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MODERNIST ELEMENTS, THEMES, AND REFLECTIONS IN THE SELECTED POEMS FROM A DRIFTING BOAT: AN ANTHOLOGY OF CHINESE ZEN POETRY

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Abstract
This paper examines the modernist poetic and aesthetic purviews of selected poems from the anthology "A Drifting Boat: An Anthology of Chinese Zen Poetry." In the regimes created by the poems, we recognize a literariness racked by internal and external contradictions. Hence, the analysis of the transitions and shifts is to be correlated with a modest chronicling of the past to show how their very bearings on the works' literary schemata result in the formation of their modernist axioms and dictums. The paper presents the image of literature in the pace of change affirming the idea that the repercussions brought by the wars and westernization are the forces that have completely devalued traditional Chinese society and its various conservative characteristics. Using the descriptive-analytical design, the poems disclosed modernist issues, themes, and philosophies verging on individualism, experimentation (breaking the conventional practices in literature), a sense of loss and exile and nostalgia, narrative authority as a reflection of the multiplicities of truth and diversification of realities, fragmentation, and destruction effected by the arrival of the Western powers in their society, and the occurrence of the states of absurdism and existentialism brought by the rush of daily life.

Keywords: aesthetics, literary history, philosophy, poetic experimentation, modernism

Introduction
One of the most important assertions prominent in the study of literary theory and criticism is that literature is undoubtedly a site of disputation. This is the kind of contestation that can make the reading communities of literature witness its aesthetic-political pluriform foregrounds. It can be a site of variance, dissension, and even antagonism (Roberts '06, 2006). Such a variance in the literary endeavour can be delineated from various discourses. For those who are classical and traditional in orientation, it becomes the perfect avenue to flaunt to other artistic regimes that there exists a time-honoured aesthetics of permanence (Calinescu,

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1987). For those who are modernist in orientation, the changing ideal of the beautiful becomes the central concern enabling artists to further explore and map the realm of the "not yet" in art—sometimes becoming the springboard to reject tradition with ever-increasing aggression. We affirm that such a transitoriness is always present in every artistic regime the reason why art is markedly typified by shifts and sea changes. In defining this regime, we take our cue from Jacques Rancière. A regime of art is a scheme of coordination and management facilitating the creation, perception and production of artists (Rancière, 2009). Embedded in every regime lies the conflict between tradition and modernity making readers realize that aesthetics in literature does not bear the stamp of an uninterrupted trajectory. There exist conflicting relationships in the poetics of representation, interpretation and articulacy (Rockhill, 2011). Literature is an identifiable work bearing the shifting imprints of creativity, civilization, artistry, and spiritual and intellectual values. We believe that in his discourses on literature Rancière is clearly accentuating the notion of "shifts." The shift between the understanding of the literary endeavour from the perspective of the belles-lettres tradition and the age of literature that we know today (modern and postmodern for example) is a potent projection of an absolute shift and transformation in the arts that needs to be generally remarked upon (Attard, 2018). This can lead to the formation of a "silent revolution" in the discipline of literature.

Another interesting discourse from Rancière that can be applied in the literary arena is how he regarded the confrontation and connection of the past and the present which is strongly invoked in the modernist discourse advanced in this paper. The past has its own intricate logic. In the historical juncture, the past can be seen as an epoch that stands on its own. Images of the past can be reconfigured for its bearing to be made visible in the present juncture. The past and present are significant projects for Rancière. The past possesses its means of creating its own poetics of representation and expression which we believe lies at the heart of "Mute Speech." New silent realms can loudly voice out their powers of expression advancing the idea that aesthetics in literature is a spot of contestation. Poetics can be rendered novel as they foreground unique configurations, overturn certain styles, and convey novel means of expressing truths and perceptions of the world. It is from this novelty that a new regime can be formed. A new regime can introduce a novel configuration of meaning that can foster new means of imaging and underscoring the emergence of mankind emplaced in a complex society. We find inspiration from the methodology that Rancière posited in his regard for the past and present as twin projects. To quote this methodology that he advanced in "*Et tant pis pour les gens fatigue*":

> My manner of treating the past is, on the contrary, to do away with this intrication of judgment and distance. On the one hand, it is a matter of conveying a past in its proper presence, of making us feel the language, the rhetoric, the style and the sonority of an epoch. On the other hand, it is a question of projecting the past into our present with the singularity of a foreign body (Rancière, 2009).

We focus on selected Chinese Zen poetry taken from "A Drifting Boat: An Anthology of Chinese Zen Poetry" in this paper. We define Zen Poetry as a

contemplative piece disclosing a remarkable state of awareness made possible through reflection and introspection (Waddell, 2022). The foregoing concept of the aesthetic regimes created by the poems is our means of historically foregrounding our modernist analysis of the poems. With the help of previous works of literature on the subject matter, we further delineate our approach and analysis in this paper.

In previous studies, the connection between the project of modernity and Zen discourse has been addressed by scholars in different possible routes. Notable in the study of Zen discourse and meditation in literary studies is how it serves as an animating ground for enhancing one's poetic voice. In a study by Chung (2011) titled "Modernist Elements in Jane Hirshfield's Voice and Zen Meditation", she underscored that the poet Jane Hirshfield remarkably creates personal, vivid and solid imageries in her poems as an offshoot of Zen meditation. In this case, Zen pertains to the incredible manipulation and activity of the mind engaged in silent creative production. Chung was able to properly trace and unveil the connection between Zen and modernity by beginning with how the author Jane Hirshfield immersed herself in Zen tradition. Considering profoundly authorial influence, she affirmed that Hirshfield was a serious practitioner of Zen Soto Sect monasteries tended by the San Francisco Zen Centre (Chung, 2011). Thoroughly studying Zen and being able to obtain the title of being "lay-ordained", she became a person noted for acquiring in-depth training in Zen with readers witnessing the extensions of such feat in her poetic voice. A perfect example of this is her poem titled "The Clock" particularly reflected in these lines, "But even fallen things disrupt each other. Beauty, griefs turn over. The leaves move all night, slowly, until they again are red." (Hirshfield, 1997). Highly imagistic in nature, the falling of the leaves and the disruption they caused confirm an individual's disruptions in the past—a means of also probing into the conflicts plaguing the human mind and body. The act of falling is perceived to be a product of the body's insightful disposition brought by the Zen meditative immersion of Jane Hirshfield.

The union of Zen and modernity offered a sharp and searching insight into human fallibility, psyche, experiences and feelings. The sharpness of the voice employed in the lines is complemented by the restrained voice of the poet as an offshoot of her Zen meditation. Evident in her works is the deployment of a personal yet controlled and poetic voice giving concrete form to the subjectivity of experiences of the speaker. Armed with an ardent Zen foreground, the modernist poetic voice acquires three tenors: the personal, confessional and self-effacing (Maio, 2005). To further specify the impacts of Zen on the works of literature of Hirshfield, the Zen elements can be further unveiled in the extraordinary concentrations of the mind, the exercise of the mind in non-interference, the act of not heavily relying on minute feelings, and with the mind becoming the vessel for the concentrated exploration of the bigger self (Chung, 2011). Chung's contemporary analysis of Jane Hirshfield's poems aided in opening the groundwork for analyzing Zen poetry in the light of modernity. Authorial training and exposure to Zen is one plausible way to understand and appreciate the connection between Zen and modernity. Others also recognize the importance of the possible diverse interpretations that can be given to Zen poetry.

In "The Making of Chinese Zen Poetry: Sam Hamill's The Poetry of Zen", Qin (2023) recognized the fact that Zen poetry requires more scholarly attention as Zen poetry is considered to be one of the most glorious works produced in China.

With translated anthologies available to the academic community covering centuries of poetry armed with a plethora of experiences associated with Zen, Qin recognized that the diversity of interpretations from the English-speaking world is instrumental in leading us to a comprehensive understanding of Zen tradition in China. With poems being translated into its native language to English through the likes of Sam Hamill, an American poet and also known as one of the founders of Copper Canyon Press, Zen literature becomes open to various literary landscapes with them experiencing and intellectualizing Zen sensibilities in different lights possible (Qin, 2023).

One of the studies that can support the truth of this invitation by Qin was written by Servomaa (2005) in her article "Poetry, Zen and Transcultural Aesthetics." In Servomaa's article, she highlighted the importance of the connection between poetry and Zen as it can be instrumental in the creation of a special kind of aesthetics that can contribute to the creation of outward diversified fertile expressions needed in harnessing the basic values and precepts of life. With various extraneous forces at play affecting the disposition of the artist, the connection of Zen with literature particularly poetry creates more profound sensitivities to human feelings and experiences and spiritual unity. Ideally speaking, this can lead to the formation of a common transcultural aesthetic language for mankind with their experiences chronicled in literature. It is evident that previous scholars acknowledge the importance of Zen in the process of producing art, while at the same time, being mindful of external forces affecting the concentrated dispositions of artists.

In "The Zen of Ecopoetics: Cosmological Imaginations in Modernist American Poetry", Callison (2024) affirmed how the ideas and dictums of the Zen tradition are also influential in 20th-century American poetry. Focusing on the works of William Carlos Williams, E. E. Cummings, Wallace Stevens, and Marianne Moore, Callison's analysis was able to further shed light on the key ideas of Zen applied and validated in literary production. These include the act of silent meditation, viewing all phenomena as an amalgamated entirety devoid of subject-object duality, unassailable endowment of wisdom. Supporting this track in the study of Zen and poetry are Lihong and Wang (2019). In their article titled "The Zen Relationship between Chinese Poetry and American Poetry", they analysed the poems of Kenneth Rexroth, Anthony Piccione, James P. Lenfesty, and Gary Snyder showing they imitated the wild quiet beauty complemented by the wild concentrated liberation that one can experience in Zen meditation. Norman Waddell's book titled "Poetry and Zen" further expanded the influence of Zen traditions on Western literature. In this book, readers can witness the plausible comprehensive correlations that he made, shedding light on Zen and mysticism, Buddhism and humour, Haiku, Senryū, Zen, Buddhist sermons in Christianity, Buddhism, and Haiku.

Previous literature mostly focused on Zen as an aesthetic agent enhancing literary production. The reconnaissance also showed the remarkable influence of Zen on Western Literature and how its dictums provided a potent jumping board to engage the modern individual issues plaguing mankind. In our paper, we recognize the call of the scholar Qin as far as the study of Zen poetry is concerned. Different vistas from the academe can be utilized in analysing the diversity of Zen captured in literature even in translation. In this case, we ground our study of modernist

aesthetics of Zen in history which entails revisiting certain timelines in the history of the writers. History, being the interrelation of the past and present, is an important precept recognized in this paper. In the endeavour of literature, the past is viewed to have profitably laid down the template responsible for capturing the aesthetic of its complex interpretive communities. However, one must recognize that the present can also be regarded as a topography of possibilities that can serve as a pliant avenue to reconfigure the fixed schemata of conventional aesthetics (Rockhill, 2011). From the foregoing thought by Rancière, this paper is an attempt to examine the modernist poetic purviews of selected poems written by poets Shih Shu, Yuan Mei, Ching An, Po Ching, and Hsu Yun. These are poets whose works are anthologized in "A Drifting Boat: An Anthology of Chinese Zen Poetry." The analysis of the poems from this anthology shows the fact that the works themselves can create a regime of their own complemented by their emplacements in history. Being highly introspective works, their works are successful in asserting their own aesthetic singularities and autonomies (Lamarque, 2008). The poems convey their own independent axioms which can evidently go in conflict with the regimes of the past. With reference to discourses on aesthetics, the chronicling and the attempt to historicize literary modernism in Chinese landscapes is an echoing of the interest in the transitional forms of transformation (Rockhill, 2011).

Method

In our close reading of the poems from the collection, we aim to flesh out how the poems configure their own aesthetic experiences mindful of the politics shaping their foreground reflected in the form and content of the poems (Carroll, 2001; Mikkonen, 2008). In doing this, we analyse the poems internally and externally. Internally, we consider the form of the poems and how they can possibly reflect the challenges of the historical shifts and transitions taking the cue from the meditations of the poets. In this regard, form is equated with the structure, the arrangement of lines and the severance of conventional arrangements. We emblematically read this departure from the tradition as the poets' means of solidifying their internal and external contradictions. Externally, we consider historical and cultural events, occurrences and references making possible the predicament of being at the crossroads. Specifically, we look at structure, images, motifs and themes in our analysis of the poems.

The modernist consciousness and perspective drawn from the selected poems reflect fragmented horizons and a society in disarray. This underscores the shift from traditionalism and nativism to modernity. The paper projects the image of literature in the pace of change affirming the idea that the repercussions brought by the wars and westernization are the very forces that have completely devalued traditional Chinese society and its various conservative characteristics. At the very core of the poems lie the most distinct earmarks of modernism: individualism, experimentation, sense of loss and exile, narrative authority as a reflection of the multiplicities of truth and diversification of realities, fragmentation and destruction effected by the arrival of the Western powers in their society, and the occurrence of the states of absurdism and existentialism brought by the rush of daily life. This serves as our means of showing how the aesthetics of poetry can be historically and culturally determined aware of its foreground shaping the work in focus (Hurley, 2008). This is an extension of the poetic aesthetic discourse of Paramalingam

(2023) in "The Aesthetics of Language" saying that through the language of the poems creating its own aesthetics, the poems from the collection configure their own artistic expressions with history at its backdrop.

Changing literary aesthetics: Offshoots and implications in context

The late Ch'ing (1644-1908) also called the Qing Empire or Manchu Dynasty and the Republican Era (1911-Present) are the two periods in Chinese History that are remembered for their intellectual turbulence and unrest ushering in their history and society's frames of reference a sense of national crisis and fragmentation. These are the two periods when the intellectuals of the time were already seeking solutions to such historical and cultural conundrums outside the over-arching influence of their traditions which form part and parcel of their literary production especially in their poetry. This became a platform for them to convey the means in how they make sense of their world and surroundings. The poems analysed from the anthology were written under the two eras.

The late Ch'ing and Republican Eras are remarkable for the creation of the idea of a revolution in poetry. They witnessed new registers in literary aesthetics, poetic form and content. These selected poems are remarkable as they signally veer away from the grand concept of tradition in the Chinese context affected by the presence of war and conflicts. A small amount of the didactic and individualist notions is reflected in the selected poems—the former underscoring the art of poetry as a kind of moral instruction, the latter seeing it as an avenue for the expression of the heart's desire. Very much dominant is the view of poetry as a technical and intuitionalist art form which can be seen as ideas that move in consonance with the idea of modernism in literature (Liu, 1962).

In our analysis, the technical and intuitionalist aesthetics are the very lenses that best describe the modernist foregrounding of the selected poems veering away from the notion of literature as a product of tradition rendering it as an upshot of pressure, unrest, and rebellion. In the poems, the moral is no longer an element that dominates their writing. In accordance with the intuitionalist view, one must consider the changing situation of the society. This leans on the idea of modernism as a creative impetus that deviates from conventional literary aesthetics and practices rendering taken-for-granted concepts into new literary trends (Levenson, 2002). This supports the idea that modernism in China, with all its complexities such as the rise of empires from the Occident, the influence of stronger economies, increasing population growth affecting food supply, and foreign pressures, has changed the very nature of reality and perception. With these, literature has to change its very nature to unveil new layers of the mind (Matz, 2004).

Armed with their creative violence, it is to be perceived that these poets become a kind of scientist in their own rights, capitalizing and manoeuvring their ways on the grounds of modernism's many ideologies affected by the sense of national crisis and intellectual crisis brought by the impacts of the war. According to Read:

> The modern poet has no essential alliance with regular schemes of any sorts. He reserves the right to adapt his rhythm to his mood, to modulate his metre as he progresses. Far from seeking freedom and

> irresponsibility (implied by the unfortunate term free verse) he seeks a stricter discipline of exact concord of thought and feeling (Read, 1951).

In relation to the foregoing statements, the selected poems analysed in this paper are clustered based on the idea of the modern or new as a literary convention and aesthetics—avenues of expressions highlighting the inclusion of a hodgepodge of other trends and ideologies and themes of non-universal significance and general human appeal. Multiplicity is the dominant element in the poems of these selected poets. The paramount romantic view on poetry is debunked as literature's textuality becomes an open ground for revolution and modification. Emphasis is given only on the technical (form) and intuitionalist (content) with history in the foreground as a springboard for understanding alterations. Bradbury and Farlane best summarize and set the pace for the vista of modernism in literature:

> The modernist movement is a breaking away from established rules of the previous eras and considers man's position and function from a viewpoint which is quite bizarre to the eyes of traditionalists. Modernism as the literature of technology displays introversion, technical display, internal self-skepticism to reflect experiments in form and style as man's roles and intellectuality change tremendously because of metropolitans and technological developments (Bradbury & McFarlane, 1991).

It is from such a perspective that the selected poems from the two periods in Chinese history become reflective of the intellectual unrest and transitions transpiring in the Chinese way of life particularly made remarkable in their literature (Hocks, 1999). In connection with this, the poems were examined in the light of modernism underscoring them as slippery and indeterminate, epistemologically uncertain and shifting (Carter & Friedman, 2013). Literature becomes the avenue for confronting and adumbrating the changes that are occurring in a certain culture (Carter & Friedman, 2013). It is from such a perspective that one can see the artist as a kind of a technician manoeuvring his forms and styles juxtaposed to that of his function as a sort of a social observer—rejecting in his art all forms of literary conventions.

Findings and Discussion

Analysis

In highlighting the modernist undertones of the selected poems in this paper, it is important to note the manifold changes transpiring in the society of China during the said time periods in their history. In connection with this, we provide the springboard that can connect Zen with the project of modernity. Both emphasize the importance and primacy of the individual, essence and freedom, affirmation, concentration and scepticism towards a rational human nature (Signorelli, 2012). With balance, harmony and spiritual progression, the Zen poets ruminate on the dichotomies plaguing the world and the attendant isolation and fragmentation of the subjects in the world.

One cannot separate the modernist vista from the events in history as these two form a symbiotic relationship. It is in this section where a short discussion of the history of China, particularly the late Ch'ing and Republican Eras, is offered as

a sort of foregrounding of the works—a way of further understanding the milieu of the selected poems subject for examination in this paper. In Chinese literature, philosophical works like the Confucian classics were highly revered. Poetry was highly regarded as an activity of the scholar-gentry (Meyer, 1994). All literature produced is grounded on the over-arching traditional light of Confucianism. This traditionalism in their way of life was rendered invisible when China underwent the fourth phase of its imperial stage as the Ch'ing rule worked to sustain their increasing population through an accrued usage of land devoted to food crops. The Chinese imported a variety of plants, the majority of these crops come from the New World, and opium from India is also a part of this importation activity. Imperial decrees forbade the sale or importation of opium, but despite the bans, the drug was brought into the land by Western firms which took over the profitable trade. The importation of opium was the immediate cause of the first war between China and the Occident (Meyer, 1994).

China in the Ch'ing period

The fascination of the West with the East begins as a commercial interest. The Westerners wanted tea and silk—two products that made the Chinese prominent in their community. The Southern Chinese merchants, because of the profit they obtained from the commercial linkage, cooperated with the Western traders. In the southern portion of China, the divide between the China and West was slowly becoming visible. The Westerners promoted the notion of sovereign equality of nationals; the Chinese kept up tributary relations and termed Westerners as barbarians, even in official correspondence (Meyer, 1994). The divide between the two, the Orient and Occident, was seen to be rooted in commerce and business where the Americans promoted individual rights, and the Chinese affirmed liability for individual wrongdoings as their means of countering the domineering commercial actions of the West. The crisis was further fomented by the way the two factions saw the way of commerce: the Westerners wanted fully publicized, low and regularized tariffs; the Chinese imposed secret, ad hoc, quixotic rates (Meyer, 1994). The Westerners as traders become progressively uptight and highly strung.

Fundamentally, the matter of opium was the triggering element for the occurrence of the first conflict. In 1839, Lin Tse-Hsu, a Chinese official scholar of the Qing Dynasty, served as the commissioner who was to deal with the matter. He obligated the Westerners to send their opium stocks mixed with spices, lime and water and had them dumped in the river. As their way of showing revolt, the English planned to reorganize their people/forces in the nearby untenanted island in Hong Kong. Conflict erupted between the two, the Chinese were overpowered by the English. Be that as it may, war was never officially declared. Because of the conflict between the two, a peace treaty was signed on the deck of Cornwallis, an English warship anchored off Nanjing on the Yangtze River. This was the treaty known as the "Treaty of Nanking." The said treaty disclosed the dominance of Western orientalist objectives in the locale of China. As a result, five ports were now opened to the English trade—this includes Guangzhou, Xiamen (Amoy), Fuzhou, Ningbo, and Shanghai—all from the South of Yangtze. The result of such an accord was remarkably China's westernization.

The Occidental forces were overwhelming for the part of the Chinese. The treaties signed were in favour of the Westerners. The Taiping Rebellion, complemented by the Second Treaty Settlement established a program known as the Tongzhi Restoration. There were attempts on the part of some Chinese leaders to negotiate with the Western powers. Zeng Guofan, a statesman and military general, attempted to bring back order through the re-establishment of the examination system, upholding civilian morale, and reconstruction of libraries—bringing normalcy back to the Chinese people. However, it was observed that Western rights and way of life were very much triumphant. As a result of the terms of the second treaty settlement, foreigners were now residing in Beijing, along the China coast from Guangzhou to Manchuria, and in the interior. Commercial and missionary interests were seen to be expanding (Meyer, 1994).

Thus, ensued foreign relations within China. Western ideas continue to shape the traditional makeup of Chinese society. Students were sent to study in the West. As a result of the failures of China after the Sino-Japanese War, the Westerners moved in to demand additional rights. Foreign powers sought to obtain additional cessions of territory and to create spheres of influence in the third treaty settlement. They forced loans on the misfortunate citizens of China and imposed the workings of imperialism on financial heights (Meyer, 1994).

China during the modern period: Literary aesthetics at a crossroads

In the advent of the twentieth century, traditional China is at a crossroads experiencing the travails of transition towards a modern and westernized society. The breakdown of the imperial structure opened a significant site for obtaining power for various competing forces. The repercussions of the clash between tradition and modernity were very much notable in Chinese society: regionalism was augmented, and economic distress compounded. Western and Japanese political demands continued to compromise Chinese sovereignty. In consonance with this, various philosophies competed concerning how to administer society. Different factions and organizations worked for the reunification of China as well as the termination of the created unequal accords. With these multilayered problems, China, during the late Ch'ing and Republican Eras, truly became a period of intellectual tempestuousness marked by a great sense of national crisis—the very period in their history where China had to face societal conundrums outside their own grand conception of tradition.

The foregoing events in their history provided writers with an impetus to experiment with their literature shaded by tradition and Confucian vantage points. Subject matters were no longer viewed as romantic in its entirety as they now dealt with the contemporary particularly disruptions and transitions in their traditional way of life, ethical values, and their familial regard for life in general. The technical and intuitionalist aspects of their literary production, delineating their modernist standing and agenda in literature, are projected as repercussions of the many disruptions and discontinuities in their way of life in general. Having provided a brief discussion of the events that foreground their modernist agenda in literature, we proceed to give the discussion and analysis of the selected poems from the late Ch'ing and Republican Periods in the history of China.

Modernism and its affected intersections

The untitled poem by Shih Shu (c. 1703) with the first line "the human body is a little universe" is a convergence of the vistas of naturalism and expressionism. The former underscores the idea that humanity becomes enmeshed in the complexities of existence brought by the growing forces of doctrines, shifting power structures, and the turning away from teleological means of making sense of the world to a sense that is seen as discontinuous where the self becomes diverse, indeterminate, confounding, and multiple. The latter can be sensed in the foreground of this untitled poem. Radical changes are seen to be at work powerfully expressing its potency slowly affecting the transition from the holistic tradition to the ruptured present in the society of China. It can also be read that the flourishing presence of foreign social doctrine of superiority significantly ushers in the replacement of their belief in the absolute making humanity's existence very much convoluted making it a "little universe" in a sense. Tracing back one's roots in such an era of radical development is seen as a herculean undertaking on the part of the subject. To quote this poem of Shih Shu:

> The human body is a little universe
> its chill tears, so much windblown sleet
> beneath our skins, mountains bulge, brooks flow,
> within our chests lurk lost cities, hidden tribes.
>
> Wisdom quarters itself in our tiny hearts.
> Liver and gall peer out, scrutinize a thousand miles.
> Follow the path back to its source, or else be
> a house vacant save for swallows in the eaves
> (Seaton & Maloney, 1994).

The grand notion of traditionalism is no longer situated in the foreground of the poem as they see themselves in a "world that is a mote of dust." In a world that is hued by the step-up of global warfare and shifting power structures, the notion of the so-called "Tao" is decentralized in the way they live their life. The ultimate creative principle of the universe is in its transitory as the belief in provisional truths becomes the sole focus. The concept of the "Way" is disillusioned as the society is now in disarray where emptiness and nothingness become the very truths that are certain. This is where one can see how the sense of traditionalism is slowly being overpowered by the overwhelming ideologies of empire brought by the fury of the advent of modernism in a society like China in the late Ch'ing period where the presence of modernization was slowly being felt by society in general. The last two stanzas of the poem of Shih Shu affirms the invisibility of the philosophy of the "Tao" in the modern setup of things:

> As flowing waters disappear into the mist
> we lose all track of their passage.
> Every heart is its own Buddha;
> to become a saint, do nothing.

Enlightenment: the world is a mote of dust,
you can look right through heaven's round mirror
slip past all form, all shape and sit
side by side with nothing, save Tao (Seaton & Maloney, 1994).

Underscoring the convergence of naturalism and expressionism in this poem, a great sense of breakdown is seen exaggerating the idea of existence as like that of the universe where the cosmos is displaced and in rupture and discontinuity. This is the complexity of existence in the period of radical changes. Divine power is no longer perceived as the provider and structuring element of society. The pioneering ideologies of imperialism (e.g. Opium Wars, Taiping Rebellion, and the signing of unequal treaties between China and other foreign nations) and other forms of power plays lead society to its epistemological concerns making them pose the question: "How do we know that we know?"—a question that can highlight simultaneously held positions and frames of references showing the idea that society itself already rejects their belief in downright and cognizable means. Everything becomes contrapuntal with the core of traditionally perceived existence becoming blurred.

Experimentation as transitions and reflections

The poem by Yuan Mei (1716-1798) titled "Monk's Place" is a poem that veers away from the conventional structuring of a poem. The impression of such a construction underscores the changing setup of modern society highlighting the impact of the transitions. The poem is a resounding reminder of China's oldest foreign religion, one that is intertwined with beliefs from Daoism and folk religion—Buddhism. For the Chinese, the Buddha is also rendered as a god to be prayed to for assistance and redemption. This is the difference in how the Chinese perceived Buddhism from its original teachings. To quote this poem by Yuan Mei:

Monk's place
I lean the painted rail.
Eyes play gazing on the plain.
A little rain beyond a thousand miles.
An evening's sun reds half the village.
Breeze cool, a sense of flowers gathering.
The hall is small the Buddha's incense mild.
There, where, last night we played at chess . . .
On mossy step a fallen man lies still (Seaton & Maloney, 1994).

The image of the mildness of the Buddha's incense complemented by a fallen man lying affirms the notion of the actualization of the invisibility of native religion brought by tremendous and profound changes in their society. The escalation of warfare in the global heights and the dominance of the ideologies of empire is reflective in the structure of the poem—in disarray and disorderliness. This reflects the upshots of a society turned modern affecting the way they understand, convey their thoughts, utter their speeches, execute every action and effort, deal with their livelihoods, and obtain utmost mindfulness and concentration. Such becomes the challenge for the individual caught between the overarching themes of traditionalism and modernism. These challenges move in consonance with the idea

of Buddhism's Noble Eightfold Path—the means of achieving spiritual enlightenment. The "fallen man" can be read as the turning away from the chronological means of thinking replacing the belief in the absolute where every mind constructs its own perceived shattered realities.

Society's tremendous modern modification is further supported by the poem "Late Gazing (Looking for an Omen as the Sun Goes)" also by Yuan Mei. The poem possesses a sombre tone providing its lamentations on concepts such as changes, sunsets, filial tombs, golden tiles, and grand pagodas. Nostalgia is very much dominant in the poem as the speaker seems to long for the idealized past of traditional Chinese society grounded on the ideal socio-political order which forms a central earmark of Confucianism. It was the system of philosophical and ethical teachings that had the most abiding effects on Chinese society.

The strong belief in idealism becomes a "one wind-flickering flame"—a noteworthy image for highlighting how society is rendered as transitory and dynamic with the advent of modernism ushered in and affected by the triumph of mass democracy and the rise of mass communication, and the very emergence of a "new consciousness" propelled by the information technologies and their attendant ideologies. To quote Yuan Mei:

I
Window's dark, roll back the curtain's waves:
what's to be done about sunsets?
Climb up and stand, in some high place,
lusting, for a little more last light.

II
From a thousand houses' cook fires' fumes,
the Changes weave a single roll of silk.
Whose house, the fire still unlit, so late?
Old crow knows whose, and why.

III
Golden tiles crowd, row on row:
men call this place the Filial Tombs.
Across that vastness, let eyes wander:
grand pagoda: one wind-flickering flame
(Seaton & Maloney, 1994).

The three sections of this poem perfectly capture the three basic problems of making sense of modern life namely the melancholic way of dealing with life where the sunset is rendered as the final chapter of life in the advent of modernism, the complexities of experiencing transitions as effected by the "Changes" and the ultimate yearning for nativism and traditionalism moving in concordance with the goal of looking for the romanticized essential self that was once deemed grand and universal. This becomes the problem that is situated at the forefront of their consciousness leading to the notion of the so-called "problem of consciousness" (Hau, 2000). This is in concordance with their regard for the past as the authentic moulder of their identity as compared to the present that continually renders them

as diverse and contrapuntal. It becomes a kind of "baggage" that they must carry with them. In connection with this, the poem "By Accident" by Yuan Mei, also presents unconventionally, succinctly and romantically captures this predicament of being at the crossroads resulting in fragmentation as reflected in these lines:

> Here, I've seen every temple,
> asking naught, as the Buddha knows.
>
> But the moon came
> as if to rendezvous,
> and the clouds went off
> without goodbyes.
> In the inns a decent bite to eat
> was hard to come by,
> But in my carriage
> poems came easy.
> Going back the baggage will be heavier:
> Two or three seedlings of pine (Seaton & Maloney, 1994).

Summarily, the experimentation reflected in the foregoing poems utterly captures the sense of disarray that the people are experiencing a society working under the light of modernism. The breaking of the structure of the poems, the veering away from the "mimetic" tradition, and the peculiar way of presenting thoughts and ideas coupled with the poem's universal stance of romanticism and expressionism significantly make these poems modernist in perspective. This can be perceived as Yuan Mei's reflections conveying his own conundrum of bestriding competing cultural traditions and ideologies and how he made sense of the various scripts of the contradictory self that shift in accordance with the present domineering situation foregrounded by the clash between tradition and modernity, westernization and nativism. Such are forces that can result in the invisibility and erasure of the golden days of natural and spiritual affinity in traditional Chinese society.

Abandoning traditional rhyme schemes and employing the free verse style in poetry, these so-called "collage of styles" and the mixing of images from their ideal past and present are the ruminations of the inner workings of the consciousness in a society that is becoming modern. Experimentation and the breaking of conventions in literature can be read as a reflection of how a society in transition is in a constant state of disarray affecting the way they remember, romanticize, and be nostalgic for the past, live with their present, and build their future. These selected poems from Yuan Mei are short romantic poems where one can see the personas in the poem being caught between what is traditional and modern. Such is the very affirmation modernist earmark of capturing the notion of "little words, big ideas", the disappearance of the authentic character, supporting the stance of the self as multiple. Yuan Mei's poem titled "Nearing Hao-pa (I saw in the mist a little village of a few tilled roofs and joyfully admired it)" echoes such modernist predicaments showing how the past presents their essential selves moving in harmony with their spiritual and orienting primitivism and nativism. The nature images in the poem support this theme of nostalgia:

> There's a stream, and there's bamboo,
> there's mulberry and hemp.
> Mist-hid, clouded hamlet, a mild, tranquil place.
> Just a few tilled acres.
> Just a few tiled roofs.
> How many lives would I have to live, to get that simple (Seaton & Maloney, 1994).

This is romanticism at its finest and simplest as invoked by the problems concerning consciousness and identity in the modernist aesthetics of things. Infusing places, memories and ideas with significant meanings, the emotionalism and sensibility for the strong familial and religious past is powerfully conveyed in their poems, economized yet possessing the wild continents and sentiments of going back to their idyllic past.

Conflicting aesthetic views: Self/selves captured in poetry

A foremost earmark of modernist aesthetics in literature is fragmentation—the very negation of the Hegelian concepts of integrity, completeness, and wholeness. In the poem of Yuan Mei titled "Mornings Arise", modernity is already seen to be triumphant in the background, and close to its goal of annihilating the past. The speaker in this poem is at the centre of the disorienting effects of individualism bringing him feelings of estrangement and loss. Such is reflective of the destabilization and fragmentation of their grand and structuring realities during the latter periods in their history where conventions were collapsing resulting in chaos and destruction. The speaker in the poem becomes a radically new kind of being. He is the persona from the past who is adamant in rooting himself in ideas and memories of the past over the material present. In this regard, the idea of fragmentation resulting in the various scripts of their self/selves becomes a literary convention in this period of their history. The worldview of absurdism is also seen in the foreground of this poem. In the complexities of life, the essential self has been disregarded and erased. The Chinese essential self, following the conservative and traditional Chinese profile, is the familial romantic who possesses a strong connection with their families, believes in the ideal socio-political order, sustains ethical values ushered in by the views of Confucianism and Taoism, and grounds himself on the realities brought by the "worthy ones." The poem breaks and questions all these conventions as supplemented by its absurdist foregrounding:

> Mornings arise to find ten thousand kinds of pleasures.
> Evenings sleep: the single mantra (now, the heart) is Nothingness
> No knowing in this world which, of these ten thousand things, is me (Seaton & Maloney, 1994).

The senseless and meaningless violence of the war and its concurrent Westernization have continuously made the Chinese spirit fidgety, isolated, and directionless. A result is their longing for the light of the perfect religious and spiritual past. Figures of authority and conventional truths are no longer present in the foreground of society. Man's own morality is dominant as compared to the

morality of the past. However, it always results in great feelings of alienation and disaffection. As a result, outlooks toward life become nihilistic as man becomes isolated and disenfranchised in the modern community. Ching An's (1841-1921) poem titled "Moored at Maple Bridge" discloses this characteristic of living a modern life caused by societal ills and contradicting idyllic depictions of life as imposed by the modern and the traditional:

> Frost white across the river waters reaching toward the sky.
> All I'd hoped for's lost in Autumn's darkening.
> I cannot sleep, a man adrift, a thousand miles alone,
> among the reed flowers; but the moonlight fills the boat
> (Seaton & Maloney, 1994).

Chaos is the only theme resurfacing in the modernist poems within this period of Chinese history. Truly remarkable is the inner-outer correspondence of romanticism with other ideologies such as expressionism, imagism, realism, and naturalism. The poem by Ching An (1841-1921) titled "At Hu-k'ou, Mourning for Kao Po-tzu", in support of the foregoing statements, is an invocation of idealization where Kao Po-tzu is emblematic of the modernist aesthetic earmark of characterization. In the chaotic setup of society, the foremost challenge is to reconstruct their own meanings by assembling their own shattered pieces of history and their selves. They have experienced various ways of being in such a condition. They are defined by the others. Teleological thinking is no longer upheld in the social makeup of things. The sense of the discontinuous and nostalgic are the only prevalent notions conveyed in their literature of such a period. The nostalgia and implied hungriness provide the grounds for shifting from the linear to the "moment time" resulting in the unification of the fragmented realities in their poetry. In connection with this, these inner-outer correspondences of the romantic notions brought by the present situation is further highlighted in the poem:

> Though he was young, Kao
> was the crown of Su-chou and Hu-k'ou.
> It was only to see if he was still here
> that I came today to this place . . .
> found a chaos of mountains
> no word
> this evening sun
> this loneliness (Seaton & Maloney, 1994).

In accordance with the multifarious nature of truth based on the modernist vista, the "self" or "selves" is best captured in poetry because of the modernist element of "narrative authority." Authority becomes a matter of perspective. It is through this authority that one can see and experience the diversities of reality as reflected in literature. The poem by Ching An titled "Laughing at Myself" underscores the great task of writing affected by the "dust of the world"—a world typified by chaos and destruction. This is the modernist agenda of breaking all fixities in the unconventional world of innovations resulting in the multiplicities and variegation of realities and frames of reference. Such forms the groundwork for

the Chinese traditional episteme's formidable conundrum of situating themselves between the past and present. This is where one can note the simultaneity of changing values and truths as reflected in writing (Said, 1993)—surpassing temporal limits of the secular orientations of the familial and cultural (Carter & Friedman, 2013). The concept of destabilization in the said poem blends with the satirical disclosure of the idea of the profoundness of the motion of modern daily life. It also projects the idea of how writing can effectively lead people astray—a means of showing how the belief in the absolute past is already replaced with knowledge that is contradictory and multiple. It breaks the conventional image of their literature and its accompanying conventional disposition—how they are rich and extensive in nature and how sophisticated scholarship complemented their popular culture with Confucius' teachings as its guiding light (Meyes, 1994). To quote this poem of Ching An:

> Cold cliff
> withered tree
> this knobby pated monk . . .
> thinks there's nothing better than a poem.
> Laughs at himself for striving so
> to write in the dust of the world,
> and scolds old Ts'ang K'o
> for inventing writing,
> and leading so many astray (Seaton & Maloney, 1994).

Literature in the pace of change

The "pace of change" experienced by the people was notably dizzying and complicated. Wars and Westernization are the very forces that have completely devalued traditional Chinese society and its various conservative characteristics. As reflected in their literature, writers have responded to this new world in a variety of ways. Their poems become the very reflection of their own neurosis—which consists of broken stanzas and various images that reflect the cultural debris and detritus through which the Westernized society wades (Zhang, 2016). The idea of fragmentation is rendered as a literary form on its own, reinforcing the notion of how realities become illusory and disunited, thereby providing a rejection of the concepts of wholeness and totality. The subject matter, in employing the kind of trend in their poetry, centres on the predicament of being caught between two paramount and governing forces namely traditionalism and modernism as supported by the foregoing chronicle of their history during the late Ch'ing and Republican Periods. The escalation of warfare on the global heights, the proliferating doctrines pertaining to racial superiority, the emergence of the problem concerning conventional identity and consciousness, shifting power structures, and the veering away from the teleological ways of thinking replacing the belief in the absolute leading to the occurrence of simultaneously held positions are the very forces that can be found at the foreground of the selected poems discussed in this paper.

The inner-outer correlation of Romanticism and its concomitant heroic individualism as reflected in the poems boost their predicament of yearning for the idyllic past that is grounded on the abiding beliefs of Confucianism and Buddhism.

The radical changes in society brought by the war and Westernization are a resounding theme in the poems discussed. The untitled poem by Po Ching (Su Man-Shu, 1884-1918) best summarizes the modernist foregrounding of the poem examined in this paper. To quote Po Ching's poem:

> The sea, the sky
> where dragons were, I go
> to war.
>
> Blood in a bowl is water, black, mysterious,
> and earth, yellow.
>
> Hair wild, song long and
> steady, as you gaze out
> on the ocean's vastness.
>
> Yi Shui, The River of Changes, sighing
> soughing, when the ancient Ch'ing K'o
> set out toward a hero's death:
>
> Now, then, one sky, one
> moon, all white,
> an emptiness as pure
> as frost (Seaton & Maloney, 1994).

The poem captures the realism and naturalism of their situation. War, as made manifest in the workings of Westernization, is considered a force to be reckoned with, its impacts tremendously upsetting the social order. Man is situated as the very animal who has to fight for his survival. The "River of Changes" is in a continuous state of flux and flow rendering the people to face the predicament of competing cultural traditions. The war successfully made invisible the overarching presence of tradition in Chinese society—no sort of behavioural map to guide them (Buddhism, Confucianism, Ideal-Political Ordering of Society). In an existence where the absurd is certain, a place destitute of avenues to engage in meaning-making, one thing is certain which makes them subjects devoid of their "essential foregroundings"—emptiness as pure as frost—the phrase that best captures their absurd and existential conflicted existence, vantage points, and horizons where they are to continuously engage themselves in the herculean tasks of romanticizing their past, living with their present real situation, and build their future. This brings the image of the purity of the existence of a "Triple World" where life becomes complicated as mentioned by Hsu Yun (1840-1958) in his poem "Feelings on Remembering the Day I First Produced the Mind." This is the pureness of the modernist condition and conundrum creating its own aesthetics and reflections (Parker, 1920):

> Drawn some sixty years ago by karma
> I turned life upside down
> And climbed straight on to lofty summits.

Between my eyes a hanging sword,
The Triple World is pure.
Empty-handed, I hold a hoe, clearing a galaxy.

As the `Ocean of Knowing-mind' dries up,
Pearls shine forth by themselves;
Space smashed to dust, a moon hangs independent.
I threw my net through Heaven,
Caught the dragon and the phoenix;
Alone I walk through the cosmos,
Connecting the past and its people (Seaton & Maloney, 1994)

Conclusion

In the regimes created by the poems, we recognized a literariness racked by internal and external contradictions in reference to their respective histories. Hence, our analysis of the aesthetic transitions and shifts was correlated with a modest chronicling of the past to show how its very bearings on the literary schemata of the works resulted in the unique formation of their axioms and dictums complemented by the poetic introspection of the writers and their awareness of their histories. This summons the aesthetic discourse on the notion of representative poetics in literature. This is our further engagement with what Peter Lamarque said concerning the connection between aesthetics and literature—one that is not just grounded on language but also on the complexity of discernment (Lamarque, 2014). The humble chronicling of the past in the poems is an endeavour to understand, in the Chinese locale of the poems, that a poem should be conventionally produced, introspectively aware of the dualities shaping the world. We support what Uriah Kriegel said that the poetic in poetry can be shaped by various circumstances and conditions leading to the conclusion that poetry can be an offshoot of various affective reactions (Kriegel, 2023). In consonance with what Dewitt H. Parker said in “The Principles of Aesthetics”, poetry can create its own aesthetic values that can be instrumental in expressing the different layers that comprise the intricacy of life (Parker, 1920).

Situating the poems within the historical contexts that shaped their contents projected the notion that literature can also move in consonance with the different and peculiar paces and phases of change. This is also made possible because of the heightened awareness of the poets in chronicling the issues challenging their experiences at the crossroads. Based on our analysis, we recognized different themes and truths that support the modernist view of life as reflected in Zen poetry. An offshoot of the poets’ meditations and keen awareness of the world can be seen in their reflections on the repercussions brought by the wars and Westernization devaluing traditional Chinese society and its various conservative characteristics. Complemented by the intricacies of their histories, the poems are efficient and potent in disclosing modernist issues and themes such as individualism (self/selves captured in poetry), experimentation (breaking the conventional practices in literature), sense of loss and exile (nostalgia and the yearning to go back to their authentic selves), narrative authority as a reflection of the multiplicities of truth and diversification of realities, fragmentation and destruction effected by the arrival of

the Western powers in their society, and the occurrence of the states of absurdism and existentialism brought by the rush of daily life.

The selected poems of the poets Shih Hsu (c.1703), Yuan Mei (1717-1798), Ching An (1841-1921), Po Ching (1884-1918), and Hsu Yun (1840-1958) are texts that can incite contingencies concerning the Chinese modernist aesthetics and ruminations in perspective highlighting the means how they break with the past, reject literary traditions, break with Romantic pieties and cliches, stylistic experimentation and syntax juxtaposed to the naturalistic tendencies of foreign and imperialistic pressures and historical upheavals.

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