving” suggests a hegemonic, spontaneously (in Gramsci’s sense) inculcated embodiment by subjects. The intimation of Taiwan’s ambiguous status and compromised sovereignty becomes explicit in the second stanza:

I should have my National Flag
to mark my true love
in a domain we rule,
but I am too timid
to speak my mind,
only draw fictitious maps on the sly. (Lee, *Twenty Poems*, n.p.; my translation)

Added to the identification of Taiwan are rather school-bookish definitions of sovereignty taught in political science: the flag would “mark” something “in a domain we rule.” Yet the use of “true love” here rings exaggerated in an almost campy way; would not “love” be sufficient? So it might seem; however, indeed the overblown language of self-parody is necessary in combination with the closing three lines of this stanza, which paint a poet afraid to speak out, only fantasizing, “draw[ing] fictitious maps on the sly.” The third and final stanza indeed imagines a resolution to this Prufrock-like hesitancy, a dialectic of inaction and love, the spatial reduction of territory to a flag:

I envy the Brazilian poet who can
wrap himself in a scarf of his national flag
showing it off around his warm neck.
If I had my own national flag
or would I myself become the national flag
I would surround your entire body
to mark the coordinates of the Island of Formosa
proclaiming my sovereignty
forever a part of me. (Lee, *Twenty Poems*, n.p.; my translation.)

By establishing the image of a Brazilian poet—counterpart—“who can / wrap himself in a . . . flag,” Lee steps into an absurd, surrealist impossibility of himself becoming the national flag that would cover all of Taiwan, “mark the coordinates” and “proclaiming my sovereignty.” It reads like an inversion of Barthes’ *Pleasure of the Text* (Barthes, Miller, and Howard 10-12), which depicts reading as self-involved Oedipal orientation toward an unknown surprising pleasure (analogous to a Lacanian *petit objet a*). In Lee, rather than a dream of a strip-tease or linear resolution, one finds instead the fantasy of putting on the garment symbol-

izing a nation and embodying a topographical indexing. Ending with “forever a part of me” underscores the seriousness of his desire, which is based on other countries with flags that symbolize for the persona a utopian convergence of democratic spirit and actuated national subjectivity. The persona then turns to an implicit image of self-sacrifice, giving all (one’s life, implied by “forever”) and becoming one with the topography of Taiwan. In a way, the image may be read as so absurd that it slips again into self-parody or simply mocks oneself for holding such national aspirations. Such a reading, I believe, would not undercut the poem’s intent but rather underscore the degree of desperation, how it leads to a tinge of bitter dark humor. It is a patriotic gesture on the order of *dolce decorum est, pro patri mori*—in this case idealizing dying for a nation’s full-fledged birth. It is a position that Lee carries in poetry, yet one undercut by his semi-self-parodic persona.

In Lee, the posthuman dimension of engagement with postcolonial ironies and unresolved issues (such as the status of Taiwan) is expressed not in the rupturing intertextual nodes of haiku (as found in Ngo’s hands) but rather in the self-effacing gestures of international comparisons and projected aspirations and in networking through Facebook and international poetry associations, readings, publications, and festivals. Structurally, his poetry is less dependent on intertextual linkages than on intratextual discursivity: his poems present lyrical narratives of longing for an independent Taiwan. Yet his longing relies on a mapping of abstract comparative topographies of national normativity of Chile and Brazil onto Taiwan; Taiwan and Lee himself become virtual and schematic in his poetry, literally disembodied for the sake of engendering a vision of a body for Taiwan, and “draw[ing] fictitious maps on the sly.” As such, his blogs and poetry form posthuman networks that also function as creative political configurations with the characteristics of diffuse yet tenacious autopoietic entities.

Another poem, “Poetry Recital in the Park” (在公園念詩), idolizes Manuel Rodríguez Erdoíza (1785–1818), who was, as Lee emphasizes in a note to the poem, “a Chilean lawyer and guerrilla leader, considered one of the founders of independent Chile.” That the poem ends with a stanza connecting (like the flag, above) a statue of an independence fighter with the founder of Chilean independence suggests aspirations for Taiwan. The first two stanzas read:

Where sunshine warms the park
 a bronze statue of Manuel Rodríguez
 has been erected under the blue sky,
 spring at its springiest and all
 the emerald leaves shine before my eyes.

The rider dances in forceful steps

la cueca Chilena with a shy girl.
 All around birds sing, flowers applaud.
 I stumble across my chivalric dreams
 already lost, no idea where, while
 dreams of a homeland yet
 to awaken, no idea where
 comrades have gone. (Lee, *Twenty Poems*, n.p.; my translation.)

The key point to be noted is that Lee “stumbles across” his own grand vision for Taiwan in the image of the anti-colonial revolutionary Manuel Rodríguez. That he has lost touch with his “comrades” suggests a lost cause, in that no affective support network is felt that might put into action such a vision. This sense of a lack of support at home—even if rhetorical excess—reflects the need to turn abroad both for poetic inspiration and sympathetic readers in a posthuman realm of blogs that make possible transnational affiliations and support. The last stanza is even more explicit in terms of its relation to Taiwanese politics:

My island country Taiwan, so near
 and faraway, frustrates me to all ends.
 My poetry on island Taiwan
 awakens me to sounds of nature,
 like songs of angels above
 the statue of Manuel Rodríguez.
 Heaven blesses my island country Taiwan.
 Let me stay by you in my lovely dream
 from across the Pacific, if but a brief time
 while I feel the overarching power of poetry
 and beautiful, unforgettable voices. (Lee, *Twenty Poems*, n.p.; my translation.)

This stanza differs from the more active and self-sacrificial closing stanza of Lee’s poem about longing for a national flag. Here, we have a sense of other pro-independence Taiwanese who found it hard in the early 2010s to imagine sovereign rule of Taiwan: they turn to Taiwanese culture in lieu of politics. Here, nature is also presented as a relief in and of Taiwan (in ways familiar to anyone who has read classical Japanese poetry or the American poetry that extols national beauty in its west). The phrase “my dreams of a homeland” in stanza two is referenced in this final stanza as “Taiwan . . . / frustrates me to all ends.” Yet the action is again contained in the horizon of poetry itself. The question appears: is poetry itself an adequate form of action, or of knowledge, or merely frivolous avoidance of issues such as that of political status? One is tempted to say that for all of Lee’s political framing of himself in Chile in relation to Taiwan (seen “from across the Pacific”), despite the spatial complications of hope and affective proclamations of “the eternal power of poetry,” Taiwan remains “far-

away” both politically and topographically.

Ngo relies on the inherent abstract matrices that make possible haiku’s presentation as unfinished as well as its dependence on a shared posthuman supplement and interactivity. Lee, by contrast, depends on a mapping of a patriotic Taiwanese subject (himself) on “normative” nations, relating subjects and lands as contemporaries on a common topographical plane. Poetry becomes for both a refuge from years of being at odds with undemocratic and unfair government practices and a means of reaching out to others. “Poetry Recital in the Park” suggests that fate is allowed to play out in proximity to this ideal model of revolutionary will and success found in the Chilean Erdoíza—a provisional hope, despite apparent impending worries to the contrary in Taiwan. The poem affirms an affective role for poetry and blogs as media that engender empathy for the complicated position Taiwan finds itself in today, whatever the political predilections of readers (in Taiwan or abroad).

Conclusion

The Internet may be seen for Ngo and Lee as not simply a diversion to explore in retirement, but also as a means of keeping available dozens of printed volumes of poetry over the decades. It is also a forum for presenting and promoting new works, whether haiku or the poems to Chile discussed above. It appears for Ngo to be a long-term hobby showcased within a larger blog including medical research as well as haiku and haiku criticism. For both poets, as I hope to have shown, Internet blogs provide a means of reaching out to others to expand and share a sense of history that they—children of the 1930s, now advanced in years—carry with them: a living memory of their generation. Set apart from younger Taiwanese, their blogs form a testimony of the last generation to experience life under Japanese colonial rule. Their blogs provide a legacy for anyone interested in understanding their particular perspective on Taiwanese politics, a view that is reified in later democracy movement and Democratic Progressive Party (民主進步黨) platforms. Though in an age that not only values youth culture, but a youth that in Taiwan has stood up against overwhelming odds and reshaped the momentum of Taiwanese politics (climaxing in the Sunflower Student Movement), one can better understand the history of Taiwanese democracy and activism by seeing through the eyes of those who have seen the passing of regimes and a long-view of the progress of democracy in Taiwan. As the power and influence of the dwindling population of the elderly of their generation wanes, their unique place in Taiwanese history may be lost too.

Their blogs and poetry suggest a history not to be overlooked, and form a prosthesis that already extends beyond them and will continue to exist as an archive and memory of Taiwan as a shared production. As Jodi Dean notes, blog posts take on a life of their own:

Even if the entire blog is deleted, the fact that posts can be copied, pasted, and repeated, that they can drift and circulate throughout the information networks of communicative capitalism, gives them a kind of haunting permanence. Posts are blogs' immortal remainders, revenants that once released can never be fully contained. (47)

What one finds remarkable in both Ngo and Lee is the underlying touchstone of commitment to Taiwan, including longing for nationhood and an international orientation—reaching out to people from other countries and involvement in international poetry associations and poetic forms. Lee has been especially active lately in exchanges, conferences, and writing with Latin American and Southeast Asian poets and contexts in mind. Ngo is a haiku expert who engages the haiku not as a lover of Japan *per se*, but rather as an actively engaged haiku critic who reviews its history and antecedents of past generations, its theory and practice in Japan and elsewhere, whether in Japanese or in other languages such as English and Mandarin.

One may situate the humor and satire with which a protonationalist impulse is shared by these poets as being neither simply cynical (giving up on any serious possibility for Taiwanese independence) nor humorous self-parody, but rather as being of a sort that gives way to posthuman configurations: their blogs engender affiliations that we may consider to be functioning within a postnational affective and cultural order. The language and schematics of military force and political posturing gives way to a more amiable poetics of affiliation and tacit mutual recognition in a situation that otherwise inhibits national sovereignty. Yet, as Jodi Dean argues, new media tend to inhibit clarity and united action: “as communicative capitalism incites a continuous search for information, it renders information perpetually out of reach. Outraged, engaged, desperate to do something, we look for evidence, ask questions, and make demands, again contributing to the circuits of drive” (122). In relation to mass media, Lauren Berlant argues that a similar state pertains, one in which “there is witnessing, testimony, and yelling [presented in the news]. But there is not yet a consensual rubric that would shape these matters into an event” (225). If the PRC threatens to become an overpowering force that would with self-authoring impunity exact a “state of exception” (Agamben ch. 1)—relegating Taiwan and Taiwanese as expendable—these poets form postnational configurations that are borne of a postcolonial sense of time and posthuman distributed agencies and dependencies

manifest in blogs, networks, and transnational affiliations that support alternative ontologies. Their archive, as Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) has just been elected, will again attain a status of an affective cultural and political record supportive not of oppositional activities but also of formative cultures and revaluations of history under homegrown parties and leaders.

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後殖民台灣的部落格詩歌與後人類

摘要

本文根據 Alain Badiou, Jodi Dean, Cary Wolfe, Katherine Hayles 等批評家之理論來探討部落格詩的運用。上述理論家闡明後人類自我生成之理論可形成讓後殖民主體得以克服被外在規則壓迫的後遺症，並透過跨國家網絡，恢復某種程度的主體性。吳昭新及李魁賢這些台灣詩人均發表針對當代台灣政治與美學議題之中文、閩南語、日文與英文譯文之詩歌。對於影響至八零年代末期那些外來政權所遺留下的壓迫傳統，這些部落格均持續挑戰與反抗。本文探討詩的形式與部落格媒介何能在後人類的修復網絡中形成戰略，好擴大詩的運用而置換國家機器，並同時能當作是去殖民與重新協商國際聯盟的工具。

關鍵字：後殖民、台灣、後人類學、台灣詩人作品、社群媒體、部落格、台灣政治

