

Between History and the Unconscious: Contemporary Taiwanese Fiction Revisited

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ABSTRACT

This essay traces the development of Taiwanese fiction since the 1960's. While the 60's were a period of aestheticism ("modernism"), Chinese modernism is never completely a reaction against realism; it shows humanitarian concern for the common people and often is "realistic" in style. Thus the "local color" realism of the 70's, which aimed at accurate portrayal of the native Taiwanese people, was a further development rather than a reaction. In the 80's, a period of greater political freedom and openness, writers began to treat political encounters as symptomatic of the age and its people. Thus while history has a role to play in all three periods, its relation to the narrative becomes crucial in contemporary fiction. Here I analyze the relation between aesthetics ("modernist") and ideology ("realist") on the horizontal axis, and that between history and the unconscious (of the narrator as individual or group) on the vertical axis. In contemporary writing history functions together with myth and other genres, transforming Taiwanese fiction into something beyond modernism and realism.

KEY WORDS

modernism
realism
humanitarian
narrator
ideology

aestheticism
local color
history
unconscious
axis

Taiwanese fiction supposedly has gone through two major phases since the Japanese occupation ended in 1945: *xian-dai zhu-yi* (modernism) in the sixties and *xiang-tu wen-xue* (local colorism) in the seventies. At first glance, the two phases seem to be diametrically opposed and a great divide in sensibility seems to split the literary history of modern Taiwan neatly. To put it in a simplistic way, a transition takes place from aestheticism of some sort in the sixties to a blend of realism in the seventies. Politically, Taiwan also goes through at least two phases, from the repressive rule of the fifties and sixties (in which all voices of dissent are all but silenced) to a slightly more open society in the seventies (in which writers turn their attention from challenging the political authorities to dealing with the plight of the underprivileged).

To add to the complexities, the eighties sees some dramatic changes in the island's political structures as well as proliferations of literary expressions beyond the first two phases. Political freedom is granted for the first time and explicit political statements make their first appearance in Taiwan's history.¹ And for the first time, too, this political consciousness takes the form of history, for instead of dealing with the private experience of individuals or families, or clans, writers now choose to focus on past events which give shape to major contours of the age. At first glance, the practice bears some resemblance to the time-honored tradition in China of critiquing the contemporary world by making references to the past (*yi-ku jian-jin*), but upon closer scrutiny, one finds some ambivalences, even confusions, in history itself, and the past is no longer depicted as something ideal. The past is often shown to be rather incompatible with the present and no longer able to set an example for the contemporary world. Increasingly, as protagonists re-live their past, they find it often at odds with the contemporary world which they are compelled to come to terms with. A typical situation often involves a protagonist finding the world altogether changed after he/she is released from jail after years of political persecution.² Whereas the past gives one a temporal framework within which ideological purity reigns supreme, this purity is on the other hand called into question by the present with all its secular values. The clash between past and present further casts doubt on the island's future, especially in light of its ambivalent relationships with the mainland.

I.

Chinese modernism is quite different from its Western counterpart. To

put it simplistically, Western modernism grew out of a reaction to realism.³ By contrast, Chinese modernism is marked with a humanitarian concern for the common people and the treatment is often realistic. Realism and humanism are, in fact, said to be the hallmarks of modern Chinese literature.⁴ Modernism in the Western sense did not take root in a significant sense and probably not until much later. In Taiwan, aestheticism fares slightly better and dominates the literary world in the sixties. But it, too, yields to the local color writings in the seventies as native Taiwanese experience is increasingly highlighted in a realistic vein. It is even safe to say that Chinese modernism, either on the mainland or in Taiwan, is characterized by realism — a realism which focuses its attention on the bankruptcy of the countryside in the face of urban industrialization.⁵ And specifically, Chinese realism seems to be concerned mainly with what takes place in the peripheral regions of the nation in a cultural as well as societal sense.

II.

In depicting marginal experiences, writers tend to try to go back to a history which is now lost. It is lost either because it no longer connects with the present or because it is suppressed from collective memory. Contemporary Chinese fiction, for instance, originates from Lu Xun's critique of the past at a juncture when the present seems to be beclouded by the past, and intellectuals at the turn of the century become increasingly aware of the prospect that the modern age may die still-born. In the same spirit, the "root seekers" (xun-gen pai) in the eighties try to return to a mythic past and their efforts can also be seen as an attempt to authenticate history by personally tracing history as far back as possible. In Taiwan, the seventies sees the writers trying to return to an idyllic past at a time when industrialization has already made the attempt all but impossible. By the eighties the political novels provide a form in which personal memories go back to an unpleasant page of Taiwan's history, i.e., the Feb. 28 uprising in 1947, leading up to the white terror in the fifties after the Korean War breaks out.

Nevertheless, history means different things to different people. At the most simplistic level, it refers to what presumably had happened and the historian's task is to make the past resurface as it has been. A different school of historiography, however, argues that it is in the telling that history is constituted.⁶ History is nothing but its narrativity, involving the teller, the tale and, to some extent, the audience. When it comes to story-telling, the un-

conscious inevitably creeps in and the teller either gives away his/her secrets or is unable to say what is actually meant.

Presumably, too, history is collective in nature. Moreover, in the past history is often written in the best interest of the ruling or dominant class. Virginia Woolf's disillusionment with men's history is one of the best examples.⁷ And history becomes even more distorted in a colonial context, as a colonized nation's history is often produced by its colonial rulers.⁸ In the Taiwanese context, history has all along been suppressed and never in the fifties or sixties have history been written in a way that common people can personally relate to. According to Chen Ying-zhen, the Taiwanese history of the fifties is colonial in a true sense of the word as America asserts its influence in Asia following the eruption of the Korean War and dictates the export-oriented economy in Taiwan. As such, Taiwan's true history is suppressed under the rule of a government that legitimizes its high-handed rule by embracing a capitalistic road.⁹ Since the late seventies, fresh attempts are made to reclaim history in a personalized sense which gives rise to what is commonly referred to as political novels.

III.

With the lifting of martial law in 1987, opposition parties comes into being for the first time in Taiwan's history amidst an increasingly pluralistic political environment. Dissidents of all ideologies try for the first time to speak out through various media. Among others, local films wit critical and realist inclinations begin to appear at more or less the same time, flourish between eighty-two and eighty-six, and culminates in the success of the awardwinning "Bei-qing Cheng-shi" ("City of Sadness") in 1989. In the literary field, political novels make their debut at around the same time and take Taiwan literature to a new phase beyond the modernist experimentations of the sixties and realist depictions of life in the seventies.

What particularly distinguishes these writers is a tendency to go back to an earlier time of political repression, particularly to the period between the departure of the Japanese in 1945 and the beginning of a rapid economic development in the sixties. Given the Chinese tradition to account for what is taking place now in terms of the past, there is nothing unusual about this past-oriented approach in rationalizing one's current position, but what must be remembered is that the eighties is a decade of cataclysmic changes and the past referred to — i.e. from the late forties through the sixties — is radically

different from the present. It is strictly speaking no longer an attempt on the part of these writers to hold on to a code of conduct as a way to finding a set of guidelines for present and future actions. Instead, by going back to a time totally different from the present, these writers try to address the dilemmas they are in by magnifying some of the major political positions in the past as well as highlighting common people's responses to these ideological positions. By looking back to a time which appears completely alien to the eighties, these writers try to establish some sort of homological relations between past and present.

What is even more striking is the way the majority of these writers choose to focus their attention on what happened on Feb. 28, 1947. For three months, Taiwanese residents are engaged in arms struggle against the Nationalist regime under the infamous Chen Yi, but the rebellion is short-lived and soon brutally suppressed. Massive arrests are made, followed by executions of the rebels numbering hundreds or even thousands. Among other things, the event has the effect of pouring cold water on the nationalistic sentiments of the Taiwanese people who has for fifty years been subjected to Japanese colonization since 1895 and had been looking forward to being reunited with their motherland some day. The uprising receives special attention in the eighties because it is previously prohibited as a subject matter.¹⁰ By taking a close-up look at the unfortunate turn of events in 1947, writers of the eighties try to reexamine nationalism which has all along been inculcated very much as some sort of religious belief, not to be questioned, in the minds of Taiwanese school children. Now as they re-live the past, attempts are also made to redefine human relationships in terms of age (old vs. young), political position (power elites vs. political enthusiasts) and, above all, place of origin (the mainland vs. Taiwan), all in the context of a highly pluralized or even carnivalesque political and socio-economic conditions of contemporary Taiwan. Presumably, the hope is that presentday confusions could be traced back to a much earlier and formative stage at which positions could be magnified and examined with some lucidity.

Specifically, writers of the eighties tries to treat personal political encounters as symptomatic of the age and its people. Initially, personal experience may appear to be irrelevant to the contemporary world, but upon closer scrutiny, writings of this type actually address themselves to something quite significant to the collective as well as private experience of the contemporary Taiwanese and even prefigure what is to come in the future. To borrow from Raymond Williams, this type of writing embodies some struc-

ture of feelings which is closely connected to one's lived experience — an experience which contains both personal and social dimensions and is predictive of future events.

IV.

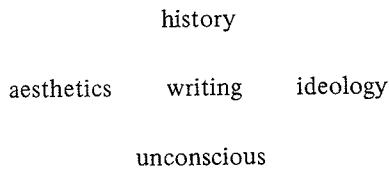
The relation between literature and society is, of course, much more complex than what has been suggested above. To clarify the situation, it is useful to examine initially a bipolar pair of concepts which condition the production of writing, i.e., aesthetics and ideology:

aesthetics — writing — ideology

By aesthetics is meant that which is related to imagination and is against instrumentality.¹¹ Aesthetics constitutes its own being, having little, if anything, to do with modern tendencies to turn everything into commodities. Nevertheless, aesthetics can also be defined in a broader sense and seen in terms of its function, Mukarovsky's view of aesthetics being a case in point.¹² In other words, one does not have to restrict aesthetics to the beauty of an imaginative structure itself; one may very well go one step further and treat aesthetics as a function, made up of a series of situations, "in which specific intentions and responses combine, within discoverable formations, to produce a true range of specific facts and effects."¹³ Seen in this light, aesthetics does not have to be taken in isolation; one can treat it in connection with history against which aesthetic facts and effects make sense.¹⁴ As a matter of fact, in Herbert Marcuse's view, aesthetics embodies certain liberating forces capable of countering not only the oppressive bourgeois reality but also its discourse: "... the radical qualities of art ... its indictment of the established reality and its invocation of the beautiful image (schoner Schein) of liberation are grounded precisely in the dimensions where art *transcends* its social determination and emancipates itself from the given universe of discourse and behavior while preserving its overwhelming presence."¹⁵ In this Marxist sense, art attempts to overcome repressive forces which dictate the relations of production as well as the shape of private subjectivity. Unfortunately, there seems to be a tendency in this approach to universalize, which makes it rather difficult to conduct a concrete analysis. Aesthetics in this sense is just as defined by one's totalistic ideology as the oppressive reality it seeks to subvert.

As for ideology, notwithstanding the common-sense perception that it stands opposite to aesthetics, it is a rather complex term in itself. On the surface, ideology deals with social and political aspects of life which are quite separate from the private sphere of aesthetics. In actual practice, however, ideology refers at least to three things: 'as a form of false consciousness, imposed upon the individual from above by the dominant class, as a limited view of the whole, resulting from the individual's class position as a perceiving subject within the social formation, and – taking it to its furthest limits to date – as the result of the ideological nature of the perceiving subject *per se*, who is brought into being through his or her insertion into ideological signifying practices, which form the substance of lived experience, within ideological state apparatuses.'¹⁶ Whereas false consciousness, the first definition of ideology, stands diametrically opposed to aesthetics which represents the abstract mental construct of an individual, the third version of ideology actually has a great deal to do with an individual's participation – often an unconscious one – in a public signifying act. As such it often suggests the possibilities of resistance, for instance, in the language of the semiotic against the symbolic, as suggested by Julia Kristeva.¹⁷ So it seems the two bipolar terms actually co-exist in a common spectrum and the opposition may not have too much significance. Besides, in terms of methodology, it is rather difficult to conduct an analysis on how human consciousness behaves in specific socio-political environments in this bipolar scheme.

To better clarify the dynamics of human consciousness and social formations, a modified representation is needed:



Ideology does not stand on its own. It interacts with other forces. Different ideological formations are, for that matter, known to co-exist and even conflict each other. Moreover, ideology is often distinct from concrete formations at work in the socio-economic realm and may predate or postdate that which actually exists in the real world. For these reasons, it seems to be desirable to create a separate category to refer to public forces which are constantly in progress and condition the production and reproduction of various

relationships. Hence the category of history above the aesthetics/ideology axis.

In the same way, even though private experience can theoretically be dealt with within the category of aesthetics, to a certain extent, the private experience can also be treated as ideology in terms of an appellative entity, as suggested by Althusser.¹⁸ Nonetheless, human psyche should preferably be seen as a separate entity, existing in dynamic relationships with either aesthetics or ideology, as what goes on in the human mind is often inaccessible to the subject himself or herself. Hence the category of the unconscious under the aesthetics/ideology axis. Specifically speaking, the unconscious — as a driving force underneath consciousness — is, in a Lacanian sense, closely related to subjectivity (but may not be causally related to writing, much less external forces). It is instrumental in the production of the self which may or may not be fully synchronized with the aesthetic or ideological climate of a particular age. By establishing the unconscious as a discreet category, we also have the added advantage of being able to cope not only with the personal unconscious but also with the collective unconscious in history.

The two axes — aesthetics/ideology vs. history/unconscious — intersect and produce something generally known as literature, or writing, to use a more generalized term. To its left, writing tends to reify into a verbal construct whose existence is justified in and of itself. To its right, literature loses its character of asserting personal freedom in defiance against conformity, or even domination. It turns itself into something with an accepted ideological coloring as, for example, realism in the orthodox Marxist line of thinking. In its downward relation, writing can be seen as a sublimation of secret desires, or a signifying process in oblique response to the signified which is never accessible.¹⁹ As for its upward movement, the past does not really exist; by contrast, writing mediates between past and present, personal and social.²⁰ And it can be said that all writing surfaces as history. All in all, it can even be argued that writing produces all four entities detailed above, without signification through writing there won't be other positions to begin with.

It is useful, too, to map out how these forces bear upon each other and create various possibilities and tendencies of writing. As something closely related to a structure of feelings,²¹ writing gives voice to private sentiments which are at the same time social and material. Writing, therefore, straddles between the aesthetic and the ideological, being both personal and collective. In the same vein, writing as a structure of feelings is also about something

embryonic and not yet fully articulated.²² At the historical level, progressive writing must be able to prefigure future turns of events and articulate what is to come of a class or society. In the same vein, at the psychological level, writing often expresses the secret thoughts of a person which may or may not be known to the agent himself or herself. In short, writing gives voice to that which is for the time being absent and yet about to be emergent in either public or private spaces.

V.

The history of modern fiction in Taiwan can be described as a progression from "modernism" of the sixties to some sort of local color (*xiang tu* [countryside]) literature of the sixties. The former stresses aesthetic dimensions of literature, with its main focus on the highly personal and formalistic, as shown in the writings of such contributors to *Xian-dai Wen-xue* magazine (*Modern Literature*) as Wang Wen-xing, Chen Ruo-xi, Cong Su, Ou-yang Zi, Chen Ying-zhen, etc. The emphasis in this movement is on the capturing of the internal minds and the fabrication of aesthetic constructs which might not necessarily have direct bearings on the socio-political reality of the time.

The literary scene underwent a dramatic change in the seventies when a group of local Taiwanese writers came to prominence with their writings about the impact of urbanization and industrialization as they brought about change to a hitherto agrarian economy in Taiwan. Writers like Wang Zhen-he, Chen Ying-zhen, Yang Qing-chu, Huang Chun-ming, Qi Dengsheng and Wang Tuo set their eyes on native sons' bitter confrontations with alien societal forces which changed their mental outlooks altogether. The characters and plots may be about private life but allegorical meanings eventually come to the surface and readers are treated to something explicitly ideological, not unlike what Jameson talks about as national allegory in third-world literature.²³

The "modernist" and "realist" trends of writing in Taiwan correspond roughly to the aesthetic and the ideological respectively. But in the Taiwanese context, the axis running between the aesthetic and the ideological is subsequently intersected, as it were, as subsequent writers in the eighties take upon themselves to deal with history. Specifically, writers of the eighties thrust their characters into a bygone time frame in which all mental outlooks seem to be reprocessed. We are given a glimpse of a set of different mental outlooks from the contemporary world. As one is plunged into the past, it

is no longer a simple choice between the private and the public. Nor is it a choice between straightforward ideological positions: e.g. anti-communism vs. communism; Taiwanese vs. mainlanders; young vs. old, etc. The past, be it private or collective, is highly complex and simply overdetermined. Neither the characters nor the authors themselves have pat answers to the issues they are confronted with. When compared with the present situations, dominant ideologies of the past, as it has been taught to school children as well as the general population as a whole are no longer convincing at all.²⁴ Among other things, official ideologies in the past are seen as threadbare, naive and thus irrelevant. By contrast, the present turns out to embody complex but concrete socioeconomic forces. Political novelists of the eighties describe the fifties and sixties as a time riddled with ambiguities and depart considerably from the official ideology of anti-communism that has been used to indoctrinate people since the fifties.

In the same way, the axis between aesthetics and ideology is intersected, on the other hand, by the unconscious. The uncertainties in the past as well as the discrepancies between past and present seem to originate equally from the human unconscious. In a collective sense, the unconscious is related to one's wavering political beliefs which surface here and there in the political novels of the eighties. Even though writers of the eighties may have an axe to grind by taking us to the bygone days of seeming ideological purity, they expose willy-nilly their own inconsistencies and give a view of the past as equally plagued by discrepancies as the contemporary age. The past is, in short, full of ambivalences and all parties involved, including writers, characters and readers, are not really aware of the complexities. Writing and reading about the past can be said to be an attempt to come to grips with these unconscious situations.

VI.

It must added, too, that the aesthetics/ideology axis can never run unintersected just as the history/unconscious axis must be constantly reprocessed. Without wishing to give a deterministic view of human activities, it must be pointed out that social formations of an age do color, or give shape to, human consciousness. In the sixties and seventies, the unconscious, more than history, seems to exert a greater pressure on writing. For one thing, writers of those two decades did not really have access to what actually was happening due to various forms of censorships. (They did not have reliable,

much less first-hand, information on the political movements of the age.) They had really no alternatives but to focus on the psychological aspects of human activities. In the sixties, writers' main interest seemed to be in depicting mental conditions of an age. The island was segregated from the mainland, which at that time seemed to many to promise a new future for China. The age was, furthermore, cut off from its literary heritage of the twenties and thirties in the mainland, which was chiefly oriented toward humanism and realism.²⁵ Writers of the sixties turned as a result to the West and came mainly under the influence of modernist writings and Existentialist thinkings, such as Joyce, Kafka, Camus, Sartre, etc., judging by some of the special issues of *Xian-dai Wen-xue*. Writers chose to try to give shape to mental constructs rather than external reality; and as they did so they inevitably incorporated the libidinal into these constructs.

In the same way, due to the impact of industrialization and urbanization which changed altogether the life patterns of farmers, fishermen, day laborers as well as other underprivileged people, writers of the seventies demonstrated their love for the land as they highlighted a strong sense of displacement. Protests were made against various dehumanizing capitalist forces. Apart from describing the exploited sectors of life that were becoming unfamiliar to most readers at that time, writers of the seventies also resorted to an unorthodox language which deviated considerably from the accepted medium, in a mode not unlike that of the semiotic as suggested by Kristeva.²⁶ The language is an uneasy mixture of orthodox written Chinese and the Fukien dialect — a mixture which departed considerably from the accepted written medium used by most mainland writers and taught at school at that time.

The situation in the eighties must, however, be seen in a different formation as the intersections point upward toward the public and the historical, quite unlike the representation given above, which is toward the unconscious.

VII.

A brief historical account is in order here about what brought about the changes from the sixties leading up to the eighties. After the pullout of Nationalist troops from Zhoushan Archipelagoes, Chiang Kai-shek's government initially treated Taiwan as a power base from which they were to launch counterattacks against the mainland some day. But the sixties saw a major change in their policy. As the situation between Taiwan and the

mainland stabilized considerably and the U.S., with which Taiwan had signed a security pact, was in favor of maintaining the status quo, i.e., with the Nationalists holding on to the island, leaving the mainland to the rule of the Communists, the Nationalist Government had a change of heart, as it were. Instead of seeing the island as a transit point, the island was now mentioned as a model province of The Three Peoples' Principles. What followed then were a series of infrastructure projects as well as an export-oriented economic policy. In fact, the rise of the middle class in Taiwan could perhaps be traced back to this period. In politics, local elections were implemented under the central authoritarian structure. As a consequence, local political elites emerged and, supported by the general public, started to make demands for more extensive political participations. The confrontations with the central government started rather early but initially the central government seemed to have no hesitations in cracking down on both individual dissent and public oppositions. Some of these major dissent resulted in: the closure of *Zi-you Zhong-guo* magazine (*Free China*) in 1960; the arrest of Bo Yang over the "Da-li Shui-shou" ("Opoeeye") program on T.V. in 1968; Li Au's arrest in 1971; the discussion of nationalism initiated by Chen Gu-ying and Wang Xiao-bo in 1972-73. Open and mass show of oppositions did not occur until 1970 with demonstrations over the government's tacit agreement over the transition of sovereignty of Diaoyutai (Senkaku) islands in 1971, which mainly went unreported. And it was not until the Zhong-li riot ignited by alleged vote rigging in 1977 that open political oppositions came to the surface. The conflict came to a head in 1979 when 152 dissidents were arrested after some bloody confrontations following mass rallies at the southern city of Gao-xiong. In the literary world, questions were also raised on the desirability of importing Western models in a wholesale manner. The most notable included Tang Wen-biao's criticism of Taiwanese poetry in 1972 and the polemic over *xiang-tu* literature in 1977-1978. In both cases, the emphasis was on the need to give priority to native experience and expression, which gave rise to the suspicions from their opponents that some form of socialist realism was being advocated.

In spite of its intransigence, the government's position softened in time partly due to pressure from its people and partly as a result of what was happening to itself and its neighboring countries. Its expulsion from the United Nations in 1971 and the severing of diplomatic relations with the U.S. and Japan in the next year or two had a great deal to do with K.M.T.'s awakening and desire to come to terms with the people it had ruled for decades. The

downfall of authoritarian rulers in South Korea and the Philippines also had an impact in quickening political reforms in Taiwan. The lifting of the martial law and the granting of full freedom of speech finally came in 1987, when political views of all shades – left or right, separatists or unionists – were tolerated. Hence the political novels of the eighties.

But even before the martial law was lifted and full freedom of speech granted, the opposition had never really been silenced. Underground publications began to mushroom in the early seventies. Meanwhile, some political prisoners were released, providing writers with subject matters which were hitherto not accessible in Taiwan.²⁷ Shi Ming-zheng's "Ke Si Zhe" ("The One Longing for Death") (1980)²⁸ describes for us the death wish of a political prisoner from the mainland – he has been found guilty for shouting some slogans out of homesickness. The despaired prisoner tries various ways to commit suicide, including hitting his head against the wall and overeating steamed bread which he has set aside secretly for days. His attempts succeed when finally he hangs himself to death with his underpants on the door knob. He dies in a half-squatting and half-sitting posture, legs outstretched and his bottom barely a few inches from the ground. The obsession quite puzzles the speaker who shares the same cell with him. The story highlights the so-called white-terror reign on the island as a result of the government's paranoia of subversions. But we also learn that political persecution is inflicted upon mainlanders and Taiwanese alike, confirming the view that the former is actually treated more severely than the latter for fear of their possible connections with the Communists in the mainland. The death wish appears bewildering, almost absurd, to the speaker as well as to the readers as it refers obliquely to some sort of political principles which are nowadays rather suspect for their purity and naivete. In fact, back in 1979, Huang Fan with his prize-winning "Lai Suo"²⁹ already takes up the issue of political persecution and sets it against a secularized contemporary society. The juxtaposition puts in doubt the relevancy of ideological purity as the protagonist is made to realize that years of suffering behind bars do not really come to anything. The leader under whom he once worked has now given up his fight and returned to Taiwan under some amnesty arrangement. In fact, Lai Suo's radical action in the past is nothing short of absurdity as he was arrested while handing out leaflets in the marketplace.³⁰ If the past is unreal, the world Lai Suo now returns to is by contrast compelling real and controls people in their daily life. It is now a world of confusing and even perverted values. In his youth, the family was a cohesive unit full of love and mutual support. He re-

members how he was once given the rare opportunity of continuing his education even though his family was not well off. Now everybody is better off but human behavior is rather beyond his comprehension. His obese wife's demand for sex proves to be rather annoying and his cousin's need for women even during his hospitalization also troubles him. He thus pins his hope on a reunion with his former leader, but it turns out to be totally futile when the man pretends not to recognize him. The story ends in a note of conciliation when we are told that Lai Suo is faced with a new beginning as he comes home from Taipei with his shoppings – pajamas for his wife and toys for his children. Strictly speaking, one couldn't really understand either the past or the present, the story seems to be saying, but life must go on. The ability to move between past and future is, of course, one major criteria of historiographical thinking, without which one wouldn't be able to grasp the movement of history. In a way, this has not been achieved here, but elsewhere the author in his well-known piece on how one can or cannot measure the width of open ditches in Taipei (“Ru-he Ce-liang Shui-gou di Kuan-du” [“How to Measure the Widths of Ditches”] [1987])³¹ gives his protagonist the ability to foretell what is to come and skillfully turns the piece into a metafiction, as if to suggest that life may be known not in terms of historical thinking but in art which sustains itself. In art, one can know not only one's past but also future.

By the late eighties, fiction seemed to have taken on a public dimension and turned historiographical. Specifically, 1987 marked a turning point in the history of democracy in Taiwan as people were given not only political freedom but also the liberty to relive their past. And as they did so, they analyzed the past by laying it out in a narrative and panoramic format evolving around individual characters as they took up various political options. What came out of it is a variety of political positions never seen before as well as different private, even unconscious, choices amidst the torrents of historical development.

As seen in “Lai Suo,” the most straightforward way to reach the past and come to grips with it is to pit it against the present. If the continuity is there, then by means of causality or sheer chronology one can more or less get to know about one's past – as well as the present. On the other hand, if the past is shown to be almost qualitatively different, then the two time frames could easily cancel each other out.³² Of course, this doesn't mean that one always gets a pat answer and expect something completely understandable or totally unintelligible. Among other things, fiction was invented in the West

with a view to trying to clarify the ambivalences in the past. Specifically, the novel came into being in the late eighteenth century, with the assumption that the present world is different from what it used to be and individual, original observations must be made.³³

Chen Ying-zhen's "Zhao Nan-dong" ("Zhao the South Wing") (1987),³⁴ like "Lai Suo," deals with political persecutions in the fifties and sixties. Both stories seem to be at the same time disproving the thesis that the past is completely knowable because both stories seem to be highlighting differences between the fifties and eighties. Zhao Nan-dong was born in the prison where his mother had been held as a political prisoner. Symbolically, he is an offspring of the revolution. As a matter of fact, he is given the torch of hope, as it were, when his mother was executed. As it turns out, however, Nan-dong and his brother find themselves growing up in a world increasingly corrupted by commercialism. His brother works in a trading firm and makes a profit through improper means, very much in a multinational capitalistic fashion in which the native can turn a profit only through deceit. As for Nan-dong himself, being born of parents with revolutionary zest and showered with love from the cellmates, he grows up to be a handsome young man, but only to use his physiological assets by living on women. The deterioration continues until he turns himself into a good-for-nothing drug addict. A family friend — who used to spend time in jail with his mother — finds him in the end and promises help. The reader is not altogether sure, however, if help may not have come too late. As for the father, he serves as the reflecting intelligence in the story, and through him we obtain most of the details surrounding the events. Unfortunately, in the very beginning of the story, he is already a dying man in hospital and the story he gives is not necessarily a truthful account of the past. There is even the suspicion that his record is not accurate as his diary was burnt earlier and the fact that he had been spared while his wife had to face the firing squad makes his account suspect. The story seems to appeal on the basis of its tropological details as much as its logical structure.³⁵ In terms of details, it may even be argued that the honistic life styles of the two brothers attract our attention more than anything else — including the historiographical contour of events — as the two brothers "successfully orient themselves toward this world" and they "allow their bodies to take them along in life. . . wanting to be happy, without sorrow." Apart from the fact that the past pales in comparison with the present, there is also the problem of language. Nan-dong's father fully realizes the changes in time and compares himself to an actor stumbling unto a strange

stage without his lines and is not likely to be heard, much less understood, by an audience at all. The work, in short, sets out to tell a story of the past and hold it up against the decadent present, but it ends up — without the author's knowledge, it seems — having the past obscured, even overwhelmed, by the present.

The dialectics between past and present does not have to be clearcut, of course. Zhang Da-chun's "Jiang-jun Bei" (The General's Monument) (1986)³⁶ is about contradictions between past and present. The past is represented by the general who has gone through some major battles in the Sino-Japanese War as well as the subsequent civil war between K.M.T. and the Communists. It was a time of epic confrontations between one political ideology and another, and there was no question of the general's enemies being in the right at all. In fact, he is so convinced of his belief that he exerts his extrasensory power to summon the later generation to the past where they are given a first-person view of the events. This ideological purity is at times excessive, though, as for example when he identifies his son's field of study, Sociology, with socialism and hence leftism and eventually Communism. The contemporary world being rather lacking in ideological purity, what one sees nowadays is full of empty rituals, without commitments. Even the eulogy read by his son in the memorial service is penned by the secretary and doesn't really mean what he has in mind. The situation doesn't improve in the course of time and by the time his monument is to be unveiled, presumably on his posthumous ninetieth birthday, he finds everything so unprincipled and unacceptable that he exercises his extrasensory power again and hits his head against the monument in an attempt to destroy everything: past, present and future; himself and the world. However, as we are told, contradictions are a fact of life and may not go away just like that. In fact, as he takes his secretary and his son to the past, it is discovered that the past was equally marred by contradictions, too, the one between himself and his trafficker father-in-law being one example. The past is by no means as straightforward as can be embodied in a simple narrative account. What appears to be more striking is the trope in the story, the monument — or more correctly, the idea of the monument. The style corresponds very much to the tropological, rather than logical or empirical. In a New Critical sense, the monument may very well be seen as a verbal icon, constituting an existence in of itself, without necessarily having too much to do with the outside world. The same is true of a well-known film of the period, "Bei-qing Cheng-shi" ("City of Sadness") (1989),³⁷ in which the chief mode of representation

is lyrical rather than narrative,³⁸ leaving the main strand about political persecutions during 1947 mostly unarticulated, lacking all the vital details. By one account, the choice of a deaf-mute photographer through whom the story is told makes the story both deaf and mute, without being able to articulate itself with regard to the political development of the era.³⁹

In both Chen's "Zhao Nan-dong," and Zhang's "Jiang-jun Bei," the past is, strictly speaking, used as a metaphor for something different from the present. It may actually be argued that the past as represented in the two stories serves merely as codes for some ideological positions. As a result, very little sense of progression is achieved. For treatments of historical movement, one needs to go to the works by Lan Bo-zhou and Yang Zhao.

Yang Zhao's "An Hun" ("Despaired Soul") (1987)⁴⁰ covers a much longer time span and for that can be said to embody some historical dimensions. The story begins during the days of the Japanese occupation and the persecution of Taiwanese intellectual elites as they pressed for the establishment of a parliament. The protagonist is as a result forced to flee the island, only to find that the persecution is also present in the mainland as the Taiwanese are often suspected to be working for the Japanese.⁴¹ Upon the reversion of the island to China in 1945, the Taiwanese are initially enthusiastic at the prospect of being able to live under a government of the people after more than fifty years of the Japanese rule. The February 28 event in 1947 again proves it all to be an illusion. The protagonist as well as his friends who try to mediate in the disputes between the corrupt regime and the militant Taiwanese is wanted and many of them eventually rounded up and executed *en masse*. The protagonist is spared, but for a good symbolic reason. Instead of experiencing death physically, the protagonist is plagued with an extrasensory vision of future with which he sees nothing around him but death. This extrasensory power is given not only to the protagonist but also to other male descendants of the family throughout the centuries. One story has it that at a mythical time, Han people poisoned the entire indigenous aboriginal tribe and thus tricked god into granting them their wish for having ended the feud between the two peoples. In reluctance, god agreed to endow them with a power to foresee future, but it was to be a future with an ironic twist, for one saw nothing but death, not to mention the fact that most of the deaths were to occur in the most ridiculous manner, totally untypical of the heroic deeds of the revolutionaries. One may even say that the protagonist is made to witness the manifestations of his people's collective original sin. And the author seems to be suggesting that all the suf-

ferings of the Taiwanese people are but the harvest of the evil deeds sown by their ancestors and there is no question of who the real culprits are.

So it seems that the progression of history is subsumed under a mystical stigma for the sin committed by one's ancestors in a mythical time, and the extrasensory insight into the sin and its manifestations further weakens the sense of progression. One may in fact argue that the sin and its knowledge constitute a tropology of some sort and what we see is not so much the historical movement which carries the Taiwanese people along but a symbolic manifestation of a national sentiment of guilty conscience. Lan Bo-zhou's "Huang Ma-che Zi Ge" (*Song of the Swinging Chariot*) (1988), on the other hand, succeeds for the first time in injecting a sense of change which affects not only national politics but also individual convictions and well-beings. The story of Zhong Hao-dong is told from a number of perspectives as diary entries from his brothers are used to collaborate his wife's account. An intertextual configuration is created, as it were, from: a half-brother's record, made in the sixties with oblique references to Hao-dong's political career and their sibling love; his brother's recollection of Hao-dong's early childhood as well as his last days; a colleague's recollection of Hao-dong's final days; and, above, all, the wife's intimate stage-by-stage recollection of her husband's patriotic deeds from the Japanese days up to the reign of white terror in the sixties. In short, the story is a composite of past records, including history as seen from the past as well as history as lived through various stages — and shared, significantly, by a woman). As an individual, Zhong Hao-dong is a fine example of true patriotism. He challenges his Japanese teachers and keeps us his connection with the Chinese tradition — by reading works by mainland author's and Dr. Sun Yat-sen. Upon leaving school, he heads for the mainland and throws himself into the struggle against the Japanese. As the war draws to an end, his socialist consciousness surfaces and prompts him to reexamine the world around him. Upon his return to Taiwan, he devotes himself to education as a way of keeping up with his contributions to his compatriots, but the corruption of the government finally dawns upon him after 1947 and he has no choice but to look for other options. The end comes when he refuses to admit mistakes and is executed.⁴² Significantly, what happens to the protagonist is also shared by a large number of intellectuals at the time and the story details the overall temperament of the age. However, this must not be taken to mean that history moves in a linear manner, taking the route of anti-Japanese sentiments first, followed by suspicions from the K.M.T. authorities and, finally, the wife's wish for the island

to be liberated between 1949-50. The story tells of a complex process of personal involvement with various political forces and eventual disillusionment with the power that be. There are, in short, sufficient gaps and absences to make the readers conclude that history is by no means simplistic as we have been made to believe in Taiwan before the seventies. History is instead fraught with ambiguities which individuals are constantly confronted with and often puzzled by. The unconscious in history often comes to the surface only after one writes about it or reads about it from one's specific temporal-spatial perspectives. Reading history from the thirties through the fifties from the position of the eighties places one in a vantage position from which some of the hitherto unrecognized details or world views can be reexamined. Lan's work can be said to be one of the most ambitious so far in taking the writing and reading experience to a public realm which at the same time contains a great deal of the unconscious as it conditions human action and gives shape somehow to the outcome of events.

VIII.

Briefly, contemporary Taiwanese fiction moved through two stages before the late eighties. "modernism" in the sixties with its interest in experimentations and form, and "realism" in the seventies with its personal and realist reexaminations of reality. What came up after that was more difficult to categorize, but the period did see, among other things, the emergence of political novels. As a voice of dissent, these novels tried to reexamine existent dominant ideology in a rather unique way by reliving Taiwan's past in its most traumatic phase from 1947 up to the late fifties. As they did so, these novels tended to move in the direction of the public, away from the purely formalistic or the overtly ideological. Public history⁴³ turned out to be a medium which lent itself to a mediation between the aesthetic and the ideological. History was, moreover, shown at the same time to be full of unconscious ambiguities, in a way not unrelated to the contemporary pluralistic situation in Taiwan. It may even be argued that by writing or reading about the past, one tried to come to terms with the bewildering phenomenon of the present.

Of course, it doesn't mean that writing eliminates all differences and provides an easy solution. As a matter of fact, literature in the eighties came under increasing pressure as all cultural productions were increasingly turned into commodities. Lan's work was published, complete with photos, in

Ren-jian Za-chi (*The Human World*), which featured photo essays in quality print and used to turn a sizeable profit until it was closed in 1989. In terms of Linda Hutcheon's description,⁴⁴ the political novels of the eighties make one wonder if Taiwan has not moved increasingly beyond the "modern" in its literary production, judging by the integration of the historical with the private and unconscious as shown in Yang's and Lan's works. The emergence of history side by side with other genres, like myth in Yang Zhao's work or diary in Lan Bo-zhou's story, also transformed Taiwanese fiction into something beyond both (aesthetic) modernism and realism.

Notes

1. See Ch'i Pang-yuan, Preface, *Zhong-hua xian-dai wen-xue da-xi* (Taipei: Wiu-ke, 1989), Among various schools of writing characterizing the seventies and eighties, the feminist consciousness is of special interest as it provided an alternative to the patriarchal dominance in Chinese literature over the centuries and deserves a separate treatment of its own.
2. "Lai Suo" by Huang Fan, for instance, deals with the protagonist's maladjustment as he is caught between political ideals of the past and commercial values at present.
3. See Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, "The Name and Nature of Modernism," in *Modernism* (London: Penguin Books, 1976), pp. 19-56.
4. Leo Ou-fan Lee, "Zhong-guo Xian-dai Wen-xue Zhong de 'Xian-dai Zhu-yi'" ("Modernism" in Modern Chinese Literature") in *Jiu-shi Nian-dai* (Sept. 1987), 96-99.
5. Socialist Realism may very well be seen as an utopian project to revitalize the countryside as in *Li You-cai ban-hua*. It is not concerned too much with the rural scene as it is. It is actually a reading of the dialectical relationships between the country and the city but the topic requires a separate treatment.
6. See Hayde White, "Figuring the Nature of the Times Deceased: Literary Theory and Historical Writing," in *Future Literary Theory*, ed. Ralph Cohen (New York: Routledge, 1989), pp. 19-43.
7. Virginia Woolf, "The Mark on the Wall," in *A Haunted House & Other Stories* (London: Hogarth, 1921).
8. For that reason, Robert Young, in *White Mythology* argues that Western history needs to be re-colonized to acquire a vision of itself.
9. Cf. *Chen Ying-chen Zuo-pin Ji* (*The Collected Works of Chen Ying-chen*) (Taipei: Ren Jian, 1988), 13. For a counter-argument about the genesis of capitalism in Taiwan, please read Hang Chi [Chen Zhong-xin], *Mai Xiang Hou Mei-li-dao de Min-jian She-hui* (*Toward a Civil Society in the Post-"Formosa" Event*), (Taipei: Tang Shan, 1990), esp. pp. 99-126.
10. "Huang Ma-che Zhi Ge" ("Song of the Swinging Chariot") (1988), for example, quotes from *Zhong Li-he Ri-ji* (*The Diary of Zhong Li-he*) (1976) on a number of occasions. While the former gives extensive descriptions about the sufferings of political prisoners in the 50's and 60's, the latter barely makes some vague references to the persecutions of the same period. Zhong Li-he only mentions how he misses his half-period. Zhong Li-he only mentions how he misses his half-

brother expresses his feelings for his dead half-brother by indirectly mentioning the sibling bond between van Gogh and his brother, Theo. By contrast, open discussions about their love are made in "Huang Ma-che Zhi Ge." The difference in the degrees of articulateness with regard to political persecution is rather substantial between 1976 and 1988.

11. Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 151. However, it must be pointed out that in a more general sense aesthetics refers to the creation and appreciation of beauty and often studies the responses of the perceiver in his/her contact with the work of art. As such, it tends to ignore the pragmatic side of art.
12. Williams, pp. 152-153.
13. Williams, p. 154.
14. Williams, p. 157.
15. *The Aesthetic Dimension* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), p. 6.
16. Steve Burniston and Chris Weedon, "Ideology, Subjectivity and the Artistic Text," in *On Ideology* (London: Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, 1977), p. 200.
17. Burniston and Weedon, 218-223.
18. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)," in *Lenin and Philosophy* (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1971), pp. 127-186.
19. The two positions are respectively represented by Freud and Lacan. See Sigmund Freud, "'Creative Writers and Daydreaming,'" in Ernest Jones, ed. *The Collected Papers of Sigmund Freud* (New York: Basic Books, 1959), Vol. IV, Chapter 9.; and Jacques Lacan, *The Language of the Self*, trans. Anthony Wilden (New York: Delta, 1968).
20. Hayden White, "'Figuring the Nature of the Times Deceased': Literary Theory and Historical Writing," *Future Literary Theory*, ed. Ralph Cohen (London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 19-43.
21. Feelings are to be distinguished from the unconscious or ideology as they express embryonic positions which are both private and social. See Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 128-135.
22. Williams, p. 131.
23. Fredric Jameson, "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," *Social Text*, 15 (Fall, 1986), 65-88.
24. Zhang Da-chun's "Si-xi Yiu-guo" ("Si-xi Worried about the Nation") is a good example of the demise of pure anti-communist ideology. The story was first published in December, 1987. See *Si-xi Yiu-guo* (Taipei: Yuan-liu, 1988), pp. 125-146.
25. Leo Ou-fan Lee, "Zhong-guo Xian-dai Wen-xue Zhong di 'Xian-dai Zhu-yi,'" in *Jiu-shi Nian-dai* (Sept., 1987), 96-99.
26. See "Revolution in Poetic Language," in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (London: Blackwell, 1986), pp. 89-136.
27. Chen Ying-zhen was arrested in 1968 and other *Xiang-tu* writers such as Wang Tuo and Yang Qing-chu were both sentenced after the Gao-xiong Incident in 1979. They were all released in the seventies and eighties.
28. Originally published in *Taiwan Wen-yi* [*Taiwan Literature*] (Dec., 1980), now collected in *Zhong-hua Xian-dai Wen-xue Da-xi* (Taipei: Jiu-ge, 1989), Vol. 8, pp. 727-734.
29. Originally published in *Zhong-guo Shi-bao* [*China Times*] (Oct. 3-4, 1979), now

- collected in *Zong-hua Xian-dai Wen-xue Da-xi*, Vol. 10, pp. 1731-1765.
30. In fact, he attracted a group of children who thought of him as a lunatic as he babbles some political slogans.
 31. Originally collected in the book with the same title, published in 1987, now anthologized in *Zhong-hua Xian-dai Wen-xue Da-xi*, Vol. 10, 1790-1806.
 32. In case the past is seen as radically different from the present, doubts are also cast on the ability of tradition to impose a unity or continuity of some sort. In the same manner, the function of reason as a faculty to see uniformity amidst diversities or discrepancies is also called into question.
 33. Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1957), pp. 9-37.
 34. Chen Ying-zhen, *The Collected Works of Chen Ying-zhen* (Taipei: Ren-jian, 1988), Vol. 5, pp. 67-149.
 35. See Hayden White, "Figuring the Nature of the Times Deceased: Literary Theory and Historical Writing," in *Future Literary Theory*, ed. Ralph Cohen (New York: Routledge, 1989), 28-31.
 36. Originally published in *Zhong-guo Shi-bao* [*China Times*] (Oct. 3-4, 1986), now collected in *Zhong-hua Xian-dai Wen-xue Da-xi*, Vol. 11, 2592-2610.
 37. The script of the film is contained in the book with the same title by Wu Nian-zhen and Zhu Tian-wen (Taipei: Yuan-liu, 1989).
 38. Zhu Tian-wen herself admitted that lyricism as suggested by Chen Shi-xiang best lent itself to the rendition of human situations in the Chinese tradition. See *Bei-qing Cheng-shi*, pp. 12-16.
 39. Liao Bing-hui, "Ji Long You Ya di She-ying-shi" ("The Photographer Who Is Both Deaf and Mute"), *Zi-li Wan-bao* (Nov. 25, 1989).
 40. See *Zhong-hua Xian-dai Wen-xue Da-xi*, Vol. 11, 2681-2697. The story was written in Feb., 1987.
 41. A situation which is also found in *Huang Ma-che Zhi Ge* (*Song of the Swinging Chariot*) (1988).
 42. The account is collaborated in part by Ye Shih-dao in his autobiographical story. See "Xi-shuo Wu-shi Nian-dai de Bai-se Kong-pu" ("A Detailed Account of the White Terror of the Fifties") in *Taiwan Wen-yi* [*Literature*], New Issue No. 1 (Sept.-Oct. 1990), 19-25. Ye was also implicated in the case.
 43. The term is tautological as all history must by definition be public, even though it must be admitted that history in literature is often seen or even lived, through private individuals. For details, see Georg Lukacs, *The Historical Novel* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1981).
 44. *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (New York and London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 3-21.