

# “Rediscovering the Use of Ancient Chinese Culture”: A Look at Pai Hsien-yung’s “Ashes” through Liu Hsieh’s “Six Points” Theory

Wai-leung Wong

## SUMMARY

Here, by way of testing its interpretive efficacy in the 20th century, Liu Hsieh’s classic theory of literary criticism presented in *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons* is experimentally applied to the contemporary short story “Ashes” by Pai Hsien-yung. Liu Hsieh’s theory gives us a way of linking objectively and comprehensively at a literary work through its “6 points”--*wei-ti* (theme/genre/form), *shih-i* (content), *chih-tz’u* (wording/rhetoric), *kung-shang* (rhyme/rhythm/meter), *c’i-cheng* (orthodoxy/novelty with reference to contemporary texts) and *t’ung-pien* (traditionality/originality). These six interpretive parameters do indeed seem to provide a clear and balanced way of looking at, and evaluating, “Ashes”: according to this framework the story, itself concerned with the need for a return to traditional Chinese culture and so embodying a balance of contemporary and classical elements in Chinese culture, receives a high rating.

## KEY WORDS

objectivity  
traditionality

orthodoxy  
novelty

rhetoric  
synthesis  
contemporary

genre  
balance  
framework



In Liu Hsieh's 劉勰 (c. 465-522) *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons* (*Wen-hsin tiao-lung* 文心雕龍), a classic of literary criticism, there is a chapter entitled "An Understanding Critic" (*Chih-yin* 知音) which discusses the theory and methodology of criticism.<sup>1</sup> The ideal critical attitude, according to Liu Hsieh, is "to evaluate as impartially as a balance and to reflect as accurately as a mirror." In order to achieve justice and objectivity in literary criticism, he advocates looking at a literary work using the "Six Points" (*liu-kuan* 六觀) theory, which is "first, *wei-t'i* 位體; second, *chih-tz'u* 置辭; third, *t'ung-pien* 通變; fourth *ch'i-cheng* 奇正; fifth, *shih-i* 事義; sixth, *kung-shang* 宮商." Liu Hsieh believes that "using the Six Points, the critic could tell the merits and faults of the literary work."

*The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons* (hereafter abbreviated as *LMCD*) has detailed analyses of different literary types and genres which can be roughly grouped under the categories of poetry and prose. In writing his book some fifteen centuries ago, there was no such genre as fiction as we understand it today. Is it possible to fruitfully use the Six Points theory in the criticism of contemporary fiction—let's say, the short story "Ashes" (*Ku-hui* 骨灰)<sup>2</sup> by Pai Hsieh-yung 白先勇 (1937—)? To put it in another way, can this old theory of traditional China be applied to a work of the 20th century?

Liu Hsieh's Six Points are hermeneutically not as controversial as his concepts of *tao* 道 and "the wind and the bones" (as in the chapters *Yüan-tao* 原道 and *Feng-ku* 風骨

respectively). Still, some of the Six Points invite different interpretations, especially the term *wei-t'i*. In what follows, I shall make use of existing commentaries to explain the meaning of the Six Points in the light of modern terminology. Also, I shall re-structure the order of the Six Points so that it looks more reasonable and facilitates the discussion in the practical criticism below. Here are the re-ordered Six Points and their explanation:

First, *wei-t'i*, which means the theme, genre, form, structure and overall style of the work or body of works under scrutiny.<sup>3</sup>

Second, *shih-i*, which means the content (including the subject-matter and the allusions to ancient events and people) of the work or body of works under scrutiny.

Third, *chih-tz'u*, which means the wording or rhetoric of the work or body of works under scrutiny.

Fourth, *kung-shang*, which means the musical aspects including meter, rhyme and rhythm of the work or body of works under scrutiny.

Fifth, *ch'i-cheng*, which means the orthodoxy or novelty of the overall performance of the work or body of works under scrutiny--in comparison with other contemporary works.

Sixth, *t'ung-pien*, which means the traditionality or originality of the work or body of works under scrutiny--in comparison with works in the past.

In the above Six Points (hereafter referred to in their re-structured order), the second, third and fourth points are concerned mainly with the parts and details of the work, while the first point is concerned with its totality. If the former deals with the "local text" of a work, then the latter deal with its "logical structure."<sup>4</sup> In his discourse on literature, Liu Hsieh stresses the organic unity of the parts with the whole. In fact, what is *wei-t'i* if not the synthesis of the elements of *shih-i*, *chih-tz'u* and *kung-shang*? By the same token, what are *shih-i*, *chih-tz'u* and *kung-shang* if not elements determined by *wei-t'i*?

While Points One to Four are concerned with analysis and evaluation of the literary work; Points Five and Six are concerned with criticism of the literary work in comparison with others, and thus clearly broaden the perspective. Since there are different opinions as to the exact meaning of *ch'i-cheng*, perhaps it is advisable to treat *ch'i-cheng* and *t-ung-pien* as similar and complementary terms which are characterized by the use of comparative method in the critical process.

Not a prolific writer, Pai hsien-yung has been highly and widely praised by critics for his thirty or so short stories and a novel. Most of his works, including the only novel, were written in the 1960s and 70s. In the 1980s he has published only two short stories; one of them, in late 1986, was "Ashes." The selection of "Ashes" as the object of the present critical endeavor is based on the following reasons. First, this is a piece by the distinguished craftsman Pai Hsien-yung whose work endures critical scrutiny. Second, unlike his *People of Taipei (T'ai-pei Jen)* stories, produced in the 1960s and early 70s and analysed by Ou-yang Tzu 歐陽子在 her superb *Swallows in Front of the Halls of Wang and Hsieh (Wang Hsieh T'ang-ch'ien te Yin-tzu 王謝堂前的燕子)*<sup>5</sup> and by other critics, "Ashes" is a relatively recent work, and has thus far received not much critical attention. However, if the above explanation does not sound convincing enough, the selection of "Ashes" can be deemed a random one. What is important is that the Six Points will be tested as valid guidelines for literary analysis and evaluation.

"Ashes" is a story about Chinese of two generations. An engineer in his forties, the narrator of the story *Lo Ch'i-sheng* 羅齊生, works in a New York firm. He has an elder brother in Shanghai and some relatives in the United States including his uncle Lo Jen-chung 羅任重. Lo Jen-chung was decades ago a military officer of the Nationalist Party; he moved to Taiwan in 1949, and emigrated with his family to the United States in the early 1970s. Lo Jen-chung's elder brother, i.e. the father of

the narrator, is Lo Jen-p'ing 羅任平, who had been professor of mathematics at a Shanghai university before he was put to work in a labor camp during the Cultural Revolution and died in early 1976. Another character of the story is Lung Ting-li 龍鼎立, also an uncle of the narrator. Lung was in his youth a champion for democracy in China. Later he became a renowned professor of eugenics but was denounced as a Rightist in 1957. After years of suffering, he moved to the U.S. in the mid 1980s.

The story of "Ashes" takes place at Lo Jen-chung's home in San Francisco. The narrator Lo Ch'i-sheng has flown from New York City en route to Shanghai to participate in a memorial service for his late father; he stops at San Francisco to pay a visit to his uncle. In his uncle's senior-citizen apartment he meets Lung Ting-li, who has just come from Shanghai en route to New York City where he plans to settle down. The ashes of the narrator's father have just been found in Shanghai many years after his death. During the evening talks, the aging Lo Jen-chung tells the narrator that he wishes his ashes thrown into the ocean when he passes away. As for Lung Ting-li, he comes to the U.S. bringing along the ashes of his wife who has just died. (Lung himself has decided to be buried in New York City when death summons him). Ashes--and death--have thus become a major topic for conversation in this story. Righteous and brave, Lo Jen-chung fought in the Resistance War and the Civil War. But when he looks back, he feels profoundly sorrowful: in the wars, he killed his enemies--the traitors and the Communists; "but, after all, they were Chinese! And many of them were young men and women. I killed so many people but, alas, I did this in vain." He continues telling Lung Ting-li: "We labored hard, but to no avail." Now these people of Lo Jen-chung's generation have either died or are at the end of their life. Some of the latter will pass away in a foreign country, but not in their own. And all of these were passionate patriots in their youth!

Obviously, the theme of "Ashes", as the critic Hu Chü-jen 胡菊人 puts it, is "to express the absurdity of revolutions and wars of the Chinese people in the past fifty years or so; also, it is to [lament] the phenomenon of Chinese being buried in a foreign land, which is contrary to the Chinese tradition-honoring conduct of a fallen leaf returning to its root' and a man resting peacefully in his native soil."<sup>6</sup>

According to the chapter *Ting-shih* 定勢 of *LMCD*, "[All writers] establish the *t'i* of a literary work in accordance with their emotion [theme]."<sup>7</sup>

According to the chapter *Jung-ts'ai* 鎔裁 of *LMCD*, "When he begins writing, one arranges the emotion [theme] to locate the *t'i*."<sup>8</sup>

According to the chapter *Ch'ing-ts'ai* 情采 of *LMCD*, "Emotion [theme] is the soul of a literary work."<sup>9</sup>

I have said that *wei-t'i* can be explained as theme, which is the central emotion or idea of a literary work. With the theme of "Ashes" just explicated, we clearly see that its central emotion is grief and tragedy. The chapter *Shih-hsü* 時序 of *LMCD* explores the influence of time and society on literature and describes a certain period in Chinese history as "marked by chaos and separation, when morals were in decline and the people were discontented." This indeed can be borrowed to depict the time and society encompassed in "Ashes." In the chapter *Wu-se* 物色 of *LMCD*, Liu Hsieh points out that "shadowed and deep" is the atmosphere of autumn, and "serious and solemn" is the atmosphere of winter.<sup>10</sup> This, too, can be used to illustrate the emotional tone of the story.

*Wei-t'i* also embraces the meanings genre, form and structure. Generically, "Ashes" is a modern short story; its narrative features are marked by a first-person narrator and by the dramatic mode. Liu Hsieh mainly dealt with poetry and prose in his *LMCD*, which was written at a time when the short story was only budding in China. For all his erudition and far-sightedness, Liu Hsieh did not envision the later

development of fiction, not to mention the 20th century Western critical theories with their focus on the point-of-view techniques in fiction. As regards structure, however, this is something that Liu Hsieh emphatically cares for. According to the chapter *Fu hui* 附會 of *LMCD*,

*Fu-hui* [structure, organization] means a comprehensive view of a literary piece as a whole with respect to both its language and its ideas; it provides an underlying principle to unify all its parts, it defines the conditions governing what should be included and what excluded, and works elements from all the various fields into harmony; in short, it organizes the whole piece in such a way that, though composed of a variety of elements, it will not as a whole fall short of the proper standard. It may be compared to the role of the foundation in the building of a house and the tailor's pattern in the making of a dress, both necessary in their respective fields. (tr. Vincent Shih)

According to the chapter *Chang-chu* 章句 of *LMCD*, a work of literature is valued for its "literary beauty in form and organic unity in content." I am here quoting Vincent Shih's translation. Professor Shih is right in using the Western term "organic unity," because I believe this is exactly what Liu Hsieh had in mind when he wrote his treatise.<sup>11</sup> With the key terms explained, we shall proceed to see how *shih-i* and *chih-tz'u* in "Ashes" are used to contribute to the theme of the story, and to see how the work is structured.

As far as *shih-i* is concerned, we find that historical events of the past fifty years abound in "Ashes" these include the Resistance War, the Civil War, the student movements, the Communist takeover, the Anti-rightist movement, and the Cultural Revolution. The story also tells of the imprisonment of Lo Jen-chung in Taiwan, his self-exile in the U.S., the

emigration of Lung Ting-li to the U.S., and the "Protect Tiao-yu-t'ai 釣魚臺 Movement" of the early 1970s. Some twenty years ago, Professor C.T. Hsia contended that Pai Hsien-yung's early stories, especially his *T'ai-pei Jen* pieces, could be considered a history of the Chinese Republic because of their concern with and depiction of historical events and people.<sup>12</sup> I would venture to say that, with the addition of Pai's two later stories, namely "Evening Song" (*Yeh-ch'ü* 夜曲) and "Ashes," all the relevant stories by Pai put together constitute a history of 20th century China—of course, a miniature history.

The Second Point, *shih-i*, includes the use of allusions, and we find this in "Ashes." Both Lo Jen-chung and Lung Ting-li are educated men, the latter once a university professor. Lo Jen-chung practices calligraphy as a hobby and has brushed a couplet by the Southern Sung poet Lu Yu 陸游 which reads, "Deep at night, lying on my back, I listen to the wind blowing the rain; the iron horses and the frozen river come to my dream."<sup>13</sup> Lung Ting-li and Lo Jen-chung are cousins; they had known each other well, decades ago, while in Shanghai. When now they meet again after the long separation, their memory is filled with national and personal pains and sufferings. Lung cannot help but sigh to Lo, quoting a line by Ch'en Yü-i 陳與義, also a poet of the Southern Sung period: "Although the body survives, it is startling to find what life has been!"<sup>14</sup> As the quoted lines by Lu Yu and Ch'en Yu-i relate the poets' life to the plight of the nation, we see that Pai has aptly employed his poetic allusions to illuminate the theme of the story.

The content or "local texture" of "Ashes" is so rich that it defies a detailed and comprehensive analysis here. However, there is one scene at which we must take a close look. This is the narrator's dream at the end of the story:

The quivering light voice of the old man suddenly stopped. In darkness, everything became silent. I lay on my back in the sofa, the cold air in the room

approaching me. I pulled up the blanket to cover my head. Gradually I felt intoxicated by the drinks, and became more and more faint. I sensed vaguely that I had come to a piece of grey waste land, where there were many people digging pits. A bunch of people were waving their tools. I reached a big pit and saw a tall and bulky old man standing there, his chest level with the ground. He waved his tool, digging energetically. The huge pit was full, quite unexpectedly to me, of bones of the dead: in piles, one piece upon another, placed vertically or horizontally. Dry with bones. The old man raised his tool, shoveled the dry bones and threw them out of the pit. His tool quickly moved up and down and the bones piled up higher and higher. Soon the bones accumulated to a small white hill. I pulled myself together and discovered, to my surprise, that the tall and bulky old man was Uncle [Lo Jen-chung]. He waved his tool angrily and dug into the pit of bones like a madman. All of a sudden, the small white hill collapsed and the bones fell down into the pit, burying my uncle. My uncle waved his hands and madly cried out:

“Ch’i-sheng--”

To put this dream in the context of the entire story, we can have the following interpretation:

(1) The pit is huge and the bones are many. This is to say that a great many people had died. They had died either a natural death, in war or under persecution. “A general succeeded while the bones of ten thousand men had already become dry,” an ancient Chinese poet wrote. Looking at the scene this way, we surely can detect a sense of accusation of wars and persecutions in modern China.

(2) People had died but their bodies could not rest peacefully in the graves: their bones were gravely disturbed. This goes contrary to the traditional Chinese custom of giving

peace to the dead.

(3) The grave digger does his job angrily and madly. Perhaps it is because he was forced to do such things, or because he protests, for the dead, the maltreatment given them.

(4) The results of wars and struggles are only piles of human bones; the efforts in fighting seem futile. Later on, the piled bones collapse; the labor of digging is also futile. All efforts--by the Nationalist and the Communist parties alike--were to no avail.

(5) The small hill of bones falls down into the pit and buries the digger. This can be interpreted to mean that men themselves and their efforts are eventually submerged by a much greater force, history for instance.

(6) In reality, Lung Ting-li had worked as a grave digger during the Cultural Revolution; in the dream, however, the gravedigger is Lo Jen-chung. What is the difference? In the 1940s, Lung and Lo were hostile to each other because of their opposite political stands; Lung even scolded Lo as a "headsman" for his killing of the Leftist young people. However, in the dream, Lo plays the role of the gravedigger, instead of Lung. The confusion or change of identity is sarcasm.

In sum, the emotion and idea connoted in the dream is futility, absurdity, lamentation and ridiculousness. In Western terminology, this dream is a symbol with rich and profound meanings. In the terms of *LMCD*, it is *hsing* 興, which comes very close to the Western concept of symbol. According to the chapter *Pi-hsing* 比興 of *LMCD*, *hsing* uses the method of analogy and is subtle. *Hsing* is by nature related to the concept of *yin* 隱, literally "obscure", which means "the multi-meanings beyond the expression." According to the chapter *Yin-hsiu* 隱秀 of *LMCD*, a *yin* expression has "hidden beauty and rich flavor."

It has been mentioned that in Lo Ch'i-sheng's dream, the

present confusion of identity between Lo Jen-chung and Lung Ting-li, who were formerly political enemies, is ridiculous. Also ridiculous are the facts that Lung zealously joined the Communist Party, only to be purged by it as a Rightist years later; that Lo Jen-p'ing was labeled anti-revolutionary because of his overseas relationship during the Cultural Revolution, which same overseas relationship has given him the chance for (or at least has expedited the process of his) posthumous rehabilitation; and that Lung Ting-li and Lo Jen-chung were in their youth champions and heroes fighting for their causes and ideals, while they are now weak and senile, only empty echoes of their virtuous names--"*Ting-t'ien li-ti* 頂天立地" ("Supporting the sky and standing on the earth"--a heroic image) and "*Jen-chung tao-yuan* 任重道遠" ("Important responsibility and a long way to go"). We call the above situations "ironies" in Western terminology. How would Liu Hsieh describe them if he were around? I think he would probably also employ the term *yin* which refers to the multi meanings and rich flavor of literary expressions. Indeed, both symbol and irony depend on the existence of "ulterior significance."

Point Three is *chih-tz'u*. As mentioned above, *chi-tz'u*, *shih-i* and *wei-t'i* are closely related. Generally speaking, besides the most basic narration of people and events, which belongs to plot and structure, all the verbal efforts the writer makes belong to the realm of *chih-tz'u*. Metaphorically, as stated in the chapter *Fu-hui* of *LMCD*, "*Shih-i* is bone and marrow, while *tz'u-ts'ai* 辭采 [rhetoric] is musculature and skin." *Tz'u-ts'ai* is another way of saying *chih-tz'u* in the sentence just quoted. It is obvious that the language employed in "Ashes," as well as in Pai Hsieh-yung's other pieces, is imagistic and sensuous; Pai is skillful at concrete and detailed description. We may take the following passages for examples. The first one is about Lo Jen-chung:

Though a Southerner, Uncle [Jen-chung] has the

features of a Northern man. [When he was young,] he was stalwart, with a tiger back and a bear waist. He did not look like a man from the Chiangsu or Chechiang province at all. Specially impressive were his broad and thick eyebrows. When they moved, you saw his bright nimble eyes sparkling and felt an overwhelming dignity in them.

The next, it is about Lung Ting-li:

In the lamp light, I clearly saw that this old man was in fact a humpback. He was seriously hunched, his whole upper body slanting forward. His two scapulas protruded high and his neck extended itself with strenuous efforts. Atop, there was a head with white hairs. The old man was very weak. The loose black wool jacket enwrapping his body looked like it was hanging on a skeleton.

The images are like those painted by a fine brush. Apart from description, a writer's efforts at *chih-tz'u* can also be seen in the coinage of proper nouns: we have in the foregoing discussed the ironic significance of the names Lung Ting-li and Lo Jen-chung. Proper *chih-tz'u* also contributes to the atmosphere of a story. Pai Hsien-yung draws such a picture of a December evening in San Francisco:

In San Francisco, there was heavy fog this evening, .... The entire Bay Area was soaked in the misty fog and the lights were hazy. The slope at the bottom of California Avenue was covered by the grey mist, and the old buildings became spirits in black color. I climbed up the slope and, greeted by the chilling wind, I could not help but shiver repeatedly.... The weather of San Francisco, a mixture of cold wind and humid fog,

seemed to enwrap me from the head downward. It was grievously cold, cutting one to the marrow.

The season is winter, the time is evening and the weather is foggy and windy. These, in addition to the ghost-like buildings, fit in well with the tragic portrayal of the two old men. If we apply the archetypal theory as expounded by Northrop Frye to "Ashes," surely this story is a prime example of the tragic mode: it is about the dying or dissolution of the heroes, and the atmosphere of the story is comparable to the autumn or winter of the year, and to the evening or night of the day. (In fact, winter and evening are the settings of the story.) In *LMCD*, we do not find a Fryean archetypal system; still, the chapter *Wu-se* 物色 has something close to Frye's theory. Liu Hsieh contends that autumn is "shadowed and deep" and winter is "serious and solemn" and these images are to influence the mood of the writer and consequently literature.<sup>15</sup>

We have thus demonstrated that the events, the historical allusions and the language serve to express the central emotion and idea of "Ashes," and that the story has a unified tone and atmosphere. It is finely structured, with hardly any unnecessary parts or detail. As to Point Four *kung-shang*, I shall only briefly touch upon it. Among the genres of literature, poetry relies most heavily on musicality. When we analyze a poem, we usually pay some attention to its musical aspects. As to a work of fiction, it is composed of paragraphs, which are in turn composed of sentences, which are in turn composed of words. We may study the musical qualities of all these verbal constructs. Nevertheless, it is impossible to investigate all these in detail; it is perhaps not necessary either. We may instead examine the "rhythm" of the work. Pai Hsien-yung mainly uses interior monologue and dialogue to advance the story. The action of the story is three men chatting with one another in the evening, within the confines

of an apartment. It is therefore apparent that the pace or the rhythm of the development of the story is quite slow. However, since the number of people mentioned in "Ashes" (the length of the original text is about thirteen thousand characters) amounts to almost twenty, the time involved is as long as half a century, and the geographical locations include the Mainland, Taiwan and the United States, it is therefore also apparent that in terms of events and episodes, the density is very high. If we compare "Ashes" to music, then it is like an adagio movement orchestrated by a great variety of instruments.

The exact meaning of Point Five, *ch'i-cheng*, is hard to tell. The chapters *Ting-shih* and *Pien-sao* 辨騷 of *LMCD* both treat *ch'i* and *cheng* as opposites. Liu Hsieh seems to allow *ch'i* under the condition that *cheng* is not lost. What are *ch'i* and *cheng*? If we interpret *cheng* as a literary style that is orthodox or well-established, then *ch'i* is novel, new-fashioned, strange and the like. However, if we view it from a historical perspective, *ch'i* and *cheng* should be judged in relative terms. Take the trends of fictional techniques for instance. When they first appeared, the narrative point of view of Henry James, the stream-of-consciousness, etc. were each new and strange fashions. But, as time went on, they have become "orthodox" crafts of fiction. Take eroticism in 20th century fiction for another example. Whereas sexual description in *Ulysses* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover* at the time of their publication was deemed morally "unorthodox," later, thus became acceptable. The 20th century is an era of multi-media and multi-cultures. Guidelines as to what is orthodox and what is unorthodox (and what is right and what is wrong, etc.) are often not easy to come by. Even if consensus is reached, one can hardly impose this on other people. Therefore, we should not view the issue of orthodoxy rigidly. Returning to "Ashes," we find that as a short story written in the mid-1980s, it is technically "orthodox;" it can even be described as very

conservative compared with the avant-gard trends of this century. As far as content and thought are concerned, although one of the heroes has some bold words about politics, "Ashes" as a whole does not break any political taboos. From C.T. Hsia to Ou-yang Tzu to Yüan Liang-chun 袁良駿,<sup>16</sup> critics are aware of Pai Hsien-yung's deep concerns with the country and its culture. In C.T. Hsia's phrase, Pai is profoundly "obsessed with China." Critics have also agreed that in Pai's fiction, the contrast between past glory and present misery is apparent, and the feeling that life is transient and changing prevails. "Ashes" has thus kept this "tradition" of his own. If there is any change, it is that in "Ashes" Pai is even more obsessed with the country: he is obsessed with the failure of China. As quoted above, during the evening chat, Lo Jen-chung says to Lung Ting-li, "We labored hard, but to no avail!" The feeling of Lo is also that of Pai, who sighed in a March 1988 conversation with the critic Hu Chu-jen, "I feel that we Chinese have badly failed in the 20th century."<sup>17</sup>

Technically speaking, Pai Hsien-yung's style of refined description regarding physical appearance, clothing and interior setting is retained in "Ashes." His cherished art of creating symbols and ironies remains conspicuous in this story. His choice of a dramatic mode as the narrative structure, that is, his treatment of his story like a one-act play, is seen in such short stories as "Wandering in the Garden and Awakening from a Dream," "Song of Liang-fu" and "A Winter Night,"<sup>18</sup> which were all published in the 1960s and early 70s; it is also seen in "Ashes." In short, Pai has maintained a "tradition" of his own.

Point Six, *t'ung-pien*, is about tradition and innovation. The chapter *T'ung-pien* 通變 of *LMCD* says, "The merit of literature renews itself from day to day.... With an eye on present circumstances, create what is extraordinary, and establish laws by reference to ancient practice." (tr. Vincent Shih) The chapter *Wu-se* in *LMCD* says,

The poets from days of old have always followed in one another's step from generation to generation. They refer to one another's experience and effect their own changes, and their success often comes from their being able to both accept and modify what has gone before. (tr. Vincent Shih)

And in the chapter *Pien-sao* of *LMCD* we are told about the merit of *Ch'u Tz'u* 楚辭:

Its [*Ch'u Tz'u's*] style is modeled after that of the literary works of the Three Dynasties, and it is fuller of the qualities of *feng* and *ya* than that of the literature of the Warring States period. Though a ruffian in the realm of *ya* and *sung*, it is a hero in the land of poetry. When we examine both the bone structure of the work and the musculature and integument which that structure sustains, we see that, although the work adopts the basic idea of the Classics, there are yet magnificent literary expressions which are the original work of the authors themselves. (tr. Vincent Shih).

Liu Hsieh had clearly and rightly spoken on the relations between "tradition" and "individual talent" fifteen hundred years before T.S. Eliot did in his famous essay. Study of literary biography and history informs us that even a highly talented writer cannot create something from nothing. Pai Hsien-yung has studied diligently since his childhood and has been nourished by masters past and present, Chinese and Western. The refined craftsmanship of *Dream of the Red Chamber* (*Hung-lou-meng* 紅樓夢), the economic use of language as exemplified by classical Chinese poetry, the theory of point-of-view of Henry James, and Freudian psycho-analysis, to name just the most important, have all cast their influences on

Pai in his fiction writing.

Often, what we call innovation and originality in literature and the other arts is only a result of synthesis in which the strengths and characteristics of certain masters are put together, sometimes with modifications. If there is something called the Pai Hsien-yung style, then it is a combination of his fictional art (as explained previously) with his tragic sense and "obsession with China," plus the touching characters and stories he has shaped, and his creation of many symbols and ironies—it is all these joined together that constitute his literary achievement, his style and his "innovation." We have cited Liu Hsieh's evaluation of *Ch'u Tz'u*; we might modify the above quotation to describe the achievement of Pai Hsien-yung's fiction as follows: The fiction of Pai Hsien-yung is modeled after the literary works of China and the West, and is influenced by the culture and society of the modern era. He has shown his own talent and is a hero in the land of contemporary fiction. When we examine both the bone structure of his work and the musculature and integument which that structure sustains, we see that, although his work adopts the basic idea of the classics, there are yet magnificent literary expressions which are the original work of the author himself. This is the *t'ung-pien* of the overall Pai Hsien-yung. "Ashes" is in Pai's own "tradition"; subtle and thoughtful, it is a fine piece of literature, worthy of inclusion in any collection of modern Chinese short stories.

Though an important classic in world criticism with a broad and far-reaching vision, *LMCD* has not predicted the hundred-flowers-blooming of 20th century critical theories. Liu Hsieh advocates "tracing the *tao*" (*yüan-tao* 原道) and "following the classics" (*chung-ching* 宗經), but there is no such thing as a Marxist theory in *LMCD*; Liu Hsieh emphasizes the importance of emotion and intellect in literature, but we do not find psycho-analysis in his treatise; Liu Hsieh acknowledges that mythology plays an important role in *Ch'u Tz'u*, and

he is aware of the impact of the seasonal changes on literature, but in *LMCD* there is no systematic frameworks comparable to those formulated by the mythic and archetypal critics; Liu Hsieh maintains that each literary genre has its formal features and he recognizes the existence of patterns in literature, but we do not find a structuralist poetics in *LMCD*; Liu Hsieh understands that different readers respond to a literary work differently, but he has not fully developed a reception aesthetics. However, any student of *LMCD* and comparative poetics would discover that this Chinese masterpiece of criticism has a great deal of brilliant and yet balanced ideas to offer, and many of them are potentially prototypes for grand critical designs. Among these, the Six Points theory is one. It is a magnificent frame of reference in evaluating the achievement of literary writing, especially its artistic aspects. Theories concerning rhetorical and technical analysis up to the New Criticism and after it can virtually each find a place in the Six Points system and its related discourses throughout *LMCD*. The Six Points theory should have a universal significance and appeal.

I have been for years an earnest student of *LMCD*, always impressed by its soundness, balance, comprehensiveness and universality. I have also been for years an earnest reader of Pai Hsien-yung's stories. The present endeavor to apply Liu Hsieh's theory to a story by Pai is a test of *LMCD*'s practicability and universality. While realizing the failure of China in the 20th century, Pai still has confidence in the traditional Chinese culture. A protagonist in "A Winter Night," Professor Yu Ch'in-lu comments: "Sometimes Western methods do not help; then we have to turn to our secret herbal medicine for a cure." In "Ashes," the frustrated Lo Jen-chung, while living in the United States, relies on practicing traditional Chinese calligraphy to maintain his inner peace. As for Pai himself, he anticipates a Chinese Renaissance; he thinks that we should "rediscover the use of

ancient Chinese culture.”<sup>19</sup>

In applying the ancient Chinese critical theory to contemporary literature, I have here cited just one work. But I believe the Six Points theory has its general appeal and can surely apply to works past and present, Chinese and Western. Since the 19th century the Chinese people, many of them haunted by a collective inferiority complex, have accepted a great number of Western methods, sometimes welcoming them in a wholesale manner. Western methods have proved to be advanced and effective in many cases. Nevertheless, the Chinese people should indeed “rediscover the use of the ancient Chinese culture” and introduce it to the West, in the hope that this can contribute to world civilization, and may help soothe a Chinese national dignity much wounded in the past century or so.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> In spring 1990 I read a paper written in Chinese at a conference on contemporary Chinese literature held at The University of Hong Kong. Later I revised this paper and translated it into English. The result is the present article. In this article, citations of *Wen-hsin tiao-lung* are from 范文瀾, 《文心雕龍註》(香港, 商務, 1960). (In the notes here, in order to save space, I do not give the romanization of Chinese characters when I mention authors, titles and related Chinese passages.) When I quote from Vincent Shih's English translation of *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons* (Hong Kong, The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 1983), I indicate it in the course of this article. I would also like to note that *Liu-kuan* is translated as “six points” in Vincent Shih's book, a rendering I have adopted.

<sup>2</sup> When I mention and quote from “Ashes,” I base this on the text of this story collected in 《骨灰：白先勇自選集續篇》(香港, 華漢, 1987).

<sup>3</sup>As further references, for the term 位體, please consult the chapters 情采, 鎔裁, 附會, 章句, 定勢 of *LMCD*; for the term 事義,

please consult the chapter 事類; for the term 置辭, please consult the chapters 章句, 麗辭, 比興, 誇飾, 練字, 隱秀, 指瑕; for the term 官商, please consult the chapter 聲律; for the term 奇正, please consult the chapters 定勢, 辨騷. The reader is also referred to my article "The Carved Dragon and the Well Wrought Urn--Notes on the Concepts of Structure in Liu Hsieh and the New Critics," in *Tamkang Review* XIV: 1-4 (1983-84).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. my article cited in Note 3.

<sup>5</sup> Ou-yang Tzu's book was published by 爾雅 in Taipei in 1976.

<sup>6</sup> Quoted from 胡菊人's introductory article to the book cited in Note 2.

<sup>7</sup> The original text is 因情立體.

<sup>8</sup> The original text is 設情以位體.

<sup>9</sup> The original text is 情者之之經.

<sup>10</sup> The original text is 陰沉之志遠; 矜肅之處深.

For a comparison between Liu Hsieh and Northrop Frye's ideas, please consult my article 《春的豫悅與秋的陰沉》 in my book 《中國文學縱橫論》(台北, 東大, 1988).

<sup>11</sup> Cf. my article cited in Note 3.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. C.T. Hsia's (夏志清) article 《白先勇早期的短篇小說》 in his 《文學的前途》(台北, 純文學, 1974), p. 164.

<sup>13</sup> The original lines read 夜闌臥聽風吹雨, 鐵馬冰河入夢來.

<sup>14</sup> The original line reads 此身雖在堪驚.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (N.J., Princeton University Press, 1957); also cf. my article cited in Note 10.

<sup>16</sup> In the course of preparing this present article, I obtained a copy of 袁良駿's most recently published book 《白先勇論》(台北, 爾雅, June 1991). This is a comprehensive study on the fiction of Pai Hsien-yung. 袁良駿 has incorporated into his book opinions of many other critics, and he has his own insights.

<sup>17</sup> Quoted from Pai Hsien-yung's 《第六集手指》(香港, 華漢, 1988), p. 175.

<sup>18</sup> The original titles are 《遊園驚夢》、《梁父吟》、《冬夜》.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. Note 17, p. 176.

