



Transcultural Aspects in Chang Yi-Jen's 張以仁 Poetry

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Abstract

The focus of the present paper is on the poetic oeuvre of the scholar and poet Chang Yi-Jen (Zhang Yiren 張以仁, 1930–2009). Born in Hunan (Mainland China), he had become familiar with the art of writing traditional Chinese poetry when still a boy. After the end of the Chinese civil war, he was relocated, with his family, to Taiwan. Notwithstanding some early and modest poetic attempts, he eventually began writing huge amounts of poetry in traditional forms around 1987. This late period of creativity lasted for 20 more years, until the very end of his life. His most active phase as a poet thus coincides with the political opening in Taiwan, beginning in the late 1980s.

Even though Chang Yi-Jen mostly applied the formal rules of traditional Chinese *shi* 詩 and *ci* 詞 poetry, in his works we encounter several peculiarities, which can be characterized as “transculturality”. Firstly, there are many direct references to Western culture, including impressions from his travels to the United States. Secondly, he tends to adapt elements from traditional Chinese culture, which also serve as a contrast to modernity, often causing a humorous effect on the reader. Thus, I will be able to demonstrate both diachronic and synchronic aspects of transculturality, which—due to Chang Yi-Jen’s affinity to comment on contemporary events—also can serve as a mirror of contemporary Taiwanese history.

Keywords: Transculturality, Classicist Poetry, Taiwan, Chang Yi-Jen, Sinophone Poetry

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In order to overcome the traditional model of distinct “cultures”, seen as more or less homogenous “spheres” interacting or conflicting with each other, Wolfgang Welsch introduced the concept of transculturality in the 1990s (Welsch, 1992). This theory is based on the realization that cultures penetrate each other on various levels; hence, two random persons with different cultural backgrounds might have significantly more cultural characteristics in common than two individuals from the same cultural region. As an alternative to the traditional spherical cultural model, Welsch envisions a flexible cultural network with various knots and connections on all levels. When analyzing cultural phenomena from the perspective of transculturality, a typical observation would identify a general trend towards hybridity, as each culture can possibly contain elements from any other cultural field within itself, and many interactions are taking place within a context that cannot be firmly linked to a single cultural sphere. The transcultural viewpoint is fundamentally distinct from multi- or interculturality, as the latter approaches still suppose the preexistence of mutually exclusive cultural core systems, before they are able to engage in interaction. The effects of transculturality become especially apparent in the modern age of globalization, with its convenient instruments of global transportation and communication; but, in fact, symptoms of transculturality can be observed in any time period throughout the history of humankind.¹

Despite the abundance of transcultural impact factors in our present time, in many parts of the world there is an obvious trend to maintain the traditional model of spherical cultures, in particular by those championing “national characteristics”—for example the organs of the Communist Party in the People’s Republic of China (PRC), which display an inflationary usage of the term “Chinese characteristics” (*Zhongguo tese* 中國特色). Although this point of view only partly reflects factual re-

1 For a concise summary of the concept of transculturality see Welsch (2017, pp. 10–30).

ality, these “national characteristics” serve as a psychological reference point for large parts of the population, and the subjective feeling of a national identity still works as a binding agent that may keep societies stable and rather uniform. In fact, the Chinese cultural region—in particular the PRC—is currently one of the best examples for this kind of illusionary monoculturality, where among its inhabitants the notion of a singular “Chinese” culture in interaction with a perceived (but in fact constructed) “Western” culture is very widespread, even among scholars, as most intellectuals in the “Greater China” area stick to the firm belief that they belong to the realm of “Chinese culture” (*Zhonghua wenhua* 中華文化) being diametrically opposed to “Western culture” (*Xifang wenhua* 西方文化). Although it is widely acknowledged among these scholars that what would be considered as “Western culture” has had a crucial impact on East Asia, in particular on China, from the mid-19th century until today, but even those who try to foster “intercultural studies” tend to argue that certain literary works and genres, historical constellations or philosophical ideas can be considered to be genuinely “Chinese” or “Western”, and together with these labels, should be treated as study objects in the academic discourse. The social impact also is undeniably strong: in the PRC, nationalistic cultural campaigns (like the so-called “Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation”, *Zhonghua minzu weida fuxing* 中華民族偉大復興) have gained a huge momentum since its very beginnings in 1949. Similar trends had emerged in the Republic of China (i.e. Taiwan) as well in the late 1960s (at that time called “Chinese Cultural Renaissance Movement”, *Zhonghua wenhua fuxing yundong* 中華文化復興運動), and still today the population in Taiwan deems many cultural elements in their society to be genuinely “Chinese” (*Zhonghua wenhua* 中華文化, or even *Zhongguo wenhua* 中國文化). Societies in the global Western regions (i.e. Europe and North America) at first glance seem to be better equipped to critically reflect on the very existence of cultural boundaries, yet many scholars still ignore or downplay the impact of cultural elements originating in the Eastern hemisphere have had on their own cultural history and identity.

In the present paper I am going to apply the concept of transculturality on the works of Chang Yi-Jen (Zhang Yiren 張以仁, 1930–2009), a

contemporary scholar-poet from Taiwan. I have selected him for this case study, because at first glance he seems to be one of the least probable examples of transcultural interaction: Firstly, as a scholar he was very well-versed in the Chinese literary tradition and more firmly rooted in the “Chinese tradition” than most other contemporary poets from Taiwan. Secondly, he was politically conservative, with a Kuomintang (Guomindang 國民黨) background. But I will showcase that even in his poetry we can observe a very strong and obvious impact of transculturality. An important catalyst were his travels both to Mainland China and to the United States of America.

In order to display transcultural factors in Chang’s poetry, it is useful to concentrate on the perspective of the “material world”, which distils down to the central question, how lyrical works express concepts of space and time. This approach is especially promising, since notions of space and time have always played a central role in the history of Chinese poetry (Liu, 1979).

1 Life and Work of Chang Yi-Jen

Our protagonist, the scholar and poet Chang Yi-Jen, was born in 1930 in Hunan (Mainland China) into the family of the high-ranking Kuomintang military officer Zhang Yangming 張揚明 (1912-?), who was quite fond of poetry himself, and even had published some verses.² Under the guidance of his father, Chang Yi-Jen had become familiar with the art of writing traditional Chinese poetry when still a boy. Later, in 1949, after the end of the Chinese Civil War, he was relocated, together with his family, to Taiwan. While the quantity of his early poetry was rather modest, at the age of sixty years he eventually began to produce huge amounts of verses written in traditional Chinese genres. The stimulus for this late period of creativity was a 16-day-long visit to Mainland China in July 1990, together with a group of professors from Taiwan

2 Zhang Yangming 張揚明: *Sketches from Floating Around, Pinggeng yin cao* 萍梗吟草 (1968). He also authored prose collections, mainly dealing with his experiences during military campaigns, like *Arriving in the North-West, Dao Xibei lai* 到西北來 (1937), and *Returning Home, Guilai* 歸來 (1948), as well as philological studies like the *Critical Review on the Laozi, Laozi kaozheng* 老子考證 (1985).

(Zhang Yiren, 2010, p. 404); a voyage that led him to the cities of Kunming 昆明, Chengdu 成都 (in particular the iconic “Straw Hut of Du Fu” *Shaoling caotang* 少陵草堂—named after the famous Tang poet Du Fu 杜甫, 712-770), Xi’an 西安, and Beijing 北京, including the nearby Great Wall (Zhang Yiren, 2010, pp. 5–9). Chang Yi-Jen wrote merely fourteen poems during this visit; but having recovered his poetic voice, he composed around one thousand pieces in the remaining twenty years of his life. His most active phase as a poet thus coincides with the era after the political opening in Taiwan in the late 1980s, after the lifting of martial law in 1987, and the period after the Tian’anmen 天安門 Incident in Beijing in 1989. The works composed since the year 1990 comprise more than 99% of Chang’s complete poetic oeuvre.

He and his beloved wife Chou Fu-Mei (Zhou Fumei 周富美, 1936–2018, born and raised in Taiwan) worked as professors at the Chinese Department (*Zhongwen xi* 中文系) of National Taiwan University (Guoli Taiwan Daxue 國立臺灣大學), where Chang Yi-Jen specialized mainly in the field of traditional Chinese poetry, especially *ci* poetry of the Song dynasty (*Song ci* 宋詞). In this context, he published many articles on the famous traditional *ci* poetry collection *Songs from Between the Flowers*, *Huajian ci* 花間詞, and his essays on this subject were published in two volumes entitled *Essays on the Huajian ci* (Zhang Yiren, 1996) followed by a supplementary volume (Zhang Yiren, 2006).³ His academic work was awarded the prestigious Academic Award of the Ministry of Education (*Jiaoyubu xueshujiang* 教育部學術獎) in 2007, two years before his death in September 2009.

A quite extensive biography, composed by his former student Yang Chin-Lung (Yang Jinlong 楊晉龍) in the traditional biographical *nianpu* 年譜 style, appeared as appendix to the collection of his poetic works, the *Collection of Chang Yi-Jen’s shi and ci poetry* (Zhang, 2010, pp. 647–671).⁴

3 Another research focus was Chinese traditional linguistics; his corresponding works can be found in Zhang Yiren (2012).

4 The Shanghai edition from 2012 also has a biography of Chang Yi-Jen in the appendix (Zhang Yiren, 2012, pp. 345–356), which includes a few more events that occurred after his decease.

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As source material for Chang's poetic works, I shall use here the very same edition, which is carefully edited and was prepared by his students and his wife. It also includes some additional notes, which are very instructive to understand the poems in the context of his biography.

As the focus of my paper is dedicated to the question of how Chang's transcultural experiences are reflected in his poetic work, I shall concentrate on the pieces composed during his travels abroad. He traveled to the U.S. several times to meet Chinese (or Taiwanese) colleagues, to attend scholarly conventions, and also to visit the family of his son, who had settled down in the Washington D.C. metropolitan area. During his first visit in the United States in 1976, he did not compose any poems (Zhang Yiren, 2010, p. 11), but his three later travels to the U.S. are represented in his poem collection *Zhang Yiren xiansheng shi ci ji*: The journey in the year 1992 yielded 12 poems, contained in a small collection entitled *Various Songs from my Voyage to America and California* (*Mei Jia zhi xing zayong* 美加之行雜詠; Zhang Yiren, 2010, pp. 11-13); the poetic output from the following visit in 1995, entitled *Poetic Sketches Recalling my Travels to America* (*Lü Mei shicao ganhuai pian* 旅美詩草感懷篇; Zhang Yiren, 2010 pp. 38-42) consists of 20 poems; and during the last visit in 1999, he composed poems divided into two sections, *Visiting Stanford University Again* (*Chong you Shidanfu daxue* 重遊史丹福大學, 5 poems) and *Joyful Family Reunion in Washington, D.C.* (*Huafu huanju* 華府歡聚, 9 poems; Zhang Yiren, 2010, pp. 215-219). Formally, all these poems belong to the genre of traditional *shi* poetry, with five or seven characters per verse, and typically 4 or 8 verses in total. Compared to original works from the Tang dynasty, the language is rather simple, which is characteristic for "classicist" poetry from the late 20th or 21st century. However, Chang still observes the traditional Tang end rhymes in most cases.

The published *Zhang Yiren xiansheng shi ci ji* contains also *ci* poetry, which amounts to 25% of the total lyrical corpus of Chang Yi-Jen, but there are no published *ci* poems that were written during his visits to the U.S.; obviously he must have felt that *ci* poetry was not an appropriate genre to transform his inter- and transcultural experiences into verse.

2 Traditional Poetic Genres in the Contemporary Sinophone World

Chang specialized in “classical” poetic forms, in particular the Tang-style *shi* 詩 (*Tang shi* 唐詩, with subgenres like the “Chinese quatrain” *jueju* 絕句 and “regular verse” *lushi* 律詩, prominent in China since the Tang Dynasty 618–907) and the Song-style *ci* (*Song ci* 宋詞, especially prominent since the Song Dynasty 960–1296).

Here, it seems appropriate to write some words on the role of “classical lyrical” forms in present-day Chinese poetry—or in a broader sense “Sinophone poetry”, i.e. verses written in one of the Chinese language varieties—and recent academic research in this field, mainly because studies on contemporary Chinese poetry mostly focus on “modern style” poetry (*xin shi* 新詩). Recently, there have been more and more—though still few—attempts to write on contemporary poetic works, written in traditional Chinese lyrical styles (see for example Yang Zhiyi & Ma Dayong, 2018, and the current project by Frank Kraushaar on classicist internet poetry). Accordingly, I shall adopt the term “classicist”, a term that has been proposed by a group of scholars and advanced students around Yang Zhiyi (the so-called “Frankfurt consensus”; Yang Zhiyi, 2015). Many contemporary poets regard “classicist” Chinese poetry as anachronistic and consider the pieces of this genre as mediocre in value. But aside from value judgments, we should at least recognize the fact that these forms still are quite popular today, hence contemporary “classicist” poetry can be used as source material to be utilized for diachronic studies in Chinese literature: When comparing modern “classicist” poetry with classical verses from the distant past, we at least profit from the advantage that the striking difference in form between modern new poetry and classical poetry remains no longer the focus of observation, which makes it easier to shape out other characteristic changes and developments. In the present study, however, I focus on classicist poetry in order to demonstrate more vividly the broad impact of transculturality.

3 Spaces

It is very obvious that transcultural experiences preferably happen in a corresponding spatial environment. We can distinguish roughly between (concrete) geographical and natural surroundings creating a landscape environment, on the one hand, and more abstract social or cultural spaces, which are very often linked to or influenced by iconic cultural symbols, on the other hand. These images are not necessarily functioning as part of a “cultural memory” as an institution (using a notion by Assmann, 2008, 110f.), since the poet does not identify himself with American culture and rather takes on an outside perspective. Still, Chang’s poetry is abundant in such examples.

3.1 Landscape

3.1.1 Parks, Mountains and Rivers

The factual physical environment in North America is depicted by the poet Chang Yi-Jen as quite impressive, and explicitly serves as source of inspiration, which is frequently reflected in the titles of his poems. Even though the parks, mountains, rivers, and forests are not cultural items *per se*; but in his poems they appear to be transcultural in the sense that distinct features of a foreign geographic region are nevertheless perceived from a Chinese point of view. His travels mostly took place in the Washington, D.C. area, where his son was living, around Stanford (in the San Francisco Bay area) and also led our poet to a number of famous touristic locations in the U.S. and around Vancouver in Canada.

Chang Yi-Jen’s travels also include a visit of Disney Park (Zhang Yiren, 2010, p. 12), where he depicts his experiences during the enjoyable leisure visit in words, resulting in the long poem *Visiting the Disney Park* (*You Disinai leyuan* 遊狄斯耐樂園), consisting of 20 verses of 5 characters each. The poet’s enjoyment reaches its peak when in another poem he describes California as paradise, albeit with some dangers lurking beyond the surface: “If there were no earthquakes, this place would be

a paradise” 「...若其無地震，此處即天堂」 (Zhang Yiren, 2010, p. 42).

3.1.2 Animals and Plants

Animals and plants have served as important symbolic markers in traditional Chinese poetry since its very beginnings, which can be related to the everyday experience in ancient Chinese rural society (Kwong, 2003). As soon as living beings typical for Chinese traditional literature dwell in a foreign context or landscape, they naturally form a transcultural image and generate a certain literary tension. The physical space in Chang Yi-Jen's poetry is densely populated with plants (trees and flowers) and animals, ranging from small insects (*Visitor from Abroad*, *Yixiang ke* 異鄉客; Zhang Yiren, 2010, p. 39) and fighting snails (*Mountain Forest*, *Shanlin* 山林; Zhang Yiren, 2010) to larger species. In fact, the most common animals mentioned in his poems are birds. For example, the duck serves as symbol of marital love, which is depicted as the speaker strolls around a lake together with his dear wife.⁵

Much more often still the (sea)gull (*hai'ou* 海鷗, or *ou* 鷗) appears, being a permanent wanderer in the skies, which serves as self-reference for the unsteady traveler longing to return home one day.⁶ This motive was already very popular in the poetry of the Tang dynasty, particularly in the works of Du Fu, who is also famous for his line “Floating around, whom do I resemble to? A single gull between Heaven and Earth” 飄飄何所似，天地一沙鷗。⁷ Even though the motive of the seagull appears in Chinese literature centuries before Du Fu, I have no doubt that Chang

5 Cf. the line “In jest, the green duck chases after the couple in from of the islet”, 青鳧戲逐洲前侶; see the poem *When Visiting the Washington Monument State Park with [my Wife] Fu-mei I Obtained Two jueju*, *Yu Fumei tong you Huashengdun jintianbei gongyuan de er jueju* 與富美同遊華盛頓紀念碑公園得二絕句 (Zhang Yiren, 2010, p. 11).

6 Cf. the line “Beyond the Clouds Ascends a Pair of Seagulls” 雲外過雙鷗, in *Visiting the Great Falls Scenic Area, You da pubu qu* 遊大瀑布區 (Zhang Yiren, 2010, p. 11). Other examples can be found in *Travelling Seagull, Lü ou* 旅鷗 (Zhang Yiren, 2010, p. 42), *Visiting the Statue of Liberty in the Port of New York I was Inspired and Obtained Three jueju*, *Ye Niuyue gang Ziyou nüshen xiang you gan de san jueju* 謁紐約港自由女神像有感得三絕句 (Zhang Yiren, 2010, p. 13; see also translation below), *My Grandson Yuan Joyful Playing, Yuan sun you xing* 元孫遊興 (Zhang Yiren, 2010, p. 217), and *News from Taiwan, Taiwan xiaoxi* 臺灣消息 (Zhang Yiren, 2010, p. 218).

7 A stanza from Du Fu's poem *Feelings While Traveling at Night, Lü ye shu huai* 旅夜書懷 (Du Fu, 1979, p. 1228f.), which has been translated and analyzed very frequently, see for example Mc Craw (1992, p. 64).

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is consciously referring to the famous master of Tang poetry: the abundance of allusions does not allow a different interpretation.⁸ But of course this does not mean that Chang is trying to copy Du Fu's style, as he still employs his modern adaptation of the formal Tang verse rules.

The following example demonstrates very well how the traditional motif of the seagull and the Moon—another central topos in classical Tang poetry—are interwoven into a factual place on the Californian coast, playing with motifs from the Chinese past:

Travelling Seagull

The bright moon sends its lonely light upon the ridges of the mountains,
a flock of seagulls arises from the treetops.
The Pacific Ocean welcomes the waves approaching from Eastern neighbours.
If I just had a boat heading back home to enter the inebriated eyes!

《旅鷗》

曉月孤明山脊上，
旅鷗羣起樹梢頭。
太平洋接東鄰浪，
可有歸舟入醉眸。

(Zhang Yiren, 2010, p. 42)

This poem was written at the sight of the Californian coast. The most intriguing picture from this poem appears in the third verse: The “waves approaching from Eastern neighbours” (or literally “Eastern-neighbour-waves”) could refer to waves running eastward from Taiwan (or China) across the entire Pacific Ocean until reaching the shores of California. This figure plays with the paradox that a region normally considered to be “Far East” is, in fact, located in the far west of the beholder's location, but is still emitting eastward waves. Alternatively, from the perspective of Taiwan, one could consider the “Eastern neighbour” to

8 Just to give an example: All motives contained in the famous verse “in this sorrowful autumn ten thousand miles from home I am a vagrant traveler” 萬里悲秋常作客 by Du Fu (*Ascent, Deng gao* 登高, Du Fu, 1979, p. 1776) appear in Chang's poem *Dwelling in a Foreign Country, Yiguo chunqiu* 異國春秋 (Zhang Yiren, 2010, p. 38). I will discuss still more connections to Du Fu later in this paper.

be California, from which waves emanate to meet the Pacific Ocean located in the Western direction.

The fourth verse obviously refers to a boat, which the poet might embark on, to journey back from North America to his home in East Asia, but at the same time alludes to his yearning to leave Taiwan and return back to his old home in Hunan on the Mainland. All in all, the reader encounters a combination of geographical spaces, interwoven by the seagull motif. Still another characteristic element of traditional Tang poetry can be observed here: this piece can be readily interpreted as landscape depiction, which resembles a piece of traditional Chinese painting.

3.2 Social Environment

3.2.1 Persons, Family and Friends

Among all persons mentioned in these poems, the central part is played by his family and—to a somewhat lesser degree—by his friends. In particular, there are several poems specifically devoted to his close family members. This comes as no surprise, since from the Chinese cultural perspective, the family has always been very crucial to define one's own social status. Chang Yi-Jen even reflects on this and states in the introduction to one of his poems:

My family is scattered, their homes spread over two countries, separated by dense mountain ridges and vast waters, by thousands and tens of thousands of miles. Facing the inconvenience not to be able to see each other every morning and evening, I cannot be but full of sorrow. When I now compose poems, I only record the joy of family reunion. A human being's life has already enough sorrows and it is not appropriate to use the [beautiful] melody of string and wind instruments to note down the sound of tears and pain of separation.

骨肉離散，分居兩國，隔重山遠水，千里萬里，無朝夕相見之

便，則又不無遺憾焉。今為詩但誌其團聚之樂，以人生已多愁苦，不堪絲竹之聲譜啼淚離情以出也。⁹

Thus, even though being homesick in Washington, he focuses on his writing about enjoyable experiences during family gatherings (Zhang Yiren, 2010, p. 216). All these poems on family and friends are positive, sometimes even full of humor. His family consists of his son, grandson, daughter-in-law, as well as the family dog named Qiubi 裘比.¹⁰ Likewise, his friends and colleagues evoke positive emotions in his mind (Zhang Yiren, 2010, p. 215f).

3.2.2 Other People

During his stay in the United States, Chang apparently had almost no interaction with locals. One reason certainly is the language barrier, but another might be a general lack of stimulus to get into contact with other cultures. The only foreign individuals mentioned in his poems are the teacher and a fellow student in his English class, which he attended merely for a few days.¹¹

Impressions while visiting an English language class for one week

Once again, I study the foreign tongue, “yi-ya”—I cannot pronounce it clearly.
One week I have learned the sound of the Western soil, me, the 60-year-old school
boy.

Beidi [= Betty] is a good teacher, Majia [= Margarita] is performing well.

In the room are mostly women, their nimble tongues like parrots.

《補習英語一週有感》
再學番人語，伊呀說不清。

9 Preface to *Joyful Family Reunion in Washington, D.C.*, *Huafu huanju jiu shou* 華府歡聚九首 (Zhang Yiren, 2010, pp. 217). Similar statements can be found in his collected essays, e. g. *Echoes of Doggerel Verses*, *Dayoushi de huixiang* 打油詩的回響 (Zhang Yiren, 2010a, pp. 181-183, here p. 183).

10 See the poem [*My Son*] *Hanyi Keeps a Dog named Qiubi, who is Brave and Robust, Guarding his Master Well, but still is Gentle and Obedient to the Family Members*, *Hanyi xu quan Qiubi jiaojian duoli shan wei zhu dui jia ren roushun zhongjin* 漢宜蓄犬裘比矯健多力善衛主對家人柔順忠謹 (ibid.).

11 The preface to this poem mentions a Russian fellow student named “Nargarida” (sic!) in Latin letters, obviously a misspelling of “Margarita”, which illustrates the intercultural challenges typically faced by East Asians living in Western countries.

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一週洋土調，六十老童生。
蓓蒂能施教，瑪嘉善表情。
同窗多女性，靈慧舌如鸚。

(Zhang Yiren, 2010, p. 41)

In this humorous piece, the English language is called “sound of the Western soil” (*Yang tu diao* 洋土調), a term encompassing all Western languages ignoring their diversity—which fits to a cliché perspective of the “West” being a monolithic unit (similarly, Westerners tend to use terms like “Asian”, “East Asian” or even “Eastern” or “Oriental” culture, when speaking about China). Despite his low level of willingness to engage into serious interaction with the anglophone culture, this failed classroom encounter would likely not have happened without the significance of English as global *lingua franca*. It is remarkable that this brief experience resulted in the composition of a poem with obvious signs of a transcultural impact on the protagonist.

3.2.3 Cultural Spaces

During Chang Yi-Jen’s visits, the U.S. is basically perceived as a cultural extension of China, with a dominant focus on “China towns” and his Chinese family members and friends. Furthermore, there is a cliché reception of Western culture, aside from the classroom experience just mentioned, also represented by iconic sites like the Statue of Liberty or Disney Park, which he found actually quite enjoyable.¹²

In the poems, China (in Chinese named “Middle Country”, *Zhongguo* 中國) is very often simply called “the country” (*guo* 國), which is common usage in traditional and contemporary China (cf. the popular expressions “country studies” *guoxue* 國學, “within the country” *guonei* 國內, “outside the country” *guowai* 國外, referring to “Chinese studies”, “within China”, “outside China” respectively).

Chang also emphasizes the Chinese roots of the people of Chinese origin living in North America:

¹² *You Disinai leyuan* 遊狄斯耐樂園 (Zhang Yiren, 2010, p. 12).

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Verses inspired by the Annual Meeting of Chinese Culture

The conference of Chinese culture shows the brilliance of our country,
two hundred specialists are assembled in one hall.
They are interested to do research and to teach, whose plan might this be?
The Red and the Yellow Emperor are root and stalk of their family.¹³

《全美華文年會書感》
華文會議國之光，二百專家聚一堂。
研教有心誰畫策，親親根蒂是炎黃。
(Zhang Yiren, 2010, p. 11)

The poet had to face a more complicated clash of cultures during his visit of the Butchart Gardens on Vancouver Island:

Inspired by a visit of the Butchart Gardens in Canada

... The landscape traverses both the Eastern Ocean¹⁴ and the West.
It is a spiritual voyage full of visual impressions and poetic feelings.
Who cares about the culture and artifacts of us Chinese?
We forever remember the old sage, who sought to abolish the weapons.

《遊加拿大布查德花園有感》
...景歷東洋又西式，神遊畫意與詩情。
吾華風物誰憐惜，永念前賢欲去兵。
(Zhang Yiren, 2010, p. 13)

During his visit of the park, which contains several sections devoted to a specific cultural region, Chang merely discovered installations inspired by Italian and Japanese culture (Zhang Yiren, 2010, comment 2 on p. 13), without any reference to Chinese cultural elements. For a Western visitor this fact might not even be recognizable, because he or she probably would not be able to clearly distinguish between Japanese

13 This expression refers to the mythical emperors Shennong 神農 (also called Yandi 炎帝, or “Red Emperor”), and the Yellow Emperor (Huangdi 黃帝), who are seen as earliest ancestors of the Chinese bloodline, and also originators of Chinese culture, like in the expression “Children and grandchildren of the Red and the Yellow Emperor” (*Yan Huang zisun* 炎黃子孫).

14 “Eastern Ocean” (*Dong yang* 東洋) is a traditional Chinese metaphor for Japan and its surrounding areas.

and Chinese cultural objects, as they all are subsumed under the label of “(Far) Eastern culture”. Furthermore, we should note that the Butchart Gardens in Vancouver have originally been designed by the Japanese landscape architect Kishida Isaburō 岸田伊三郎 at the beginning of the 20th century (Dick, 2004, p. 89), and thus have a direct historical connection to Japanese culture. But Chang Yi-Jen, who believes in the traditional spherical model of cultures with national cultures as units, naturally feels irritated. The motif of “abolishing the weapons” refers to a quote from the Analects of Confucius (*Lunyu* 論語): In case the sovereign of a state faces the dilemma to be forced to discard either weapons or food or the trust of his subordinates, Confucius would recommend to get rid of the weapons first (Legge, 1991, p. 254). Chang Yi-Jen finds himself in the awkward situation that, on the one hand, the Chinese won the war against the Japanese in 1945, but, on the other hand, the “Eastern”-themed sections of the park are monopolized by Japanese cultural objects. In the fourth verse, the wording “we forever remember” (*yong nian* 永念) shows that Chang himself still firmly adheres to the pacifist vision of Confucius, who suggested renouncing the weapons before everything else, even though this antimilitaristic stance obviously might come with the price of having less political influence abroad. This is particularly relevant, since Chang remembered well his personal trauma caused by Japanese troops invading China in 1937.¹⁵

Here follows another example of a poem playing with a change of perspective:

Strangers from a Foreign Place
 Strangers in California from a foreign place
 just from our China they come?
 Can't they dwell on the island in the ocean?¹⁶
 Where on the horizon do they find a home?
 The old tree-bark scale was corrupted by the timber worm,
 the far-off dream has compassion with the hidden flower.

15 See the poem *60th Commemoration of the Resistance Against the Japanese after the “Incident at the Marco Polo Bridge” on July 7, Jinian Lugouqiao Qi Qi kang Ri liushi zhounian* 紀念盧溝橋七七抗日六十周年 from 1997 (Zhang Yiren, 2010, p. 151f.).

16 Obviously referring to Taiwan.

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Stepping across the paths in the forest,
the clouds accompany us on the way leading far afield.

《異鄉客》

加州異鄉客，爭徒自吾華。
海島寧非寄，天涯那是家？
老鱗傷蠹木，遠夢惜幽花。
踏遍林間路，雲送路轉賒。

(Zhang Yiren, 2010, p. 39)

The poet observes the foreigners in California and is surprised that they all seem to come from China (which—according to Chang—includes Taiwan). Not all of those fleeing Mainland China dwell on Taiwan, but are scattered around the globe, which creates a feeling of displacement. The picture of a primeval forest with secret localities hidden between trees serves as poetic background image for travelers bound for unknown locations in the far distance. Our poet is, on the one hand, a Chinese individual cast away in foreign lands, but, on the other hand, a stranger in California feeling lost in a foreign realm. This reflects the sensation of the members of the Chinese diaspora, living in a foreign cultural environment in the United States, as well as the author being equally lost in Taiwan, displaced far from his home in Mainland China.

Another example of cultural pessimism can be found in the following piece:

Our Chinese Culture

The way of Confucius and Mencius today is no longer put into practice,
people from the West desire to fetch the Daoist classics.

Our Chinese culture claims to be flourishing and rich
but all we see are palaces of Chinese cuisine in every place.

《吾華文化》

孔孟如今道不行，西來人欲取真經。
吾華文化稱隆盛，但見烹調處處城。

(Zhang Yiren, 2010, p. 39)

For over 2000 years, Chinese culture has been dominated by the ideas of venerated Confucian thinkers like Confucius and Mencius. But nowadays, Westerners interested in Chinese traditional thought would rather lean towards the Daoist tradition (consisting of texts like the *Daode jing* 道德經 by Laozi 老子), which—from a Confucian perspective—is considered to be quite vulgar, or even heretic. Still worse, when visiting Western cultural environments, one could easily get the impression that Chinese food is the only remnant of the great Chinese cultural tradition, a shadow of its former glory.

To sum up, from the perspective of Chang's self-perception, Western and Eastern cultural spaces are considered to be separate spheres (and Eastern culture, furthermore, should be subdivided into Chinese and Japanese cultures as separate entities), which are in permanent competition and serve as symbols of national pride. Transculturality appears, here, insofar as foreign places, personal names and cultural characteristics are seamlessly integrated into the verses.

4 Time Axis

4.1 Traditional Chinese Culture

Not surprisingly, there are several passages in Chang Yi-Jen's poems with references to traditional Chinese literature. Thus, the famous Tang dynasty poet Du Fu is explicitly mentioned twice in Chang's verses written during his visit to the United States in 1995,¹⁷ and even more often alluded to either by the motive of the Moon¹⁸ or, more specifically, by the seagull, which is a classic motif in Du Fu's poetry, as we have seen above. The seagull often appears in Chang Yi-Jen's poems, not least because this bird species is a frequent sight in the coastal regions of the United States.

17 *Waking up at Night, Ye xing* 夜醒 (Zhang Yiren, 2010, p. 40) as well as *Addressing the Moon at Mid-Autumn Festival, Zhongqiu dui yue* 中秋對月 (Zhang Yiren, 2010), both mentioning Du Fu's style name (*hao* 號) Shaoling 少陵.

18 *Observing the Moon, Wang yue* 望月 (Zhang Yiren, 2010, p. 38); *Zhongqiu dui yue* 中秋對月 (Zhang Yiren, 2010, p. 40)..

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More important for Chang, however, is the motif cluster of the famous classical piece *Peach Blossom Spring* (*Taohua yuan* 桃花源)¹⁹ by the medieval poet and writer Tao Yuanming 陶淵明 (?-427). The classical text recalls the story of a fisherman from Wuling 武陵 Prefecture (located in the modern Hunan Province), who during the Jin Dynasty 晉 (265-420) allegedly discovered the entrance to a secret place, hidden behind the source of a river. A group of people, who had fled from the brutal regime of the Qin dynasty (221-206 BC), were living there peacefully in a secluded area; for many centuries they had been separated from the outside world, without any knowledge of later dynasties (like the Jin, or even the Han 漢, 206 BC-220 AD). In Chang Yi-Jen's work, several motifs from this utopian piece appear on various occasions, in particular the notion of "refugees from the Qin" (*bi Qin ren* 避秦人), which is used by Chang Yi-Jen as a metaphor for Chinese people, who were forced to flee from the Communist regime in the 20th century. Examples for the topos of refugees from Mainland China include the following two poems by Chang:

The Sight of California

Our hard life and all these affairs make us sigh upon [seeing] the moving clouds.

Not to mention the springtime in the ancient realm at the Peach River.

When asked what I have seen in California,
half of the settlers are people fleeing from the Qin.

《加州所見》

勞生底事嘆行雲，莫話桃溪故國春。
若問加州何所見，離鄉半是避秦人。

(Zhang Yiren, 2010, p. 40)

Street Scenery

Under a brutal political regime, it is hard to figure out whom to trust.

We Chinese cherish our personal freedom.

On the street, I suddenly heard the sounds from my old homeland.

Half of them are refugees, who had left their country.

¹⁹ The original piece consists of a famous essay, followed by a (less famous) long poem. See Kwong (1989, p. 49).

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《街頭》

暴政難猜孰可親？吾華珍惜自由身。
街頭乍聽鄉音盛，半是離家去國人。

(Zhang Yiren, 2010, p. 39)

In fact, the allusions to the *Peach Blossom Spring* conjure up a space, where the time axis and the spatial axis begin to blur, as the utopian paradise from the Chinese past here is representing the United States of today. Nevertheless, he also met some Chinese compatriots living in the United States who had not fled the Qin:

The Couple Shouren and Xiujuan Guide Me Through New York and I am Especially Delighted of the Beauty of the Paintings Exhibited in their Home
... I am delighted to see that the skill of their paint brush has largely increased,
people floating on the seas are not fleeing from the Qin.

《守仁、秀娟夫婦導遊紐約尤喜其室畫作琳瑯》
……畫筆喜知功力進，浮家不是避秦人。

(Zhang Yiren, 2010, p. 12f.)

4.2 Contemporary Context

All the dimensions mentioned above are combined in the following poem triplet on the Statue of Liberty, dating from 1992:

*I was Inspired During a Visit of the Statue of Liberty in the New York Harbor and
Obtained Three jueju Poems*

The Statue of Liberty is sitting on a lonely island
a long way from normal people but on good terms with seagulls.
The torch brightens the sky, opening up clouds and mist.
[People from] all countries strive to get there, but the Ark²⁰ is small.
In the East, there is a country, formerly known as Qin.
Its people turned westward, worshiping the Goddess [of Freedom].

20 The “Ark” is the term from the Bible used for “Noah’s Ark” (*fangzhou* 方舟).

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After they had received the torch of freedom fire
they buried the body of the Goddess of Freedom at Tian'anmen Square.

The fisherman from Wuling tried to find the ford [again] but in vain,
in the old histories who would promote the brutal Qin?²¹
Wherever in the world there is a Peach Blossom spring,
at its entrance should be erected a [statue of the] Goddess of Freedom.

《謁紐約港自由女神像有感得三絕句》
自由女神處孤島，不近凡人友鷗鳥。火炬燭天雲霧開，萬邦爭赴方舟小。
東方有國古稱秦，人向西天拜女神。傳得自由薪火後，天安門葬自由身。
武陵舟子問前津，舊史誰披說暴秦。世有桃源何處是，源前應立自由神。

(Zhang Yiren, 2010, p. 13)

We should note that the English words “freedom” and “liberty” commonly correspond to the same word in Chinese (*ziyou* 自由). Chang Yi-Jen still vividly remembers his impressions from reports on the events on Tian'anmen Square in 1989, where a group of students erected a statue called “Goddess of Freedom” (in Chinese called *Ziyou nüshen* 自由女神, just as the “Statue of Liberty”), mimicking the Statue of Liberty, which was eventually destroyed by military forces on Tian'anmen Square. On the one hand, Chang marks “liberalism” as “Western thought”, but, on the other hand, he still connects this political philosophy to the *Peach Blossom Spring*, which proves that he is very sympathetic towards it. The poet equals Communist China to the Qin dynasty, whereas Noah's Ark symbolizes the safe haven provided in the United States. The frequent use of *Peach Blossom Spring* motifs provides an axis rooted in Chinese tradition, yielding verses that are transcultural at their very core, bridging the most famous symbol of “Western” values—the Statue of Liberty—directly and consciously to a utopian scenic image from the Chinese cultural past.

21 In the traditional historiographic writings of China, from the Han dynasty to the Qin, the Qin would always be considered as a negative example of an inhuman and brutal dynastic reign, doomed to failure.

5 Conclusion

Doing research on Chang Yi-Jen's poetry is rewarding, as it grants insight into a modern classicist poetry tradition from Taiwan, which since the 1990s—unlike the “old cadre style” (*laogan ti* 老幹體) from the PRC—could develop free from any political and ideological burden. From the few samples I have given it can be seen that this type of classicist poetry represents a serious and creative lyrical style, able to deal with complex political and sociological issues of present times.

With his Mainland Chinese background and his good ties to conservative circles in Taiwan and, furthermore, his strong preference for traditional Chinese *shi* and *ci* poetic styles, Chang Yi-Jen seems to be one of the most archetypal “Chinese” poets in contemporary Taiwan. Nevertheless, we can observe distinct transcultural characteristics in his verses, often displaying the author's ability to deal with “Western” cultural assets in a playful approach, while the subjectivity of a Chinese perspective is still maintained. Especially in the very central piece on the Tian'anmen Incident, we find very strong symptoms of transculturality. Even though there are only a few explicit references to “Western” values, like the notion of liberty/freedom (*ziyou* 自由), they are not exclusively applied to Western people, but are valid for Chinese as well.

Additionally, we can observe transgressions of temporal boundaries. I have presented examples of Chang's poetry from his three “poetic” visits to the United States. The first visit is focused on touristic spots, but also overshadowed by remembering the events on Tian'anmen Square in 1989; poems from the second visit dwell on his loneliness, whereas the third visit mainly is concerned with family, friends and colleagues. However, all these poems evoke a feeling of being out of time, constantly alluding to the past and the present. This could be described by the term “transtemporality”, which—especially in the case of China with her huge cultural discrepancy between past and present—translates directly into transculturality. Observing the existence of different cultural levels within the same geographical region adds a new perspective to enrich the theory building of transculturality.

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But limits to transculturality are discernible as well: The author is firmly rooted in his own cultural background and experiences, which he perceives as being monocultural, and despite being an observer of the United States, he is still strongly influenced by iconic impressions of “Western” culture, and steadfastly sticks to the perspective of being a Chinese, who has no real home, which is an awkward situation typical for Kuomintang expatriates in Taiwan, as well as for the Chinese diaspora in many places of the world.

Another limitation is caused by the poet’s restricted knowledge about Western culture. We have observed that Chang Yi-Jen’s perception of America is mostly limited to certain icons comprising just a small part of the cultural memory of the Americans themselves. A major reason for this circumstance certainly is Chang’s personal background. Even though he was one of the most renowned Taiwanese professors of Chinese literature at his time, his generation of Sinophone academics employed in their research a hybrid methodological background, combining the traditional scholarship from Imperial China with a modernized approach developed in the 1920s and 1930s. At that time, Chinese scholars borrowed ideas from the Western academia, but hardly did engage in a serious exchange with Western scholarship in the field of traditional Chinese literature. Just like Chang’s teacher Ch’ü Wan-li (Qu Wanli 屈萬里, 1907-1979), a famous scholar specialized in “(Confucian) canonical studies” (*jingxue* 經學),²² Chang Yi-Jen spend a huge amount of work to do research on the Chinese cultural heritage, but almost never would cite a Western source in his research articles and books. In short, an exchange with Western culture did not take place on an academic level.

It would be interesting to do further research comparing Chang’s work with lyrical pieces from other Chinese poets, who wrote classicist pieces on their visits to the United States. One example would be Huang Zunxian 黃遵憲 (1848-1905), who, during his stay in San Francisco in the 1880s, wrote several verses on his encounters (Huang Zunxian,

22 Displaying a high level of reverence towards teachers is another part of this academic culture, as can be seen in some essays Chang Yi-Jen wrote to prize Ch’ü Wan-li’s poetry, personal character and scholarship (Zhang Yiren, 2010a, pp. 7-15).

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1995-2002, pp. 655ff). But doing this task would require to compose another research paper.

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