

UC Santa Barbara

Journal of Transnational American Studies

Title

Let Us Remember *Fengliu* instead of Miseries: *Dayou* Poems and Chinese Diaspora

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2b9067vd>

Journal

Journal of Transnational American Studies, 4(1)

Author

Zheng, Da

Publication Date

2012

DOI

10.5070/T841012827

Copyright Information

Copyright 2012 by the author(s). All rights reserved unless otherwise indicated. Contact the author(s) for any necessary permissions. Learn more at <https://escholarship.org/terms>

Peer reviewed

Let Us Remember *Fengliu* instead of Miseries: Dayou Poems and Chinese Diaspora

DA ZHENG

In November 1952, Chiang Yee, a Chinese writer and artist, came from England to the US where he stayed for a year to prepare *The Silent Traveller in Boston*. The following is a Chinese language *dayou* poem that he wrote to his friend Yang Lien-sheng on January 11, 1953:

啞子荒唐好打油，海外胡遊二十秋！
而今遇着楊兄嫂，烤餅蔥花第一流！！

As an idiosyncratic *Yazi*, I love to write *dayou* poems,
And I have traveled aimlessly twenty years outside China.
I have now befriended Mr. Yang and his wife,
Whose pancakes with scallions are second to none.¹

Two days later, Yang replied, in the same poetic form, responding to Chiang's poem in the same rhyme scheme and subject:

工畫能文擅打油，一天不見似三秋。
飽餐大餅八圈打，博弈猶賢豈下流！

You are skilled in writing, painting, and *dayou*;
It feels like three years if we miss each other for one single day.
After enjoying pancakes, we play mahjong for eight rounds;
It is not of low rate to be a good chess player while
remaining a virtuous person.

當年鬢綠髮如油，我亦離家十二秋！
海外相逢都是客，辛酸莫記記風流！

My hair used to be black and shiny years ago,
And I have also left home for twelve years.
Becoming acquainted overseas, we are all sojourners;
Let us remember *fengliu* instead of miseries.

Thus began the frequent exchanges of *dayou* poems between these two diaspora writers. In their letters they included *dayou* poems, which Yang would then copy with a brush pen in a traditional poetry book of rice paper. Before Chiang's return to England in October 1953, the two had written and exchanged nearly forty poems. Two years later, when Chiang came from England to the US to teach at Columbia University, the two resumed *dayou* poem exchanges. Over a hundred in total, plus a few by their mutual friends, have been recorded in that same poetry book.

Both Chiang and Yang had been living overseas for about twenty years, and both were fluent in English. They were well-established writers, using the English language for most of their publications. Why then did they resort to the Chinese language and the Chinese poetic form in their communication? Why did they choose that rather archaic and low-brow poetic form for their private exchanges? Is that medium, with a long tradition in China, appropriate for conveying the ethos of the Chinese diaspora in the modern era? Indeed, reading, assessing, and understanding those Chinese language *dayou* poems may shed light on the Chinese diasporas' North American experience and sensibility, which in turn might challenge the established boundaries of Asian American literature and demand further cross-cultural and transnational inquiries.

In the 1990s, Marc Shell and Werner Sollors called our attention to the rich sources of rarely studied non-English language publications as a means to expand the scope of American Studies. In particular, they purported that an appreciation of those neglected multilingual literary texts would open up the literary canon and support an "English plus," rather than "English only," approach. Furthermore, it would bring about a new understanding of ethnicity and the role languages play in Americanization and in ethnicization.² Critics such as Xiao-huang Yin, Te-hsing Shan, and Da Zheng, among others, have respectively studied the complexity and gap between English and native language writings in Chinese diaspora writers' works.³ For example, in his comparative study of Lin Yutang and Lao She, two highly acclaimed bilingual writers, Yin observes that, "for Chinese immigrant writers, creative writing in English often demands suppression and distortion of the Chinese sensibility that does not fit into American culture." Moreover, he has noted that these writers often assumed "different identities" when writing in English in order to cater to the taste and needs of the audience in the West. Lin Yutang could assume a "polite," "humble," and "apolitical" stance in his English language writing, but he

would switch to being “bitter” and “passionate” in his Chinese language publications.⁴ The philosophical statement by German Jewish poet Paul Celan, who continues to write in German even after having left his native country, bears the truth in this respect: “Only in the mother tongue can one speak one’s own truth. In a foreign tongue the poet lies.”⁵

Indeed, Asian diaspora poetry goes far beyond the traditional boundaries of Asian American literature and ethnic studies. Critics, such as King–kok Cheung, Sau–ling Wong, Shirley G. Lim, and Benzi Zhang, have recognized the increasing involvement of transnational and cross–cultural interactions in the age of globalization. They advocate that the emphasis in Asian American studies, to quote Cheung, should be switched to “heterogeneity and diaspora” and to the examination of the connection between Asia and Asian American.⁶ A study of the exchanges of those *dayou* poems between Chiang and Yang reveals the Chinese diasporas’ deep connection to Chinese cultural tradition, even though traditional poetry was challenged, criticized, and abandoned in their home country. Utilization of the traditional *dayou* format with a distinct diasporic content forms a critique of their diasporic locations and cultural traditions. As Wong has elucidated, Asian American studies is indeed an international field, the complexity and richness of which require a broader vision and deeper understanding of the multilayered and multilingual negotiations beyond national contexts.

The *Dayou* Poem Abroad

The *dayou* poem is a traditional poetic form in China. It originated in the Tang dynasty (618–907) with Zhang Dayou, an obscure farmer, whose poem “Snow” offered a vivid depiction of a snow scene without a single reference to snow.

江上一籠統，
井上黑窟窿。
黃狗身上白，
白狗身上腫。

The river appears blank all over,
And a black hole is there in the well.
The yellow dog becomes white,
And the white dog now appears swollen.

The colloquial language, humorous tone, and witty approach made the poem an instant success, and thus began the long tradition of the *dayou* poem. Generally a *dayou* poem has four lines, each containing five or seven characters. Unlike classical poems which adhere to rigid rhyme, meter schemes, and other rules, the *dayou* poem does not always abide by rules. The poet can even alter the number of words or lines.

The freedom from constraining regulations makes it a popular option for poets to express their opinions, poke fun at others, or cast sarcastic comments. Lu Xun, for example, wrote the *dayou* poem “Nanjing Ballad” in 1927 to criticize the Chiang Kai-shek government. It also became a favorite means for common people, with little education, who wished to vent their anger and discontent at social injustice and the privileged class.

The poetic exchange between Chiang and Yang was called *chang-he*, a Chinese cultural tradition in the Lu Mountain area dating back to the late Jin dynasty (281–420). *Chang-he* normally involves two poets. After one poet writes a poem, the other responds to it according to the subject and its poetic format. *Chang*, or 唱, meaning “sing,” may also be written as 倡, which means “leading”; *he*, or 和, means echo, suggesting an effort to respond to the other. Therefore, in *chang-he*, it is the first poem, that is, a *chang*-poem, that leads to one or more poems, known as *he*-poems.⁷ Occasionally, a *he*-poem could then become a *chang*-poem leading to more *he*-poems. Tao Yuanming (365–427), a renowned poet in the Jin dynasty, wrote many *he*-poems, responding to his poetic friends, such as “He Zhang Changshi” (和張常侍) (401) and “He Liu Chaisang” (和劉柴桑) (402).⁸ Over the next few hundred years, *chang-he* evolved as a popular literary “dialogue” among poets. Up until the mid-Tang dynasty, *chang-he* poems were mostly related to each other in meaning and content. A significant change took place in the mid-Tang dynasty, when a new format required *he*-poems to match the *chang*-poem with identical rhyme and meter. In addition to the connections in content, these poems all have four seven-character lines with the same meter, and with identical Chinese characters ending the first, second, and fourth lines. Due to these challenging rules, *chang-he* poems became a popular literary tool enjoyed by literati, especially in the Tang and Song dynasties, as a means to showcase poetic skills, wit, and erudition, as well as a way to cultivate friendship.⁹

As part of the popular culture, the *dayou* poem, often impromptu, is very well-known but deemed casual if not inferior. Even though some learned poets practice the *dayou* poem, it has never been treated as a serious literary endeavor. Both Chiang Yee and Yang Lien-sheng were skilled at traditional verses. Chiang, a well-established travel writer, published two collections of Chinese classical poems, neither of which included any *dayou* poems. Yang never published his *dayou* poems either since he probably considered them too casual and insignificant. Nevertheless, both resorted to *dayou* poems for poetic exchanges; thus writing *dayou* poems was a deliberate choice.

Although Chiang and Yang had been in the West since 1933 and 1940 respectively, they were fully aware of the changes in the literary field in China. More importantly, having lived through the first three or four decades of the century, they witnessed the rise of modernity that impacted Chinese culture at the beginning of the twentieth century. There was enthusiasm in exploring new poetic forms and searching for new voices under the influence of the West. Modern poetry highlighted

the subjectivity and social consciousness of the poet, generating an intense interest in the humanity as well as in the future of the nation. With the rise of new poetry, rigorous traditional conventions were challenged and uprooted, giving way to vernacular language, free verse, new rules about rhythms and structure, and experimentation of some Western poetic forms, such as sonnets, odes, and limericks.¹⁰ Consequently, classical poetry became less popular. Appreciated as an essential part of the cultural tradition, it was practiced in limited small circles of literati and scholars.

After the communist government was established following the defeat of Chiang Kai-shek nationalists in 1949, China underwent dramatic sociopolitical changes. The literary field took a dramatic turn in the 1950s. In particular, left-wing literature, which could be traced to the 1920s, became the “most influential faction” and dominated the literary field. As a result of official Marxist ideology, international revolutionary literature and art—especially the literature of the Soviet Union—was given “the highest prominence.”¹¹ Poets in China were to serve the people by writing revolutionary poems; thus, the subject matter or the perspective of those poems published between the 1950s and 1970s were highly politicized. According to Hong Zichang, “poetry’s social ‘function,’ the ‘stand’ of the writer, and norms of thought and emotion were repeatedly expounded and emphasized. Poetry was in service to politics, was integrated into contemporary life, and was at one with the ‘masses of the people’—these were the ideas at the core of contemporary poetical concepts.”¹²

Two major schools of poetry were advocated: revolutionary realism and revolutionary romanticism. The former emphasized the “social function” of poetry and a “true” reflection of the “life of the workers, farmers, and soldiers.”¹³ It encouraged the poet to re-present “true” life; any search for inner feelings and emotions was deemed bourgeois. Revolutionary romanticism, on the other hand, responded to the “demands of contemporary political campaigns.”¹⁴ As He Qifang and Ai Qing defined it in the 1950s, this “poetry is the literary form that most concentratedly reflects social life, and it is saturated with rich imagination and emotion, and is often expressed in a direct lyrical fashion.”¹⁵ Needless to say, classical poems were condemned as feudal remnants, and the younger generation was taught and encouraged to write new modern poetry. Since classical poetry demands rigid poetic regulations, practicing new poetry with relatively fewer restrictions and rules seemed to offer an unprecedented sense of freedom, making poetry writing easily accessible to the general public.

What makes this case particularly intriguing is the fact that when Chiang and Yang exchanged their *dayou* poems in the West, *chang-he* and *dayou* poems had already dwindled to an extremely limited circle of poets in China. In some cases, poetry writing had transformed into a political medium, a means of public expression, and a way to mobilize the general public.¹⁶ Writing *dayou* poems overseas was thus not just a means of distancing oneself from the popular modern poetic form at home or deviating from traditional poetic expressions; it was a way to perpetuate and

preserve a valuable tradition that was on the brink of extinction. More importantly, the content and meaning of these *dayou* poems was related to the diasporic experience—a distinctive feature which traditional *dayou* poems do not exhibit. Therefore, a study of these poems offers a glimpse into the meaningful relationship between cultural tradition and the diaspora, complexities of immigrants' acculturation, and the significance of language in cultural practices that occur outside of the home country.

“Home Is in My Heart”

Home(-land), or the “original center,” always looms large as the universal and perpetual issue with which diasporas wrestle. Benzi Zhang, in his study of Asian diaspora poetry in North America, makes the following comment on home in relation to diasporas: diasporas are “migratory birds,” who are strangers from elsewhere, without a sense of belonging, unable to return home yet never able to feel at home in the new country. Zhang argues that “diasporas have constantly to situate themselves in an awkward mediation between home-ness and homeless-ness; and they have to learn how to reposition themselves in a new relationship between their permanent residences and their ‘homes.’”¹⁷ It is no surprise then that there are numerous references to home in Chiang Yee's and Yang Lien-sheng's *dayou* poems. In Chiang's line, “And I have traveled aimlessly twenty years outside China,” the Chinese phrase “胡遊,” meaning “traveled aimlessly,” connotes traveling in a foreign country since the character “胡” historically denotes the northern and western part of China where nomads and barbarians resided. Yang's response that “I have also left home for twelve years” effectively draws empathy and reduces the distance between the two diaspora poets.

Born in 1903, Chiang grew up in Jiujiang, Jiangxi Province. His education began at the family school, and he later attended local middle school before going to Nanjing for college in 1922. After graduating with a major in chemistry, he participated in the Northern Expedition to fight warlords and then served as county magistrate of three counties. Disappointed with the corruption of the Chiang Kai-shek government, he resigned from the post and decided to go to England to study the political system and observe the government in the West in order to bring about changes back in China. He left behind his wife and four children as well as relatives and friends. Unexpectedly, because of wars and subsequent sociopolitical upheavals in China, his stay overseas was prolonged indefinitely. Nevertheless, his hometown and family were always in his mind. The line from one of his poems—“When spring comes, every dream takes me back to the south of the Yangtze”—reveals the poignant feelings of the poet.

Chiang and Yang became acquainted in England in the spring of 1951 when Yang visited sinologists in England, France, and Holland during his sabbatical leave. With his publications of *Topics in Chinese History* (1950) and *Money and Credit in China*

(1952), Yang established himself as a most promising scholar and attracted considerable attention in the academic circles of Europe. Chiang admired Yang's rare talent, profound scholarship, and gentlemanly qualities. At the same time, Yang, eleven years younger, respected Chiang for his extraordinary accomplishments, suave manners, and artistic temperament. There were very few Chinese intellectuals overseas in the 1950s, and those who studied Chinese history, language, and art were even fewer in number. Common and mutual respect brought the two together, and their conversations covered broad subjects freely and openly: literature, history, Chinese language, art, and publications. During his visit to Boston in 1952, Chiang even stayed at Yang's house at 10 Prescott Street in Cambridge.

Indeed, it was the Yang family's hospitality and affection that offered Chiang consolation and comfort. He was invited to dine with the family, enjoying home-made meals prepared by Mrs. Jean Yang, "Whose pancakes with scallions are second to none." These were compliments he offered with utmost sincerity. Jean, also a new immigrant from China, dutifully carried out her domestic responsibilities by preparing meals and taking care of the children while her husband provided economic sustenance with his salary. As a hospitable homemaker who often entertained family guests, she was well-known for making pancakes, roasted ducks, chickens, bean-curd soups, and dumplings, all of which were frequently mentioned and admired in Yang's and Chiang's *dayou* poems. Chinese cultural practices had been transported across the Pacific into a new cultural setting, and it was food and meal preparation (or "domesticity") that maintained the Yang family's diasporic "Chineseness" in their Cambridge home.

When Chiang was county magistrate in China in the 1930s, he had body guards and personal servants who took care of his daily needs. One of the first challenges he encountered in England was the preparation of meals. For the next four decades while living overseas by himself, he had to prepare his own meals. Thus, sitting at the dinner table with the Yang family and savoring home-made Chinese meals became a precious experience. "I would not dare to offend Mrs. Yang. / Where else could one enjoy the dumplings and chickens prepared by her?" Food allowed him to re-experience, at least vicariously and momentarily, the warmth of family life. He even bought the Yang family Chinese ham as his Thanksgiving gift: "I am posting this authentic Yunnan ham to you, / Letting your mouth enjoy home-return first." Additionally, Chiang became No. 1 Uncle to Yang's children, who enjoyed his visits and loved his stories and paintings. He wrote affectionately about Lily, who "often chirps like a bird / Sometimes like a crow, and sometimes like an oriole." As for the little boy Tom, who called him "Uncle" "day and night with no ending. / A foreign candy, if offered, could always bring smiles to his face." "Tom's tears poured like heavy rain, / But a piece of candy could quickly bring about sunshine." Upon his departure on October 24, 1953, Chiang wrote the following *dayou* poem, expressing his gratitude and attachment to the host family.

欲寫無從寫，臨行不願行。
一樹康橋柳，絲絲牽我情！

I intend to write but know not where to start;
I am to depart but hesitant to set out.
Of the willow tree in Cambridge,
Each and every branch clings to my heart.

To that, Yang responded, reciprocating with deep emotion and appreciation,

一載波城住，今朝又遠行。
前期難可料，無奈此時情。

After a year long visit to Boston,
You are leaving today for a far-off destination.
When we will meet again we do not know,
Yet poignant thoughts are unbearable at this moment.

Nevertheless, as Chiang stated, “Other people’s home is never my own home.” Being in a friend’s house probably only sharpened his sense of displacement and homelessness. As the “Silent Traveller,” he considered himself living “a life like a beggar,” like a “stray dog” (喪家犬) or literally a “homeless dog.” In 1947, his older son joined him in England and a few years later, despite his objections, married an English woman. In the meantime, his younger son, who had escaped to Taiwan in 1949, was forced to serve in the Nationalist army there. Chiang was not able to visit his wife and daughters in China, nor could he enjoy visiting his grandchildren in England. “I perceived recently many failures in my life,” he wrote deprecatingly in 1962, “as I have failed to be a husband, a father, and a grandfather.” His family house in Jiujiang was destroyed by Japanese soldiers in 1938; his home country was invaded by the Japanese and then damaged by the subsequent Civil War. Political changes in 1949 transformed him into a stateless citizen. Unfortunately, there was no safe haven overseas. He was forced to move again and again in search of a new home because of war, employment, and other needs. Even though his departure from home(-land) and family had resulted in fame and success, his heart was incessantly burdened by a heavy sense of homelessness and restlessness.

Chiang never stopped searching for home. In early January 1956, a few months after he returned to the US to teach at Columbia University, he sent Yang the following *dayou* poem, full of self-derision and disappointment:

到處為家未有家，逢人便笑總無差！
說來太平天和地，吃著常多魚又蝦。
想起大兒成毛子，二兒做了八爺爺。

孤燈猶亮呼雷後，睡看天花板上花。

Everywhere is my home, yet there is no home;
It is always safe to put on a smile with people.
The earth and heaven appear peaceful,
And I often have fish and shrimps to enjoy.
My older son has now married a foreign woman,
And the younger one is now conscribed in the military.
Being awakened from sleep, I stay in bed,
In the dim light, staring at the flowers in the ceiling.

Yang quickly responded, praising him for having swiftly settled by “turning the apartment into a home.” Their mutual friend Chen Shixiang commented that “home was everywhere and the world was home.”

In those *dayou* poems, a shared feeling of homesickness and home-crisis exists; yet, there is also a strong determination of rehomeing, a process in which diasporas attempt to reconstruct and produce a sense of dwelling in the new locale.¹⁸ When Yang responded to Chiang’s aforementioned poem, he was “so excited about writing *dayou* poems” that he composed two, the second of which began with this line: “Leaving home does not mean a lack of responsibility.” It was apparently a friendly gesture, showing support and understanding toward Chiang; simultaneously, it was also a mechanism of self-defense or self-consolation for Yang. Like Chiang, he had left his own family in China, including another son and daughter, as well as his aging mother. Staying overseas meant being separated from family members, which always bore a heavy burden of worries and anxiety. On his fortieth birthday, Yang responded to Chiang’s congratulatory poem, claiming, “No news from home is good news, / And thousands of miles away I express my best wishes to my mother.”

Diasporic experience is essentially a wandering life. It is, as Iain Chambers’ states, a “drama of the stranger,” cut off from the homelands of tradition, constantly experiencing “renewed identity.”¹⁹ The wandering Budai Monk, a legendary figure in Chinese cultural history, clad in a loose gown with chest and belly exposed, became Chiang’s favorite painting subject. It is a self-portrait, serving as “a consoling tribute to his memory” of the distant hometown in the East.²⁰ Consequently, Chiang’s statement that “Home Is in My Heart” (家鄉只在心安處) becomes both a reconciliation and an appealing, idealistic goal.

Remember *Fengliu* instead of Miseries

In his first two *dayou* poems, after stating that he has been overseas for over a decade, Yang Lien-sheng writes, “海外相逢都是客，辛酸莫記記風流！” (Becoming acquainted overseas, we are all sojourners; / Let us remember *fengliu* instead of miseries). The character 辛 means pungent, hardship, and sadness, and 酸 means

sour and sadness. The phrase 辛酸, with the two characters combined, denotes hardships and miseries. On the other hand, 風流 *fengliu*, which means wind and flow literally, carries several different meanings. In this case, Yang apparently refers to the following meaning of the phrase: distinguished and admirable, elegant, and of refined taste.

Yang did not privilege success over miseries in cultural representation; rather, his remarks functioned as sympathetic advice drawn from their common experiences of pain, suffering, and displacement. After his departure from China, Chiang Yee transformed into the “Silent Traveller,” as his penname indicated. According to his own explanation, he became silent because of his disillusionment with politics, his desire to observe the world, and his linguistic incompetence in a foreign country. The penname “Silent Traveller” itself carries a woeful undertone. As the Chinese proverb goes, “A dumb person tastes bitter herbs—suffering in silence.” Indeed, his diasporic experience was full of bitterness. Soon after his arrival in England, the Japanese invaded China; members of his family had to flee from their hometown and they were separated from each other. Chiang, stranded in England, was heartbroken. He missed his family members and was constantly worried about their safety. Around the same time, he lost his Chinese language teaching position at the School of Oriental Studies, which refused to renew his contract simply because of his Chinese accent. This episode was so humiliating that he never revealed the true cause to his friends. After his apartment building was destroyed during the German blitz in 1940, he was forced to leave London and relocate to Oxford.

However, these hardships did not stop him from achieving success. In 1935, he published *Chinese Eye*, which was followed by a sister piece *Chinese Calligraphy* in 1938. In between, *Silent Traveller: A Chinese Artist in Lakeland* was published in 1937, a slim volume that led to eleven other titles in the “Silent Traveller” series over the next four decades. All his books included charming and eye-catching illustrations designed by Chiang himself. Through his publications, Chiang has, in art critic Herbert Read’s words, “greatly extended our knowledge, not only of Chinese art and civilization, but also of art and civilization in general. He is one of those rare foreigners who help us to understand ourselves.”²¹

Chiang’s poem, written in the late 1950s, underlined the inevitability of miseries as an essential element in human life. It seemed contradictory to Yang’s advice to remember success and forget misery:

人生只一次，凡百皆如寄。
憂患娘肚來，苦惱須記起。

Humans have life only once,
And everything is a transient experience.
Suffering and hardship begin with birth;
Distress and troubles should be kept in mind.

Forgetting miseries, in fact, exacts deliberate suppression of painful memories and worries. Past experiences and memories were often so traumatic and disturbing that amnesia and complete suppression were practically impossible. Yang's *dayou* poem, written sometime in 1957 as a response to Chiang's, could serve as a footnote to this:

小心翼翼啞行者，八面威風縣太尊。
畢竟誰真誰是幻，當年此日果難論。

A cautious and humble Silent Traveller,
And a magnificent and awe-inspiring county magistrate—
Which is real and which is illusory;
It is indeed difficult to assess between the present and the past.

The confusion between the present and the past, between a diaspora in the West and the county magistrate in China, is actually a typical feature in the diasporic experience. As James Clifford has argued, “In diasporic experience, the co-presence of ‘here’ and ‘there’ is articulated with an anti-teleological (sometimes messianic) temporality. Linear history is broken, the present is constantly shadowed by a past that is also a desired, but obstructed, future: a renewed, painful yearning.”²² “Constitutive suffering,” which includes but is not limited to loss, marginality, exile, and blocked advancement, “coexist with the skills of survival: strength in adaptive distinction, discrepant cosmopolitanism, and stubborn visions of renewal.” In that sense, Clifford affirms, “diaspora consciousness lives loss and hope as a defining tension.”²³

Notably, the character 記 *ji*, has two meanings: 1) remember, bear in mind, commit to memory; and 2) write down, record. Even though the exact meaning often depends on the context, it is rather ambiguous in this case. Both meanings are equally valid. The line could very well mean “Let us record *fengliu* instead of miseries” or “Let us remember *fengliu* instead of miseries.” Indeed recording *fengliu* with miseries excluded was exactly what Chiang had been doing with his *Silent Traveller* volumes. All but two of their Chinese titles contain the city or country name followed by 畫記 *huaji*, a phrase which means “painting and recording.” In these books, Chiang recorded his observations and impressions of the West. His writing was humorous, cheerful, and witty, and his talent and productivity were appreciated and admired. Because he always presented himself as a happy-go-lucky man, few people were aware of the struggle, agony, and anxiety behind the halo of glory bestowed upon him. For example in 1952 and 1955, when he visited the US and then joined the faculty of Columbia University, the Cold War was raging, and the public was swept by a fear of Communism (McCarthyism and the Red Scare). Chiang did not dare mention his family in China or express his wish to visit his hometown. Those personal thoughts surfaced nearly twenty years later in his posthumously published book *China Revisited*. As he asserted, “Only experienced political exiles can understand what I

went through.”²⁴ In other words, in those English language publications, which were meant for the reading public in the West, Chiang did, as Yang pointedly noted, “record *fengliu*” but left out all miseries and pain of his private memories.

Dayou poems, on the other hand, offered a venue for diasporic individuals to express their true feelings with little constraint, to celebrate *fengliu* as well as talk about miseries. Yang wrote on Chiang’s fiftieth birthday, “You have now lived a half of the hundred years, / And surely you are to write many more travel books” (百年福壽今方半，畫記懸知定等身). Chiang candidly expressed his sincere admiration of Yang as the “Sage of Poetry” (詩中聖). He would admit that “Your foreign students are countless, / And your style and manners as a professor impressive” (洋李洋桃有的是，教授風貌很堂堂). The poetic exchanges even allowed Jean Yang to voice her pride, light-heartedly defending her husband’s reputation: “Yang is not bragging about his accomplishments, / But his title of professorship was indeed donned on him by others!” (楊牛不是自吹牛，教授名銜送上頭). She even proclaimed that “To be successful one must not shy of self-praise” (趕學洋人須自捧).

However, misery coexisted with *fengliu* in these *dayou* poems. In Chiang’s own words, his career of “selling artwork and writings” was nothing but to “fool others” (騙騙人). In 1955, he moved to New York to teach at Columbia. Ten days after his arrival he wrote the following *dayou* poem:

紐約高高那易居？到此方知氣喘噓！
端的人生爲什麼，不貪熊掌也無魚。

It is by no means easy to reside in the high rises in New York,
And I gasp for breath upon my arrival here.
What do I really want in life?
I neither covet the bear’s paws nor seek any fish.

It was understandable that life in New York turned out to be more difficult than what Chiang had previously expected. He included a footnote to the *dayou* poem, also in a poetic form: “Although New York is nice, / It is not easy to reside in the high rises. / My mind should stay clear, / And I need to handle everything properly.”

Chiang taught “Introduction to Chinese Literature” at the School of General Studies at Columbia. To him, this was an ideal opportunity. America was a sizable market after World War Two, and he had already established a foothold in the country with the success of *The Silent Traveller in New York* as well as a few other titles published by John Day Company. Besides, teaching at Columbia was probably financially and psychologically satisfying. It provided a steady, though modest, income, and, more importantly, being a teacher was an honorable profession. Therefore, it was a surprise when he questioned his decision by asking what he was really after. “Bear’s paws” and “fish” are references to the Chinese classic *Mencius*.

The ancient sage Mencius stated that, while both were desirable, he opted for the bear's paws since one could not obtain both. Chiang seemed more disappointed in his case: his teaching position was not secure since it was on a yearly contract; a full-time appointment at Columbia was unattainable since he did not have a PhD. Moreover, the book market in the US was unfamiliar and very competitive, and it was not certain how long he would be able to stay in the country after his contract expired. Yang, as his confidante, responded with a *dayou* poem, offering consolation to boost his morale. "Thousands of people" will buy your books, he encouraged Chiang.

The connections between the imminent and past, between personal history and cultural tradition, transform the exchange of these *dayou* poems into a vital means for diasporic poets to sustain sympathy and support. Yang wrote a *dayou* poem, half of which is quoted below, responding to Chiang's concerns:

梅福求名不顧家，可憐兒女有何差！
甘心自縛無情繭，回首方知沒眼蝦。

Mei Fu, coveting reputation, left his family behind,
Yet his miserable children are good in every respect.
Willingly you have bound yourself in a cruel cocoon;
Looking back, you realize that you have not been blind.

Mei Fu, a famous recluse, was a very loyal government official in the Western Han Dynasty. After Wang Mang usurped power, Mei left home to live a secluded life in Jiujiang. Yang's sympathetic adjective "miserable" seems to suggest that Mei's overtly selfish decision cost him his family. Similarly, the poem highlights the sacrifice that Chiang made in pursuing his literary "reputation" or losing his freedom in the form of "a cruel cocoon." Yet, it concludes that his sacrifice was worthwhile and that Chiang has "not been blind" in his pursuits. As Yang stated appreciatively in another *dayou* poem about Chiang, "Having been unfortunately cast overseas during your prime years, / You still retain a noble spirit in your heart" (可惜華年拋海外，猶存浩氣在胸中). Yang's poem was simultaneously a complaint, a defense, and a cry of admiration. Such understanding derived from their common diasporic experiences, helping to strengthen their friendship and justifying the difficult cause to which they were both devoted.

"Utilizing the Barbarian Language for Life's Sake"

Chiang Yee and Yang Lien-sheng are exceptionally masterful in both the Chinese and English languages. In the mid-1930s when the Coca Cola Company was looking for a Chinese translation of its brand product, Chiang submitted his rendition, which subsequently won the contest. His translation, 可口可樂 *ke-kou-ke-le*, a phrase which

translates as “palatable and pleasurable,” consists of four common and simple characters with a melodic tonal quality that matches the original English term. Chiang’s translation has become a classic, popular among Chinese-language speakers all over the world. Yang also had an extraordinary command of the Chinese language, history, and literature. In 1941, after Hong Kong was conquered by the Japanese, he wrote “Mourning Hong Kong,” a long poem which was circulated among Chinese students in the US. In 1942, Hu Shi, an advocate of vernacular language in Chinese literature, visited Harvard and encouraged Chinese students to write poems using vernacular language. Yang followed this advice over the next few years, and his modern poems won Hu’s admiration, even though his poetic talent was revealed mostly through traditional style poems. At age 45, Yang was elected to become a member of the Academia Sinica in Taiwan. In the eyes of Hu Shi, Chen Yinke, Fu Sinian, and Zhao Yuanren, he was one of two most promising young Chinese Studies scholars—the other being Zhou Yiliang.²⁵

In their *dayou* poems, Chiang and Yang appear completely at ease with the poetic format—in their creative and skillful use of images and historical references. Many phrases and idioms are colloquial and appear rather casual. Chiang uses “捉麻雀” (to catch the sparrow) as a reference to playing mahjong. Vernacular and informal terms abound, such as “入網” (to be trapped), “瞎叉” (mindlessly playing mahjong), “老頑皮” (mischievous old man), and “豈下流” (not of low rate). The most interesting is the transliteration of some English terms: “Subway” is rendered as “薩琶衛”; “Sacramento” as “沙克惹饅頭”; and “Nylon” as “來鸞.” These Chinese terms have quotation marks, which suggest the poet’s intention to underline their foreignness and exoticism. In “安扣康地好湯湯” (Uncle, candy, and good Ton Ton), “安扣” *ankou* and “康地” *kangdi* are transliterations for “Uncle” and “candy,” respectively, even though standard Chinese equivalents—that is, “伯伯” and “糖果”—do exist. In a *dayou* poem written to pay tribute to the Yang family, Chiang deliberately uses transliteration to dramatize the children’s liveliness and highlight the hybrid cultural experience of the diaspora. Occasionally, he even uses English in his *dayou* poems. “這裡兩個洋 candy, 一給 Ton Ton 一 Lily!” (Here are two pieces of foreign candy, / One for Ton Ton and the other for Lily). By so doing, Chiang and Yang produced a “curiously mixed language,” which registers their modern, transnational, and transcultural experience.

Writing *dayou* poems in the Chinese language and with historical references offered the poets some critical distance from the new culture in which they were living. Chiang’s following poem, which was written in response to one of Yang’s, is full of rich cultural connotations:

做什黃梁夢？管牠多少春！
猿鳥早為友，鬼怪久同群。
蠻語為生計，啞遊強作人。

色色空空相，來來去去身！

I indulge in no Golden Millet Dream,
And I care not about the years that have passed by.
Monkeys and birds have long been my companions;
Amongst ghosts and monsters I dwell and mingle.
Using the barbarian language is but means for survival;
As the Silent Traveller, I simply manage to get by.
My appearance is hear and there;
And my body travels to and fro.

The phrase Golden Millet Dream (黃粱夢) has its own story: a poor scholar, while waiting for his lunch in the tavern, fell asleep and dreamed that he had become a high official and enjoyed a life of wealth and comfort. As soon as he woke up, however, he found that the pot of millet was still on the stove in the kitchen, and his dream was nothing but an illusion. The story has been referenced as an illusory dream of unrealistic expectations. Yang nevertheless admired Chiang for his resilience and diligence in literary and artistic pursuits: “Never indulging in the Golden Millet Dream, / You have traveled freely for twenty years!” (不做黃粱夢，逍遙二十春). In response, Chiang affirmed that he never cherished any illusory dreams. Most surprising, however, is his use of “猿鳥” (monkeys and birds), “鬼怪” (ghosts and monsters), and “蠻語” (barbarian language). These terms seem to indicate that he had been living in a ghostly and barbarian country and that his friendship with those animals and ghosts were involuntary. The word “蠻” *man* means “rough, unreasoning, boorish,” and as a noun it refers to southern nationalities in China. The phrase “蠻語” in this case obviously refers to English, a barbarian language which he uses for the sake of survival.

Chiang’s remarks are surprisingly shocking given the fact that he had been continuously advocating the commonalities between the East and West. In 1956, just a year after he started teaching at Columbia, some of his American friends already considered him “Americanized.” However, Chiang’s remarks here are not surprising if examined in the context of his personal experience. His hometown Jiujiang, situated on the south bank of the Yangtze River, became a treaty port after 1858. In the summer of 1914, at the age of eleven, he accompanied his grandfather for a walk along the Main Street to the British and Japanese concessions near the river. Grandfather, age 75, felt exhausted and sat on a public bench for a short rest, but was ordered to move by a foreign police officer who brandished a baton. Not far away, on another bench, sat an elderly foreign lady with a huge dog by her side, and no one bothered her. Chiang was indignant. He never forgot the incident. A decade later, he saw a sign on the entrance gate of a park in the French concession in Shanghai: “No Dogs or Chinese Allowed.” He turned and left. A few years later in 1931, as county magistrate of Jiujiang, he blocked the American Texaco Oil Company’s

secret deal to purchase a piece of land for the construction of a refinery. His decision brought him reprimand from the provincial government and eventually led to his resignation. These incidents most likely added to his perpetual feeling of alienation, reinforcing the notion that complete assimilation in the West is nothing but a myth. Even though he had long befriended “monkeys and birds” and lived amongst “ghosts and monsters” in England and then in the US, he still felt very much marginalized by these colonial powers.

In late October 1957, Chiang applied for permanent residency so that he could teach at Columbia for an extended period of time. He had been working on a study of Chinese Zen poetry, a challenging project yet vitally important to his academic and immigration status. Yet in his *dayou* poems, Chiang stated that he had decided not to care about the “damn ‘living’” and wanted to write *dayou* poems instead. “A man lives only once, / So one should never knit brows,” he admonished. After that, he wrote the following:

孔子朝聞道，老子騎黃牛。
莊周夢蝴蝶，達摩一葦浮。

Confucius learned of the Dao in the morning,
And Lao Zi rode away on the Yellow buffalo.
Zhuang Zi dreamed of butterflies,
And Bodhidharma floated across the Yangtse on a reed.

This list of historical references is dizzying and stunning, instantly creating a mythical aura: Confucius’ respect toward the truth; Lao Zi’s detachment from world affairs; Zhuang Zi’s philosophy of enlightenment and ultimate freedom; and Bodhidharma’s mystical power. The four sages represent the three main philosophical schools in Chinese culture, that is, Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. The citation of these remote—both in space and time—references create a new cultural identification for both Chiang and Yang, who kept their choices devoid of ideological or political entanglements. The contrast in terms of the degree of formality between these lines and the preceding ones in the poem is surprising: the former are scholarly, erudite, and mythical while the latter are carefree, informal (or even close to vulgar), and earthly. More importantly, these four historical references point towards the past in China. The tension created by these incongruous elements invokes a unique form of diasporic art, which is restless, vibrant, and transcultural. Thus, native language plays a double role in ensuring the diaspora’s peripheral stance, offering criticism in a new cultural setting while forming a link with the homeland.

In May 1962, Chiang wrote two *dayou* poems both about the Chinese language. The first was composed on May 9, right after a discussion of the “Communist Style” at Columbia University:

八股之臭已千年，民初變成洋八股。
不久有過黨八股，現在又興共八股。
說來‘今’也不算‘今’，古吧到能談到‘古’。
白話文言並彈詞，旗袍裸體草裙舞。
簡體楷書鬧不清，碧眼兒娘只叫苦。

Notorious *bagu* has existed hundreds of years,
And it transformed into foreign *bagu* in the Republic period.²⁶
Soon after came the Party *bagu*,
And now the Communist *bagu* is in fashion.
To consider it “modern” is not accurate;
To view it as “ancient” may have some truth.
Vernacular and classic elements are blended with fiddle ballads;
Qipao and naked body mingle with *kahiko*.
It is impossible to distinguish simplified and traditional styles;
Blue-eyed boys and girls bemoan and groan incessantly.

As if still unsatisfied, he expanded the poem into a song, entitled “Misery of the Chinese Language,” which begins: “Miseries and miseries of the Chinese language—those miseries are too many to enumerate” (華文苦，華文苦，華文苦處不能數). Chiang complains that Chinese, a non-alphabetical language, became even more difficult with the Wade-Giles and Yale Romanization systems invented for pronunciation. In addition, there were the canonical “Four Books” and “Five Classics” prior to the development of *bagu*.²⁷ Such rich tradition has paradoxically become heavy baggage, especially to foreign language learners. The poet lamented at the very end of the song: “Miseries and miseries and miseries” (苦呀苦呀苦呀苦). Chiang, who sounded plaintive, was actually nostalgic for a pure mother tongue, clear and free, not straitjacketed by ideology.

In a short poem titled “My Faithful Mother Tongue,” Polish poet and Nobel Laureate Czeslaw Milosz speaks of a similar sentiment with respect to the meaning of native language to an poet in exile: “Every night, I used to set before you little bowls of colors so you could have your birch, your cricket, your finch as preserved in my memory.”²⁸ Poetry writing in his native language became a ritual that he performed faithfully and religiously every night as a way to “serve” his “mother tongue.” The mother tongue gives him identity, offers him hope, and makes the sacred connection with his motherland. At a time when the language has become “a tongue of the debased,” “a tongue of informers,” and “a tongue of the confused,” writing poetry in his native language in a foreign land gains paramount significance. The poet eventually considers poetry writing as a serious mission in his endeavor to “save” the language from depravity. In his words, “what is needed in misfortune is a little order and beauty.” Likewise, for Chiang and Yang, two Chinese diaspora poets away from their motherland, writing *dayou* poems, free of formalistic constraint and ideological

restrictions, offers an opportunity to create a space to share their cultural experiences and their yearning for home, while making a connection with their motherland in the East.

Notes

¹ From the poetry book, in Chien-fei Chiang's private collection. Unless otherwise indicated, all Chiang Yee and Yang Lien-sheng poems are from the same source, and all translation is mine.

² Werner Sollors, *Multilingual America* (New York: New York University Press, 1998); 9–10; Marc Shell and Werner Sollors, eds., *The Multilingual Anthology of American Literature* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 4; and Da Zheng, "Writing of Home and Home of Writing." *Comparative American Studies* 1.4 (2003): 499.

³ Xiao-huang Yin, "Worlds of Difference: Lin Yutang, Lao She, and the Significance of Chinese Language Writing in America," in Sollors, 176–190; Xiao-huang Yin, *Chinese American Literature since the 1950s* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2000) 164–177; Te-hsing Shan, "Redefining Chinese-American Literature from a LOWINUS Perspective: Two Recent Examples," in Sollors, 112–123; Zheng, "Writing of Home and Home of Writing," 488–505.

⁴ Yin, "Worlds of Difference," 180–181; Yin, *Chinese American Literature*, 174, 177.

⁵ Quoted from Yin, Yin, *Chinese American Literature*, 176–177.

⁶ King-kok Cheung, "Re-vieing Asian American Literary Studies," in *An Interethnic Companion to Asian American Literature*, ed. King-kok Cheung (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Shirley G. Lim, et al., "Introduction," in *Transnational Asian American Literature*, eds., Shirley G. Lim, et al., (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2006), 1–26; Sau-ling Wong, *Reading Asian American Literature: from Necessity to Extravagance* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993); Benzi Zhang, *Asian Diaspora Poetry in North America* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

⁷ Zhao Yiwu, *Changhe shi yanjiu* (A Study of chang-he poems) (Lanzhou, China: Gansu wenhua chubanshe, 1997), 1–2.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 370, 389, 418.

¹⁰ Zhang Dehou, et al., *Zhongguo xiandai shige shilun* (On the history of Chinese modern poetry) (Changchun, China: Jilin jiaoyu chubanshe, 1995), 4–5.

¹¹ Hong Zichang, *A History of Contemporary Chinese Literature*, tran. Michael M. Day (Leiden, Germany: Brill, 2007), 8, 21.

¹² Ibid., 66–67.

¹³ Ibid., 67, 77.

¹⁴ Ibid., 67.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ This does not mean that *chang-he* as a literary practice had become extinct by the 1960s. In fact, a small number of traditional scholars and well-versed poets still occasionally resorted to this style within their own elite circles. One of the famous and rare examples is Mao Zedong, who wrote *change-he* poems with Liu Yazhi and Guo Moruo, two well-known scholars, in the 1950s and 1960s.

¹⁷ Zhang, *Asian Diaspora Poetry*, 9–10.

¹⁸ Ibid., 4–5.

¹⁹ Iain Chambers, *Migrancy, Culture, Identity* (London: Routledge, 1994), qtd. in Zhang, *Asian Diaspora Poetry*, 10.

²⁰ Da Zheng, “The Traveling of Art and the Art of Traveling: Chiang Yee’s Painting and Chinese Cultural Tradition.” *SLI* 37.1 (2004): 168–190.

²¹ Herbert Read, “Preface,” in Chiang Yee, *Chinese Calligraphy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1954), ix.

²² James Clifford, “Diaspora.” *Cultural Anthropology* 9.3 (1994): 318. See also Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Double Consciousness and Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 281.

²³ Clifford, “Diaspora,” 312.

²⁴ Chiang Yee, *China Revisited* (New York: Norton, 1977), 34.

²⁵ Xie Bing, “Yang Liansheng weishenme shengqi” (Why Yang Lien-sheng became upset), in *Hafo yimo* (Writings from Harvard), ed. Jiang Li (Beijing, China: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2004), 450.

²⁶ *Bagu*, also known as “the eight-legged essay” format, can be dated back to the Yuan dynasty in the eleventh century. In the fifteenth century, the term “eight-legged essay” first appeared to describe the standardized essay as a requirement in the court examinations, and it remained in use until 1911. Today, the *bagu* is generally viewed as pedantic and trite, and Chen Duxiu, when advocating the New Culture Movement in the 1910s, labeled *bagu* as “lifeless.”

²⁷ The “Four Books” are Chinese classic texts, which include *The Great Learning*, *The Doctrine of the Mean*, *The Analects of Confucius*, and *The Mencius*. The “Five Classics” are five ancient Chinese books, which are said to have been compiled by Confucius himself: *I Ching*, *Classic of Poetry*, *Classic of Rites*, *Classic of History*, and *Spring and Autumn Annals*.

²⁸ Czeslaw Milocz, “My Faithful Mother Tongue,” in *Selected Poems 1931–2004* (New York: Harper Collins, 2006), 90.