

Soungui Kim and the Daoist Horizon of Great Wu 大無,  
the Undifferentiated (W)holistic Composition of All Things  
Wai-lim Yip

1. The Contending Site

Octavio Paz's warning:

We are *condemned* to be modern [ We might now add "postmodern"]. We cannot (should not) dispense with technology and science. 'Turning back' is both impossible and unthinkable...[T]raditional societies must be defended if we wish to preserve diversity...The extinction of each marginal society and each ethnic and cultural difference signifies the extinction of a survival possibility for the entire species. With each society that disappears, destroyed or devoured by industrialization [We might now add the word "globalization"], a possibility of mankind disappears--not only the past but also the future. History has been, until now, plural: diverse visions of man, each with a distinct version of his past and his future. To preserve this diversity is to preserve a plurality of futures--which is to say life itself.

What kind of intervention can we, as cultural workers, suggest as a possible measure to resist the eradication of diversity of cultures? I asked in my *Diffusion of Distances: Dialogues between Chinese and Western Poetics* (1993): "Are we to condone mapping a course for modern world culture, literature and history solely through the coding interests of the West, namely the appropriation of non-Western world in terms of the interest of multi-national or transnational corporatism, or TNC as charted out by the consumer-oriented, goal-directed, instrumental reason of the post-Enlightenment West?" Should we allow us to be swept into the crushingly stark globalized culture dictated by the rules of the game largely dominated by the agenda of the TNC's? To avoid this catastrophe, we must maintain a tensional dialogue with the colonizing intruding ideologies of the West, maintain our works as antagonistic symbioses emerging from the inevitable ongoing conflicts between native sensibility and alien ideologies.

It is against this fabric of concern that we want to see the work of Kim Soungui and her links with Daoism, Daoist-inspired Zen Buddhism, John Cage and Wittgenstein. Let me offer my reading of Daoism to expand on their congruence as well as to recast certain comments on her works by Cometti and by Jean-Luc Nancy.

2. The Daoist Contemporariness

Daoism is a root-awakening forward-looking horizon, which can be best characterized by the double meanings of the English word "Radical". On the one hand, it attacks the root questions of how language affects our conceptions, both of the world and of our selves as beings in the world, leading to opening up a new perception of total phenomena as an interweaving, inter-disclosing, and inter-defining entity free from the restriction and distortion of ideas, on the other, it offers us radical, avant-garde subversive strategies to retrieve and re-inscribe such a space in and out of which we are empowered to move freely. In the Daoist discourse, we often find words, phrases, statements, or stories of actions that take us by surprise, unconventional, strange forms of logic, or anti-logic, teasing language and rhetoric, including paradoxes and attacks by way of using off-norms to re-inscribe off-norms as possible norms, and challenging norms to expose their acceptance as absolute as treacherous. In the neo-Daoist developments, we find further the use of actions or activities to tease and assail the life-imprisoning institutions, including technique of shouting and beating in Chan (Zen) Buddhist *gongan* or *koan*. These language strategies and actions or activities of ancient China have anticipated and previewed the three stages of attack often used in Western avant-garde art events since the Dadaist movement, namely, TO DISTURB, TO DISLOCATE, and TO DESTROY. It is important to note that these triple stages of the Daoist attack are inseparable from their target vision of retrieving the free flow of Nature and humanity to the full. Without this understanding, all the "disturb-dislocate-destroy" attempts in avant-garde art movements since Dadaism, including deconstruction and poststructuralist attempts, will remain merely shock techniques as such. As we will see, Kim Soungui's works follow similar strategies and her projections must be seen through this understanding as well. About this, more later.

The Daoists began their project as a critique of the Naming System of the feudalistic Zhou Dynasty (12-6 B.C.). They felt that under this system (such as calling the Emperor the 'Son of Heaven', investing *lords, fathers, and husbands* with unchallenged power over *subjects, sons, and wives*) the birthrights of humans as natural beings were restricted and distorted. Politically, they intended to implode the so-called "Kingly Dao", the "Heavenly Dao" and the Naming System so that memories of the repressed, exiled and alienated natural self could be fully reawakened; thus leading to the recovery of full humanity. The Daoist Project is a counter-discourse to deframe the tyranny of language; it is at once political and aesthetic.

This political critique of language opens up larger philosophical and aesthetic dimensions. From the very beginning, the Daoists believed that the totalizing compositional activity of all phenomena, changing and ongoing, is beyond human comprehension. All conscious efforts to generalize, formulate, classify and order it will result in some form of restriction and reduction. We impose these conceptions, which, by definition, must be partial and incomplete, upon total phenomena at the peril of losing touch with the concrete appeal of the totality of things. Meanwhile, the real world, quite without human supervision and explanation, is totally alive, self-generating, self-conditioning, self-transforming and self-complete (wuyan-duhua). Inherent in this recognition of the inadequacy of language is the acceptance of humans as limited and the rejection of the idea of seeing humans as preeminently the controller or orderer of things. To represent the original condition in which things and men can freely emerge, first and foremost, humans must understand their position in and relation to the Great Composition of Things. Humans, being only one form of being among a million others, have no prerogative to classify the cosmic scheme. We should understand that "Ducks' legs are short; lengthening them means pain. Cranes' legs are long; shortening them means suffering" (2:317). We must leave them as they are in nature. Each form of being has its own nature, has its own place; how can we take *this* as *subject* (principal) and *that* as *object* (subordinate)? How can we impose "our" viewpoint upon others as the right viewpoint, the only right viewpoint? "Not to discriminate *this* and *that* as the opposite is the essence of Dao. There you get to the Axis. There you attain the Center of the Ring to respond to the endless...Obliterate the distinctions and view things as things view things from both *this* and *that* (*liangxing*, to travel on two paths) (2:66) is called the Balance of Tao (2:70)

It is not hard to realize that what is called *this* (the so-called subject, determining and dominating agent) is really also *that* (the so-called object, dominated and determined), for when I say *this*, is it not also *that* from your point of view? Thus, only when the subject retreats from its dominating position--i.e. not to put "I" in the primary position for aesthetic contemplation--can we allow the Free Flow of Nature to reassume itself. Phenomena do not need "I" to have their existences; they all have their own inner lives, activities and rhythms to affirm their authenticity as things. Authenticity or truth does not come from "I"; things possess their existences and their forms of beauty and truth before we name them. Subject and object, principal and subordinate, are categories of superficial demarcation. Subject and object, consciousness and phenomena inter-penetrate, inter-complement, inter-define, and inter-illuminate, appearing simultaneously, with humans corresponding to things, things corresponding to humans, things corresponding to things extending throughout the million phenomena. Accordingly, we must be aware that each of our perceptual acts, i.e., each of our makings of meaning is provisional and it has to wait for the presence of, and modification by, other angles, other perceptions, in order to be free from the fetters of naming, while using them.

Aesthetically then, it offers a floating registering activity free from the domination of one parent subjectivity. It is no accident that most Chinese landscape paintings use aerial, mid-air, and ground perspectives simultaneously and freely. Front mountains, back mountains, front villages, back villages, bay in front of mountains, and bays behind mountains are seen simultaneously. This is because the viewers are not locked into only one viewing position. Instead they are allowed to change positions constantly to undo viewing restrictions, allowing several variations of knowledge to converge upon their consciousness. Take Fan Kuan's "Travellers in the Valley". In this large vertical hanging scroll, a caravan of travelers, appearing very small, emerge from the lower right corner with large trees behind them. This means that we are viewing this unit from a distance. But behind the trees, a very distant mountain now springs before our eyes, huge, majestic and immediate as if pressing upon our eyes. We are given to view the scene simultaneously from two distances and from several altitudes. Between the foreground and the background lies a diffusing mist, creating an emptiness out of its whiteness, an emptiness which has physicality in the real world. It is this whiteness, this void which helps to dissolve our otherwise locked-in sense of distances, engendering a free-floating registering activity. One may also notice that the speck of human existence, the travelers in the lower right corner, instead of dominating Nature, merges with, and has become part of the Total Composition of all phenomena. This strategy is paramount in Chinese landscape paintings. Witness, for example, this frame [Slide 2], which seems to suggest a perspective of the Western kind, but this is only a detail of the next painting by Dai Jin (1390-1460) [Slide 3], in which we are drawn into Nature in its cosmic totality. Please remember this

feeling of moving freely toward limitless space, which is closely related to the aesthetic-cultural staples of “jingjie 境界” (a *world* such as that evoked in Chinese poetry and painting), “fengfan 風範”( a *mode* or *way of life* that aspires to the free flow of Nature) ”and “xionghuai 胸懷( a *bosom* or *sphere of consciousness* that embraces “a million things, a million changes” in the free-floating space that allows one not to be locked into one hegemonic system” Let Nature be!

A similar free-floating activity is reinvented in the poetic language in classical Chinese poetry. Language now can be used to avoid being locked into one stationery, restricted, subjectively dominated, directed and determined position; this is to be achieved by adjusting syntactical structures to allow objects and events to maintain their multiple spatial and temporal extensions, and by providing a gap between objects, events, or frames of meanings, an emptiness, a subversive space, so to speak, whereby one can move back and forth between or among them to evoke a larger sense of what is given so as to constantly remodify, and, at the same time, deframe and reframe anything that gets stuck.

For example, although the Chinese language also have articles and personal pronouns, they are often dispensed with in poetry, opening up an indeterminate space for the reader to enter and re-enter for double to multiple perception. Then, there is the absence of connective elements (prepositions, conjunctions), and these, aided by the indeterminacy of parts of speech and no-tense declensions in verbs affords the reader a unique freedom to consort with the real-life world.

These facts quite often leave the words in a loosely-committed relationship with the reader, who remains in a sort of middle ground between engaging with and disengaging from them. This syntactic freedom promotes a kind of prepredicative condition wherein words, like objects in the real-life world, are free from predetermined closures of relationship and meaning and offer themselves to us in an open space. Within this open space around them, we can move freely and approach them from various vantage points to achieve different shades of the same aesthetic moment. We are given to witness the acting-out of objects and events in cinematic visuality, and stand, as it were, at the threshold of various possible meanings.

These “engaging-disengaging”, “framing-unframing” language strategies achieved by the gaps between objects or visual events made possible through asyntactical and paratactical structures in classical Chinese poetry or the free-floating perspectives through the diffusion of distances in Chinese paintings, it is apt to note here, have helped stimulate syntactical innovations by a huge number of modern American poets since Pound to use space breaks and syntactical breaks to achieve similar aesthetic effects of simultaneity, montage, and visual perspicuity, including elaborate extensions of these techniques in the juxtaposition of luminous cultural moments on a large scale (as in Pound’s *Cantos* ), leading to a polyphonic or orchestration of patterned energies.

It is not an accident, therefore, to find various attempts by the Daoists and Daoist-inspired Zen Buddhists to break or blur boundaries to return to the prepredicative condition of things in their multiple extensions. Most people, Western people that have internalized Platonic-Aristotelian perceptual modes in particular, traditionally allow the subjectivity of their ego to dominate, mould and determine the contours of the million things as if they were authentic representations of the world, they are not; these representations belong only to the world of ideas, not the (w)holistic world that defies naming and representation.

Here, the Daoist discussion of You 有 and Wu 無 is of utmost importance for understanding Cage, Wittgenstein, and Kim Soungui. Briefly, from the Daoist critique of the framing function of the Naming System comes the awareness that all concepts, political or otherwise, are not absolute and, in the last analysis, are *merely* linguistic constructions dominated by subjective interests implicated in distinctions, judgments and power hierarchy. They are limit-setting, privileging certain aspects to the exclusion of others. Take the concept of Beauty. Beauty is not absolute but relative; different periods hold different views; different cultures have different projections. Similarly, the concepts of being, nonbeing, before, behind, high, low, construction, destruction, strong, weak, male (as higher) female (as lower). Things before naming and language are totally equal and point to each other as inter-independent, inter-disclosing existences. Take *You* 有( for convenience, let us call it Being) and *Wu* 無 (Non-being). Straightly speaking, Being and Non-being are not stable things; everything in total phenomena, and human lives all are in an ongoing process of change. All things are in a state of Becoming, that is, always moving from the condition of Being continuously to the condition of Non-being. Because the Daoists view each of our perceptual acts, each of our makings of meaning as provisional, they understand that it has to wait for the presence of, and modification by, other angles, other perceptions, in order to be free from the fetters of naming and framing, while using them. What we call *You* 有/ Being is the domain circled out for inspection by way of the language activity of naming, defined position, defined direction, and

defined meaning at the expense of the so-called irrelevant elements. Is the so-called *Wu 無*/ Nonbeing really nothing? We use the idea of *beginning* and *end* to define range. But to talk about "beginning" is inadequate, because there is always a "before" before another "before" of the beginning. We call it "beginning" only at the risk of cutting Time into sections. If we do not cut time into sections, there would be no "beginning" to speak of. We use the term "*You 有*/Being" and "*Wu 無*/Nonbeing". But there is always a "before" before the "before" of the beginning of "*Wu 無*/Nonbeing". Shall we call any of the various stages "*You 有*/Being" or "*Wu 無*/Nonbeing"? "Being" and "Nonbeing" is born with our biased subjective interests. Suppose we take presence as Being, absence as Nonbeing. But a stage of absence does not mean that it will remain forever absent; it might disclose itself later. Shall we, then, rename it as "Being"? *You 有* and *Wu 無* are born through language and naming. Before naming and language, the million things are *You 有* (concrete existence/ *You 有* as defined by naming and language), but they are also *Wu 無* (condition before naming and language which can also be *You 有*), a million forms synchronously co-exist, free from the imprisonment of the defining *You 有*. From this horizon, *Wu 無* / Nonbeing or Nothing is both empty and full. But imagination is not dead. After the language's grip on us is deframed and the prison of mind is liberated, there is another activity through which we can repossess the Great *You 大有*/Being (communion and consort with the million things) and freely move into the Great *Wu 大無* / Nobeing that is free from the imprisonment of the defining *You 有*. Once we realize that our thinking has been proceeding within the language frames defined by other people's subjective interests with layers and layers of impediment to attain the Great *Wu 大無*, we will achieve a spatial mobility and sensitivity, moving into and out of language frames without being locked into the limiting range of others' subjectivity.

Cage shows that the so-called Silence, in fact, consists of countless minute tremblings; they are only excluded by the framed concept of Silence as having a boundary defined by so-called Sound. With the concept of Great *Wu 大無*, the Undifferentiated Whole, the Nature before being carved, Cage's project becomes more poignant. It is not an accident that he calls for the "demilitarization of language". Cometti's characterization of Kim Soungui's work as "abuses" of language (about which, more later) to achieve the "wavering boundaries of sense and nonsense" and that she engages in Wittgenstein's language games to arrive at "an open networks of relations" (which is, by the way, also Cage's "Unimpeded Interpenetration") can also now be reread as attempts to deframe the distortive, dominatory power structures and the hegemonic subjectively dominated but essentially reductive signifying system of the West. We must now alert the West that the term *hundun 混沌* must not be translated as "chaos" (Cometti, Nancy) without qualification, because "chaos" is a term used to pitch against "order"; *hundun* is the Great *Wu 大無*, the Undifferentiated Wholistic Composition of Things. Now this understanding will make Nancy's statement more cogent, and fuller: "Kim experiences time as matter, before and after, left and right, yesterday and tomorrow, shore to shore, East and West, a simultaneity in which time means all time and all the time, always a presence."

In this Undifferentiated Wholistic Composition of Things, which is, of course, Nature in its full body and movement, the words like "Chance", "Accident", "Irrelevance" "Aleatoriness", "Disorder" etc., do not exist; they were so called, often in the derogatory sense, because they were framed as such against what has been defined to be "normative", as if anything deviating from this core has nothing "meaningful" to offer, but in reality, what is offered under the so-called Norm is the real Great Deviation from Nature whose so-called chance, accidental, irrelevant, aleatory, disorderly, constantly shifting performance and movements are, in fact, authentic pulsations of the world. In the words of Cage, "Art is not an attempt to bring order out of chaos... but simply a way of waking up to the very life we are living, which is so excellent once one gets one's mind and one's desire out of its way and lets it act of its own accord." Most of Kim Soungui's works emanate from this all-inclusive awareness. Dao is not only to be found in our consort with the million things, it can be found in anything anywhere. As Guo Xiang, Zhuang Zi most important commentator, says, "Though different in sizes, when put into their self-sufficient selves, each object fulfilling its natural endowment, they all achieve the same easiness and freedom. Why even allow the idea of win and loss to interfere among them?" The million things before language-framing and value and hierarchy framing are immanently self-complete and sublime in their own right. Kim Soungui's works allow things, often in their pristine state, to come to us, uninterfered as if were. Her art begins with this state of things as interrogation of established frames that her audience have internalized, empowering them to simultaneously see and consort with Dao in both "high" and "low" things, to leap and frisk among established value and meaning categories without being bogged down by them, and achieve a movement without depending on anything and an open bosom across which all things, self-attained, all things, unblocked, move about. We will comment more on this aspect later. For the moment, let us focus on the three pieces on show November 6, 2004- March 6, 2005 at the San Diego Museum under the rubric of "Past in Reverse: Contemporary Art in East Asia".

The series called “Lunes” are photos taking from a pinhole camera in a sort of *wuwei* 無為 (take no action) condition, allowing the shifting lights to act themselves out, with the kind of unpredictability in which there is no control of light, frame, timing, climate, temperature, offering chance appearances that continue to surprise us, like the Great Wu condition of Nature following its built-in measure always true to itself. Against the shifting, but seemingly stable background of shadows, the moon/s move as calligraphic strokes across the limitless dark space. In the words of Guo Xiang, Zhuang Zi’s great commentator, “The Sage roams in the path of a million changes—a million things a million changes in accordance with the laws of a million changes. Changes are infinite, and so would be the Sage.” Similar richness and fullness can also be witnessed in “Pap-Gre” and “Alea”. “Pap-Gre” is the video projection of the dances of a frog and a butterfly upon a traditional Korean jade-white moon vase where, in spite of , and perhaps because of the vague, but not committed, connection to the legendary inhabitants on the moon (jade rabbit, for example) , and possible associations with the dreamed butterfly and the short-vision frog in the well in different chapters of the *Zhuangzi*, both the vase and the dances take on a cosmic dimension where both the butterfly and the frog seem to have divested of all their mundane framed meanings and become self-contained beings with their full solemnity. “Alea” is “chance winning” as the word originally means in gambling. What began as the destruction of the artist’s chronological planning by an accident of the computer to the degree of irretrievability surprises her as the technological generated Alea reclaims itself by revealing a life of its own functioning in a process against her original plan but equally natural, acting unacting and unacting acting.

Kim Soungui is also quite in tune with the Daoist interrogation of language as explained above. When we use language, we are already trapped in the agenda, both aesthetic and political, of others and must engage in the magnetic field of the war of languages. We must subvert the language at hand, that is, to breakthrough the limits of language, in particular, the preset meanings of the target language in which the speaker’s own language is embedded, so as to return to the prepredicative moment, or the moment of our encounter with the world before reflection, before contamination by intellect and subjectivity. Kim is fully conversant with the Daoist and Daoist-inspired Zen Buddhists’ use of words, phrases, statements, or stories of actions that take us by surprise, unconventional, strange forms of logic, or anti-logic, teasing language and rhetoric, to make us startled and become aware of our internalizations of preset frames as absolute and unquestionable, thus, empower us to deframe them in the process. These strategies not only play an important role in Zen Buddhist mode of transmission of knowledge through *Gongan* ( or *Koan*), but also in the making of Chinese and Oriental taste. A higher level of art is often call *Yipin* 異品 (unusual, strange, untrammelled work) or *Yipin* 逸品 ( works that are out of this world).

Kim Soungui uses these subversive techniques extensively in her *Montagne c’est la mer, Tchouang-tseu et Wittgenstein*. One must view this wonderful little book as her own *Zhuangzi* or her own *Gongan* or *Koan*, in which her playfulness, shocking answers, and clowning-teasing are not separable from the same Daoist vision of retrieving the free flow of Nature. Compare this *gongan* or *koan*:

from Zen master Cao-shan Ben-zi

Q : Eye and eyebrow: do they know each other?  
M : No.  
Q : Why no?  
M : Because they are in the same place.  
Q : So they are not divided?  
M : The eyebrow is not the eye.  
Q : What is the eye?  
M : What is correct?  
Q : What is the eyebrow?  
M : I have doubts.  
Q : Why doubts?  
M : If no doubts, then correct.

to Kim’s sequence from her *Montagne c’est la mer, Tchouang-tseu et Wittgenstein*:

Vers interroge Rouge:

--Comment t’appelles-tu?  
--Rouge.  
--Ah! Mais, je ne te vois pas.

--Je suis ici mais tu ne peux me voir, car je suis invisible.  
--Invisible! Ne m'as-tu pas dit que tu es Rouge?  
--Oui, mais quand je suis ici j'en'ai plus de nom. C'est  
comme toi que je ne vois pas mais dont j'entends la voix.  
--Si tu te trouvais dans un tableau serais-tu toujours invisible et sans nom?  
-- Oui, meme si je suis partout, ici et la-ba.  
--Comment t'appeler quand tu n'es pas?  
--Rouge.  
--Ah! Meme le vide s'appelle Vide, dit Vers.

On the surface, both read /act like being playful, but between knowing and not knowing, divided and not divided, name and no name, visible and invisible, one must relinquish these as merely linguistic constructions and conceptual frameworks. Quite often, such constructions--the modes of circling out their domains can be different in their contours of divisions. For the Daoists, Zen Buddhists and Kim Soungui, beginning, ending, being, nonbeing, life death etc., as explained above, are only provisional demarcations. In the working of the Great Change or the Great Wu , things are separate, each according to its natural endowment, but also together in their prelinguistic, prepredicative condition as inter-defining, inter-generating, inter-recognizing beings. The teasing of language is to drive the readers/ viewers to constantly revise their positions to rethink, to reflect, and as a result, re-recognize that words of vessels of imprisonment through which we cannot arrive at the moment of unblocked communion with a million things.

Soungui Kim's early art, such as using blatantly simple and self-explanatory things, or a few bits of language from the larger language which, by the stark fact of their randomness or seeming unconnectedness, ( See *Ceci est du Rouge* and the rest of series and *Hier, aujourd'hui and demain*), often has the effect of startling or teasing the audience into awareness, engendering a journey free and easy into the Great Wu 大有, into Nature's working in all its senses and pulsations .

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27 nov. 2004

Dear Wai-Lim Yip,

Bonjour.

First, I'd like to tell you that I 'm very interested on your texts & poetry. I was happy to read them, specifically, "Why Taoisme today", "Subversive strategies in Taoisme". I'm interested on your analyse of language (very important, I think.) For your poems, it is more difficult for me: I feel the transcription of "Chinese mind" in English . But, I have to say, my knowledge on litterature is very poor, and, my english also, very poor !

As you feel, I suppose, that we have fundamentally common position about Taoisme and actual time. So we will have good occasion to exchange together: we have, however, some difference of point of view which can due to our differenece of recherc field. For exemple, about the analyse on the question of langage. I 'll be happy to hear from you about John Cage who was very good freind of mine. Yes, Jean-Luc Nancy, good freind of mine also : we worked together many times. For exemple, 2 years ago, we realised one "dialogue" (visio-conference & edited video film) that I presented in GwangJiu Biennale International in Korea : "Diversité des arts et la pratique pluraliste" For this Biennale, I realised also one "dialogue with Jacques Derrida : " Y a-t-il, par dessus le marché, un art, à l'avenir de la mondialisation ?" Oh!, He is, since some days, in travel far away . I hope, he is happy to return to the Sky... He was so generous, friendly... I had one another film project with him... With Jean Pierre Cometti, I exchanged during many years: We have many commun point of view on Wittgenstein.

For this occasion of San Diago exhibition, I'll be very happy to hear (critics) from you about my work expose which are :

1) "Moons" : A serie of 12 photographies (60 cm / 80 cm each one) : I observed moons mouvements during one year (2003-32004). I used "Pin hole camera" technic, I conceived my own cameras. Pin hole camera is the origin and very primitif camera of photo. Black box with a very little pin hole which has no lens, so, I can't control neither distace neither lighting, neither frame, neither, timing, neither precision of image. The weather and the temperature play important role, so, I have to find good timing. Important is receive ("shu") the all condition offered by nature. It's more then to decide to make image: something happens, and I try to receive with time and disponibility. One sort of game of hasard, of chemical process , of time and of atmosphere. Sometimes, I have to open the hole of camera very long time and wait & wait, until I feel, it's O.K. So waiting image, I can take out to walking, even,forgetting. The moon is mouving alone, the Pin hole camera, staying on the place, but our globe is running, and me, floating. During this time image is forming. Very exiting for me. I'm always suprised with my images .  
I use this technic since 1987, so, now, my experience tell me what I have to do. Something happens evry day. It's true, some subject is more adequate then the other. Observation of moons movement was the very interesting and good for this technic.

2) "Pap-Gre" : realization: 2000. video sculpture: Video projection on "Moon vase". I use one white ceramic vase: very traditional Korean vase which name is "Moon vase": which has the form of full moon . No function but to see, this vase was very appreciated by Korean poets. We can find this kind of vase from 16end -19 end AC. I interpret this vase (one kind of copy that I realized in Korea). On this "Moon vase", one video projection: which images are : dance of two frogs and two butterflies floating. The rhythm of dance is important for me(timing & energy). Frogs and butterflies are conceived(created) by tree dimension- digital technic: Virtual animals images on white ceramic "Moon vase".

3) "Aléa" : realization: 1999. Video installation: video projection on the wall. The video image is conceived (result) from the very aleatory & accidental process: one day, my computer had the big problem and lost my video editing work (worked during 6 months!). The problem was: my hard disk forgot the memory, so, I try to find them . When I, finally, "find" them, one another "accident " produced: all images were completely mixing in disorder : It's means that my computer cant not remember the order of liner & chronological time. Another word, past-present & future were anarchical mixing: what disorder it was, but so beautiful it was !!. I found this situation very interesting . So, I used this images edited by my computer became stupid & crazy.  
The sound was composed in same ways.  
For the projection, I conceived one furniture. One can move this furniture in which to find (inside ), video projector, player & speakers). So, one can move this furniture and project the video image on any place of wall and enjoy (I hope).  
I do video art since 1975, and realized many works : I enjoyed to conceive the very immaterial video images which are the "wave of the light and time". Video is nothing but energy, as like to sound, different to the painting or sculpture. The energy is very emptiness! On the beginning time of my video experience, I realized the work technically very complicated...I enjoyed to give very compexe form of time & light. Now, I like very simple process, as like "Aléa". I have nothing to do but to find and receive("shu").  
For to receive, it's necessary to have empty eyes, empty mind ("hsü hsin") I try....

- Yes, We need the translator. I'll try to speak in Korean, but some times my French can help. For economize time I can prepare one shot text. Museum find one Korean student: I sent to her your last mail and ask to her to translate first.
- About your introduction: yes, yes : "taoisme & art". But, also, as I told you before, I'll be very honor to receive your critics on my works that I present in Museum.Is-it possible ? We will have 45 minutes. We can, for exemple: 1) your introduction on Taoïsme & art, and your critics on my work (20 minutes) . After, I'll reply to your introduction and critics (20 minutes). We will have 5 minutes for eventual questions from the public. It's very short time. But I hope, to have the another occasion to continue to exchange with you.

Best,

Kim Soun-Gui

### **Mon text (réponse) à lire pour le dialogue avec Wai-Lim Yip.**

After brilliant and shiny introduction of professor Wai-Lim Yip and considering on the Taoïst teaching, I have to say: I have nothing to say. However, I have to reply to professor Wip, and I have no possibility but to speak.

What is important is not: what to do? But , how to do, how to proceed. Art, as like life, is an activity to proceeding. Activity of change, activity of transforming. Evry moment, something happens, something changing, something transforming. All is changing and transforming. Only the changing can not be change; only the transforming cant not be transforming. Past means, the absolute virtuality and absolute possibility of changing and transformation which result the present. The present is the process of opening, process of changing and

transformation which proceed the future. The future, result of the changing and the transformation which is the virtual possibility of beginning and opening of Chaos process.

For me, the art of changing and transforming is the very process of receive (“shu”). What is important is to find and receive (“shu”), then to decide to conceive (make) something beautiful. . . . Every thing is beautiful (except violence), if we have the disponibility to hear and observe. Open your eyes, open your mind sad Nam-June Paik. It means, something happens and one can find. For that, we have to have first empty eyes, empty mind (“hsü hsin”) To hear, to see; it’s means, very simply, to live, actual time. To live actual life is very necessary for changing and for transforming. Following the movement of water. We can change the color of water or the speed of water, but we can not stop the movement, even, change, the direction of the movement of water which produce the vilolence. In ancien time, Taoist didn’t imagine, the telephone, video, cinema, computer, E-mail, internet. . . , they didn’t imagine that we can go to the moon ! They had their tool of communications , lived in specific political, economical, social and cultural situations. They fought with their languages & expressions. Fluxus artists did, and created in their context and on consideration of theirs actual life. Live the actual life, which is the very principle of Art, was the first claim of Fluxus. Time is nothing but changing, transforming (“p’ien-wha”). Now, Art is very contextual, more complexe then before: system of market which reflect the international and economical, political, social and cultural situations. The specific art space such as museum and galleries are developed. So many peoples work such as curators activities. Actually, all activities depend on the movement of , so called, globalization. In this context, the meaning of Art is changed. After avant-garde mouvement of 60& 70, Fluxus was, after “Post modernisme”, and after, “post-post modernisme”, we call actual art mouvement, “Contemporary art”. The expression, ”Contemporary art in Asia”, or “Asian contemporary art” is, perhaps the naming, as consequence of the mouvement of globalization. Is-it the geographical or historical and chronological definition?

The very actual tendency of art, it seems to me, are : the pluralisation of langage & expression. Also, the very active multiple exchange of cultures and langages. From one point of view, the very “confused situation” : the tendency of cathégorisation (category esthetic, for exemple) or the dichotomy of “verity and wrong” or monotheisme which need one absolut verity, are no more possible. But, the difference is important; we can’t exchange without the difference.. Difference is synonyme of harmony (“ho”); the harmony is possible where the difference exist andwher each one or each thing has his own center. The confusion is interesting; it’s means, existence of pluralities, on another world, coexistence of centers. The veritable Hamony is possible through the respect of the difference, meeting of different center.

This is precisely, nothing but the point of Taoist philosophie which agree all kind of difference , where the hierarchy doesn’t exist. Tschouang-Tseu say:

#### Wai-lim Yip 葉維廉 : Bio-Bibliographical Summary

Called by Jerome Rothenberg "The linking figure between American modernism (in-the-line-of-Pound) and Chinese traditions and practices" Wai-lim Yip has been active as a bicultural poet, translator, critic and theorist between Taiwan and America for over 30 years. He was born in Kwangtung Province, China, in 1937. He received his BA (1959), and MA (1961) in English in Taiwan where he became a leading modernist poet and theorist and has won many literary prizes, including an award from the Ministry of Education and recognition as one of the Ten Major Modern Chinese Poets. In 1964, he received an MFA from the University of Iowa for a volume of original English poems, and in 1967, he obtained a Ph. D. in Comparative Literature at Princeton University.

Wai-lim Yip's interests are multiple, but his crowning achievement comes from his lifelong commitment to creating and critiquing poetry in a crosscultural context. As a poet in Chinese, he attempts to synthesize the heritage of the Chinese poets of the 1930's and 1940's, the modernist expressive strategies of the West since Symbolism, and those of classical Chinese poetry. As a poet in English, he creates a kind of syntactical flexibility that accomodates the perceptual priorities of both worlds. As a critic and theorist on East-West comparative poetics, he has provided new pedagogical guidelines for deframing monocultural theoretical hypotheses, leading to truly open dialogues between Chinese and Western cultures in an inter-illuminating and inter-reflective manner. As a translator from Chinese into English, his translations of Wang Wei and his Chinese Poetry: Major Modes and Genres offer a fluid perspective from which one can re-view and, as a result, readjust many current poetic and cultural strategies in the West. As a translator from Western languages into Chinese, he has helped to extend the expressive techniques of contemporary Chinese poetry.

Wai-lim Yip has written more than 40 books in two languages. Chief among them are: Poetry: Fugue 賦格, Crossing 愁渡, Edge of Waking 醒之邊緣, The Wild Flower Story 野花的故事, The Voice of Blooming 花開的聲音, The Legend of a Pine and a Bird 松鳥的傳說, Startled: Travelling 驚馳, Thirty Years of Poetry 三十年詩 and The Ferry that cannot be detained 留不住的航渡; Moving toward Maturer Age 移向成熟的年齡 and Selected poems 葉維廉詩選 (ed. Yang Kuanghan 楊匡漢編.) Between Landscapes (in English, Pennywhistle Press, Tesque, NM) The transcendence of Glaiers 冰河的超越; Criticism and Theory: Ezra Pound's Cathay, (Princeton Press) Phenomenon. Experience. Expression 現象。經驗。表現, Order's Growth 秩序的生長, Comparative Poetics 比較詩學, History . Hermeneutics. Aesthetics 歷史。傳釋。美學, Reading the Modern and the Postmodern 解讀現代後現代, Chinese Poetics 中國詩學 and Diffusion of Distances: Dialogues between Chinese and Western Poetics (U C Press); Translations, with critical and theoretical introductory essays: Modern Chinese Poetry, 1955-1965 (Iowa University Press); Lyrics from Shelters: Modern Chinese Poetry, 1930-1950 (Garland Press); Hiding the Universe: Poems of Wang Wei (Wushinsha-Grossman Press) Chinese Poetry: Major Modes and Genres (U C Press/ Duke University Press) Translations into Chinese: T.S. Eliot (The Waste Land), and And All the Trees Sing (translations from modern European and Latin American Poets such as St-John Perse, Seferis, Guillen, Paz, Borges, Machado, Celan, Du Bouchet, Montale, Ungaretti, etc.) and many volumes of lyrical prose in Chinese.



Prof. Yip has been with UCSD since 1967, and has played a central role in the Comparative Literature Section as well as in the Program of Chinese Studies. His influence abroad is significant and extensive. In 1970 and 1974, as Visiting Professor at National Taiwan University, he helped to launch the first Ph. D. Program in East-West Comparative Literature, and again between 1980-82, he took up the Chair Professorship in the Chinese University of Hong Kong where he became instrumental in setting up an M. Phil. in Comparative Literature. While there, he also helped Beijing University to begin their Comparative Literature Studies. He was invited by the Academy of Social Sciences, Beijing University, Fudan University, Shanghai University, Southwest Normal University and The Association of Chinese Writers to give a series of lectures on comparative literature, modernism, postmodernism, modern Chinese poetry in Taiwan, and recent critical theories, including a special session in Shenzhen for representative professors from all universities in China. In May 1986, Beijing Univ. issued his In Search of Common Poetics 尋求跨中西文化的共同文學規律 which became an instant bestseller. At the same time, the 10 books he edited on East-West comparative literature have been avidly read by scholars on both sides of the Taiwan Strait. Between 1987-1988, Tung-ta Press honored him by putting out a boxed set of five of his books. In October 1990, he was featured as the theme poet in the Second International Conference on Literature and Religion organized by Fu-jen University in Taiwan. Many literary histories written between 1991 and 1994 in China identify him as one of the main figures of modern Chinese poetry and critical theory. He was also selected to appear in "Portraits of Modern Chinese Poets" by the Public Television of Taiwan. In 1995, he invited ten poets to join him in writing a set of 20 books of poems for children illustrated by noted illustrators as a gift to young readers. His Mother Tree 樹媽媽 was voted by the Cultural Section of the Executive Ministry as the best publication for young readers for the year of 1997. In the same year, a collection of 32 Chinese essays on his work was published: Liao, Tung-liang and Chou, Chih-huang ed., Engraver of Landscapes of Humanity: Essays on Wai-lim Yip's Poetry, Prose, Translations and Critical Theories 人文風景的鐫刻者. In May of 1998, he was asked by Beijing University to give the inaugural lecture in the newly established Comparative Literature Lecture Series in celebration of the 100 Anniversary of Beijing University. In the Spring of 1999, he led several avant-garde performance artists from the U.S., (Allan Kaprow, Helen and Newton Harrison) France (Jean-Jacques Lebel) and Japan (Shozo Shimamoto) to do a series of happenings, activities, and performances as well as lectures at the Tainan National College of the Arts under the title Reflections on the Arts and Nature in the Postindustrial Age, and he himself provided a whole day of (post-Happening) activities entitled "Living Poetry", which included leading the audience through poetry to the original moment of multisensory, multimedia poetry; meditating poetry; dancing to poetry; body sculptures improvised from poetic images; paintings improvised from poetry; spring float (courtship and marriage songs along a river with floating cups of wine); spring thaw (ice sculptures improvised from poetry provided); spring thunder (with Kaprow); spring poetry-lanterns, as well as a cooking ritual (his poetry with Kaprow's cooking). Since 1998, Anhui Educational Press in China has been working on the publication of his Complete (Chinese) Works, a total of 12 volumes. Ten volumes will be released sometime before August, 2002. To celebrate this event, the 7<sup>th</sup> Triennial Congress of Chinese Literature Association, August 14-18, 2002 in Nanjing will devote a special workshop to discuss the significance and impact of his work, including the influence of his English writings in the US. He is also asked to give a keynote speech in the same Congress. In September, 2002, the Main Library of National Taiwan University, his alma mater, is going to have an exhibition of his archives ( letters, early drafts, photos, journal notes, publications in magazines, some 45 or so of his books and numerous articles). A small conference on his contributions is planned to launch this event.

Wai-lim Yip 葉維廉 : Bibliography (Abbreviated Version)

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A Brief description of my performance/activity entitled "A Day of Living Poetry"

at National Tainan College of Arts, Taiwan, March 19, 1999

Wai-lim Yip

This is a renewal of a class I initiated in UCSD as far back as 1967 which takes form first as a literary walk with students, and later as a class offered under the title of "Living Poetry". I invented this class, the only of its kind probably in the whole US, as a counterdiscourse to rigidified, streamlined forms of teaching poetry which often privilege "What does a poem mean?" (something I, of course, also do, being part of a system), and inadvertently repress the larger experience of the body of the poem; they often strip away the sensuous body of the poem (the sounding and the gesturing dimensions) and deliver only the bone, the so-called "meaning". Because I did not frame it as an "artistic" activity (the later form of HAPPENING), I succeed in giving the participants fuller access to the experiencing of poetry, not only as a semantic text, but as a field of energies as well. What I did and continue to do is to take the class out of the framing of classroom and bring them to a natural environment where they learn how to chant, meditate with, dance to and create poetry, i.e., to live poetry the way poetry originally emerged. I invented ways to make them improvise and to open new sentient channels to receive and create poetry. This is the spirit with which I brought to the Tainan students (one hundred, a bit too big for my purpose) a one-day activity called "Living Poetry", but planned out new ideas to fit in with the environment and the season which was Spring.

I began the meeting with the students on a slope overlooking a manmade lake by the main Campus and started reading poems with them. First, my "A Morning Walk" as an example of a nature/ landscape poem written by a modern person who by chance stumbled

into a place of perfect silence, of virgin natural environment almost untouched by human intrusion and felt a deep connection with Primal Nature. Almost all modern poets can just do that. But as we move from modern times to say the Tang Dynasty, we find this wonderful poem and letter correspondence between Wang Wei and Bei Di. "If not for your marvellous accord with the cosmic scheme, would I dare extend to you such a 'premature' invitation [to roam with me]?" Again, if we move back further to the 3rd century to the Orchid Pavilion gatherings, we have a community of poets, artists, calligraphers, singing, fluting, and chanting poems along the winding stream and drinking from the floating cups of wine to pour out fully their admiration of the million things in Nature, "to let the eyes go on an excursion, let the bosom gallop, enough to exhaust the pleasure of sight and hearing. Truly a joy, this occasion!..." And then we read a poem in praise of Mount Koonak by the Eskimo of East Greenland. Now the whole tribe gathered together and chanted a choric incantatory burden,, as punctuations throughout, to a single voice of the Solo Tribe leader, the shaman poet's elevated eulogy of Nature. At this time, the students were temporarily transported to an earlier time to experience poetry in its originating form. With the "Song of the Animal World" from Congo, the student whom I designated at random as the shaman poet began to dance as a fish, as a bird and as a monkey throughout the ritualistic performance of a poem constructed again with a soloist voice and a chorus. I closed this activity with a poem of "Rain-making Ceremony", again with Recitative and Response. All this was done in Chinese I provided, while the students could also look at the English texts next to them.

Next, I asked them to close their eyes and empty out any lingering thought for about ten minutes, and thus approximating a meditative condition. The result, as can be expected, was wonderful. They all said that for the first time they could hear the voices of Nature ringing in their consciousness or that they felt they were one with Nature etc.

Time for dancing poetry or dancing to poetry. I told them to do some movements ( I had poetic images prepared for them) in slow motion; meanwhile, I read a poem in English by Kenneth Patchen which contains, in different junctures throughout the poem, these words PAUSE, AND BEGIN AGAIN. The frozen movements of the students were the dancing gestures that defined the dance, plus, of course, what went on each performers' mind and heart, including the sense of release. I read the poem again, but this time, two students or a group of students were to do mirror images of each other, in slow motion, with the similar kind of PAUSE before moving again.

Now that their bodies were sufficiently relaxed, I asked them to form groups of their own choice and begin to do body sculptures, including such image as a willow responding to the wind etc. There were some very imaginative sculptural forms. I closed this segment by asking everybody, one hundred of them, to form a chrysanthemum bud. I ordered this human bud to open and close a couple times before they dispersed like a pounding wave.

Next, I led them to a Square at the entrance of the University. I had there prepared two kinds of poetry, one from classical China, including unique lines from the Tang poets, another from my contemporaries. They were to read the poems and draw or paint on the ground with prepared bags of color sand. The students devoured the materials immediately, and tore the xeroxed materials apart, presumably reading them privately, but the action very quickly started. The imagination of these art students leaped and flew, and

soon one color led to another into a large abstract, but clearly activated picture on the ground. The children of some tourists on the Campus were drawn into the PLAY and vigorously built on what was there.

The next event in my plan was "Cooking Ritual", a cooperative "activity": I provided the poetry, Allan Kaprow would do the cooking. But as it turned out, the number of participants was too large for him to cook, so he changed it to a form of "Tea Ceremony" with the same idea of service and expression of gratefulness with which my poems began. I started this group with a poem of mine that led the students back to the beginning of the beginning when some primal energy created things, including of course the food that we eat ( I named several local Chinese vegetables) followed by an ancient Chinese hymn on the five grains, the early people's expressions of gratefulness to Nature every time they take anything from her, plus poems by Fan Chengda and others on various vegetables, and then with a twist, a poem about eating by John Cage, and another by Gary Snyder. I was to ask the students to perform segments of Gonggan (Koan) I selected (with my English translations) after the Cooking, but since the plan was changed, I decided to have them perform these before the Tea Ceremony, which turned out to be humorous, particularly when I asked them to read these in the Taiwanese dialect; such a decision suddenly turned all the ancient words into contemporary humor.

In the afternoon, the students and I gathered around the two sides of a bridge over the manmade river. I had prepared a series of love poems from the Shijing, notably those from the Zheng Feng , rewritten and translated by me plus some poems from Zi Ye songs. I had also prepared, with the help of the art students not participating in the event floating cups of wine. The girl/s on one side would read a poem, teasingly, seductively, to the boy/s who would respond with another, after which he/ they or she/they would then walk down to the edge , pick up a floating cup and drink. The poems were arranged in the order of courtship, longing, meeting, sex, and final consummation in a wedding song. It was festive and a lot of noise, but it was fun and the students got to play out some of these longings. The title of this event, as can be expected, is called Spring Float.

Spring Thaw followed. The carving of ice into sculptures is nothing new. The conception makes the difference. I divided the students into ten groups and gave the leader of each group a torch that never dies (that is, not until all the oil or wax therein is all burnt out) and each group one line of my poem. As they ran across the bridge to the ice-blocks, they were swinging the torches and chanting the lines. During the sculpting process, aside from the saw, hammer, and chisels, they naturally incorporated the torch into the act without my cue. You would have to be there to feel the action and excitement engendered there. Just before they were done I asked all of them to read the poem together. Here is my poem in English; they of course were reading in Chinese:

Ether is formless, ether is form.

Ether condenses into a million thing.

A million things, a million changes, infinite changes.

A million things disperse and to ether return.

Nothing is never nothing; empty is never empty.

Void, the Great Nothing. Solid , the Great Something.

Void, void, solid, solid, nothing, nothing, something, something.

Great image, no image; No image, great image.

At once illusive and real, real and illusive.

What image is real? This image, this reality.

At seven in the evening, I planned two related events, Spring Thunder (to be realized by Allan Kaprow) as a prelude to my Spring Lantern. At the end of the river, over a bridge, Kaprow lined up 12 oil drums on each side and conducted the students according to a score inscribed in his own mind to use rocks to hit on these drums following his cues. It was nightfall with a thin crescent moon. In the meantime, I lined up the 20 lanterns made by the same art student ahead of time ( four wonderful shapes) on each of which was written a Chinese character of a poem. There were two sets of these, flanking both sides of the willow-lined river. When the "thunder" was over, the lit lantern procession started with the students shouting out at random the Chinese character. In this manner, we walked to where the ice sculptures were still standing which were no longer in the same shapes, I had the lanterns form two lines and had the words read out in fives forming four classical Chinese lines, a jueju. Then I asked the first lantern to move to the end, and had the words read out again in the same manner. The same process was repeated 20 times. We could also read these backwards and would be still perfect lines. This was the same circular poem written by Chow Tse-tsung I used in my book Diffusion of Distances by Chow Tse-tsung, but to have it performed in this manner and to follow from all these other activities has led the students to a new high.

[ My plan was to follow up with the students reading two more of my modernistic poems in orchestration form, but the light coming from the poetry-lanterns was not sufficient, so I cancelled it, but the students were given a copy of these performance structured poems to ruminate with.]

---

## Between Landscapes

Wai-lim Yip

### Fugue

I

North wind, am I to bear this one more year?  
Streets shiver along the walls  
Romances, cold sorrows, from the frontiers  
Disclose to me these:  
Patience of mountains Erratic breath of outlands  
Chronic neighing of Tartar horses  
Bonfires in war and farming in spring  
Plants that transcend all knowledge  
Immaculate snowfalls Grand cathedrals and palaces  
All plunge into the scandals of gods  
In our youthful days

The song goes:

The moon will rise

The sun will sink

Quick, quick, do not get lost in the sun

Have you forgotten the oracle of the dragon?

It may slip again from the jade balcony

Into this single sycamore among

Compacted houses Yesterday

Or is it today?

Beside the river, the deepflowing river

and dark-shimmering rushes

I see a cloud of crows gather around a drifting of lives

But where to?

The winds bring the barking of dogs into winding back alleys

The poets are dead The Vixen reappears

Is the one-eyed seer still living?

The north winds roar In the cold street in the flying dust

I vaguely recognize this is the bus to my native land

Tables, mats, and wines proudly invite me

To look at the stars--fugitive ideas on flowers

And intentions in myths

We go sight-seeing

## II

My feet and my hands collide together In the rushing coach

Stumps uphold the body of winter

In the rush, the fire burns the translucent days of the past

In the rush, the tree-lined boulevard tempers the translucent days of the past

A line of thatched huts and flying birds embrace

My skyward solitude I go in search of

Vespers and festivals within a tent a beach

A kitten rains in apricot days and smoke from wild ferns

In the first frost shortly after my vigorous hands

Caressed a holy face

Standing up, he

Imitating the ancient prophet:

By the Twelve Branches

It comes true

It comes true

I wait for you to bring you to the golden dynasties of Tang,

Yu, Xia, Shang, Zhou

The earth holds a full load of floating-sinking memories

We were the great book read into the world

We were the children on the vastest plains

We were the giant of skyreaching ranges

The earth holds a full load of floating-sinking memories

Glimmering Mars appears and strolls over our gardens

A man with disheveled hair sings

I want to see the land of Lu

Mount Tortoise hides it

And I have no axe or hatchet

To Mount Tortoise, what can I do?

Warm southerly winds

Woes-soothing southerly winds

Grains-increasing southerly winds

In early winter

In whispers

In sickbed

The fire burns the translucent days of the past

The boulevard tempers the translucent days of the past

We drink to the flowering chrysanthemum make a flute from reeds

And play a stanza from the fugitive song

## III

Do you not see people seeking for their children

the embryo of man?

Do you not see people seeking from abrupt waterfalls  
    an ode of stone?  
Do you not see people seeking in the jingling of spears  
    communion with the heavens?  
Against the maple, the willow, the wind, and the wine of the poet  
There is the speech of cliffs the hurrah of the sea  
The soundless pit of the sky as we remember  
A source turns into a pond  
    or gets into plants  
    or gets into human bodies  
    real or unreal  
    abstruse or void  
We simply walk down the steps No monsoon  
Nor ill-omened events coming on  
Let us brood over a tale: A peach or a desire  
Which spoils the moral of the celestial court? O how boring  
Let me tell you the legendary charm of a white mouse...  
    But on craggy precipices  
Or on rocky ruins of a long wall  
What can we make of the world?  
    We have admired  
Millions of flowers, trees, and bays of water, far and near  
What can we make of the world?  
    We have made and remade  
Rhymes, rhythms, meter, tones, ballads, etc.,  
What can we make of the world?  
Board a congested bus stop at the crossroads  
Look here and there wait for a butterfly  
Wait for a supreme seer wait for a knight on horseback  
Pass by  
    How many faces  
    How many names  
Flouted by trees and buildings  
    My good friends? They are faraway  
    I stop and scratch my head  
Night brings down a galaxy of chilling rains

1960

Lu, the birthplace of Confucius, symbol of Chinese culture.

#### Enormous stillness

Enormous stillness... a tract  
of watery sensations drifts  
on the floor  
Autumn falls abruptly from the eaves  
As syllables of voices flame  
out of the uncouth chambers of the heart  
The enveloping night mystifies  
The eye and the visible  
Autumn falls  
The room sinks into a trance  
Rustling of silk gliding over strings of a lute  
So we go into a rainy season  
Rains that have a downward cadence  
In the faraway provinces  
a shower slashes a city in an afterglow  
stirs up a flight of white cranes



from the marshes  
In an afterglow they say one senses  
a pavillion of brightness of the past  
screened in a sunny shower  
undertones in time of war  
gold winds winding down the cornfields  
wafting a flow of glimmering hair  
with a downward cadence  
A canticle of bones  
rises  
Drums and heads of martyrs from the plains  
flow here and away  
with a downward cadence

(Unknowing of full dawn's arrival That comes like the wheel  
Comes in mourning drapery Where the door opens  
The shouting of peddlers of the well-known yesterday)

1960

Are these the voices...

Are these the voices we have never heard, O you dumbfounded season  
Voices of falling, voices of shining and blooming?  
Are you the rising that doubles the sea and the sky  
That lets the yearlong hair of clouds stir  
The conflagration of ancient hoofs  
From the white-erosive flood?  
Where does the song end?  
Among the blue--the blue hills?  
Where, the yellow birds' way?  
Where, the seagulls' flight?  
When all colors are now governed by one,  
When all voices stay unvoiced, and  
Cities in the horizon disperse and cliffs sink,  
A tremendous flapping now strikes the void  
As the stone-head that has never been given the seven apertures  
Commands the growing picture of our knowledge.  
What swelling movements from flowers  
Which defy shaping and naming  
Have made everything explainable?  
We suddenly see so many door-handles  
That lead us to courts and bowers  
Where you, rising once again, with postures of a relief  
So stun us that we have to resist  
Rivers, forests and villages from being washed away  
And the nostalgia of soldiers on the only outpost  
From dissolving into the season, dissolving  
Into the soundless roaring of a fall  
When paths of woodcutters  
Slowly and silently  
Reach the yearlong clouds

American sketches

1.

Rows and rows of deserted urns  
and domestic fowls  
Become an obsession for the aged, as if  
Every day there would be  
White reeds overgrown from stars.  
Likewise, an unpulled blind,  
An unentered room.  
Noises jostle against the streets.  
Streets flow. Sprouts of water are  
Like pillars praying  
In every door and window  
For tender faces of children  
To bloom from clouds.

2.

Eddies ebb on the radar.  
Weather-vanes churn  
The streaming mist.  
Dawn, unstained by daylight,  
Prints mountains and rivers,  
Shades of water,  
Upon ashen pupils.

1965

&, of course, deaths

Quiet gods.  
Enormous eyes  
of stone  
stare out.  
Monoliths blasted,  
unheard.  
What are years?  
We scale  
up bloodshot trails  
of the brain  
quietly--  
Whatever smoke, turbulent  
empyrean & sickness  
pulleys &  
stretching of wings  
& blazen deaths  
beyond..

We know no distaces.  
Whitening  
blood-trails alone  
We know.  
We nod to the gods,  
Quiet brides  
upon banks of the brain  
waiting  
waiting: no thudding of guns.  
Clouds unfurl.

Sunspots are, perhaps, necessary,  
& some tremors & screams,  
forest fires,  
&, of course, deaths.

1970

Between: 8 poems

1

conception--

wind  
penetrates

roots  
pulsating  
grip:

absorbed  
gaze

&

immediate mounting

2

quiet

flare-up  
from  
rocks  
crystal-blue

feathers and clouds  
a thousand piles  
a million piles  
break up

distant wars

in brain's lobes  
fruits fall

one

by

one

3

snake-waves  
we guard--

stare  
clouds, cliffs

in the horizon  
fly  
shreds of tiles

limbs

&

columns &  
columns  
of riding smoke

4

heads, pressed,  
noiselessly  
seep out

5

a car crashes into a corner: no man.  
leavings poured into stagnant memory.  
a boy looks out from a white hospital.

a dance loosens hair  
&  
constructions of bones

some growth, in thick clusters,  
rises  
from our ignorance.

6

across the wind

blooming

a flower-coffin  
to receive you

flapping

invisible texture  
weaving into a flight

7

those moving shades  
finally arrives at  
some drifting brim  
bending toward  
a narrow outlet  
to block  
dismembered  
hieroglyphics

8

sieve each architecture  
into curves  
& lines  
to thread up our desires  
dangling them in space  
so that  
we do not know  
whether to look is  
out  
or  
in.

Midnight. Chicago

slash upon  
    sleep  
a dream  
    awakened:  
two rows of blue lights  
burst into flames  
the field edges into  
    a dream  
slash upon  
    the entire watery field  
a sky  
    caught in lightning  
a dream  
    flashes sideways  
across certain wings

we find ourselves  
arriving  
at a junction

a junction:  
familiar faces  
languages edging into gestures  
remembered in  
dreams

hair combed into golden streaks  
                                  lightning  
a dream edging into an arrival  
or perhaps an  
always arriving--  
with a difference  
always a difference  
always  
a beginning  
into the edge of another  
arrival

and in two hours  
midnight  
then  
dawn

1972

#### A Morning Walk

Autumn extinguishes itself into frost and ice.  
Frost and ice weigh on grass.  
Grass gradually thins out.  
No wheels or pulleys.  
A perfect wilderness of no paths.  
Yellow leaves brim over the valley.  
At the gorge, upon a stream, above the bridge,  
the scaffold of an empty house, singly, perches  
in the silence of the distant past.  
Bare branches reach the sky.  
And from nowhere  
A twig of cold scent rises into the air as thin ice breaks  
heard, unheard,  
in the mountains, perhaps,  
beyond the mountains, perhaps,  
like a gurgling stream  
the clamor of armors and war-drums.  
Perhaps, it is a spring from deep caves.  
Perhaps, the trembling rays of bright ice.

Move lightly. Do not disturb the young deer's first walk.

#### Sky Meditations

Suddenly  
lit up from silence

Mountain  
sheen

wrinkled by fast winds

2

Starlight    silent  
shakes  
the fierce river

Dam  
breaks

Follows  
white birds  
to sink into the mountain air

O What a Negative of Martial Gait!

3

A million miles  
of mountainrock  
trickles  
line  
by  
line  
into the  
surging yellow  
sand.

4

Moon

gone.

The panicked faces  
of the children.  
The hesitating feet  
of the mountain spirit.

A spring through the holes of a flute

Birds, birds, birds, birds  
A stretch of tightly interwoven birdsongs  
Scatter with the morning mist

Transparency  
Crystal flesh  
Widens

The city is reduced to a point

The last morning star fades out

Up in the high mountains  
A spring flows into the huge hollow of a flute  
And gurgles out  
Through its holes

Redwoods listen  
Rocks in the stream fingering the holes  
Mountain greenery, now dark, now light, accompanies it  
Into valleys, out of valleys  
Into clouds, out of clouds  
Valleys listen  
Clouds fingering the holes

Until

The water falls  
Falls into the washing of clothes, the washing of groceries, the  
washing of chemicals, the washing of chassis...  
A stretch of tightly interwoven peplemotorsounds  
People, people, motors, motors, motorpeople, peplemotors  
Resounding throughout the empyrean

1974

Pastiches from Taiwan countryside

1. A nameless peasant hut



Among quickly growing trees  
Between moldgreen tiles  
Upon the rotten wooden door  
Dreaming  
Is tempest  
Waking  
Is tempest

## 2. Deep night visitor

Night sinks deeper.  
Cued by the fragrance of the cassia  
I walk the entire narrow lane  
And arrive at the Temple of Tutelary God  
Beside a big banyan tree  
When laughters of girls washing by the well  
Have subsided  
I tiptoe  
To the side of the well  
And, in a fast move,  
Pull up from the well  
A bucket of glittering stars.  
1974

## A Bird and a Pine

Onward is snow.  
Further onward is still snow.  
Snow snow snow,  
A stretch of mistiness no sabre can split.  
My wings from long exposure to the sun of the South  
Cannot feel out the direction  
Of the drifting cold currents.  
Needle-sharp crystal-white icy light,  
Warming Time,  
Clanking of weapons from unknown sources,  
Floods from torrential rains,  
Are all enveloped by  
An immense vagueness of no distinguishable color.  
How am I  
To match  
The Five Peaks and the Dongting Lakes from memories  
With this map of no clear markings?  
Not to mention  
That my wings are now frostbitten,  
So heavy, these wings,  
So heavy, the sinking air.  
Tell me how  
I can stir these wings  
To break up  
This thickening immense vagueness in front  
To find

That one  
Lone pine  
Congealed in ice-laden Time?

A frozenstill bird.  
A congealed pine.  
All valleys, quiet.  
Birdcalls are caught in the ice of a spring-heart.  
Pine surges tremble in the kernal of memories, heard, unheard.

December, 1976.

For Jorge Guillen

Thinking of you  
In rains  
So rare in Southern California  
Rains that change  
Distances  
Far and near  
Near yet far  
Now, as I think of you,  
Walking together in the  
Rains in China  
Reading the poetry of Li Shangyin  
Listening to their shafts  
Upon wide banana leaves  
Years are now days are  
Minutes are  
Those crystals of light  
Transparent in the mist  
Leading into  
A single line wavy in  
The distance, hardly a  
Mountain  
Which trembles as if  
To speak  
We both look out a frame  
And decide to continue  
Looking out at the single line  
Wavy into deeper distance  
Hardly a sky, silent, void  
Completely magnificent

Del Mar, California  
1978

Quest

Perhaps we have waited too long.  
All journeys are a circle

(You said you knew)  
Returning to a pure beginning.  
In spring: forest trees show their first green.  
Some fierce animals appear.  
In deep nights: dark water gurgles.  
Some specks of ghostly fire drift around.  
You departed from the east to the west...  
Anticipation is  
A line in the distance  
So thin, so small, so fine  
Between seen and unseen.  
Notes of flutes stretch on and on  
Toward that distant beginning  
Long forgotten  
Chaining you.  
Every time you said: We have waited too long,  
You opened your heart's window.  
The air all at once was filled with the tenderness of earth,  
As if that happy moment had already arrived.  
Birds, like bouquets and bouquets of light,  
Exploded out from the tree like a fountain.  
You ran to embrace it  
And suddenly stopped short.  
Are you all ready?  
After the fusion of this moment  
And then  
And then, separation and death.  
You responded philosophically:  
Eternal happiness is--  
Eternal quest, following the heels of  
Pain...  
In the surging spring,  
In the clear river water,  
Between the shadows of two banks of peach blossoms,  
There is some prowling, there is some calling.  
Invading the spring coldness is  
Your familiar fragrance,  
Such a soft and small line of fragrance  
Chaining you.  
Thus, you open your heart's window again....

Hong Kong Feb.1, 1981

#### Silhouettes

Winds blow.  
Rains beat.  
Across the wide road,  
An ironblack body.  
One slash,  
One cut,  
From an old wound, layers and layers,  
Opens:  
Iron-rusted blood,  
Line by line,  
Seeps into  
The yellow sand.

Along the deep ruts of wrinkles,  
Crawl dreams,  
Crawl diseases.  
Sweat-dripping ploughs  
Plough through  
A rimless reach of  
Life, of livelihood.  
Barely once  
Would there be sunning  
Upon furrows of the face  
Of leftover ears  
Of grains

Of hope.  
Sun up: the same swollen muscles.  
Sun down: the same quiet swearing.  
No godliness, no sageliness.  
Drink when there is wine.  
Eat when there is rice.  
Sing when songs by themselves  
Burst through the bosom,  
And unfurl, like clouds,  
When feelings surge...  
This is the way it is:  
Life: no growth.  
Death: no things.  
Winter: tremble.  
Summer: sweat.  
The logic of seasons!

Winds blow.  
Rains beat.  
One slash, two slashes,  
One crack, two cracks,  
One dynasty, two dynasties  
Of wounds,  
Urging  
These nameless, immense silhouettes  
To pull along,  
Heave-ho, heave-ho,  
How much of your  
How much of my  
Happiness and sorrow.

North China,  
May, 1981.

Street scene--Peking, 1981

Deep night:  
Beside a four-lane highway  
Barely lit by the feeble streetlights  
Four shadows of squatting men  
Their backs against darkness from four sides  
With all concentration  
Under an occupied circle of streetlight  
Are enthusiastically playing poker

Life

Deep autumn.

Trees:  
Form thins out; bones protrude.

Leaf by leaf of  
Medical records  
Like memories we are reluctant to discard  
Pile up in a corner  
Dustladen  
Discolored.

In the vast, high, blue sky  
A blackbird  
Flashes by and is gone.

Winter, 1983

## In and out of checkpoints

Is the river a boundary line?  
A small boat can cross it.  
Is the mountain a boundary line?  
A bird can fly over it.  
The sky, void, cloudless, totally unblocked  
Wildgeese fly south, swallows fly north  
Out and back  
Rising with the rising sun  
Resting with the resting sun  
The sky, is the sky a boundary line?  
The sea stretches into the sky beyond our ken.  
From here, fish in large schools follow the tides to the east.  
From there, fish in large schools follow the waves to the west.  
The sea, is the sea a boundary line?

At the seaport, document check after document check  
At the airport, verification and verification  
This is no longer a question of having wings  
This is no longer a question of being able to swim  
This is no longer a question of language and skin color  
This is no longer a question of custom and tradition  
There is simply such an invisible line  
Tensed there  
On one side: a group of anxious people waiting  
On the other side: another group of anxious people waiting

Have you not seen  
People in a passionate fashion  
Proclaim from a height toward the four directions:  
"We are born free"?

Is the river a boundary line?  
Is the mountain a boundary line?  
Is sky a boundary line?  
Is sea a boundary line?

Hong Kong  
August 21, 1981

## Moving on --for Paul Engle

I.

Upon distant waters  
Layered clouds embrace a circle  
Quietly  
Waiting for something to happen.  
Spring  
Hesitates, as usual,  
Upon snowy fields of vying white and grey.  
Black branches  
Hardly noticed  
Tremble with small small dots of first greens.  
An early bluejay  
Stops for an instant on a branch  
For an instant  
As if in thought  
And then flashes, a thinning shade, into the high sky.  
At this moment  
The house with windows and doors wide open  
Is deeply quiet.

The earth  
Jolts  
Only slightly  
And moves on  
As usual  
Between sunlight and darkness  
Firmly  
Tunefully  
As if nothing has changed at all.

2.

Nothing has changed at all?  
In fact  
Everything has  
Between noticed and unnoticed.  
A change  
As if never-changing.  
Ice cracks only a little  
    moves only a little.  
We know from this  
The waking of the river  
The sleeping of the river  
In the hustle-bustle of  
Our chasing the world on.  
Bones turn: a small, small sound.  
We know from this  
The drive of energy  
The circulation of blood  
Have never stopped for once  
Because of sleeping.  
We know from this  
Upon waking  
Energy-drive, blood circulation  
Would leap up  
Clambering the sky.

3.

Between change and no change  
Engaging-disengaging  
Life is forever  
Growing daily into death  
Death is forever  
Growing daily into new life.  
We are forever abandoned in between  
To chase after your dream  
    after my dream.

4.

As for clothing  
We know for certain  
It is a linking soon to become dust.  
As for our body  
We know for certain  
It is a clothing soon to become dust.  
Between waking and sleeping  
We know for certain  
There is an eternal moving,  
Indestructible by tempests and frost,  
Into mountains  
Out of waters  
Into flowers  
Out of trees  
Diving deep with fishes  
Flying high with birds.  
Life is  
Afterall  
A never-ending circulation

Like the river that we cannot exhaust by seeing  
Continues to complete, continues to revise  
Toward the rimless desert.  
The earth  
Jolts  
Only slightly  
And moves on  
As usual  
Between sunlight and darkness.

San Francisco  
March 22, 1991.

Received 1 march 2005

A brief note in place of a holiday card  
from Tzu-mei and Wai-lim

Dear Friends,

As we look back on 2004, we find that Life has been generally kind to us.

In spite of occasional muscle spasms and burning sensation running through the fingers (Wai-lim), or various pains and inconveniences from eye and tooth surgeries (Tzu-mei), we continued our wanderlust in high spirit. In June, we went up to the high mountains of Deer Valley and Mirror Lake of Utah with David, June, and grandsons Justin, Dylan and Griffin. In the first two weeks of June, we took a tour to St. Petersburg, Moscow and the Scandinavian countries of Denmark, Norway and Sweden. In late August and the entire month of September, we were first in Taiwan and then traveled across half of China lecturing to rather sizable student bodies and saw many beautiful towns and pristine waters and waterfalls.

From Changsha, we were taken to the ancient city of Fenghuang, birthplace of famous modern Chinese novelist Shen Congwen, to relive some of the images stamped into our mind by his writings. Throughout the month, we managed to climb five plateaus and mountains: air-thin Huanglong renowned for her calcified pools laddered into virgin forests and Jiuzhaigou where we were overwhelmed by pounding waterfalls, virgin, powerful, pristine, and "seas" of untold colors, (echoing the mirror lakes and fjords of Norway) both located the far West of Sichuan's portion of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, the Big Buddha of Leshan near Chengdu, the imposing Taishan near Jinan, the Sky's End near Weihai, and the Laoshan of Qingdao, no small feat for our age.

Some updates:

It seems only yesterday, but our grandsons have grown up fast! Justin is already 10, Dylan 8, and Baby Griffin 4! As Griffin loudly pronounced, I am no baby, I am a boy. They are energetic, curious and alert, and there is not one dull moment. They kept David and June, and even us, when we are around, happily busy. One more member is coming, this time from Jonas and Arita, in May. Needless to say, everybody is excited.

June's first big book is finally published by Duke University Press: *Envisioning Taiwan: Fiction, Cinema and the Nation in the Cultural Imaginary*, close to 400 pages. We are very proud of her, considering that this is done in the middle of building a house and taking care of very demanding boys.

Jonas, having just finished a book with Wai-lim, (*Taking Time to Savor Provence*) a book of prose and poetry with color pictures from cover to cover taken by him, National Taiwan University Press, 2004, which also appeared in another format in China, has produced another of his own, in cooperation with Glen Hirshberg, *Flowers on their Bridles, Hooves in the Air*, text by Hirshberg, photo and design by Jonas. The last is available through internet.

The Anhui Educational Press which finished printing most of Wai-lim's Complete (Chinese) Works in 2002, has finally brought out the last of the 9 Volume Set this August. The complete set is now available in most big bookstores in China.

We have no big plans for next year yet, but wanderlust is addictive. We will come up with something soon. So much for now.

May this holiday season bring you and your family happiness, harmony, and good health!

Best,

Tzu-mei and Wai-lim Yip