

Modernism in Modern Chinese Literature: A Study (Somewhat Comparative) in Literary History*

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One of the most intriguing problems in the comparative study of Chinese and Western literary trends is that while in both China and Europe unprecedented literary revolutions took place roughly at the same time, the artistic products which emerged from these revolutions were qualitatively different. From the perspective of literary influence, the new Chinese literature which resulted from the Literary Revolution of 1917 and the May Fourth Movement of 1919-1923 was by no means akin to the radical, avant-gardist strains of "modernism" in Europe, despite the zestful effort on the part of modern Chinese writers to borrow from Western literature. And in spite of their desire to be abreast of the newest trends from the West, the May Fourth decade in China (1917-1927) witnessed, as I have argued elsewhere, a massive compression of essentially the nineteenth-century legacy in European literature. It was not until the 1930s that a small coterie of Chinese writers and critics became fascinated by Western modernistic poetry and not until the 1960s in Taiwan that modernistic fiction came to vogue under the active championship of the youthful editors of the journal, *Hsien-tai wen-hsueh* (現代文學, Modern Literature).

This problem cannot be explained away merely by the simple argument of "natural time-lag" in any situation of intercultural contact. Rather, it reveals profound cultural differences and the ambiguities of "modernity"

* Portions of this paper are taken from "Literary Trends I: The Quest for Modernity," a chapter written for the *Cambridge History of China*, Vol. 13; and "Modernism and Romanticism in Taiwan Literature," a paper delivered at the "Symposium on Taiwan Fiction" (February 23-24, 1979, Austin, Texas). No citation or translation without the author's written permission.

in this modern phase of both cultures.

This paper will first explore some of the intellectual “roots” in the divergent conceptions of “modern literature” in China and Europe. It will then concern itself with the early experiments in modernistic poetry (notably by Li Chin-fa [李金髮] and Tai Wang-shu [戴望舒]) in the 1930s. In the final parts of the paper, the focus will shift to the Taiwan literary scene of the 1960s in which Western modernism was introduced with aplomb to Chinese readers for the first time — more than thirty years after it had reached its “high season” in the West.

I

Viewed in a Western perspective, the term “modern” — defined as a temporal consciousness of the present in reaction against the past — had by the nineteenth century acquired two different kinds of connotations. According to Matei Calinescu, since the first half of the nineteenth century, “an irreversible split occurred between modernity as a stage in the history of Western civilization — a product of scientific and technological progress, of the industrial revolution, of the sweeping economic and social changes brought about by capitalism — and modernity as an aesthetic concept.” This latter concept, which brought into being such new trends as symbolism, cubism, futurism, imagism, expressionism, Dadaism and surrealism, represented a strong and radical reaction against the former modernity, which was characterized by the new rebels as the modernity of the middle class and of the philistine — “with its terre-à-terre outlook, utilitarian pre-conceptions, mediocre conformity, and debasement of taste.” The beginnings of this reaction can, in fact, be traced to certain strains of the Romantic movement which were opposed both to the classic notions of permanence and perfection and to the hypocrisy and vulgarity embodied in the increasingly materialistic civilization of the nineteenth century. By the turn of the century, however, this new modernism had taken on some definite polemical positions. It was anti-traditional, anti-utilitarian, and “anti-humanist” in the sense of seeking “dehumanization” (in Ortega y Gasset’s famous phrase). The new artistic rebels had become weary of empty romantic humanitarianism; the human content of nineteenth century life, with its “bourgeois mercantilism and vulgar utilitarianism” had generated in

them "a real loathing of living forms or forms of living beings" and led to a progressive elimination of the human elements which had been predominant in romantic and realistic art. The new modernism was also anti-rationalistic and anti-historical: as Georg Lukacs has charged, "modernism despairs of human history, abandons the idea of linear historical development." This sense of despair, the result of a disillusionment with the positivist notion of progress and the Enlightenment idea of rationality, had caused the modernist writers and artists to lose their interest in the outside world, by now seen as hopelessly recalcitrant and alienating; rather, they took upon themselves, in an extreme gesture of subjectivism and iconoclasm, to reinvent the terms of reality through their own artistic creativity.

Viewed against this perspective, the Chinese concept of modernity shows some striking differences. Since the late Ch'ing, the increasingly "present-oriented" ideologies (as opposed to the general past orientation of classic Confucianism) were filled, both literally and figuratively, with a "new" content: from the "reform anew" (維新, *wei-hsin*) movement of 1898 to Liang Ch'i-ch'ao's (梁啟超) concept of the "New People" (新民, *hsin-min*), to the May Fourth manifestations of "New Youth," "New Culture" and "New Literature," the epithet *hsin* (新, "new") had accompanied almost all the social and intellectual movements to free China from the shackles of the past so as to become a "modern" nation. "Modernity" in China thus connotes not only a preoccupation with the present but a forward-looking search for "newness," for the "novelties" from the West. Accordingly, this new concept of modernity in China seems to have inherited, in varying degrees, several familiar notions of Western "bourgeois" modernity: the idea of evolutionism and progress, the positivist belief in the forward movement of history, the confidence in the beneficial possibilities of science and technology, and the ideal of freedom and democracy defined within the framework of a broad humanism. To be sure, as Benjamin Schwartz has noted, some of these liberal values received a very "Chinese" reinterpretation in the works of Yen Fu (嚴復) and his contemporaries: the faith in the individual was combined with a fervent nationalism in an envisioned effort to achieve the goals of national wealth and power. Thus, this Chinese view foresaw no necessary split between the individual and the collective.

When the May Fourth iconoclasts launched a totalistic attack on tradition, their emotive ethos brought about a romantic assertion of the self which was opposed to the "philistine" society of early twentieth century

China. While sharing to some degree the sense of artistic revolt of Western aesthetic modernism, the May Fourth writers did not give up their faith in science, rationality, and progress. In literature, the demand for "realism," in fact, echoed Ortega y Gasset's summation of nineteenth-century European artists as a whole — that they "reduced the strictly aesthetic elements to a minimum and let the work consist almost entirely in a fiction of human realities. In this sense all normal art of the last century must be called realistic."

In his otherwise perceptive assessment of the Chinese Literary Revolution, Jarostav Průšek acknowledges this nineteenth-century impact but then goes on to state that the subjectivism and lyricism of May Fourth literature "was certainly in essence closer to modern European literature after the first World War than to the literature of the nineteenth century" — the result, according to Průšek, of a "convergence of the old Chinese tradition with contemporary European moods." In basic agreement with Průšek, Bonnie McDougall likewise stresses the Chinese interest in avant-gardist trends. But as we examine closely McDougall's own evidence, the Chinese writers' sense of the "avant-garde," although springing from an artistic revolt against tradition, was still confined to the realm of "life": in other words, their feelings of anger, frustration, and loathing of contemporary reality propelled them to a stance of rebellion which, however, was rooted in a socio-political nexus. The Creationists' slogan of "art for art's sake" neither followed Gautier's idea of the gratuitousness of art nor echoed the Symbolists' polemical assertion of the superiority of a transcendental reality — not to mention the characteristic modernist claim of creating a new aesthetic world more "authentic" than the shallow external world of contemporary life and society. Even the mood of flux and impermanence found in such works as Yü Ta-fu's (郁達夫) early stories is connected with China's historical situation and not with the more abstract and ahistorical notions of "the transitory, the fugitive, the contingent" (in Baudelaire's phrase). Finally, nowhere in May Fourth literature can we find any evidence of modernism mocking and turning against itself (as in "decadence" and "kitsch"). Yü Ta-fu's "decadence" remained essentially a glamorous style that barely veiled his frustrations as a "superfluous" intellectual afflicted with a sense of socio-political impotence.

The most salient feature of the "modernism" of May Fourth literature is that, instead of turning within himself and the realm of art, the modern

Chinese writer displays his individuality most prominently and imposes it on external reality. In this sense, May Fourth literature resembles to some extent the first phase of Western modernism, according to Irving Howe, when modernism, not disguising its romantic origins, "declares itself as an inflation of the self, a transcendental and orgiastic aggrandizement of matter and event in behalf of personal vitality." The epitome of this first stage is Whitman, an idol of the early Kuo Mo-jo (郭沫若). But modern Chinese literature has largely eschewed (until the 1960s in Taiwan) the middle and late stages of Western modernism: "In the middle stages the self begins to recoil from externality and devotes itself, almost as if it were the world's body, to a minute examination of its own inner dynamic: freedom, compulsion, caprice. In the late stages, there occurs an emptying-out of self, a revulsion from the weariness of individuality and psychological gain." The exemplars of these stages are, respectively, Virginia Woolf and Beckett. Among Chinese writers, only Lu Hsün (魯迅) brought himself fortuitously into a Beckett-like landscape in his prose poetry; and the Virginia Woolf legacy was known only to two later women writers: Ling Shu-hua (凌淑華) and Chang Ai-ling (張愛玲, Eileen Chang).

For the majority of May Fourth writers, to be "modern" means, on the superficial level, to be "chic" (摩登, mo-teng), *à la mode*, to be abreast with the latest fashions from the West — from styles of clothing and hairdo to trends in literature. But on a deeper level, as represented by Lu Hsün, it implies a subjectivism in profound tension with the forward journey toward a national modernity — to build a new China in a new and better world of the future. C. T. Hsia's (夏志清) judgment seems therefore precisely on target:

He [the modern Chinese writer] shares with the modern Western writer a vision of disgust if not despair, but since his vision does not extend beyond China, at the same time he leaves the door open for hope, for the importation of modern Western or Soviet systems that would transform his country from its present state of decadence. If he had the courage or insight to equate the Chinese scene with the condition of modern man, he would have been in the mainstream of modern literature. But he dared not do so, since to do so would have blotted out hope for the betterment of life, for the restoration of human dignity.

From historical hindsight, however, Professor Hsia's generally valid insight requires one important qualification: a few modern Chinese writers did attempt to equate the Chinese scene with the condition of modern man, but the majority of them *chose* not to do so, for to do so would be tantamount to entering a universal "Ivory Tower" — an irresponsible way of artistic "escape" from the exigency of the times and of the nation. Thus, at its best, May Fourth literature conveys a mode of mental conflict and agony different from its Western counterpart but equally intense: the threat of outside reality did not retreat from the writer's consciousness but remained; the problem posed by a stagnant, philistine society intruded upon the writer's conscience with aggravating force. The modern Chinese writer, unlike his Western contemporary, cannot afford to dismiss "reality"; the price he pays for his "patriotic provinciality" is, therefore, a deepened sense of spiritual torment which carries the "realistic" force of imminent crisis. From a less aesthetic point of view, the quest for modernity in Chinese literature yields a tragically human meaning. It never became "inverted" to the *cul-de-sac* of "pure aestheticism." Nor was it confronted with the self-defeatist dilemma in which Western modernism defines itself: obsessed with the impermanence of time, modernism can never succeed, for if it does, it, too, becomes "old," thereby ceasing to be modern. In Irving Howe's subtle summation, "modernism must always struggle but never quite triumph, and then, after a time, must struggle in order not to triumph."

In his search for the "betterment of life" and the "restoration of human dignity" to himself and his country, the modern Chinese writer kept on hoping for a bright future as he agonized over the gloomy reality of worsening social crisis. This conflict between ideal and reality provided the source for some of the most mature works in the early 1930s. But modernity never really triumphed in the history of Chinese literature. After the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War, the artistic side of this modern quest was overshadowed by political exigency. The value of creative literature was reduced to a position subservient to politics, in spite of its constant socio-political dimension. And with the canonization of Mao Tse-tung's "Yenan Talks on Literature and Art," the very concept of artistic reality has been prescribed by political ideology; modernity, whether in its Western or Chinese connotations, thus ceases to be a central hallmark in Chinese Communist literature.

II

Although the mainstream of modern Chinese literature remains on a social-realistic plane dominated by an overall "obsession with China," a small number of writers – mainly poets – did make certain groping efforts to come to terms with the techniques of Western modernism. Since they went against the prevalent temper of socio-political commitment, they were often received with ideological abuse: their works were deemed decadent, bloodless, sickly, lifeless, senselessly formalistic, chaotic, and incomprehensible.

The chief culprit to this charge was Li Chin-fa, a French-educated poet who openly proclaimed his indebtedness to French Symbolist poetry – particularly to Baudelaire, Verlaine, and Mallarmè. Branded by his contemporaries as a "poet eccentric," Li further compounded his notoriety by announcing that his poetry carried no meaning except as a series of fragmentary images and symbols which needed no elucidation. Among his incomprehensible works is the following example, a poem entitled, "Abandoned Woman" (棄婦):

With a blade of grass, I come and go with the spirit of
God in the empty valley.
My sorrow can be deeply imprinted only in the brains of
creeping bees.
Or with the waterfalls, let it be dashed down the hanging
cliffs,
To be then drifted away with the red leaves.

The hidden grief burdens her every move.
No fire of setting sun can melt the ennui of time
Into ashes, and fly away through the chimney
To color the wings of the roaming crows,
And with them perch on the rocks of a roaring sea
To listen quietly to the boatman's song.

The frail old skirt mournfully sighs
As she wanders among the graves.
Never will there be hot tears
To drop on the lawn
To adorn the world.

(English translation by Julia Lin)

靠一根草兒，與上帝之靈往返在空谷裏。
我的哀感惟遊蜂之腦能深印着；
或與山泉長瀉在懸崖，
然後隨紅葉而俱去。

棄婦之隱憂堆積在動作上，
夕陽之火不能把時間之煩悶
化成灰燼，從烟突裏飛去，
長染在遊鴉之羽，
將同棲止于海嘯之石上，
靜聽舟子之歌。

衰老的裙裾發出哀吟，
徜徉在邱墓之側，
永無熱淚，
點滴在艸地
爲世界之裝飾。

In present-day standards, Li's "exotic" imagery in this poem seems heavy-handed, and the sudden shift of point-of-view after the first stanza seems a "prosaic" device. A recent poet and scholar in Taiwan, Ya Hsien (痲弦), has also charged that Li's use of language is stilted and requires stylistic "doctoring." But it was Li Chin-fa who was the first among modern Chinese poets to confront the Symbolist concern with imagery — the creation of an artistically "surrealistic" world dominated by "a logic of metaphor or form" which carries no correspondence with commonplace reality. Measured against the Western Symbolist ideal, Li's poetry, though smacking of Baudelaire, still contains artistic compromises with reality. But in Chinese terms, Li's poetry was already a far cry from the superficial sentimentality of early May Fourth poetry which aimed, as Hu Shih (胡適) once put it, merely to be simple, free, and easily understandable. Li Chin-fa had performed a second "emancipation" which freed modern Chinese poetry, at least temporarily, from its obsessive concern with nature and society and pointed to the possibility of an aesthetic vision so daringly new and anti-traditional that, as in European modernism, it could serve as an artistic statement of rebellion against the philistine status quo. But Li was obviously

not interested in founding a new literary movement. Considering himself a Chinese "avant-gardist" who was "ahead of his time," Li soon stopped writing poetry altogether and eventually joined the diplomatic service.

Li Chin-fa's pioneer efforts were taken up in the pages of a new monthly journal, *Hsien-tai* (現代, The Contemporary or "Les Contemporains," 1932-35), edited by Shih Chih-ts'un (施蟄存), Tu Heng (杜衡), and Tai Wang-shu. The magazine's contents were eclectic, its political stance allegedly neutral. Thus in its four years of publication it attracted some of the best writers in the 1930s from the camps of both the left and the non-left: the novelists Mao Tun (茅盾), Chang T'ien-i (張天翼), Lao She (老舍), and the poets Ai Ch'ing (艾青), Pien Chih-lin (卞之琳), Ho Ch'i-fang (何其芳), Li Chin-fa, and Tai Wang-shu. In its coverage of Western literature, the magazine's editors seemed intent on fulfilling the promises of its title by concentrating on what they considered to be the "contemporary" trends in the European literary scene. Thus we find information on recent winners of the Nobel Prize in Literature (Galsworthy), articles on Post-war French literature, on Neo-Romanticism, Dadaism, Surrealism, and lyrical and imagistic poetry. A special issue of the magazine (Vol. 5, No. 1) was devoted to American literature and contained several learned surveys of recent American writers in the fields of fiction, poetry, drama and criticism, together with translations of selected stories. Particularly noteworthy was the survey of American poetry by Shao Hsün-mei (邵洵美) which cited the works of e. e. Cummings, Robert Graves, Ezra Pound, Gertrude Stein, and T. S. Eliot. Though not the first Chinese writer to introduce Eliot into China, Shao gave a perceptive analysis of Eliot's "Waste-land" which he considered "the greatest work" of "literary internationalism." Other American authors mentioned include Irving Babbitt (in a celebrated article by his Chinese disciple, Liang Shih-ch'iu [梁實秋]), Jack London, Upton Sinclair, Theodore Dreiser, Willa Cather, Sinclair Lewis, Eugene O'Neil, John Dos Passos, Ernest Hemingway, and William Faulkner. Both Hemingway and Faulkner were cited, in one article, as writers of "pessimism" whose popularity in America was being challenged by "a shining new star of social realism," John Dos Passos. In another article, Hemingway was defended by a self-styled Chinese follower (Yeh Ling-feng [葉靈鳳]) as representing a healthy reaction against the psychologism of Joyce's *Ulysses*. In a third article, Faulkner was viewed as a typical product of "an unhealthy age" whose works, despite their novel technique, imparted very "abnormal sensory

thrills" and were consequently unlikely to have "eternal value."

It seems that despite their impressive grasp of the modern literary scene in America and Europe, the *Hsien-tai* writers were somewhat lukewarm, if not downright hostile, to the modernistic tendencies they had duly discerned. With the exception of "effete snobs" like Shao Hsün-mei, most Chinese writers of the 1930s appeared ambivalent in their attitude toward Western modernism: while they were attracted by the novelty of the "new tides" from the West, they were at the same time repelled by the general outlook of pessimism and nihilism. In a revealing essay titled "Literature of the Mind" (心境主義的文學, Hsin-ching chu-i ti wen-hsüeh, *Hsien-tai*, vol. 4, no. 6), Mu Mu-t'ien (穆木天), a veteran of the Creation Society (創造社), warned his readers against such recent Western trends as impressionism, psychologism, and mysticism which he deemed basically decadent and escapist, thus unsuitable to the social and realistic demands of the age.

Although the magazine did not advocate the importation of Western modernism into China, it is clear that all the three editors were nevertheless dissatisfied with the state of modern Chinese literature, particularly poetry. As Tu Heng (Su Wen [蘇汶]) recalls: "In vogue at the time was a confessional style: in poetry it called for wild whining, straight-forward statement, and frank, unbridled release. We all reacted strongly against such a tendency in private." To counter this May Fourth romantic current, the editors encouraged in particular poetry written in a modernistic vein. An editorial on poetry was published in volume 1, number 4:

The poems published in *The Contemporary* are poetry, pure modern poetry. They constitute the poetic form composed of contemporary phrases and idioms written by modern men with the sensibilities of present-day life. . . . The poems in *The Contemporary* are mostly rhymeless; their poetic lines untrimmed, but they all contain quite accomplished texture: they are the modern shape of poetry; they are poetry!

This manifesto can be regarded as the beginning formulation of modernistic poetry in the history of modern Chinese literature. With its emphasis on texture and language as the "shape" of pure poetry and on breaking down the restrictions of rhyme and meter, this bold statement was clearly intended to advance Chinese poetry from the simple, realistic poetry of the early May Fourth.

Despite this avant-gardist claim, the editors were not able to bring modern Chinese poetry entirely into a truly “modernistic” terrain. The journal published a few poems by Li Chin-fa, including a highly “abstract” piece titled, “In a Rainy Night, Sitting Alone, Listening to Music” (雨中, 獨坐、聽籟音). But the reigning poet of the *Hsien-tai* was undoubtedly Tai Wang-shu.

Likewise interested in French Symbolism, Tai had inherited Li’s penchant for impressionism and mysticism; he claimed that the purpose of poetry was to express that “poetic mood” which he defined as an evocation of “something between the self and the hidden self.” But Tai’s poems did not achieve the jarring effect of Li’s dark, bizarre imagery. Instead, he seemed to carry forth the aural values of Hsü Chih-mo’s (徐志摩) poetry; he shared with the Crescent Moon poets (新月詩人) – particularly Ch’en Meng-chia (陳夢家) and Fang Wei-te (方瑋德), after the untimely deaths of Hsü and Chu Hsiang (朱湘) – the emphasis on musicality, texture, and the suggestive nuances of the lyrical mood. A supreme example of Tai’s “softer” symbolism can be found in “The Alley in the Rain” (雨巷, 1927), the poem which earned him the sobriquet, “the poet of the rainy alley”:

She seems to be in this lonely alley,
Holding an oilpaper umbrella
Like me,
Just like me,
Silently walking back and forth,
Cold, lonely, and melancholy.

Silently she moves close;
Moving close, she casts
A glance like a sigh,
She floats by
Like a dream,
Sad lingering, and faint.

Drifting by in a dream,
Like a spray of clove,
She passes by my side:
Farther, farther away she goes,
To the broken hedge walls,
To the end of the rainy valley.

(English translation by Julia Lin)

她彷徨在這寂寥的雨巷，
撐着油紙傘
像我一樣
像我一樣地
默默地行着，
冷漠，淒清，又惆悵。

她靜默地走近
走近，又投出
太息一般的眼光，
她飄過
像夢一般地，
像夢一般地淒婉迷茫。

像夢中飄過
一枝丁香地，
我身旁飄過這女郎；
她靜默地遠了，遠了，
到了頹圯的籬牆，
走盡這雨巷。

The effect of “synesthesia” created in the poem, according to Julia Lin’s analysis, produces “an atmosphere permeated with effeminate charm, languorous grace, and mellifluous music that is worthy of his poetic guide, Paul Verlaine.” But when one juxtaposes Tai’s poem with Li Chin-fa’s “Abandoned Women,” quoted earlier, which also conjures up the image of a woman, it is apparent that Tai’s “softer” symbolism pales in intensity and inventiveness against Li’s “harsh” originality.

It is noteworthy that Tai himself did not consider “Alley in the Rain” a masterpiece and soon afterwards began to move away from a reliance on musicality of tone and rhyme, which he considered to be “detrimental to poetic sensibility.” His later poems, from “My Memory” (我底記憶) to “Paradise Bird” (樂園鳥), showed progressive signs of nihilism and despair, according to his friend Tu Heng, as his technique became more “abstract” and “surrealistic.” In 1936, Tai founded a new magazine entitled *New Poetry* (新詩, Hsin-shih) together with Hsü Ch’ih (徐遲) and Chi

Hsien (紀弦). On the editorial board were a number of poets who were all interested in Western modernistic poetry: Feng Chih (馮至), Liang Tsung-tai (梁宗岱), Sun Ta-yü (孫大雨), and Pien Chih-lin. After its auspicious beginning, however, the magazine was forced to stop publication in June 1937 when its printing plant was destroyed by Japanese cannon fire. What promised to be a major effort in modern poetry beyond the achievements of the Crescent Moon and Contemporary poets thus came to an abrupt end.

The outbreak of Sino-Japanese War brought to a close a decade of artistic maturation in modern Chinese literature, of which poetry was but one manifestation. As the eastern cities were occupied by the Japanese, the majority of modern Chinese writers were compelled to make the exodus to the rural hinterland. Confronted with the problems of rural depression and prompted by a conscience-ridden patriotism, most of the poets consciously abandoned their modernistic experiments, which they now regarded as "ivory-towerish," and replaced them with a simple, proletarian style. As Li Chin-fa, Tai Wang-shu, and other modern poets receded from the scene, the new generation of "patriotic" poets — Tsang K'o-chia (臧克家), T'ien Chien (田間), Ai Ch'ing, and Ho Ch'i-fang — began to evolve a more positive outlook on life, to depict mainly "flesh-and-bone" figures of the Chinese countryside, and to employ a more colloquial idiom for poetic effect. Thus, as a result of the war, both poetry and fiction converged on themes of immediate reality. And the urban tradition of symbolism and modernism disappeared forever from the Chinese mainland.

III

If the socio-political milieu of Mainland China has not been conducive to the growth of modernistic literature, the situation in Taiwan since 1949 has proved just the opposite. The Nationalist government rules on the basis of a political myth — "to recover the mainland" — which serves both to reinforce the feeling of transitoriness among mainlanders who fled to the island and to alienate the indigenous Taiwanese population who have never set foot on the Chinese continent. The generally authoritarian style of the KMT government further induces political apathy, if not self-enforced silence. Since the 1960s, the success of the land reform programs and the commercia-

lization of society have given rise to a pervasive middle-class mentality which is basically apolitical. The "masses" in Taiwan demand escapist entertainment: they are in no mood to confront a political reality which promises no certain future. Hemmed in from without and unable to find ready solutions to their political frustrations, the Chinese writers in Taiwan — mainlanders and native Taiwanese alike — have gradually turned inward, "to dwell in the personal world of sensory, subconscious and dream experience."

The publication of *Wen-hsüeh tsa-chih* (文學雜誌, The Literary Review, 1956-60) marked an important chapter in the history of Chinese literature in Taiwan. Edited by the late Tsi-an Hsia (夏濟安), the magazine called for "realism as a canon for fiction writing." In its inaugural issue, Professor Hsia set guidelines which were decidedly reminiscent of the general literary stance of the 1930s: "Though we live in a time of great chaos, we do not want our literature to be chaotic. . . . We do not intend to dodge reality. . . . Our conviction is: a serious writer must be the one who can reflect for us the zeitgeist of our time. We are not after the beauty of language for its own sake, for we feel that it is more important for us to speak the truth."

As Joseph Lau (劉紹銘) has convincingly shown, "truth was apparently not what the reading public nor the would-be contributors were after or prepared for." Ironically, Professor Hsia's seminal contribution lay precisely in nurturing the creative talents of a younger generation of writers who were not so much interested in reflecting the socio-political reality of their time as in "the beauty of language for its own sake." Insofar as they felt compelled to describe the "truth," they had to resort to "the art of innuendo in numerous forms of 'modernism' to express their claustrophobic fears, their sense of insecurity and . . . their bewilderment at being used as hostages for the sins of their fathers." The climate was thus ripe for the unprecedented blossoming of modernistic literature.

Poetry preceded fiction as the major genre of modernism in Taiwan, for obvious reasons. In 1953, Ch' Hsien, one of Tai Wang-shu's associates in the ill-fated *New Poetry* magazine, apparently resurrected this minor legacy of the 1930s in his new journal, *Hsien-tai shih* (現代詩, Contemporary Poetry, 1953-63). Some eighty poets subsequently joined to form the "Contemporary" society in 1956, though it is doubtful if they were aware of their historical precedents. As formulated by Chi Hsien, the

society's professed principles read deceptively like a continuation of those of their predecessors. The following are the six basic tenets laid down by Chi Hsien:

1. The society wished to promulgate the "spirit" and "basic elements of all new schools of Western poetry since Baudelaire."
2. The group believed that writing new poetry meant "horizontal transplantation" rather than "vertical inheritance."
3. The group emphasized "newness" — "to explore new continents and new virgin lands of poetry, to express new contents and create new forms, to discover new tools and invent new techniques."
4. They also underscored "rationality": one of the key features of modernism, they believed, was its "anti-romanticism, its emphasis on rationality and its rejection of emotional confessionism."
5. They would like to seek "the purity of poetry": to cleanse poetry of all "non-poetic dregs, to purify, distil, and refine poetry."
6. They were "patriotic, anti-Communist, and supporters of freedom and democracy — this needs no explanation."

Aside from the perfunctory anti-Communist caveat, these principles seem to represent a clearer articulation of what the earlier Contemporary poets had attempted to achieve. The emphasis on "pure poetry," on creating new forms and content, can also be found in the manifesto of the earlier group. Chi Hsien's pronounced indebtedness to Western modernistic poetry and his open advocacy of direct borrowing ("horizontal transplantation") in fact carried his group one step further toward total Westernization in poetry. Expectedly, these two principles were singled out for special attack by conservative critics who ironically used the same arguments as the earlier leftists by castigating the decadence of Baudelaire and his Chinese followers.

While Chi Hsien's pioneering status has been recognized by all new poets in Taiwan, he is himself a traitor to his own theories. The *Hsien-tai shih* lasted a decade (1953-1963), but by the early 1960s Chi Hsien had already turned back on his early stance: he confessed that he had misled his fellow poets in the wrong direction! But despite Chi Hsien's about-face, modern poetry in Taiwan prospered; new poetry societies were formed and new journals published. Among them the "Lan Hsing" (藍星, Blue Star) and "Ch'uang shih-chi" (創世紀, Epoch) societies were probably the most famous. In addition to publishing their own magazines and editing poetry

supplements for newspapers, they also sponsored poetry readings and poetry prizes. Through their efforts, they have in fact realized Chi Hsien's self-imposed mission: "To lead another revolution in poetry, and to promote the modernization of new poetry."

The lion's share of contributions to the cause of modern poetry in Taiwan must be given to the Epoch group. Founded by a number of former servicemen and university students, the Epoch society, through its journal of the same name (1954-1970), has launched a series of impressive efforts to translate and introduce Western modernistic poetry: such authors as Baudelaire, Valéry, Rilke, Eliot, Spender, St. John Perse, Verlaine, and Dylan Thomas were featured in special issues of the journal. Efforts were also made to encourage original poetry writing and to study and edit the works of earlier modern poets, such as Li Chin-fa and Tai Wang-shu.

Viewed from the perspective of literary history, it is apparent that the poets of the Epoch group and their other colleagues have achieved, despite their many excesses of Western imitation, one of the central objectives of modernistic poetry — original imagery. They have created, through years of trial and error, a mature poetic idiom which has made it possible for each poet to evolve his individualized poetic images. Compared to Li Chin-fa, some of the best Taiwan poets (such as Ya Hsien, Yang Mu [楊牧], Lo Fu [洛夫], Chou Meng-tieh [周夢蝶] and others) have demonstrated a facility with the language and a secure grasp of technique. Li Chin-fa and his generation were still too enamored with the new tides from the West: some of Li's poems, for instance, contain images so exotic and mannered that they read like foreign products in Chinese translation. The graveyards and female phantoms in Li's poetry are as "French" as Hsü Chih-mo's rivers and cathedrals are "English." Moreover, the early poets all shared a basically ideological obsession with the *pai-hua* (白話): the use of the vernacular idiom was considered a *sine qua non* of modern Chinese poetry and its major, if not the only, hallmark.

The Taiwan poets seem quite aware of this May Fourth heritage. The Epoch poets in particular have argued that modern Chinese poetry need not be confined strictly to the *pai-hua*, and that a certain Chinese sensibility is required to transform their Western formalistic borrowings into original creations. Despite Chi Hsien's iconoclastic principles, they are much less antagonistic to traditional Chinese poetry than their May Fourth predecessors. As Yang Mu (C. H. Wang [王靖獻], himself a scholar of

classical Chinese literature) once observed: the impact of traditional Chinese literature on modern Taiwan literature is "invisible, yet thicker than blood; a born Chinese can never shake off this traditional literary heritage from their consciousness." And in their better works, Yang Mu, Ya Hsien, and Yü Kuang-chung (余光中) have not only assimilated many traditional poetic images but also turned their very nostalgia for the ancient tradition into a powerful irony, which accentuates their sense of ambivalence as modern Chinese intellectuals caught in a modern, technological world at once too alien and too familiar.

To assimilate the best from China and the West, "to create the kind of poetry which, being Chinese-flavored, is also capable of expressing the spirit, thinking, and mentality of the modern man" is the generally acknowledged objective of all Taiwan poets. Yet in spite of many groundbreaking innovations in language and form and the evolvement of mature imageries, new verse from Taiwan remains amorphous and unsettled in matters of content. To put it simply: what does it mean to be "modern" in Taiwan poetry? Ya Hsien's famous metaphor of "poets who put on suits of corduroy" can be read as an ironic comment on the modern poet in Taiwan. In an important preface to an anthology of Taiwan poetry, Lo Fu refuses to admit that modern poetry in Taiwan is a product of Western modernism. He calls for a "new humanism" and a new "critical spirit" perhaps to combat the fundamental sense of despair with the human condition so prevalent in Western modernistic literature. Unlike the "art for art's sake" premise of Western poetry since Baudelaire, a premise which defines a deeper reality for the artist apart from the philistine society around him, modern Chinese poets — past and present — can never totally break away from their nationalism and social conscience. One suspects that Lo Fu's "new humanism" may have something to do with this Chinese obsession: for this positive faith, as Lo Fu states wistfully, would give the modern Chinese poet "spiritual strength" in the face of adversities, and the adoption of the "critical spirit" would enable the poet to "realize the positive meaning of life from its pessimistic side." Like Chi Hsien's anti-Communism, this amorphous plea sounds enforced — as if not to have such an affirmative gesture would be tantamount to failure in being Chinese!

In recent years there has been in fact a noticeable transition from "obscurity" and "nihilism" to "transparency" and "positivism" (in Yü Kuang-chung's words). By the early 1970s, most Taiwan poets agree, modern

Chinese poetry has gone through its Western phase. The younger generation of poets are beginning to develop a new trend toward simpler forms and more "earthy" subjects. Even the erstwhile highly metaphysical and academic poet, Yeh Wei-lien (葉維廉, Wai-lim Yip), has recently written poems depicting the coal miners at I-lan. With the nativist reaction gaining more momentum in the last few years, it seems that Taiwan literature, in both poetry and fiction, has gone beyond its "modernistic" stage.

IV

Following poetry, the modern movement in Taiwan fiction was launched by a group of Taiwan University students in their journal, *Hsien-tai wen-hsüeh* (現代文學, Modern Literature, 1960-1973). The magazine began as a mouthpiece for a few novices at creative writing, all students of Western literature under Tsi-an Hsia. The first issue of the magazine, which was rather shabbily put together, sold no more than six to seven hundred copies. But in terms of historical significance, this unpretentious bimonthly (later changed to quarterly) occupies a position comparable to such earlier, and more renowned, journals as *Hsiao-shuo yüeh-pao* (小說月報, Short Story Monthly), *Ch'uang-tso yüeh-k'an* (創作月刊, Creation Monthly), or *Hsin-yüeh* (新月). If it can be said that the above-mentioned magazines were instrumental in introducing nineteenth-century romanticism and realism, the discovery and assessment of twentieth-century modernism must be claimed (*The Contemporary* group notwithstanding) by this single publication.

The most formidable accomplishment of this magazine lies, therefore, in its systematic introduction of Western modernistic literature. The feat is all the more amazing in view of the fact that these undergraduates had themselves no systematic training in Western literature. Yet, for some reason, they were able to discover (all by themselves) and to affirm the literary significance of a host of Western masters whose works had hitherto received scant attention in China. The list of Western authors featured in the issues of *Modern Literature* is impressive indeed: Franz Kafka, Thomas Mann, James Joyce, D. H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, Katherine Ann Porter, Scott Fitzgerald, Jean-Paul Sartre, Eugene O'Neil, William Faulkner, John Steinbeck, W. B. Yeats, St. John Perse, and many others. With a few exceptions,

these authors — mainly novelists — comprise the cream of Western modernistic literature. Among them, James Joyce seems to have received special attention from his Chinese admirers: his *Dubliners* received the first complete Chinese translation.

To be sure, the array of twentieth-century Western authors would have been overwhelming for any graduate students in major American universities. For these uninitiated readers of Western literature whose command of the English language was barely sufficient for them to translate, the task proved all but impossible. Not every Western author was given full justice; most of whom were represented only by short stories, and the introductions to them consisted of translated articles by well-known American scholars and critics (Robert Penn Warren, Alfred Kazin, Edmund Wilson, etc.). With few exceptions, the editors of *Hsien-tai wen-hsueh* were not capable of making independent judgments apart from parroting Western scholarly opinions. And the choice of Thomas Wolfe in the magazine's second issue as a seminal figure is, in present academic standards, disputable. Virginia Woolf was advertised as a "giant of the stream of consciousness," whereas Sartre received a curiously condescending review. But the decision to feature Kafka in the first issue — a daring act of Wang Wen-hsing (王文興) — and the subsequent highlighting, in three consecutive issues, of Mann, Joyce, and Lawrence must be considered an impressive feat and a tribute to the intellectual precocity of Wang Wen-hsing and his classmates.

This Western orientation is buttressed by a strong sense of mission and ambition. The manifesto in the inaugural issue (drafted by Liu Shao-ming [劉紹銘]) defines the journal's mission as "trying, seeking, and creating new artistic forms and styles" and engaging in a task of "constructive destruction" vis-à-vis Chinese tradition. At the end of the second issue, Wang Wen-hsing wrote the following defiant words:

In our last issue we introduced Kafka and created a furor on the literary scene of Free China. Some readers wrote us in support; other readers complained that they didn't see Kafka's merits. Kafka's stature has long been confirmed. That our readers are not accustomed to him is due to their lack of exposure to modern Western literature. Accordingly, in this issue we have promoted Thomas Wolfe, an American author who will surely baffle even more readers. Moreover, we will from now on bring out with consistency fiction written in brandnew styles. Whether you are

stunned or want to curse us, we are determined to shock the literary world of Taiwan.

Such a defiant stance has been rare in Taiwan literature; in a small way, it recalls Ch'en Tu-hsiu's (陳獨秀) forthright manifesto calling for the Literary Revolution in the pages of *Hsin ch'ing-nien* (新青年, New Youth). One wonders whether Wang's decision to feature Kafka in the first issue may not have stemmed from a private desire to make an iconoclastic statement, for in Wang's opinion, Kafka was an anti-traditional writer par excellence. Coupled with this iconoclastic bent was Wang's equally powerful intention to shock the Taiwanese readers into a new recognition of the mainstream of modern Western fiction. At the end of the magazine's first year of publication, Wang Wen-hsing, on behalf of the editors, felt ready to sum up the two parts of his mission in a more comprehensive fashion. In the commemorative essay celebrating the first anniversary, Wang gave the following self-introduction of the editors and the magazine.

The editors of *Hsien-tai wen-hsüeh* all shared three common characteristics:

1. Their "dissatisfaction with the declining state of contemporary art and literature" in Taiwan;
2. Their effort "to assimilate modernism from Europe and America, while at the same time reassessing classical Chinese literature";
3. Their youthful age — "all between the ages of twenty and thirty."

With an impulsive display of youthful ambition, Wang predicted that the editors would be "the forerunners of the Chinese Renaissance" — an implicit rejection of Hu Shih's similar claim for the Literary Revolution of 1917 and a bold intimation of another revolution to come. Having thus downgraded, albeit implicitly, the May Fourth Movement, Wang, surprisingly, proceeded to call upon his followers to emulate the true "romantic spirit" which, contrary to sentimentalism (which "every modern man disdains"), was defined as a total release of "passion, hatred, and courage," a healthy disregard of practical results, and an espousal of "the essence of human dignity." This definition of the romantic spirit bears an uncanny resemblance to the May Fourth view of romanticism. Whether or not Wang and his colleagues were conscious of this historical debt, their immediate purpose was

obvious: the romantic spirit of defiance and rebellion was invoked in order to serve a more serious intellectual objective — modernism in creative writing.

Wang Wen-hsing fully acknowledged the group's intention to "assimilate modernism from Europe and America" (the caveat about classical Chinese literature was mentioned perhaps to disarm potential critics; Wang and the other editors initially had little interest in traditional literature). Although it seemed an echo of Chi Hsien's earlier clarion call in poetry, Wang was much more committed to practicing his cause. This dedication to the craft of modernism can be seen in his self-defense against possible detractors:

If someone would say that this Chinese effort to experiment with modernism betrays a mentality of adulating foreign things, we cannot tolerate (this charge). Are Chinese not permitted to create new forms? . . . In the opinion of some people, Chinese cannot write psychological or symbolist fiction or novels of fantasy, nor should they experiment with surrealism or accept existentialism. These people are like fathers who forbid their children's activities — no ball-playing, no running, no singing, no riding bicycles, no listening to radios — all because of one reason: that they are foreign things. Dear reader, if you meet such a father, please give him some good advice.

To put the different attitudes toward modernism as a generational conflict indicates another trace of the May Fourth inspiration. But the important message conveyed in this pseudo-polemic is that the younger generation naturally *should* explore new possibilities in symbolism, surrealism, Freudian psychology or existentialism. In Wang's own works, these strains are in ample evidence. While he argued for content as a chief criterion for modernism, he was clearly more interested in fictional form and technique.

Inventiveness in fictional technique is, in fact, another major hallmark of the magazine's modernism. In its fifty-one issues, a total sum of 206 pieces of fiction, written by over seventy authors, were published. Although these pieces, mostly short stories, are of varying quality and interest, the harvest taken as a whole gives strong evidence to the journal's claim as the leading publication of creative writing in the 1960s. The merits or demerits

of individual authors represented in *Hsien-tai wen-hsüeh* have received perceptive analyses elsewhere. My discussion will be concerned only with some salient characteristics in the works of the magazine's founding members: Pai Hsien-yung (白先勇), Wang Wen-hsing, Ou-yang Tzu (歐陽子), and Ch'en Jo-hsi (陳若曦).

Judging from their early works, there is no doubt that all four of them demonstrated a stylistic consciousness inspired by modern Western fiction. Wang Wen-hsing, in particular, was a conscientious, though not always successful, practitioner of style and form. His early stories ranged from a Hemingwayesque tale of adolescent confrontation ("Wan-chü shou-ch'iang" [玩具手鎗]; Toy pistol), a lyrical prose piece about his summer in an army training camp ("Ts'ao-yüan ti sheng-hsia" [草原的盛夏], Hot Summer in a Grassy Plain), to a very brief (one-page) story of sexual disillusionment ("Tsui k'uai-lo ti shih" [最快樂的事]; The Happiest Event), and a daring description, in a cinema vérité style, of voyeurism and sexual frustration ("Ta-ti chih ko" [大地之歌]; The Song of the Earth). In all of them, Wang experimented with a variety of forms and techniques: the short story, the short, short story, lyrical essay; long unpunctuated sentences alternating with short, staccatolike sentences, numerous symbols (the most obvious example: the "toy pistol" as phallic aggression), sight-and-sound imagery (Mahler's "Das Lied von der Erde" played in a dark café). From years of practice, Wang has developed a prose style that attains, in his own phrase, an "arid quality" of controlled detachment; this would be his creative response to the flowery and emotion-tinged prose of early May Fourth novelists.

Pai Hsien-yung's early work likewise showed an eagerness in studying Western fictional technique. With the exception of his first story, "Yü-ch'ing sao" (玉卿嫂, Yü-ch'ing's Wife), most of his early stories before 1966 portrayed youth or young Chinese intellectuals in America (subsequently collected in his *Niu-yüeh k'o*, [紐約客] or New Yorkers), which gave him enough opportunities to toy with Freudian symbolism, stream-of-consciousness narration, and other modernistic ploys. His story titled "Hong Kong, 1960" represents the height of Pai's formalistic experimentalism, which also reveals its inherent weaknesses. A recent paper by Susan McFadden has shown that Pai has brilliantly incorporated the techniques of Lawrence, Thomas Mann, Dostoevsky, and James Joyce, among other Western novelists. It was not until after 1966 that Pai began to write his more "traditional"

stories about older generation mainlanders stranded in Taiwan (collected in *Taipei jen* [臺北人] or Taipei Characters). His talent for characterization, reinforced by his knowledge of classical Chinese poetry and drama, has turned these stories into artistic jewels. Yet even in these later works, Pai has not forgotten his debt to Western modernism: the long stream-of-consciousness monologue in the story "Yu-yüan ching-meng" (遊園驚夢, Wandering in the garden, waking from a dream) is a remarkable example of Pai's ability to fuse Western technique with Chinese themes.

Besides Pai and Wang, the two gifted women writers shared the modernistic inclinations of their male colleagues. Ch'en Jo-hsi's debut piece, "Pa-li ti lü-ch'eng" (巴里的旅程, Pa-li's Journey), is a rather pretentious parable which betrays traces of Nietzsche, Kafka, and the Bible, although her subsequent pieces ("Spirit Calling" [收魂], "The Last Performance" [最後夜戲]) convey a more native Taiwanese flavor. Ou-yang Tzu's work has its unique integrity: her themes are concerned mainly with the suppressed inner tensions in the female psyche, which lend themselves naturally to the Freudian analysis she sometimes attempts. Reading her early stories one also detects certain affinities with the works of Virginia Woolf. And to complete this cursory survey of the authors' fascination with the techniques of Western modernism, Joyces's *Ulysses* has received two satirical imitations — one, by the poet Yeh Wei-lien, appropriately titled, "Ulysses in Taipei"; the other by Ts'ung Shu (叢甦), called "Ulysses in the New Continent" (i.e., America).

These young writers' avid interest in Western literary techniques is easily understandable. As undergraduate majors in Western literature, they were conditioned by their curriculum toward foreign literatures. The department library, with its sizable collection of English-language books, provided an intellectual oasis and a haven for them to retreat from the tedium and barrenness of their regular course work. In the broader perspective, however, this generation of Chinese writers in Taiwan had no other recourse but to plunge themselves into Western literature. The more immediate legacy of literature in the 1920s and 1930s was largely banned, due to political reasons, and the rich heritage of classical Chinese literature was deemed suitable only for scholarly research, but not for inspiring new creative writing. The result was a corpus of fictional writing, bristling with technical brilliance, which is in search of the proper subject matter.

It seems that aside from introducing Western modernistic literature

and evolving new techniques inspired by it, the editors never came to any agreement as to the precise meaning of the word "modern" in the magazine's title. Perhaps still under the spell of their mentor, the editors seemed to encourage a kind of creative writing which, though Western-oriented in technique, should still be concerned with contemporary Chinese reality. In this sense, they certainly departed significantly from some of the fundamental premises of Western modernism.

In the tradition of Western modernism, realism is no longer considered a central issue. The various formalistic devices have been created because the Western novelists feel compelled to find a more profound artistic truth with which to combat mundane society and somehow define the meaning of their own existence. Beyond this aesthetic quest modernism often reacts against culture or existence itself. Thus, while its primary creative locus is private and individualistic — it represents the extreme of subjectivity — its content is *ipso facto* universal; the boundaries of Western modernism may be vaguely urban but certainly not national. When transplanted to Taiwan, however, this universal philosophical *angst* is largely lost in the works published by *Modern Literature*. Their ruminations on existence and death, when taken out of the Taiwan context, read disappointingly sophomoric and affected.

Western modernism also grew out of a pervasive sense of crisis — a crisis of history and culture which is traceable to the turn of the century (in Vienna) or to the end of the First World War (in France and Germany) or to the end of the Edwardian era (in England). The modern Western writer, at the beginning of the twentieth century, no longer felt optimistic about the accumulated heritage of civilization from past centuries but was nevertheless driven by an existential compulsion to create new art forms from a total void. Such a crisis situation did occur in China during the May Fourth period, but the Chinese solution to it was markedly different (as discussed in the first section of the paper). In Taiwan during the 1960s, however, the consciousness of cultural crisis was noticeably absent. The ideological battles against tradition has been fought long ago and "won"; tradition and modernity were no longer sharply polarized in Taiwan as in May Fourth China, despite the spurious slogans of "total Westernization." The fashionable discourse on identity and the search of identity was not accompanied by any insight into the cultural roots of the problem. And in contemporary Western literature, modernism itself has already run its course

by the 1930s, to be replaced (in the opinion of Ihab Hassan, Geoffrey Hartman, Susan Sontag and others) by a "post-modern" literature which extends some modernist strains and mocks them, but no longer shares the apocalyptic sense of crisis and "ending." The editors of *Modern Literature* seemed unequipped with historical knowledge, either Chinese or Western, in their wide-eyed eagerness to embrace modern Western literature. Without the backdrop of culture and history — both Chinese and Western — and without any pointed consciousness of the national and international contexts, modernism in Taiwan becomes ultimately more form than content, more stylistic and technical showmanship than a doctrine of profound philosophical implications. In its inability to transcend the Taiwan reality, the modernist in Taiwan — poet and novelist alike — seems also incapable of avoiding the fate of being somewhat "provincial."

Provincialism is precisely what some of the most recent native Taiwanese writers attempt to achieve — an honest, true-to-life provincialism that can authentically reflect their attachment to the land and its people. This younger generation of native writers, most of whom were nurtured by the *Hsien-tai wen-hsüeh* group, are challenging the supremacy of the modernists with great success. The new political temper in Taiwan (following Nixon's visit to the People's Republic in 1972) has given rise to an anti-Western strain in literature: modernism, with its inevitably Western connotations, has come under scathing attack by native writers and socially oriented critics.

Ch'en Ying-chen (陳映眞), one of the best novelists of the native generation and himself an articulate critic of modernism, has come to fault modern literature for what the *Hsien-tai wen-hsüeh* editors would regard as its basic merits: its experimentation in form and technique Ch'en dismisses as nothing more than erecting "an empty structure of formalism"; its attention to language and imagery as "affected mannerism and posturing"; its aesthetic, "dehumanizing" tendency as lacking in humanism and in "a healthy power of ethics." Instead of "the self-pity, masochism, and exhibitionism" which he finds in modernism, Ch'en chooses rather to bask in the "rays of reason, love, and humanity of the nineteenth century." Thus, it seems that as a result of scathing critiques like this, Taiwan literature, at least in its recent *hsiang-t'u* (鄉土) variant, has returned, full circle, to an old legacy — the humanistic and realistic tradition of the nineteenth century and, to some extent, of the 1930s. The increasingly ideological

tendency of *hsiang-t'u* literature bears "an uncanny resemblance to the Maoist rhetoric" in its clarion-call for addressing literature to its own people. And when Yü Kuang-chung, a former editor of *Modern Literature*, somewhat irresponsibly imposed charges of leftism on *hsiang-t'u* writers in a recent article, the *cause célèbre* seems to have affected the entire group associated with the magazine. Wang Wen-hsing has been besieged with criticism; his recent novel, *Chia-pien* (家變, Family Crisis) which is probably his best work to date, has met with mostly adverse reception. Although *Hsien-tai wen-hsiueh* resumed publication in July 1978, it is doubtful that the literary trend it so brilliantly exemplified a few years ago can ever return in favor.

One can only hope that in this "post-modern" era of Taiwan literature, its "provincial" obsession can provide a sufficient source for artistic creativity and excellence, and its resulting products can match what C. T. Hsia has aptly called the "hardcore, rock-bottom" humanism that once characterized the best works of the 1930s.

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