

*The Isle Full of Noises: Modern Chinese Poetry from Taiwan.* Edited and translated by Dominic Cheung. New York: Columbia University Press, 1987. Pp. xii + 265. \$27.50.

Professor Cheung's new book is the most current and probably the most extensive anthology of modern poetry from Taiwan available in English. Its resonant title, *The Isle Full of Noises*, is taken from Caliban's monologue in Shakespeare's last tragicomedy, *The Tempest* (Act III, sc. ii, l. 143-148): "The Isle is full of noises, / Sounds and sweet airs, that delight, and hurt not. / Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments / Will hum about mine ears; and sometimes voices, / That, if I then had wak'd after long sleep, / Will make me sleep again." Although the title may not be complimentary to Taiwan's poetry, it may fit Professor Cheung's concept of the poetic climate of that island.

Compared to previous English translations of Taiwan poetry—*New Chinese Poetry*, edited and translated by Yu Kuang-chung (1960); *Modern Chinese Poetry: Twenty Poets of the Republic of China, 1955-1965*, by Wai-lim Yip (1972); *Modern Verse from Taiwan*, by Angela Palandri (1972); and volume 1 of *An Anthology of Contemporary Chinese Literature: Taiwan, 1949-1974* (1975), edited and compiled by Chi Pang-yuan et al. (1975)—*The Isle Full of Noises* covers a broader range of the contemporary scene and offers fresher material in its selections of Taiwan poetry in translation. As such, this new addition should be welcomed with great enthusiasm, since modern Chinese poetry, either from Taiwan or from Mainland China, has not received as much attention in the West as traditional Chinese poetry in the *shih* and *tzu* forms.

However, the expected enthusiasm is dampened, for this reviewer at least, for two reasons: (1) Professor Cheung's unwarranted claim that his selection was "judiciously chosen"; and (2) the uneven quality of Cheung's translations, which is especially noticeable because the editor-translator is also a professing poet published under the pseudonym Chang Ts'o (see the blurb on the dust jacket for this information).

The anthology contains thirty-two poets chosen, according to Cheung, "on a highly selective basis," and whose works "deserve presentation" (p. 28). Although Cheung's goal is "to scan and delineate the major poetic activities of the last twenty years" in Taiwan, less than ten of the well-established poets who became known earlier in the 50s and 60s are presented here, namely: Yang Mu, known earlier as Yeh Shan (1940- ), Yu Kuang-chung (1928- ), Lo Fu (1928- ), Cheng Ch'ou-yu (1933- ), Ya Hsien (1932- ), Wai-lim Yip (1937- ), Chou Meng-tieh (1920- ), Lo Men (1928- ), and Yung Tzu (1928- ).

The majority of the poets such as Kuan Kuan (1930- ), Huan Fu (1922- ), Fei Ma (1936- ), Tu Kuo-ch'ing (1941- ), Lan Ling (1946- ), Wang Jun-hua (1941- ), Lin Huan-chang (1939- ), Hsin Mu (1943- ), Chang Ts'o, also known as Ao Ao (1943- ), and Lo Ch'ing (1948- ), who are not frequently anthologized in translations, are known only to connoisseurs. A few are even less known, mainly because of their youth or their lack of recognition beyond their immediate circles.

In his Introduction, Cheung first presents a synopsis of the historical development of Taiwan poetry, acknowledging some of the key figures in the various poetry societies and their individual poetry magazines. Then he gives the reason for concentrating on poets and poetry of the last twenty years, in order "to avoid repeating material published in other anthologies" (p. 28). As a result, even among those well-established poets of the earlier generation he has chosen, with the exception of Ya Hsien, only their recently published poems are included. In so doing, Cheung inadvertently or intentionally deprives his audience of the panoramic view of Taiwan's poetic landscape by leaving out some of the best poems. For instance, the only two poems of Lo Men that are offered here are "Watching the Sea" 觀海 and "The Tree and the Bird: A Duet" 樹鳥: 二重唱. Although these are delightful poems of irresistible charm, they lack the intensity of passion and vigor that predominated Lo Men's earlier poems such as "Death of the City" 都市之死 "Fort McKinley" 麥利堅堡.

The "judiciousness" of his selection of younger poets is also dubious, as shown by the three poems he has chosen to represent Lin Huan-chang. It is inconceivable that a prolific poet such as Lin Huan-chang, who wrote eleven volumes of poetry between 1967 and 1985, has no better representation than the three poems selected here. As an example, consider the first stanza of Lin's poem "The Beginning of the Day," which in Cheung's translation reads:

What shall I tell you?	我該告訴你什麼
Morning is the happy hour--	工作嗎?
For work.	早晨
(p. 155)	這是快樂的時光。

After four more stanzas of similar platitudes (e.g., "Life is a journey; / What it reveals is truth. . .") the poem concludes:

In the morning	早晨，
I can tell you only--	我只能這樣告訴你：
Work!	工作吧！
This is the day's beginning.	這是一天的開始
(p. 155)	

There is good sentiment here, but this is not poetry, and this is not the only example of poems that Cheung has "chosen for their quality" (p. 28).

While I agree with Cheung that "all anthologies are subjective" (p. 28), I am also in agreement with Ezra Pound, who believed that the translator-anthologist also has the mission of a critic, due to the responsibility of selecting exemplary works of original poets and introducing them to the reader. Perhaps to anticipate this kind of criticism, Cheung has defended his position in the Introduction:

I do know that more could have been included; however, I believe anthologies are subjective, and indeed ought to be. When conceived, begun, and completed, an anthology results in more unhappy than happy people. Those not selected think they should have been; those selected did not have enough, or the right, poems anthologized. (Chinese have an insatiable appetite for fame!) However [,] the poems, and the number selected, were chosen for their quality, regardless of how many books their authors may have published. As the old saying goes, you can't please all of the people all of the time; thus, I have chosen to please my conscience and poetic judgement.  
(p. 28)

Was it, then, to please his own conscience and his personal literary judgment that Cheung devotes more space to the poems of Chang Ts'o, his pseudonymous self (pp. 139-153), than to any other poet, and that his "Tears of Pearl" (pp. 149-153) is the longest poem in the entire volume? Had Cheung exercised a little more of the "editorial discrimination" that he had promised, he could have replaced this tedious, long piece, or some of his occasional poems like "Drinking Tea" or "To the Hosts: A Reply," with a few excellent poems by a number of young poets, especially women poets, since only two out of the thirty-two poets chosen here are women. But one cannot accuse Cheung of having an "insatiable appetite for fame," like his allusion to the other Chinese poets, since Cheung the editor does not make the identification that Chang Ts'o is actually Cheung the poet, not even in the biographical sketch that prefaces Chang Ts'o's poems.

Perhaps Cheung has the right to prefer his own (i.e., Chang Ts'o's) poems to those of others, since they are among the most readable in his translations. His romantic "confessional" poems have some very moving passages containing beautiful imagery, as in "Confused:"

You are prepared to erase your life  
 For the sake of those very moments when  
 Flowers silently bloom,  
 Rivers abruptly bend,  
 Mountain ranges appear in shocking reflections,  
 Hands touch each other, foreheads tap gently together;  
 And eyes meet, to charm.

...  
 ...

Whatever happened, what you recall  
 In trauma or in intermittent sobs,  
 Those are the very moments, innumerable confusions  
 When you have only duty to oblige.

(p. 143)

Note also the rich, sensuous and erotic images in these lines from "Empty Promises:"

Since I have given my whole life to you,  
 What else is there to regret and hope for?  
 Perhaps everything is an empty promise,  
 Like your arrival, abrupt but gentle,  
 As a breeze over my body, cooling, soothing,  
 Sweeping the young green fields of early spring.

...  
 ...

Since this life of ours, I know, is over,  
 What is there to say of our next life?  
 Really, empty promises are empty,  
 Like the silence of your departure,  
 And my sudden waking from the dream.  
 I persist in searching for the scent of your hair on the pillow,  
 Among the blooming flowers of the bed sheets.  
 But in my own blooming, bitter smile  
 Is the taste of a ripe, heartbroken cherry.

(pp. 141-142)

It matters little that I personally prefer a different diction for 額的相觸 (foreheads pressing together, or touching) to Cheung's "foreheads tap gently together." And what if he sees with hindsight that it is more fitting to change the line *ling ren hsin-sui ti ying-t'ao* 令人心碎的櫻桃 to "heartbroken cherry?" After all, the poet-translator should have the prerogative to exercise poetic license on his own poems. But should a translator take as much liberty when dealing with the works of other poets? Notice the destruction of the originally intended metaphor of personification in his translation of Hsin Mu's "The Second Winery" 第二酒廠:

Like a rich has-been,  
 The Second Winery slantingly leans  
 Against the side of Chung Hsiao Road.  
 A big tobacco pipe in his mouth,  
 It smokes, from dusk to dawn.  
 Children play in the black snow.

(p. 157)

第二酒廠像個過時的闊佬  
 歪歪斜斜的倚靠忠孝路邊  
 從天黑到天亮  
 從天亮到天黑  
 啣著一根大煙嘴  
 孩子們在黑雲中玩耍

The simile in the original poem is employed to draw an analogy between the liquor factory's smokestack and the rich man's tobacco pipe, both of which cough up smoke that pollutes the air and forms "black snow" in which the children play. In the translation, the analogy is dropped, the personification is aborted, and the result is a grotesque image of the "Second Winery" with "A big tobacco pipe in its mouth!" Besides, I believe that *chiu-ch'ang* 酒廠 is more likely a distillery, and not a winery, since a winery uses fermentation and does not require a heating system.

Distortions of original meaning are also seen in the rendering of Wang Jun-hua's "Which Chapter?," a poem alluding to the disintegration of the Chia clan in *Dream of the Red Chamber*. Its opening line, 埋葬了匆忙死去的一羣 clearly speaks of the protagonist, Pao-yu, who has buried, one by one, those who were short-lived, or those who had died in a hurry. In Cheung's version: "After hurriedly burying all those who died" (p. 134), the translator erroneously switched the modifier *ts'ung-mang* 匆忙 from those who died to the action of the agent who has buried the dead.

Having been reassured by Cheung that this "book has undergone many phases of change before arriving at the form it now has" (p. 28), I was amazed by the many careless errors that still remain. Sometimes Cheung ignores number-agreement: e.g., "If it were a thorn, let it be loved by blood; / If it were poppies, let it be a smile on the lips" (p. 65); or "... a handful of cosmetic powders, / And swallowed them down" (p. 135). Sometimes he disregards the sequence of events, as in the following line from "White Sheep Slop:" "Mother, you kneel and bear me; mother, how can I not kneel and be milked by you?" (p. 198) ("To be milked" should read "to be nursed" for 媽我豈可不跪着吸吮乳汁. Mistranslations of terms are many. Specifically, *ju-ming* 乳名 (literally, "milk-name;" i.e., a pet-name of one's childhood) is not "child's name" (p. 136); *ts'o-wu* 錯誤 ("error" or "mistake") is not necessarily a "sin" (p. 135); and "*Ti shih-ssu k'o hsing-hsing*" 第十四顆星星 is "The Fourteenth Starlight" and not "The Fourteen Starlights" (p. 125).

Infelicities of expression also abound. Some are caused mainly by the literal observance of Chinese diction: e.g., "Betel Palm Tree" for *pin-lang shu* 檳榔樹; "tombstone tablet inscription" for *mu-chih-ming* 墓誌銘; "grampaw's smoking pipe" for *A-kung ti yen-ch'ui* 阿公的煙吹 [emphasis added], and "Lupus" for *Tien-lang-hsing* 天狼星 which is Sirius, the most brilliant star in the sky, whereas Lupus is a southern constellation.

There are also inaccuracies and inconsistencies in Cheung's romanization. Chinese place-names are misspelled (*Hanchou* for Hangchow, *Chen-tu* for Cheng-tu, *Chai-ling* for Chia-ling), as are some personal names. Here are several samples of the latter: Yeh Ssu 也斯 is transliterated as Yeh shih (p. 257), Huoli Tzu-kao 霍里子高 as *Holi Tz-kao* (pp. 20, 254), and Wu Te-liang 吳德彰 as Wu *Te-liang* (passim). Moreover, Lin Huan-chang 林煥章 is occasionally transliterated as Lin Huan-*ch'ang*, while Shih Shan-chi 施善繼 frequently becomes *Si San-chih* (p. 25) (possibly a variant in Taiwanese pronunciation). These minor errors could be easily dismissed as typographical errors, if the book were not issued by such a reputable and prestigious publisher as Columbia University Press.

Despite its various shortcomings, this anthology does serve a useful purpose. It succeeds in presenting thirty-two contemporary poets from Taiwan to the reading public in the West. The book should be of particular interest to poetry lovers who do not know the Chinese language, and who have not been previously exposed to Taiwan poetry. The Introduction, in addition, provides adequate information concerning the current poetic trends in Taiwan. My one caveat with the Introduction is the lack of clarity when Cheung insists on making a distinction between Taiwanese and Chinese poetry in Taiwan.

A Chinese version of Cheung's anthology has been published recently in Taiwan (Taipei, 1987) under the title *Ch'ien ch'ü chih tao* 千曲之島 (*An Island of a Thousand Melodies*). Aimed specifically at a Chinese readership, the Introduction to the Chinese version, translated by Hsi Mi (pseudonym of Michelle Yeh), has omitted passages that may be offensive to the Chinese audience. Some of the biographical sketches of individual poets have also been revised to include

more positive comments. With both English and Chinese texts available, the anthology will also be useful to students of advanced Chinese who wish to study modern Chinese poetry and its translations. Cheung's anthology would be easier to use for research if it could have a bibliography and an index, which are lacking in both the English and Chinese versions.

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