

一個台灣詩人在移民社群中的發展

——楊牧遊歷海外的散文

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摘要

作為一個台灣本土人，當代台灣作家王靖獻（筆名楊牧）以其與現代派、鄉土主義、抒情風格、文學研究及散文的錯綜複雜的聯繫而在台灣文學史上占有一個幾近獨特的位置。雖然他以詩歌著名，但他也寫了大量的散文。本文試圖精研楊牧的幾篇最重要的散文，並指出這種研究有助於闡明楊牧生活的其他方面，尤其是他的詩作。這些作品都闡述著楊牧在美國——他的第二故鄉——的種種經歷。由於他是一個移民，他能夠反思人在美國的陌生感，有時是異化感，比如說，美國的廣闊空間以及社會保守性與他在台灣感受到的人流與群體文化形成了巨大的反差。他也寫了很多他作為一個研究生在加州大學伯克利分校的經歷，以及他的幾個最重要的良師。這些經歷有助於形成他的文學敏感性及敬業精神，並對他日後形成何種類型的作家產生了巨大影響。在他的作品中貫穿著作者的包容性和寬容性。最重要的是：楊牧是一個兼容並包的詩人，一個研究比較文學的學者，和一個文化上的多元知識份子。

關鍵詞：離散、散文、流亡、柏克萊精神、包含性、漢學家

The Development of a Taiwanese Poet in the Diaspora: Yang Mu's Prose Peregrinations Abroad

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Abstract

The contemporary Taiwanese author Wang Ching-hsien (penname: Yang Mu) occupies a nearly unique position in modern literature from Taiwan as a native Taiwanese with complex affiliations to modernism, nativism, lyricism, literary scholarship, and prose. He is best known for his poetry but he is a prolific writer of prose essays as well. Most of the scholarship on him in English focuses on his poetry. This essay seeks to examine more carefully several of Yang Mu's most important essays, and it suggests that such an examination sheds important light on the other facets of Yang Mu's life, in particular his poetry. The essays also all dwell on various experiences that Yang Mu had in the United States, his adopted second homeland. As an immigrant, Yang Mu is able to reflect on the strangeness and sometimes alienating dimensions of the United States, such as the wide-open spaces and social reserve of Americans in contrast with the crowds and more group-oriented culture he perceived in Taiwan. He also wrote extensively about his experiences as a graduate student at the University of California, Berkeley and some of his most important mentors. These experiences helped shape his literary sensibilities and work ethic and had a dramatic impact on the kind of writer Yang Mu came to be. The one consistent point running through his essays is the author's sense of inclusivity and tolerance. Above all, Yang Mu is an eclectic poet and scholar of comparative literature, and a culturally hybrid intellectual.

Keywords: Diaspora, Prose, Exile, Berkeley Spirit, Inclusivity, Sinologist

The Development of a Taiwanese Poet in the Diaspora: Yang Mu's Prose Peregrinations Abroad

Introduction: Yang Mu's Inimitable Syncretism

The contemporary Taiwanese author Wang Ching-hsien 王靖獻 (b. 1940), known better by his pseudonym Yang Mu 楊牧, is one of the most revered poets to have emerged in the postwar era in Taiwan. He is also one of its most complex, puzzling, and difficult to characterize in summary fashion. The mixture of his upbringing, family background, education, aesthetic predilections, and professional career defy easy categorization. But his gift for poetry was discerned by many when he was still at quite an early age, and his subsequent literary and linguistic training have only added further fuel to the fire of his exquisite verse, verse that is allusive, insightful, lyrical, crisp, and layered with metaphor, imagery and cultural references that tap into an array of disparate traditions. What is less well known, or at least receives less attention, especially in English-language scholarship on him, is his career as a writer of prose essays. Yang Mu is generally viewed as a poet first, a scholar second, and, perhaps as an afterthought, with a few exceptions, as a prose artist. In fact, however, he has maintained a steady output of prose writing throughout his career and has produced several volumes of prose essays. His prose essays are quite different in character from his poetic works. And yet the two corpuses stand side by side and have been produced in virtual simultaneity. In fact, his prose works, which are often biographical and autobiographical, or ruminate on practical points of concern for Yang Mu, offer great insight into his thinking, his interests and priorities as an author

and literary scholar; and they offer a map through which to better understand the poet as he developed over the years. They add flesh to the bone of one of Taiwan's towering creative geniuses and provide detail into his life abroad, in the greater Chinese/Taiwanese diaspora where he has spent a large portion of his life.

What the present essay endeavors to do is to explore several of these important essays and to use this opportunity to contemplate what factors in Yang Mu's experience have contributed to making him into the poet and scholar that he is. I intend to examine an early essay that Yang Mu wrote relaying his observations as he attended the University of Iowa Writer's Workshop, from which he obtained an MFA degree in 1965. I will discuss three essays that dwell on his student years at the University of California, Berkeley. Another essay describes his home in Seattle. I also ponder Yang Mu's thoughts on Chinese and Taiwanese identity among the overseas population. What we find in reading through Yang Mu's prose is the empirical side of the literary figure, practical information and ideas as well as impressions of lived experience and his interactions with people influential to his life.

We gain from such an inquiry an appreciation for the highly complex, nuanced and multifaceted composition of his aesthetic view and sense of cultural heritage. Yang Mu is a character that is fiercely loyal to his native Taiwanese roots and to his hometown of Hualian. At the same time, he recognizes and values the cultural heritage of China and the impact that this rich literary, philosophical and historical tradition has had on him while not positing it as a national ideology that forecloses the notion of a Taiwanese identity. Finally, he has a deep veneration for the Western classics, for Greek and Latin literature and mythology, and for the English tradition from the earliest days of Beowulf, through Shakespeare, and down to Romanticist writers such as Shelley and Keats and Modernist writers such as Yeats and

Eliot. Yang Mu appears to be the kind of person who draws on many traditions and is not particularly exclusive in his tastes. The results of this all-embracing aesthetic attitude percolate throughout his poetic work and add to it strains that can only be peeled back by those who also imbibe from the same vast reservoir of cultural signifiers of which Yang Mu has consumed voraciously since his youth.

In her comprehensive treatment of Yang Mu's poetry, *Rays of the Searching Sun: The Transcultural Poetics of Yang Mu*, Lisa Lai-Ming Wong goes into great detail to demonstrate how Yang Mu's poetry exhibits both "intracultural intertextuality" and "cross-cultural intertextuality," not to mention "intratextuality," which we will leave aside for now.¹ She identifies allusion as one of the most important components of Yang Mu's distinctive poetic arsenal, but this is not allusion to one, solitary literary tradition, such as the Chinese. His poems often combine allusions from vastly disparate sources that include classical Chinese literature of all sorts with those from the Western tradition. On the one hand, she illustrates how Yang Mu is employing a strategy that has been long practiced in Chinese poetic works and is elucidated by Liu Xie 劉勰 in his classic work of the fifth century, *Wenxin Diaolong* 文心雕龍 (The literary mind and carving of dragons). On the other hand, she notes how the way he marshals these literary references in a given poetic work allows him to manufacture an "intertextual" identity that goes beyond simple borrowing. Citing Jonathan Culler, she suggests that what Yang Mu is doing is inserting himself into the broader "discursive space of world literature" (Wong, 76). In other words, by folding these allusions into his own verse structures, he becomes a denizen of world culture, someone who asserts his own voice

1 Lisa Lai-Ming Wong, *Rays of the Searching Sun: The Transcultural Poetics of Yang Mu*. (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2009).

through the merging of these diverse references but retains the traces of the originals even as his own style is unmistakably established.

The result, Wong continues, is what she calls a “palimtext,” drawing on a term coined by Michael Davidson that presumably plays with the notion of “palimpsest” (Wong, 77). Yang Mu’s works do not force a dialectical relationship upon these discrete elements, according to Wong, where one element synthesizes and subsumes the others. Rather, she argues that Yang Mu opts for a more dialogical relationship between the distinct elements that allows them to coexist within his poetic works in parallel fashion with each other. I tend to agree with her assertion, as the notion of a sort of egalitarian aesthetic in Yang Mu’s work comports with the view that he prefers to leave unresolved the various cultural, ethnic, and aesthetic roots that have informed his literary identity. He exhibits no sense of discomfort with the notion that he is at once native Taiwanese and loyal to Taiwan culturally, linguistically, socially and politically while at the same time openly acknowledging and even flaunting his debt to the Chinese tradition and place within it. And at the same moment that he displays his learned erudition in traditional Chinese literature, both as a scholar and as a poet, Yang Mu delves deeply and affectionately into his Western resources as well. Unlike many of his generation, a career in traditional Chinese studies was not the death knell of his interest in a decidedly avant-garde style of writing poetry. His poetry, crafted in free verse, is clearly indebted to the styles launched by poets of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in English, French, German and Spanish. And yet there is something unmistakably “Chinese” about the subject matter, imagery, syntax, and diction of his work, above and beyond the allusive quality. But lest we deceive ourselves into thinking that the “Chinese” quality of Yang Mu’s poetry invites a denial of Taiwanese identity, we must keep in mind that Yang Mu is not above pressing his aesthetic works

into the service of political action and expression. His poems often appear in the literary supplements of major newspapers in Taiwan and contain echoes of the political turmoil that has beset Taiwan in recent decades with respect to its identity and destiny, even as these poems are wrought with a bricolage of images as far flung as riots and police suppression in Chechnya, mythical and historical Taiwanese figures, Renaissance English playwrights, lonely figures in the midwestern cornfields, and the list goes on.

Narratives of an Aesthetic in the Making

So how did we get here? Yang Mu's prose works provide many clues to the amalgamated style of his poetic oeuvre. The style of Yang's prose writing also changed considerably over the years.² In the time leading up to his stay in Iowa City, his prose was as dense as poetry, highly descriptive and lyrical, and in some cases musical and imagistic. His later work is more straightforward, matter-of-fact, and occasional, remarking on people, places and events of importance. Yang Mu was born in Hualian in 1940 and attended Tunghai University in Taichung, Taiwan, where he studied literature under the illustrious scholar Xu Fuguan 徐復觀, among others. Beginning in high school, he was already writing poetry and getting it published in various venues in Taiwan so that by the time he graduated from college he already had two poetry collections published, had built a bit of a name for himself, and was on friendly terms with a number of older, more established, poets such as Yu Guangzhong 余光中.

His essay "Qiuyu Luo Zai Moshengde Pingyuanshang" 秋雨落在陌生

2 He Jipeng 何寄澎 has written a detailed and lengthy article on these various changes over the years. See his "Yongyuande Sousuoazhe: Lun Yang Mu Sanwende Qiubian yu Qiuxin" 永遠的搜索着——論楊牧散文的求變與求新 (The eternal seeker: on seeking change and seeking the new in Yang Mu's prose) in *Taida Zhongwen Xuebao* 台大中文學報 (Taiwan university journal of Chinese studies) 4 (June, 1991): pp.143-176.

的平原上 (Autumn rain falls on the foreign plain), written in 1964, expresses the near shock, culturally and environmentally, from his trip by train across the United States to Iowa City, the location of the University of Iowa where he studied for his MFA degree. In it, he remarks how vast and endless the plains across the United States are and how foreign they are when compared to his native Taiwan. Of course, Taiwan is not only a great deal smaller than the United States in size, it also is far less mountainous, although part of his experience during the writing of this piece was to cross the Rocky Mountains. What impressed Yang the most at the time was that the plains went on and on for days, and he scarcely saw any people on them. The sheer expanse of land was mind boggling to the writer, who at the time was only 24 years of age. As he says near the beginning:

The image is still in my mind of the train cars as they swept through Salt Lake City yesterday, how with the flat land all around I felt like I was on a boat in the middle of a lake, or on the ocean, or in the desert; but that was just what “remoteness” was – once Ya Xian said to me, “Remoteness, what would you call remoteness? When you’ve been to Henan and you see the plains without end, then you’ll know what remoteness is.” The autumn rain falls on the foreign plain, that’s when it sunk it to me what the real meaning of remoteness was. It wasn’t in Henan or in Hubei, but in this nameless state in a foreign country. But that word “remoteness” wasn’t just a word. It concealed within it the helplessness of being seized or being crushed.³

When Yang Mu wrote this essay, he was still known by his first penname, Ye Shan 葉珊. He abandoned this name for Yang Mu in 1972. According

3 See *Ye Shan Sanwenji* 葉珊散文集 (Collected prose of Ye Shan). (Taipei: Hongfan, 1977), p. 147.

to Michelle Yeh, during most of his youth and through his graduate years, then, he continued to be known by the name “Ye Shan,” which has a delicate, natural beauty to it. “Ye” means leaf and “shan” is a kind of fine jade.⁴ The name bespeaks the attention to nature in its exquisite beauty that occupies much of the imagery of Yang Mu's early poetry, and of his essays as well. Thus, the imagery for this essay is also primarily natural imagery that is pressed into the service of a larger theme of exile or diasporic feeling that Yang feels far away from home and at sea, as it were, in this vast, unfamiliar land. The richly descriptive natural imagery and the repetition of it throughout the piece so that it creates a rhythm is the vehicle through which the feelings of desolation and isolation are conveyed. The rain, one would think, is reminiscent of a dank, dour, and perhaps melancholy mood, and we cannot fully deny that a mild melancholia pervades the work. But we also have to remember that the rain could be a partial reminder of his homeland in Taiwan, where rain on the subtropical island is an incessant affair. But it is only a partial reminder, for the rain in this piece is “the rain of a foreign land.” At the time of his writing, he likely could hardly have imagined that he would eventually live permanently in this vast, foreign land.

Near the end of the essay, he is met at the train by Paul Engle, the Director of the Writer's Workshop where Yang Mu studied, and the husband of Nie Hualing 聶華苓. He says to Engle:

“En route, I saw the verdant plain with the rain falling on it – autumn rain falling on the foreign plain.” He stood under a tree dripping with raindrops, and smiling with delight responded, “That reminds me

4 See Michelle Yeh's introduction to the translated collection of Yang's poetry entitled *No Trace of the Gardener: Poems of Yang Mu*, translated by Lawrence R. Smith and Michelle Yeh (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), p. xvii.

of the feeling I had last April when I was in Taiwan – when I went from Taipei to Taichung, looking out the window of the train I saw the spring rain falling on the farmland. You can put your mind at ease. Iowa is just as beautiful as Taiwan.” My heart skipped a beat as I thought to myself: “Although I believe it is beautiful it’s still not my land” (Ye Shan, 150).

The last line is a direct quotation from a *fu* 賦 poem (narrative rhapsody) of the later Han dynasty by Wang Can 王粲 (177-217) entitled “Denglou Fu” 登樓賦 (Rhapsody on ascending a building). Even though Yang is appreciative of Engle’s empathic comfort, he cannot purge the feeling of exile he has and the inexorable need to be close to his own land. This early prose example illustrates how in his youth he would often use references to classical Chinese poetry to communicate the feeling of separation from Taiwan, thus assembling the complex image of devotion native Taiwan, alienated presence in the United States, and feeling of exile conveyed through the classical Chinese reference. The piece also repeats several times Yang’s key title line “autumn rain falling on the foreign plain,” both evoking a narrative poetic sense not unlike that of the traditional Chinese *fu* and also adding a creative flourish, for this line is his own.

By the time the poet settled into his life as a graduate student and emerging scholar at the University of California, Berkeley, two years later, his sentiments toward living in the Chinese diaspora had begun to shift to a certain extent. To be sure, he never surrendered his love for traditional Chinese poetry or feelings of longing for his homeland on Taiwan, and in fact his view of Taiwan as an independent social entity likely grew as the years went on. Nevertheless, it was in Berkeley that he truly became acclimated to American life and probably began to think of it as a possible second home.

The essays that he wrote about this pivotal experience in his life were written between one and six years after his departure from Berkeley, and therefore between seven and twelve years after his early essays written during his Iowa days. Front and center in his acclaimed essay “Bokeilai Jingshen” 柏克萊精神 (The spirit of Berkeley) is a discussion of Shakespeare’s play “Richard the Second.”⁵ Yang Mu’s whimsical invocation to this play centers on its passing mention of the town of Berkeley in England. He uses his response to this brief mention to contrast the first time he read the play as an undergraduate with the second time, when he was preparing for his Ph. D. examinations. The first time, as a naïve but budding literary aficionado, he had no idea where Berkeley was, either the one in the play or the one with the famous university. The second time, he was living in Berkeley, California and the resonance was clear. But he also adds that he knows the origin of the name of Berkeley, California did not derive from the town in England but from the influential philosopher Bishop George Berkeley. The point of this discussion has less to do with the origins of the name of this collegetown in which he was living, and less to do with Shakespeare per se, than it does with an implicit admission on Yang Mu’s part that he is evolving. Gone are the college days of his youth where names and literary references are nothing more than words in a book. Combining his two years in Iowa City with his four in Berkeley, Yang Mu had now spent fully six of his most crucially and intellectually formative years in the United States in academic settings. He had become truly worldly in a lived sense, in a sense that he was now intimate with these places, with these texts, and with life overseas in a way in which he could only imagine as a college student. At the time of his writing this essay in 1975, he was teaching

5 The title of the essay was also used for this collection, *Bokelai Jingshen* (The spirit of Berkeley) (Taipei: Hongfan, 1977).

in a visiting position at National Taiwan University. This position adds a third element to the equation. Yang has returned periodically to Taiwan to teach at various leading universities such as Taiwan University, and these experiences add more layers to his worldview and his identity as a global citizen. As he comes across the sentence in Act II, Scene III of Shakespeare's "Richard the Second," "How far is it, my lord, to Berkeley now?" Yang Mu reveals his feelings right then, teaching the play to this third year class of college students in Taiwan:

Looking out at the rows of intently serious eyes in the classroom, I thought back to the ambitious and vivacious undergraduate that I was fourteen years earlier. But I could not assume that they were exactly the same as I was fourteen years ago – I wanted to believe that they were more mature and advanced than I was at the time. When we read the sentence "How far is it, my lord, to Berkeley now?" they were as unmoved as I was fourteen years ago." But I felt a deep quiver and I asked again: "How far is it to Berkeley?"

As to exactly how far it really was to Berkeley from here I could not say; I just knew there was a vast Pacific Ocean between us, but also five long and languorous years. Perhaps in addition to the spatial and the temporal distance, there was a psychological gap as well. On the campus of Taiwan University, I felt the immediacy of how remote Berkeley was, primarily a psychological remoteness, not a spatial or temporal remoteness. (Yang Mu, 1977, p. 82)

Curiously, back in Taiwan, Yang Mu had turned the tables on the notion of diaspora and revealed his nostalgia for his graduate school days at the University of California, Berkeley, which proved to be so instrumental in fostering the cultivation of his intellectual views to maturity. He may have,

in this essay, revealed for the first time a sort of permanent sense of spiritual or psychological exile, as he was now consolidating his thoughts into those of a young adult through this many-layered maturation process. In the United States, ten years earlier, he voiced his alienation on the vast midwest plain. Now, a decade later, he seems not fully at home in the academy in Taiwan. But, as always, he resorts to literary references, his discursive home-away-from-home, to communicate this complex and unresolved set of feelings and to help ameliorate his sense of alienation. Yang Mu himself is a sort of palimpsest who ingests literary material as the years go on, and who utilizes these texts and the references within them as signposts for comprehending and coming to grips with these feelings as he proceeds through life.

But what exactly does this mean, the “Berkeley spirit” that Yang Mu speaks of in the title? After a brief discussion of the history of Berkeley and the University of California system, noting with pride the number of Nobel and Guggenheim recipients, Yang explains that the true spirit of the university rests not in its lofty intellectualism. Yang observes that the University of California as an institution has only been around for little more than one hundred years. So, unlike Harvard and the other Ivy League universities, let alone those of Oxford, Cambridge, Heidelberg, and Bologna, Berkeley is relatively speaking still in its infancy. The kind of ethos that the mixture of academic excellence, based on economic prosperity that affords such excellence, and relative youth begets has been, according to Yang, an empiricism that would make George Berkeley proud. As Yang states, “Simply put, the so-called spirit of Berkeley is that which unifies scholarly research and social engagement” (Yang Mu, 1977, p. 86). Yang offered the example of one of his most important professors at Berkeley, the French medievalist Alain Renoir, son of the filmmaker Jean Renoir and grandson of the Impressionist painter Pierre-Auguste Renoir. Renoir was a highly animated instructor who

often would feign ignorance in class to get his students to come forward with their own insights into the medieval era. He also was someone who impressed upon his students the necessity of making the medieval era relevant to the present. He argued that medieval literature, thought, religion, and history – especially depictions of military conflict – provide important lessons for contemporary society. It is this sense of pragmatism, Yang argues, that is the essence of the Berkeley spirit.

One might think that this fresh, pragmatic spirit is being advanced in contrast with the moribund nature of traditional Chinese culture, particularly given the past century of doubt in which traditional thought among Chinese intellectuals has been cast. After all, Yang himself is but a member of the latest generation of such intellectuals to travel to the West (or Japan) to further his education. He is preceded by such important thinkers as Hu Shih 胡適 and Y. R. Chao 趙元任 at Cornell, the latter of whom eventually took up residence at Berkeley as a professor of linguistics. Below, I will discuss in more detail the impact that Chen Shih-hsiang 陳世驥, Yang's advisor at Berkeley, had on him. In fact, though, Yang draws a parallel between the Berkeley social engagement and traditional Confucian thinking, quoting the famous line from the *Analects* “a scholar must be broad and firm minded” 士不可不弘毅. Indeed, there is a decidedly pragmatic and socially engaged dimension to Confucianism. The blending of this pragmatic, socially engaged spirit where practice and practicality are insisted upon is the single-most crucial kernel of thinking that Yang Mu drew from Berkeley. He cites with reverence the contribution of Clark Kerr, the President of the University of California system and former Chancellor of the Berkeley campus, as an example of the spirit, energy, practicality and vision that defined the expansion of this system into the world class standard that it became in the 1970s and continues to be today. Yang also pointed to the student demonstrations that took place on the Berkeley campus

in 1964 as part of the Free Speech Movement. The activities at Berkeley were a harbinger of future foment that would occur on college campuses across the nation over the next ten years. Berkeley led the way on the Free Speech Movement, which was a protest against the suppression of free expression on campus. Interestingly, one thing that could not have been known to Yang Mu at the time, because it has only recently come to light in the publication of Seth Rosenfeld's book *Subversives: The FBI's War on Student Radicals and Reagan's Rise to Power*, was Kerr's blacklisting by J. Edgar Hoover.⁶ It would have been easier for Yang and others to know the information about Clark Kerr's blacklisting by the FBI and the effort to destroy his career if Rosenfeld had not been forced to sue the FBI several times, under the United States Freedom of Information Act, to obtain the secret documents that attest to this political mischief. As Rosenfeld explains, Kerr himself was in fact a moderate, someone who attempted to mediate between student radicals and leftwing professors on the one hand and the cold hand of conservative politicians such as Ronald Reagan and the hardcore, rightwing tactics of the FBI on the other. Kerr actually signed the controversial pledge known as the Loyalty Oath not to engage in Communist activities required of all University of California faculty members, but he privately worked to protect the members of his faculty who refused to do so.⁷ Yang Mu, studying Greek, Latin, Old English, and medieval

6 See Seth Rosenfeld, *Subversives: The FBI's War on Student Radicals and Reagan's Rise to Power*. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012).

7 Coincidentally, Peter Boodberg, the subject of one of Yang Mu's Berkeley essays, resigned his position as Chair of the Department of Oriental Languages in 1951 in protest against the Loyalty Oath. There is no evidence I have seen that Yang Mu was aware of this, at least not at the time he was at Berkeley or wrote his essay on Boodberg. This is made all the more ironic because Boodberg was fiercely anti-Communist and anti-Stalinist. According to Yang, Boodberg, who came from a military family, had dreamed of becoming an assassin and eliminating Stalin himself. But what is most impressive is that he did this (the resignation) in 1950. He was clearly ahead of his time and should be commended for it. See Edward H. Schafer, "Peter A. Boodberg, 1903-1972" in *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 94.1 (Jan-Mar, 1974): pp.1-13.

studies at Berkeley in the late 1960s could not have been immune to the social unrest and concerted calls for justice that were occurring there and elsewhere in the United States at the time. Yang extols the spirit of Berkeley at the time: the insistence among students and faculty upon freedom of expression and academic independence; the sympathy and concern for the impoverished and the call for a more equitable distribution of resources; and the appeal to public officials to preserve green space, clean up the San Francisco Bay, and strengthen environmental regulations. Berkeley was one of the first places in the United States where these practical, moral ideals received a sustained public voice. As Yang Mu concludes:

the four years I spent at Berkeley forced me to open my eyes and confront what was happening in society. And this confrontation did not give me the feeling that knowledge and learning led to impotence; rather, they strengthened my faith in the power of knowledge. Knowledge is power, but it cannot be confined within the gates of the academy. Knowledge must be set free; it must be disseminated into the real world. Only then can it become power. (Yang Mu, 1977, p. 88)

Autobiographical Threads Woven in Biographical Remembrances

“The Spirit of Berkeley” sets the table for two other essays that Yang Mu wrote on his graduate school experience there, two detailed essays on his closest mentors Chen Shih-hsiang and Peter Boodberg. No two intellectuals in the United States had more of an impact on Yang Mu than these important Sinologists. The essays give insight into Yang’s intellectual development in particular, but they also reveal aspects of his personality and demonstrate how his worldview evolved during those four important years. Yang Mu’s essay simply entitled “Bu Bide Xiansheng” 卜弼德先生 (Mr. Boodberg),

reads much like a short story, a character sketch, and a vignette of their relationship. The essay is also noteworthy because in it Yang illustrates a test of wills between himself and Boodberg as well as a bit of a conflict in approaches to literary and linguistic knowledge. Yang relates how he came to terms with the “Boodbergian” approach. It is evident from the essay that Yang does not exactly consider himself a Boodbergian, but he was nevertheless heavily impacted by Boodberg's explosive intellect. Yang has great respect for Boodberg's approach and for his attitude toward Chinese studies.

Peter Boodberg was from an ethnic minority family in the Russian empire, and his family was pushed eastward to Vladivostok and finally to Harbin out of fear of persecution from the Stalinist regime in Moscow. Boodberg's exemplary command of spoken Chinese (many classicists can hardly speak Mandarin) benefited from several formative years in Harbin. Additionally, his patrician upbringing afforded him the opportunity to learn a large number of other languages as well. He came to the United States for college and spent his whole educational career, as well as the balance of his professional career, at the University of California, Berkeley. Having arrived at Berkeley as an undergraduate in 1920, Boodberg proceeded to take his BA, MA and Ph. D. there. He became a professor at Berkeley and rose through the ranks to become the senior member of Oriental languages. He passed away in 1972 at the age of 69, which means his entire adult life was spent connected to Berkeley. He epitomizes Yang Mu's notion of the Berkeley spirit. Curiously, despite his broad knowledge of languages, Yang clearly implies that Boodberg did not view himself as a comparatist or have much respect for the discipline of comparative literature. Yang's tribute to Boodberg includes a lengthy portion that amounts to a test of wills largely, if implicitly, predicated on the disciplinary rift between area studies and comparative studies. Yang Mu is an eclectic thinker, and as such it is not in his nature to eschew another literary

tradition by choice. The only limitations he placed on himself were practical ones. In fact, in a later essay he even wistfully wonders if he should not have continued his broad study of other traditions. But Boodberg marshals all his vast knowledge and brings it to bear on his first and only love, archaic, ancient and medieval Chinese language and culture. For someone who knows so much about so many different cultures and has such unmediated linguistic access to them, he was incredibly focused in his pursuit of raising the understanding that English speakers have of traditional China. Yang seems instinctively to have been drawn to Boodberg because of his uncompromising and exacting standards and because of his vast, intricate and acute knowledge of the classic texts. Yang, on the other hand, is certainly fond of, and very knowledgeable of, these texts himself, but he never elected to pursue the complete and exhaustive understanding of them that would have precluded the study of other subjects. This is the essence of the Boodberg/Yang tension. But in spite of this difference in direction, it is obvious from this essay that the two shared a mutual respect and affection.

Yang Mu was recruited to do his Ph. D. under Chen Shih-hsiang at Berkeley, and after arriving there only met Boodberg through Chen. The way Yang describes his early encounters with Boodberg are humorous and revealing. Yang depicts Boodberg as stately dressed and deliberative in his movements, the picture of a traditional academic. That he occupied the choicest office in Durant Hall, dedicated to Oriental Languages, was but one indication of his seniority and preeminence in the department. His Chinese colleagues do not appear to have resented this, as it was Boodberg who had methodically recruited them to Berkeley. This was long before the litigious days of national searches. It appears that at the time, assuming there was support from the administration, a senior faculty member could choose his team as he saw fit. Boodberg chose well. He enticed Chen Shih-hsiang,

Yang's mentor, to Berkeley, and he also brought in Y. R. Chao, considered by many the most important linguist of modern Mandarin Chinese in the world at that time. He attempted to enlist Wen Yiduo, which would have been a tremendous coup, but Wen could not be swayed, citing the patriotic need to remain in China and train the next generation of scholars there. As fate would regrettably have it, Wen Yiduo was assassinated not long after he rebuffed this overture. Yang's first encounter with Boodberg proved prophetic:

Mr. Chen presented me in front of Mr. Boodberg: "Professor Boodberg, this young fellow is a newcomer. He's at Berkeley to study." "Ah, how are you?" He spoke with a thick European accent: "What are you studying?" Mr. Chen told him I was studying comparative literature, and Mr. Boodberg seemed to give a sigh of relief, responding: "Oh, comparative literature, that's nice." He had a strange expression on his face that I couldn't decipher at the time. It was as if to say fortunately it's comparative literature and not Chinese literature. But it also seemed to suggest, what are you studying something silly like comparative literature instead of Chinese? I stood by cautiously, listening as he and Mr. Chen discussed a couple departmental matters. I deeply admired his professorial manner and thought to myself that when I'm sixty I doubt I'll be able to exude such a distinguished countenance.⁸

The essence of this essay entails a description of Yang's relationship with Boodberg, both his reluctance to approach him and his growing attraction. Boodberg was a force at Berkeley, and it was natural that Yang's advisor, Chen Shih-hsiang, would encourage him to take some courses with the master,

8 "Bu Bide Xiansheng" (Mr. Boodberg), in Yang Mu, *Bokelai Jingshen* (Taipei: Hongfan, 1977), p. 90.

the intellectual doyen of the department. Yang resisted, though, and avoided taking any courses with Boodberg until his final year, mainly, as he states, because Boodberg's favorite subject, archaic etymology, did not appeal to Yang. He finally did take a course with Boodberg and appears to have found it torturous. Boodberg's rigor and exactitude in interpreting original texts was a challenge even for a highly literate native speaker such as Yang Mu. When he received his final paper back from Boodberg after the end of the semester, it was awash with red ink. Some of the corrections, Yang relates, were in English; others were in exquisitely penned Chinese. But no critical stone was left unturned.

It was therefore with some puzzlement on Chen's part that when he was asked for input on his own Ph. D. examination committee, Yang nominated Boodberg to be one of the members. Chen queried Yang on this selection but deferred to the student upon his insistence. Yang takes pride in the essay for persevering with Boodberg. His written examinations took place over five weeks in 1969, followed by a three-hour oral examination. Suffice it to say that the oral examination portion devoted to Boodberg's questioning, which appears to have been more of an interrogation by Yang's account, was brutal and did not end well. Yang suspects that the final vote over his passage to candidacy so that he could write his dissertation could not have been better than five to one, with Boodberg voting against him, but at any rate he did pass through this portal and make it to the dissertation stage. It was therefore with even more incredulity that Chen regarded Yang's insistence that Boodberg be placed on his dissertation committee. The intriguing aspect of this whole relationship is that Yang neither became the devoted adherent to Boodberg that many of the other students did, nor did he reject and avoid Boodberg either. He maintained his relationship with the classic scholar right through his completion of his dissertation. Yang constantly sought

Boodberg's approval, or at least his recognition of worth, but he did not want to surrender to the highly specialized and meticulous (and perhaps narrow) style of his research into archaic Chinese. He wanted both worlds at once, and perhaps in this regard he was unique at Berkeley during his time. He was certainly mature and brave enough to realize that Boodberg would only make him stronger as a scholar. Interestingly, Yang's finished dissertation manuscript elicited a different response from Boodberg than did Yang's previous two performances for the master. Boodberg praised Yang for his "imagination" and "creativity," and at the end of a letter to him (written in green ink) wrote this: "Having finished reading your thesis, I believe that Chinese and Western comparative literature is a worthy subject of scholarly endeavor after all" (Yang, 1977, p. 95). Subsequently, someone told him the reason Boodberg used green ink is because it fades in time and there will be no permanent record of this admission!

The next and last time that Yang and Boodberg encountered each other was at a memorial service for Chen Shih-hsiang in May of 1971. The death of Chen had taken a visible toll on Boodberg, whose own health was not that great either. In another year, he too would be dead. After the service, Yang and Boodberg talked, and Boodberg confessed to Yang that he had been especially strict with him because he wanted him to know that just because someone was a poet did not make them a scholar. "For a poet to become a scholar," Boodberg said, "he needed to undergo strict training. I am pleased that you continually sought me out and did not fear my ruthlessness. Chinese literature needs Chinese people such as yourself to work hard to open it up to the world. That Chinese study a little Western literature is fine too" (Yang, 1977, p. 96). He added that Yang should not give up on his study of Greek. After this, Yang related a touching episode in which he returned to Berkeley to place flowers at the grave of both of his mentors there.

I would suggest that to Yang, Boodberg embodied the Berkeley spirit that he referred to in his essay by that name. He concludes his essay on Boodberg with a discussion of this scholar's impact on the field of Chinese studies that is quite objective and even-handed. In weighing the accomplishments against the shortcomings, the Boodbergians certainly have made more positive contributions than they have mistakes. He argues that chief among these contributions was the establishment of a school of study, a method or approach to the inquiry into archaic and ancient Chinese. This style was unrelentingly rigorous and can be seen in many of his students, and in his students' students. The scrutiny of early Chinese morphology, phonetics, semantics and syntax are emblems of this legacy. Edward Shafer echoes that one particular and fundamental contribution was Boodberg's refuting, in a published debate with Herlee Creel, the notion that Chinese characters are ideographs, mere visual representations of semantic information (Shafer, 1974, p. 9). Yang Mu further argues that the weight of Boodberg's authority was central to pushing back the "linguistic imperialism" of Western linguistic study and carving out a legitimate space of Sinological linguistics in the American academy. On the negative side of the Boodbergian style, Yang adds, was the fact that Boodberg mistakenly saw early and ancient China, the era before the Tang dynasty, as cut off from late imperial China and contemporary Chinese culture. He viewed early China, Yang argues, through a similar prism as that with which scholars view the Western classical world of Greece and Rome. In the West, Yang acknowledges, there is a gulf between the classical era and the modern. Observing that during the middle ages European society cut itself off from its heritage, forcing languages like ancient Greek and Roman to become fossilized or "dead," Yang posits that classical studies in the West is the study of dead languages that are not closely connected with the contemporary world in which we live and work. But China never experienced

a middle age or a dark age period, and it never cut itself off from its past. In this respect, Chinese culture is different from Western culture, because the former has more continuity to it, more of an organic and connected history. Yang states that albeit contemporary China (Yang wrote the essay during the Cultural Revolution) efforts were under way to demolish traditional Chinese culture. But at the time of his writing he did not believe they would be successful, and indeed they have not been. Yang believes that on this point Boodberg was mistaken. Taken as a whole, the essay on Boodberg is neither a lionization of this imposing intellectual figure, nor is it a critique. It illustrates both the complex character of Boodberg as a scholar and demonstrates Yang's relationship with him, revealing in its course key details about Yang's own character and attitudes. Yang is eclectic and inclusive. He may not be as exhaustively dedicated to the intricate etymological parsing of the semantic minutiae from ancient China, but he is dedicated to understanding and appreciating the essence of what it offers those interested in the study of it and the creation of a new literature in modern Chinese that is indebted to its heritage. That is the main reason why he stuck with Boodberg and continued under his tutelage. Yang's poetry, deeply indebted to ancient Chinese culture as it is, but not exclusively so, reflects that loyalty.

A much more straightforward and less vexed relationship existed between Yang Mu and his principal advisor, Chen Shih-hsiang. The essay "Berkeley – In Memoriam to Mr. Chen Shih-hsiang," was written within months of his advisor's untimely and unexpected passing, and reads much more like the sort of memorial that one would expect of a student for his teacher.⁹ Interestingly, Yang Mu entitled it simply "Berkeley" and saved the subtitle for his specific

9 "Bokelai – Huainian Chen Shixiang Xiansheng" 柏克萊——懷念陳世驥先生 (Berkeley – in memoriam to Mr. Chen Shih-hsiang) in Yang Mu, *Yang Mu Zixuanji* 楊牧自選集 (Taipei: Liming Wenhua Shiye Gufen Youxian Gongsi, 1975).

reference to Chen. What this suggests to us is that there was no more synonymous an equation that Yang made with Berkeley than Chen Shih-hsiang. To Yang, Chen was Berkeley. The impact that Chen had on Yang was second to none. Chen crystallized for Yang the whole meaning of what it was to be a Chinese scholar: someone who worked hard to understand Chinese culture but enjoyed doing it too; someone who shared his views of this culture with others, and equally enjoyed that. In the opening paragraphs of the essay, Yang Mu quickly articulates why he had such a feeling of tacit understanding for his chief mentor. Chen Shih-hsiang was a classical scholar who wrote important articles on a variety of subjects, including the notion of *xing* 興 (metaphor, for lack of a better word) in the *Shijing* 詩經 (Book of songs), several pathbreaking articles during the 1950s, published in the Taiwan-based journal *Wenxue Zazhi* 文學雜誌 (Literary review), edited by T. A. Hsia 夏濟安, that applied the techniques of New Criticism (which was actually *new* at the time) to traditional Chinese poetry, and he maintained a welcoming and nurturing attitude toward contemporary poets. Without making it explicit, it is certain that his style of conducting scholarship was quite different from that of Boodberg. In fact, in other circumstances, it could easily have been taken as being opposed to the Boodberging method. But for whatever reason that was not stated in any of Yang Mu's essays, the two pillars of traditional Sinology at Berkeley during this era were close friends. Yang's natural attraction to Chen stemmed from the latter's catholicity of taste, his tolerance for a variety of approaches, his view that the Chinese was a living tradition, and his practice of applying contemporary criticism and theory to the object of his study.

When Yang Mu first met Mr. Chen, as he refers to him, the professor did not initially convey a welcoming sense to Yang, but later Yang learned that Chen was still mourning the loss of his close friend T. A. Hsia, who had only died a few months earlier. Hsia himself was an outstanding scholar of astute

reasoning with perceptive reading skills. However, Yang never came directly into contact with him and, alas, was not able to benefit from his wisdom. Thus, his essays on the Berkeley spirit only refer to him tangentially. Chen quickly warmed to Yang, mainly, according to Yang, because Chen read many of Yang's poems and realized both his artistic talent and his dedication to the Chinese literature tradition. Yang even shared his poems with other Chinese studies scholars, such as Ogawa Tamaki 小川環樹, one of the most influential mid-century Sinologists from Japan. Chen took Yang under his wing as a surrogate father, even representing Yang's own father at the latter's wedding in Berkeley. Yang felt Chen understood his overconfidence and pugnacity. When Yang sought Chen out regarding the study of ancient languages, Chen urged him to drop the classics, Greek and Latin, and focus on Early English, in which Yang had already built a foundation. Yang in part has long regretted that decision, because he truly fell in love with Greek, but he respects Chen's advice because Chen most assuredly weighed the costs and benefits in light of Yang's own personal situation. Chen felt Yang had to recognize his limits, and Yang could not deny that this recognition was beneficial to him. There was no division between this nurturing personal relationship and Chen's tutelage of Yang in the Chinese poetic classics. Yang writes fondly of his discussions with Chen as Chen gently guided him to a deeper understanding of the *Book of Songs* and other classic works, and this guidance took place in the classroom, in Chen's office, and at Chen's home that carried the moniker "pine fragrant terrace," known in Chinese by the title 六松山莊.

The natural flow of the discussions between Yang and Chen consisted of Chen first letting Yang speak, gently and patiently coaxing from him his reaction from reading a specific classical text. As Yang proceeded, he began to wear out, and he also began to realize Chen's intimate knowledge of the classics far exceeded his own. From the conversations that Yang had with

Chen, Yang described himself as feeling like an infant on his father's lap. Through these conversations on an array of important texts, such as the *Book of Songs*, the *Songs of the South* 楚辭, *The Literary Mind and Carving of Dragons*, and others, Yang steadily improved his understanding of classical Chinese poetry and poetics. The most important point that Yang grasped from Chen was the sense of Chinese literature as part of a living tradition:

Classical Chinese literature has always been a living thing, but considering that there are various different views of what constitutes classical literature, the form in which it is perceived to live varies as well. In the Chinese scholarly community, it is taken for granted that classical literature is “old literature.” It was not until I met Mr. Chen that I realized that from poetry to proverb, these texts have a timeless life in the present. The entreaty to Jiang Zhongzi and the trepidation his lover expresses in the *Book of Songs* reflects a Chinese woman's hopes and fears that have not changed in 3000 years. How could we say that the grievances and laments in the face of the awe-inspiring Nanzhong army described in “Bringing Forth the Chariots” cannot explain the feelings of many soldiers today? By exposing me to practical applications of all sorts of literary theories, Mr. Chen helped me realize an interesting side to literature: literature isn't merely a scripture or canon. He demanded we delve deep into the original meaning and retrieve those elements that contained enduring life, popular elements, the unique, individual characteristics, and then point to their universal truth. Only through this painstaking retrieval could we assert that literature has a certain universal truth in it. During my four years at Berkeley, I ceaselessly ventured into this aesthetic realm, and with Mr. Chen's encouragement and supervision, I fathomed the literature

of early English and Chinese and brought forth the foundational aesthetics of what both had to offer. In tracing the words our forebears uttered, there necessarily are commonalities. (Yang Mu, 1975, p. 276-277)

This seamless connection between the ancients and contemporary, living authors and scholars is what stood out to Yang Mu and made the deepest impression on him. The balance of his essay on Chen dwells on a discussion of Chen's life, both past and present. The only connective ligature between the experiences of his whole life was that he had a passion for making the ancient literature, philosophy and history count in today's world. He actively sought out and cultivated friendships with contemporary poets, both during his time in China before the Civil War and after he immigrated to the United States. He also exhorted Yang Mu to never put aside his creative writing. This was clearly good advice, for without this authoritative exhortation there is no telling what direction Yang Mu's future career would have taken. Fortunately, this piece of advice, the parallel pursuit of both his creative writing and his scholarship, one of the most distinguishing features of Yang Mu, is something that Yang heeded very well.

Conclusion: Yang Mu's Aesthetic Identity

Admittedly, there are many great literary figures who live in the diaspora, and for most of them that experience outside their own native land somehow affects their writing. This is true of Yang Mu too, but what is particularly remarkable is that he steadfastly maintained his connection to the Chinese tradition and to Taiwan. He never gave that up. In the present time, Yang Mu and his wife spend on average about half of the year in Taiwan. Yang Mu has returned to Taiwan to serve as a visiting professor or in important

administrative positions such as the Director of the Institute of Chinese Literature and Philosophy at Academia Sinica. He has never forsaken his roots. But some of his roots are also now deeply entwined in the United States. Yang Mu is a hybrid author, an author of inclusivity and tolerant, all-embracing views. His knowledge and intimate connection with literary texts of various traditions and eras is only hindered by the limitations placed on any human's mortal abilities. Had he been able to continue with his studies of Hellenic literature, he would have rejoiced in it. Had he broken into other fields such as Persian or Sanskrit, he would have relished it. He has, nevertheless, accomplished a great deal. He will always be remembered foremost as a poet, because he is such an outstanding one. In addition to his poetry, however, he will be remembered for his essays on a wide range of topics. These essays provide important insight into his life, his career, and the people and experiences that have influenced him. He will be remembered as one of the most important comparatists whose primary focus was early China. His contribution as a publisher will not be forgotten either. Finally, he will be remembered as a copious translator of some of the great poets, especially William Butler Yeats.

Most prolific contemporary Chinese essayists are known first for their prose. In Taiwan, notable essayists in the postwar period begin with Liang Shiqiu 梁實秋, who bridged the historical divide between the early modern period in China and the postwar period in Taiwan. Other renowned essayists are Qi Jun 琦君, Lucien Wu 吳魯芹, Zhang Xiuya 張秀亞, Chen Zhifan 陳之藩, Bo Yang 柏楊, Jiang Xun 蔣勳, San Mao 三毛, and others. The difference between Yang Mu and most of them is that they are primarily known for their prose, whereas Yang Mu is known mainly for his poetry. But in volume, Yang Mu is equal to many of these essayists and more prolific than one or two. He also is equally devoted to the craft as they are. In some cases, his prose

works adopt some of the techniques of poetry; in other cases, they employ features of the short story. Yang could also be associated with prose authors of the Republican Era who practiced what Charles Laughlin has called “the literature of leisure.”¹⁰ Laughlin centers his study on the *xiaopinwen* 小品文 genre popular in the 1920s to 1940s. Admittedly, Yang Mu betrays some of the whimsical features of these leisure artists. He is well aware of literary events of the Republican Era and has been instrumental in anthologizing literature of the era through Hongfan, his publishing house in Taiwan. One can see a connection between the literary sensibilities of people like Lin Yutang 林語堂, Liang Shiqiu, and Xu Zhimo 徐志摩 and Yang. Where Yang departs from this earlier group of essayists is in the inimitable quality of his overall oeuvre, including his poetry and prose. As Laughlin argues, most of these prose essayists were part of a tight coterie of specific literary figures that worked to define their aesthetic tastes, practices and tendencies in ways that put them in relief with the other groups. It is much more difficult to categorize Yang. If we can categorize Yang, it would be to say that he is a liberal poet and prose essayist who eschews encapsulation, rejects narrow definitions of identity, and embraces an impressive range of interests and stylistic proclivities. The essays discussed in the above article illuminate the formative influences on Yang as a scholar and literary practitioner, and they provide an important narrative for Yang's intellectual growth. Aside from his devotion to a wide range of influences, interests and allegiances, culturally and aesthetically, Wang Kewen identifies pragmatism and practical application as the thread that goes through all of Yang's essays:

10 See Laughlin, *The Literature of Leisure and Chinese Modernity*. (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008).

The other essays in the volume are: “Dushu Wanjuan Qie Dulü” 讀書萬卷且讀律 (Reading the myriad books and the rules for reading), “Waiwenxi Shi Gan Shenmede?” 外文系是幹什麼的 (What is the department of foreign languages doing?), “Renwen Jiaoyu yu Daxue Jiaoyu” 人文教育與大學教育 (Humanistic teaching and university teaching) could all be footnotes to “The Spirit of Berkeley.” They all emphasize “the power of literature, but that literature cannot be confined in the academy. Knowledge must be set free and placed in the real, social world. Only then can it have power.” These essays all advocate a broadmindedness in the study of literature – especially in humanistic study. And literature has the ability to provide students with “humanistic ideals, an optimistic state of mind, and an empathetic consciousness of concern for others.” In this way, students are able to develop into intellectuals engaged with the world.¹¹

This is the spirit of Berkeley, and it is the spirit of Yang Mu as well.

11 Wang Kewen 王克文, “Shiren yu Xiangtu: Tan *Bokelai Jingshen*” 詩人與鄉土——談柏克萊精神 (The poet and native soil: on the Berkeley spirit) in *Shuping Shumu* 書評書目 53 (Sept. 1977): pp.45-48.

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