

## A MYTHOPOETIC DISCOURSE ON MODERN CHINESE (TAIWANESE) POEMS

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The aim of this article is to evaluate the works of three contemporary Taiwanese poets with the mythopoetic topic on the background of the ancient Chinese and modern European mythological theories.

Chinese poetics since Confucius has paid great attention to honesty and moral feelings in poems. Under the strong influence of the Confucian concept that people should be in awe of ghosts and gods and keep a distance from them, Chinese poets rarely take the supernatural phenomena as their subject matter. This is why, in the long history, we do not have epics like Homer's *Odysseys* and *Iliad*, Dante's *Divine Comedy*, or Milton's *Paradise Lost*. We hardly have poems praising the ancient legendary heroes, or the ones describing the Genesis and the hell on earth. All the above-mentioned poems and subjects are about the supernatural. They do not agree with the Chinese aesthetic requirement, which emphasized human relations. What the Chinese poets cared about is to help express the common sense or complaints, to harmonize the relations between liege lords and common civilians, and to try to suppress any ideas that were/are not expected by the rulers. Nevertheless, that does not mean that Chinese classic poems and modern poems never touch the supernatural phenomena. What I mean by "the supernatural phenomena" only refers to the mythic elements in the poems; descriptions in poetic form about mysterious phenomena or ghosts are not included. This paper attempts to raise some questions concerning Chinese poetic criticism, and will concentrate on the myth in modern Chinese poetry, with only a slight touch on Chinese poems.

The earliest Chinese mythic poem is Qu Yuan's 屈原 (ca. 340-278 BC) *Jiu ge Nine Songs* 九歌<sup>1</sup>. In her *Qu Yuan yu Jiu ge* 屈原與九歌 *Qu Yuan and Nine songs*, a monograph on Qu Yuan's *Nine Songs*, Su Xuelin 蘇雪林 believes that

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<sup>1</sup> Published by Guangdong Press, Taipei, 1973. Besides Su, another monograph on *Nine Songs* in Taiwan is Zhang Shouping's 帳壽平 *Studies of Nine Songs*, Taipei, Guangwen Press, 1970.

*Nine songs* is a wholesome Divine comedy written to worship the gods in the ninefold heaven. According to Su, the nine gods are the following:

The Chinese Apollo is known as Dongjun 東君;  
the Luna is Yunzhongjun 雲中君;  
the god Mercury is Hebo 河伯;  
the god Mars is Guoshang 國殤;  
the god Jupiter is Donghuang Taiyi 東皇泰一;  
the god Hesper is madame Xiang 湘夫人;  
the god Saturn is Xiangjun 湘君;  
the god of the eight heaven is Grand Siming 大司命;  
the god of the ninth heaven is Minor Siming 小司命.

Besides, Su considers the Shanguai 山鬼 Mountain Ghost in *Nine Songs* to be Dionysus in Greek Mythology. Dionysus was once the King of Terrors – that is the Dadi zhi shen 大地之神 Earth God. Similarly, Shanguai the Mountain Ghost stands for the Earth God. And Su thinks that the eleventh Canto, Lihun 禮魂 “Soul of Ceremony”, is the general song to see the gods off. Therefore, Su concludes that *Nine Songs*, with eleven cantos, can be not other than an integrated myth. However, objections have now been raised by some scholars against professor Su’s research methods.<sup>2</sup> The reason that I quote Su’s words here is to emphasize that Qu Yuan’s *Nine Songs* was written to show worship toward ghosts and gods – in other words, to placate the various external natural powers. The mythic elements present themselves not only in *Nine Songs*, but also in *Tian Wen* 天問 *Questioning the Heaven* and *Li Sao* 離騷 *Encountering Sorrow*. And these poems have already become rich sources for research into ancient Chinese mythology.

Both Qinshi huangdi 秦始皇帝 (r. 221-209 BC) and Han Wudi 漢武帝 (r. 140-86 BC), the first emperors of Qin and Han Dynasties respectively, had faith in the theories of Huangdi 皇帝 (traditionally r. 2697-2597) and Laozi 老子 (4th cent. BC). Accordingly, during these two dynasties, there should have been some great poems of myth. Yet as we know, besides the fact that the Qin Dynasty did not last long enough, the dominating literary genre during the Han Dynasty was *fu* 賦. *Fu* is an old Chinese literary form, similar to ode, which was used in narrative writing. Whether it was *Shaglin* 上林 (*Upper Woods*) or *Zixu* 子虛 (*Fictions*), *Liang Jing* 兩京 (*Double Capitals*) or *Liang Du* 兩都 (*Two Cities*), *fu* concentrated on depicting the queerness of mountains and woods, the grandness of palaces, and the magnificence of various ceremonies – all these were within the limits of the real world. Whereas writings like the *Mu-*

<sup>2</sup> I once read a critical article in a certain journal, in which the author pointed out that Ms. Su’s method of analysing *Nine Songs* was not quite right. Nevertheless, Yang Ximei 楊希枚, in his *Tianwen yanjiu pingjie* 天問研究評介 “A Review of Researches on *Tianwen*” (in the second volume of *Qingzhu Zhu Jiahua xiansheng qishi sui lunwenji* 慶祝住家驂先生七十歲論文集 *Papers on Celebrating the Seventy’s Birthday of Mr. Zhu Jiahua*, published in the Mainland China, 1962), considered Su’s *Qu Yuan and Nine Songs* a work of comparative mythology and the history of culture. I agree with the latter.

tianzi zhuan 穆天子傳 *Biography of Mutianzi* and Hanwu gushi 漢武故事 *Tales of Hanwu*, which were not poems, passed down the mythic tales of the Han Dynasty, just in the way *Shan Hai Jing* 山海經 *Tales of Mountains and Seas* passed down the myths of the period from Zhou Dynasty to the end of Zhan Guo 戰國 Warring States (475-221 BC). These so-called *Zashu* 雜書 *Miscellaneous Writings* made it possible for us to have a restricted view of ancient Chinese mythology.<sup>3</sup>

During the Wei (386-550) and Jin Dynasties (265-420), Buddhism and Taoism were quite prevalent because of the uneasy political and social circumstances. And the imagination of Chinese literati of that time was suddenly simulated in some way. This was exemplified in the novels full of tales of ghosts, and in the poems about the travelling gods across mountains and rivers. To take He Zhao 何劭 (236-n.d.) and Guo Pu 郭璞 (276-324) – poets of the Jin Dynasty – for example, though their poems cannot be referred to as typical mythic ones, yet the travelling gods depicted in their poems were closely related to the poet's own idea of travelling like gods beyond the restrictions of time and space. The mythic colours in their poems are actually very rich.

Mark Schorer's definition of myth is that "a myth is a large controlling image... which gives philosophic meaning to the facts of ordinary life".<sup>4</sup> T.S. Eliot also considers myth to be one of the "indispensable substructures" of poetry. In He Zhao's *You xian shi* 遊仙詩 *Poem of a Travelling God*, it is obvious that there is "a large controlling image" – Wang Ziqiao 王子喬 travels above the clouds, riding a crane. With this image, the motif of He's poem is vividly and precisely conveyed. And this image can also be referred to as the "indispensable substructure" of *Travelling Immortal*.

Though I am not sure, yet I think it is quite possible, that Chinese poets after the Wei and Jin Dynasties continued to describe the relationship between human beings and the natural universe – the alternating of the four seasons, the birth-death-rebirth pattern, etc. And I believe that if we can appreciate and criticize classic Chinese poems against myth in its broader sense, we will surely gain a lot more perspectives and meanings from these poems.

In the field of modern Chinese literature, there are more and more literary writings probing or describing the secrets of the universe and human life. For example, there are stories and poems in which the four seasons of the natural world are used to symbolize the different stages of a human being. In the poems by Ye Shan 葉珊 (1940– ) and Wang Runhua 王潤華 (Wong Yoon Hwa)

<sup>3</sup> As for the monographs on Chinese myths, the following can be found in Taiwan: Shen Yanbing 沈雁冰 *Zhongguo shenhua yanjiu* 中國神話研究 *Research on Chinese myths*, Xinlu press, 1959; Du Erwei 杜而未 *Shanghai jing shenhua xitong* 山海經神話系統 *The Mythic Systems in Shanghai Jing*, Huaming Press, 1960; *Research on Chinese Ancient Myths*, Wang Xiaolian, 王孝廉 trans. Horizon Press, 1974; Lin Huixiang 林惠祥, *Shenhua lun* 神話論 *On Myth*, Commercial Press, 1968. In Hong Kong, Yuan Ke 袁珂, *Zhongguo gudai shenhua yanjiu* 中國古代神話研究 *Research on Chinese Ancient Myth*, Commercial Press, 1st ed., 1951.

<sup>4</sup> Richard Chase quoted Schorer in his "Notes on the Study of Myth". See *Myth and Literature*, ed., John B. Vickery (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1969), pp. 67-68.

(1941–) there are themes of life-death-revival and the journey-initiation quest. Other writers like Da Huang 大荒 (1930–2003), Yu Guangzhong 余光中 (1928–) and Luo Fu 洛夫 (1928–), and others, occasionally make use of myth as their subject matter. In their writings, they may just pay tribute to some mythic events, or enhance their imagination with some fragments of a certain piece of myth.

For the convenience of further discussions, Malinowski's way of dividing myth into three categories will be introduced here. These categories were brought forth after Malinowski finished investigating the culture of the Trobriand Islanders. Malinowski divided the myth of the Trobriand Islanders into the following three categories: 1) Legends, which are about the things that happened before, things that these islanders considered to be historically true; 2) Folk tales or tales about gods, which are quite fictitious, and mainly for sake of entertainment; 3) Religious mythology, which reflects the basic elements concerning the religious belief, moral structure and social structure in that island.<sup>5</sup> (These three categories also represent three different attitudes toward myth). Francis Fergusson in his *Mythology and Literature* also quoted Malinowski's words in his discussion of Valéry's *Fragments du Narcisse*, Wagner's opera *Tristan und Isolde*, and Dante's "Purgatory" in his *Divine Comedy*. People of the neoclassical period look at mythology as entertainment; Romanticists consider mythology to be a religion; and Fergusson thinks that it is natural that modern people regard mythology as a sort of entertainment. Though Valéry was a masterhand of Romanticism, he was different from other Romanticists. His *Fragments du Narcisse* expresses the neoclassicist's attitude toward mythology. The first line of this poem well exposes its overall theme:

How you shine at last, pure end of my journey!  
(*Que tu brilles enfin, terme pur de ma course!*)<sup>6</sup>

Thus speaks Narcissus to his own reflection in the mirror-like surface of the pool. He thinks that his handsome and beautiful physical shape is the final destination of his life. Narcissus's monologue while facing his own reflection can also be viewed as the poet's murmuring to his own soul while he was composing the poem. I personally think that Fergusson distorted the general idea of this 300-line poem simply through the discussion of its first line. He is reasonable, nonetheless, to conclude that Valéry did not use the myth for the sake of obtaining truth, preaching, or transmitting knowledge. (If a poet really has something to pursue, that should be pure truth, or pure poetry.) As a matter of fact, some poets, especially some romanticists, did take myth as a tool for preaching or transmitting knowledge. Consequently, they often mercilessly distorted the original myth. That is really the degradation of myth to those myth researchers. To Fergusson, Wagner was a representative of those romanticists. In his opera

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<sup>5</sup> Fergusson in his "Myth" and the Literary Scrupule" made use of Malinowski's categories. See *Myth and Literature*, p. 140.

<sup>6</sup> The Chinese version of Valéry's poem can be found in *Xingzuo shikan* 星座詩刊 *Constellation Poetry Quarterly* (Spring, 1970), pp. 25-32.

*Tristan und Isolde*, Wagner uses Tristan myth solely for the purpose of changing the audience's attitudes and beliefs.

Here I cannot agree with Fergusson on one point – Fergusson thinks that only those romanticists make use of myth as a tool in pursuing truth, yet I consider that a general phenomenon, especially after the time of Dante. In Dante's time, or a time earlier than his, people innocently believed that they had a very close relationship to gods; they literally believed in the stories told in myth. After that, people tended to doubt what has been told in myth, or they retouched the myth or even distorted it according to their own needs. Percy Bysshe Shelley, a romantic poet of the early 19th century, in his lyric poetic drama *Prometheus Unbound* set free Prometheus, god of fire, who was chained to a rock and was pecked by an eagle. Through retouching the myth of Prometheus, Shelley expresses his ideal of achieving humanitarianism in a democratic society. Actually, this had been done long before Shelley. Aeschylus wrote *Prometheus Bound* in 500 BC and later he finished *Prometheus Unbound* and another play. And they formed a trilogy. Unfortunately, only the first and some fragments of the second of this trilogy have survived. Yet we can still see that Aeschylus had already paved the way for Zeus to become reconciled with Prometheus. In the first book of this trilogy, the god of fire said to Io who was transfigured into a heifer: you still have to wander the land until you reach the River Nile, then Zeus will turn you back into a human being, and your descendant will be my liberator. In the fragments of the second in Aeschylus's trilogy, *Prometheus Unbound*, Hercules, the son of Zeus and Io, showed himself. He killed the eagle that kept pecking Prometheus, and set the god of fire free, while Zeus did not interfere what Hercules did at all. Therefore, we can see that the reconciliation between Zeus and Prometheus represents Aeschylus' harmonious and orderly world out-look as expressed in his plays. To conclude what I have said, my point is that it is quite natural that modern poets make use of myth as a vehicle to transmit knowledge, truth, and faith, since it has a long tradition from Aeschylus. So, Fergusson cannot be correct to say that only those romanticists make use of myth as a tool in pursuing truth or preaching. Nonetheless he cannot be more correct by saying that Dante's *Divine Comedy* well exemplifies all the three attitudes toward myth. Great writers can always make use of myth not only to entertain the reader, but also to make myth an indispensable element in their works, and to help exemplify the authors' motif.

Now let us return to the topic on how modern Chinese poets make use of myth in their poems. When modern poems first began to prevail in Taiwan, average poets would often have Zeus, Prometheus, Diana, Venus, and Cupid etc. appear in their poems. Yet unfortunately, besides the fact that these gods made their poems appear to be elegant to a degree, they had no true relationship to the themes of the poems – they were not indispensable. And it is quite understandable that we had very few great poets who could make good use of myth in their compositions at that time. Hopefully, things have changed greatly recently. They are many examples of modern poets expressing the theme of life-death-

revival and the journey-invitation quest. Some poets even rewrite myth or create a new myth.

Here I would like to analyse Ye Shan's *Shi'er xinxiang lianxiqu* 十二星象練習曲 *Etudes in Twelve Horary Branches*<sup>7</sup> first, which attracted the reader immediately after it was published. And it won Ye Shan the first award issued by *Chuangshiji* 創世紀 *Genesis* after this magazine resumed its publication. Yet it is a pity that there is no academic review on this poem. In my mind, it is better to discuss Ye's *Etudes* from the mythic perspective. The twelve horary branches mentioned in this poem are the symbols used by the Chinese to reckon time. Zi 子 (the first of the twelve horary branches) stands for the period of time from 23:00 to 00:00, and chou 丑 (the second), the period of time from 01:00 am to 02:00 am, and so on, till hai 亥 (the twelfth) from 21:00 to 22:00. Ye's *Etudes* relates things which happen during the period of 12 hours from 23:00 to the next day's 23:00. Let us look at the first two parts, and see what happens in the poem:

Zi (The Third Watch)

Sleepily and exhaustedly we are waiting  
For the coming of the midnight. The midnight is shapeless  
Except that there are three streets.  
At that time, sound of bells fly in,  
As if from our childhood.

Let's turn to worship the antelope that hasn't been seen for long!  
With legs arched, I march northward,  
Like a night sentinel in the desolate suburbs.  
Louisa – please look at Houtu<sup>8</sup>  
Adore it, just as I adore your healthy shoulders.

Chou (The Fourth Watch)

NNE3/4E Louisa!

It's the fourth watch now.

Occupies the peninsula where we newly parted the tweeting insects.

In the posture of a gold ox

We explore the spacious valley. In another direction are the bamboos.

Hunger is burning the fighting soldiers of both sides.

It's the fourth watch now.

And still some car lights in such quietness

Intermittently sweep over the hanging buttocks.

The first stanza explicitly discloses the conditions of the speaker of the poem, as well as the time and place. The speaker came back home after a whole day's hard work. He was already very exhausted before midnight, but he, together with Louisa, was still waiting for the coming of the midnight. They

<sup>7</sup> See *Chuanshuo* 傳說 *Legends*, Taipei, Zhiwen Press, pp. 83-92.

<sup>8</sup> The earth, or the god of the earth.

wanted to make love in bed after all disturbances were put aside. In the second stanza we see that the speaker “turn to worship the antelope that has not been seen for long!” In the following two lines, the speaker describes his manner of behaviour. The poet makes the action of the speaker vivid with a military image – “night sentinel”, as if we were watching a manly soldier marching northward and attacking his enemies. The speaker told the person on the bedside: Louisa – please look at earth/ Adore it, just as I adore your healthy shoulders.” To sum up, in this first part, there is sound, action, dialogue, live image, and logical developing structure. In a word, “The Third Watch” is vivid and full of life, and yet it is also quit plain.

Through the above we can more or less see what is described in Ye’s *Etudes in Twelve Horary Branches* – it is probably about making love. But the small indoor “cosmos” is closely related to the enormous outdoor universe. Indoors, there is a “war” on the bed; outdoors, there is a war in its true sense. And this makes us think of Yu Guanzhong’s *Schuangren chuang 雙人床 Double Bed*, in which Yu also intermingles the “war on bed” with the true war outside. Yu is clear and simple in the structure and motif in *Double Bed*. In Ye’s *Etudes*, knowledge of different fields is brought into use – knowledge concerning navigation and astrology, etc. Maybe, that is the reason why few reviewers ever attempt to analyse this poem.

When analysing *Etudes*, I find the images in the poem are of great importance. In “The Third Watch”, the poet compares “me”, the soldier, and Louise to an “antelope”. In classical Chinese poems, “antelope” will naturally remind us of a fascinating allusion – an antelope wisely hides itself from the hunters by hanging its horn on the branches of a tree; while in western literary tradition, the antelope is an animal with a strong libido. In “The Fourth Watch” the speaker referred to himself as “gold ox”, which is also an image representing insatiable sexual desire. Obviously, it is the poet’s purpose to have “antelope” and “gold ox” echo with each other. Moreover, in these two parts I quote here, other images are the following: “Houtu” standing for penis; “peninsula” and “valley” for pudenda; and “the bamboos” for female pubes. Therefore, it is safe to conclude that *Etudes in the Twelve Horary Branches* is about the scene of sexual intercourse. Nevertheless, the poet means more than that. Otherwise it will be meaningless to entitle each part of the long poem with a term from the twelve horary branches in time order. This has something to do with my view of looking at the modern poem from the mythic perspective. My understanding of this poem is that it deals with a mythic archetype – life-death and revival.

Besides the images of sex, this long poem is full of images of war. There are images like “sentinel” and “I march northward” in the first part; “occupy”, “Hunger is burning the fighting soldiers of both sides”, and “sweep over” in the second part. In the third part, we will read

Listen, northeast, east to the north  
The Spring blowing out, the razing battle, the machine gun  
And the helicopter, cutting through the morning haze...

The fourth part mentions "I slaughter, vomit, cry, and sleep." The ninth part describes

Another arrow coming flying

45° to the south

Falling down the riding shooter, hugging the cold moon

In Part Ten again we read "ambuscade a square, chatting city of the first watch/drizzles falling on our gun."

In the metaphysical poems of the 17th century, sexual intercourse was described as death. War of course also consumes human life, hence the close relation between the war on the bed and war on the battlefield. And at the same time, there is life implicit in *Etudes*. Since there is war, there is peace; since there is death, there is life. And without making love, there will not be any descendants. In the last part of the poem, the poet says:

Louisa, with all the America's tenderness

You accepted me, an ejaculating fish wounded in blood

A gleaming fish are you, too

Rotten in the city's smog. Louisa

May your revive in the garden of olives, and for me

Only for me, turn to face upward. It's the second watch now

The heavily frosted garden of olives

"Fish" in classic Chinese poems may remind the reader of sex. In the stanza quoted here, the swimming sperms are the symbols of revival. But in the corrupted city, the process of revival cannot be fulfilled. Just like in Eliot's *Waste Land*, the "fish king's" revival can only be completed on the suburban river bank after a thunderstorm. In Ye's poem, "me" could revive only after he sowed the seeds in the chest of the earth, and was soaked in the sun and rain. Here we can find several images connecting to the earth – "all the America's tenderness", "garden of olives", and "heavily frosted garden of olives," etc. It is especially so when we read

Louisa

May you revive in the garden of olives, and for me

Only for me, turn face upward.

Isn't it very clear that the poem has conveyed the sense that the revival must be carried out on the basis of a peaceful land? The last stanza of this long poem is:

Many we have forgotten

The ship carried back my poisoned flag

Hovering above the eagle was, like the last ghoulish bird

North, northwest, to the west, Louisa

You would cry out of surprise

To find I triumphed and suddenly died

And froze stiffly on your nude body

The very first stanza of this long poem begins with "Sleepily and exhaustedly we are waiting/ for the coming of the mid-night" to make love. The last stanza quoted here ends with "You would cry out of surprise/ To find I tri-

umphed and suddenly died/ And froze stiffly to your nude body.” Therefore, obviously we see the poet interweaves the sexual “battle” on the bed with a close battle in the real war, and express the thematic archetype of life-death-and-revival implied in myths. If we compare the things that happened during the 24 hours from The Third Watch to The Second Watch, which is the last among the horary branches, with the journey of human life, if we discuss the speaker in *Etudes* through comparing him with Tiresias, the speaker in *Waste Land*, or with the mythic Ulysses, then we will find that Ye’s *Etudes* is enwrapped in the strong atmosphere of myth.

According to Malinowski’s categories or viewpoints of Fergusson’s, the attitude toward myth in this poem belongs to the second. The poet fuses his tenor into different vehicles in the poem, yet he does not use the life-death-revival archetype to teach people or to transmit truth, in order to arouse sympathy from the reader, or to change the reader’s attitudes. The poet uses myth for the sake of entertainment to pursue a peaceful mind and a sense of satisfaction. This attitude is a neoclassical one. In the Chinese poetic world, there are two other poets who wilfully make use of myth to help express their feelings. They are Dahuang and Wang Runhua. In Dahuang’s *Cun chou* 存愁 *Conserving Anxiety*, published early in 1973, there are three mythic poems: “Ba 魃 The Draught Demon”, “Kua Fu 夸夫 The Thirsty Semi-god”, and “Jingwei 精衛 The Bird Jingwei”.<sup>9</sup> According to the tenor and vehicles, the most successful poem among these three is “Kua Fu”. “Jingwei” is weaker. And “Ba” has only the elements needed, yet without any tenor. “Ba” cannot be a successful mythic poem, and the attitude toward myth cannot be defined in it.

The following are the first two stanzas from “Jingwei”:

When night was peeping at the swimming sea in the moonlight  
The sea was dancing flirtatiously with zillions of jade arms  
A stone flying down from the sky  
Knocked into pieces the coquettish heart of the sea  
Sending out the warning the sea roared  
And demanded to catch, immediately, an octopus  
To catch a bird right now  
And a killer whose name was flying with stones

Kept filling the sea, for five thousand years  
Kept calling her own name  
Not crying out her grievance  
Not fearing that people might forget her  
She kept calling herself  
Kept her name to her mouth  
Each call is to read history for another time

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<sup>9</sup> *Cun chou Conserving Anxiety*, Taipei, October Press, 1973. “Ba”, “Kua Fu” and “Jingwei” appear respectively in pp. 52-54, pp. 55-58, pp. 59-62.

Jingwei is the mythic bird from “Beishan Jing 北山經” in *Shanghai Jing*. The story is the following:

Another two hundred li to the north, there is a mountain called Rifajiu 日發鳩, on which there are many tall trees. And there is a special bird, which looks like a crow. The bird has red feet, white beak, and a head with stripes. It is called Jingwei, which comes from its calling. It was actually daughter of Emperor Yandi 炎帝 – Nüwa 女娃. Nüwa drowned herself when she was swimming in the East Sea. And then she turned into the bird Jingwei. The bird Jinwei keeps carrying branches and stones in its beak to drop into the East Sea.

Obviously, it is a myth of a human being turned into a bird. Previously, I have mentioned that there are three different attitudes toward myth. This myth of the Bird Jingwei can be a good example Chinese poets of different dynasties read it differently. Let us take Tao Yuanming 陶淵明 (365-427), poet of the Jin Dynasty, as an example. He once wrote a poem with the title of *Du Shanghai jing 讀山海經* “On Reading Shanghai Jing”, in which Tao Yuanming did not consider it ridiculous for Bird Jingwei to carry little branches and stones to fill the sea. On the contrary, he considered it a way to show unyielding perseverance, and against it, he expressed his own grief and indignation. And his understanding of Bird Jingwei in this poem will naturally arouse a strong feeling in the reader, and will even change the reader’s attitude. So, to a degree, in this poem, Tao Yuanming’s attitude toward the myth is an integration of the three, according to Fergusson’s analysis.

In Dahunag’s “Jingwei”, the poet looks at the myth of Jingwei as a tragedy. I find that this poem cannot be termed as perfect, because the tenor reflected in the poem does not work very well with each of the vehicles in it. In the first stanza, the poet very vividly retells the story of the Bird Jingwei. The second stanza suddenly talks about “Kept filling the sea, for five thousand years/Kept calling her own name”, and “Each call is to read history for another time”. We can see that the poet takes this stanza as a transition, and he tries to connect the myth of Jingwei with the fate of China. Yet unfortunately, the poet’s work is not successful, because we can only see a maiden who dies early before she sufficiently enjoys the beauty of the rivers and mountains (“Into a bird she turned soon after being drowned”). While in the fourth stanza, the poet writes: “Never finished travelling over the rivers and mountains cut out by her grandfather/Never picked up the flowers in the garden were”. And in the last stanza, there are the lines:

Filling the sea with cobblestones, for five thousand years  
The sea never was dead  
Never did she ever rest  
Vented her own anger with each stone  
With each stone, she called back the spirit of the dead

Through these lines, the poet seems to say that the reason Jingwei fills the sea with little branches and stones to vent her own anger, and to call back the glorious spirit of her ancestor. If my understanding is right, then what does the sea stand for? To me, the poet appears to have obtained the tenor and have

found the “objective correlative”. However, the poet has failed to have them agree with each other. Otherwise, the poem can demonstrate the third attitude as mentioned earlier, because the poet openly intends to influence the reader with the myth.

In my mind, Dahuang’s “Kua Fu” is his best mythic poem, in which the tenor reflected works excellently with the vehicles. The first stanza reads like this:

Hovering and hovering above, the two cannonballs  
Exploded not or fell down, and made the air a dead knot  
Blast please! Or fall down  
The sky was suffocated  
That calendar ripped from the beginning  
Now the end of the year shown

The myth that Kua Fu races with the sun and dies of thirst on the way is from “Dahuang Bei Jing 大荒北經” and “Haiwai Bei Jing 海外北經 Classics of North Overseas” in *Shanghai Jing*. The following is from “Classics of North Overseas”:

Kua Fu raced with the sun. It was day, and Kua Fu was very thirsty. He wanted to drink some water. He drank in the Huanghe 黃河 Yellow River and River Wei 渭河. The Yellow River and River Wei were not sufficient for him. He wanted to go north to drink Daze 大澤 Great Marches. But he never arrived there. He died of thirst on the way. The crutch he dropped turned into a forest called Denglin 鄧林.

In the poem “Kua Fu”, Dahuang uses this myth as a dominating image. He does not concentrate on the tragedy of Kua Fu. He combines the mythic tragedy with the tragedy of a soldier. And that is why at the beginning of the poem, the poet creates a military image – “Hovering and hovering above, the two cannonballs/Exploded not or fell down, and made the air a dead knot”. Then in the second stanza, we see that the time is “the first month in the spring”. In the third stanza, the time is the second month in the year. Though it is February, “The sky is still clear without a dragon”, a phenomenon of a drought. Later the soldier is considered to be an idiot by the others because “sleeping a night in the battle field, a drunkard” and some other accidents. He goes to the field hospital because of the mental chaos. Yet after seeing the doctor, he is even deserted by his lovely wife. At last, he can only

Fast for three days  
You start racing with the sun with a crutch  
Left behind the false teeth, the wig, diploma, and marriage certificate  
Yet never cast off that sense of  
Thirst...

Though the mythic story of Kua Fu is not credible, the nameless soldier’s romance is believable. The poet’s attitude here appears to be detached, but his purpose is obviously to move the reader to a degree. Therefore, his attitude toward myth is that of the first and the third mixed together.

Now to the end of this paper, let us discuss three mythic poems by Wang Runhua: *Di ji hui* 第幾回 “How Many Times”, *Pu yi* 襍遺 “Addendum”, and *Zhuan qian* “Brick”.<sup>10</sup> “How Many Times” is about Jia Baoyu’s (Chia Bayu) 賈寶玉 missing from the examination room. The speaker in the poem is Jia Zheng 賈政. “Addendum” is the addendum to “How Many Times”. It is about Jia Baoyu after his missing. The consciousness centre in this poem is Jia Baoyu himself. Though in these two poems, we find the archetype of Jia Baoyu, a careful reading will reveal the fact that the poet himself is the persona there. From Jia Baoyu, the poet finds the objective correlative, and he puts his tenor in the archetype, through which the poet exposes his view of the overseas Chinese students working hard in the USA. The second stanza from “How Many Times” reads like this:

“Let’s go, or we won’t catch up with that sun”  
 Along the brook with blue sky floating, he went anyway  
 Treading on the fallen flowers  
 From ladies’ arms not completely breaking lose  
 He strode out from the courtyard with shading tears  
 “In the shadow of dragon gate we jostled against each other  
 So many are there  
 Chasing the mentioned prosperity somewhere inside the rampart  
 We were pushed over time and again  
 Can’t tie down the sun, no matter how long the rope is”. With the words  
 The bundle of roses in his hand scattered on the ground  
 And was trampled upon, into earth.

Is the voice in the poem Jia Lan’s 賈蘭? Wang Runhua’s? The voice of so many students crowded outside the wall of Taiwan University each summer? Or of the overseas Chinese students jostled outside the buildings of American universities? For thousands of years, Chinese intellectuals jostled against each other in the shadow of the dragon gate every few years – “Chasing the somebody-mentioned prosperity somewhere inside the rampart”. In the competition, some had got a meteoric rise, while majority failed. Though Jia Baoyu could have a clear insight after he passed the primary examination, and escaped with a monk and Taoist, Jia Lan, as well as many others like Jia Lan, could not be so unrestrained and go off in a huff. Jia Baoyu’s leaving does not mean that all the problems have been solved. Wang Runhua is very objective toward the archetype of Jia Baoyu – his taking part in the examination and running away to become a monk. This is well illustrated in “Addendum”. Yet Jia Baoyu’s escape cannot be a righteous conduct of a monk without having his family well arranged before leaving. After his leaving, Jia Baoyu knew that there would still be

For three days and nights, the footboys raised high the torches  
 Searching the stone city

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<sup>10</sup> These three poems are collected in *Gaochao* 高潮 *High Tides*, Taipei, Constellation Poetry Society, 1970.

With gongs and drums, loudly they reported  
Was my golden name in the notifying wall sound

In these two poems, the poet not only considers the archetype of Jia Baoyu to be a piece of unofficial history, but also uses this archetype to expose his pessimistic view toward modern Chinese intellectuals.

“Brick” is a successful poem of social criticism. It is about the collapse of the Leifeng 雷峰 Tower because some greedy persons kept digging under it. The following are the first three stanzas.

Put aside the bricks and the hack  
Squatting on the desolated tomb half in water, she washed her hands  
Blood and mud befouled the ten sceneries in Western Lake

Treading on some epitaphs, she listened carefully  
Urgent wind  
Casually scattered the dog barks from in the city  
And cries of the child on the back  
On the middle of the Lake

“The time I entered the hollow  
The home of darkness and bats  
He called me ill-bodingly, I replied  
Find a block or two in the corner or under the wall  
Press down the corpse candle, not to hold the gold deep in night  
To knock on the vagrants’ door.”

In the postscript, Wang Runhua writes: “Leifeng Tower collapsed when Sun Chuanfang 孫傳芳 and his army marched into the city of Hangzhou 杭州. Therefore there was a saying that the Tower toppled down because of the earthquake caused by the fighting between the old warlords for larger spheres of influence. Another saying was that the reason that the Leifeng Tower in Hangzhou broke down was that the countryside people there were quite superstitious – they believed that if they had a brick from the tower in their own house, then everything would be just in the state as one wished, and people could turn ill luck into good. That was why almost everyone joined in the digging. By and by, the tower collapsed.” In the poem mentioned above, Wang put into person who looks neither like man nor a woman such bad human elements as selfishness, greediness, ignorance, and subversiveness. That effeminate man or manly woman stealthily rapped and rent the bricks from the tower. And then being sure that nobody was around, he/she washed his/her dirty hands in a corner. There are several dark images in this poem like “desolated tomb”, “mud”, “dog bark”, and “darkness and bats”, etc. These images are used to describe and strengthen the brick thief and his/her contemptible action. And this brick thief can be anybody. Obviously, the image of the thief is a dominating one in the poem. Sadly, the descendant of the brick thief, who is endlessly weeping and wailing, is also unhealthy in both body and mind. In the last two stanzas of the poem, the brick thief tripped over the ruins when the Leifeng Tower toppled

down with a loud crash. The bricks and stones he/she stole “fell onto the tombstone/Braking into several pieces/The muddy lake surface caught no flouting reflection of the Leifeng Tower”. The thief still argued that “the army scrambling for territory will not arrive till tomorrow at Narrow Lane”. In another word, what he/she stole is only a small brick, while those warlords scrambling for more territories steal the “big bricks”. The poet creates such a myth which he believes in. And he criticizes the society and moralizes the people through this myth. The attitude toward myth exposed in this poem is a mixture of the first and the third according to Fergusson. It is a successful poem with its criticism of society and humanity.

From the above discussions, we find that the use of the mythic elements does not only occur in the classic Chinese poems, but also appear in modern Chinese poems. In order to compose a good poem, the poet has to have his or her own feelings permeate into all elements. Some poets like He Shao and Ye Shan make use of myths for the sake of entertainment; other poets like Wang Runhua and Dahuang use a myth to arouse the reader's sympathy, or to influence the reader's attitudes. Their attitude toward myth is usually a mixture of the previously mentioned first and third, or even a mixture or combination of all the three attitudes. I wish that this discussion could arouse the reader's interest in mythology.