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MARGINAL LITERATURE: THE OVERSEAS CHINESE WRITERS' SELF-IMAGES IN EXILE

by

Janice Chen-I Yang

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts
Graduate Department of East Asian Studies
University of Toronto

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Marginal Literature: The Overseas Chinese Writers’ Self-images in Exile

by Janice Chen-I Yang, 1998

Master of Arts, Graduate Department of East Asian Studies
University of Toronto

Overseas Chinese literature, a form of marginal literature, has emerged under these circumstances: the exile’s complex state of mind, the ambiguity of modern Chinese nationness, and the influences of Western imperialism. It is the literature at margin that is both neglected by Chinese conventions and unrecognized in the foreign host country. Its struggles for recognition and identity are often reflected in the overseas writers’ self-images in exile. The main focus of my thesis is therefore on the tragic sense of marginal writers’ self-images in their work while in exile will be emphasized. I will concentrate on the continuity of the ancient exiled poet, Qu Yuan 屈原, whose tragic sense of life is projected in the self-images of two contemporary overseas writers, Zhang Cuo 张错 and Wang Dingjun 王鼎鈞. It is presented as a case study in the overseas Chinese writers’ search for meaning and identity enclosed in their tragic yet heroic self-image of exile.
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Introduction

Deprived of his cultural heritage, the Wandering Chinese has become a spiritual exile: Taiwan and the motherland are incommensurable. He has to move on... The Rootless Man, therefore, is destined to become a perpetual wanderer... The Chinese Wanderer yearns for the “lost kingdom,” for the cultural inheritance that has been denied him... He is a sad man. He is sad because he has been driven out of Eden, dispossessed, disinherited, a spiritual orphan, burdened with a memory that carries the weight of 5,000 years.¹

Overseas Chinese literature, a form of marginal literature, has emerged under the following circumstances: the exile’s complex state of mind, the ambiguity of Chinese nationness, and the influences of Western imperialism. Being in exile is a sense of alienation from one’s environment. It is a disruption of the natural tendency for a person to be a single whole, and as such, is one of the most profound afflictions for the human soul. It puts the firmest aspects of one’s beliefs and values, representing one’s personhood, to trial as he/she is forced to embrace compulsively the resentments, humiliations, and sorrows from such fate. The true home for the exiles is perhaps located only in their minds and for the writers, in their writings.

The modern version of common exile is migration. It is a watershed that divides people’s lives into two—the past and the present—it is the renewal of life with a forever unattainable past: that one carries two statuses, that of the native and the newly adopted. This modern phenomenon forces people to face the dilemma of assimilation and rejection, inclusion and exclusion, forgetting and accepting. It provokes a quest for
personal identities. The fundamental response to a rift in the state of being is to transform and suture the severance back into continuity. Only through self-discovery of the past is an exile rejoined with his/her broken life.

Today, the Chinese are destined to be in a state of deracination. The political split between Taiwan and the mainland and the Chinese diasporic effect have shifted the land-based Chinese centre to the greater China, which encompasses the mainland, Taiwan, and the overseas. This enhances the ambiguity in the notion of modern China. Moreover, the May Fourth cultural formation of modern China is highly influenced by Western imperialism. It is thus partially “colonized” by Western thoughts and values: it “takes Chinese scholarship as the basic principles and the Western scholarship as practices” 

For many overseas Chinese writers, to be in exile is initially a self-imposed choice. They do not suffer from any political repression and are allowed to return home. However, their predicament comes from being entangled in the complications of Chinese sociopolitical upheaval and the obscurity of modern Chinese identity. The overseas writers are deprived of their own cultural heritage and of the contentment in interacting with the new host environment. They yearn for a place to which to belong, to take it as the source of identities, and even to return. Unfortunately, they will never be able to find a home even when they return to their motherland. For their homeland, coloured by their

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2 This proposition was first introduced by Zhang Zhidong 张之洞 in the Qing Dynasty and carried beyond the May Fourth Movement. See Danjiang University 淡江大學. Emancipating Spell and Rebuilding of May Fourth Movement 五四运动的解咒与重塑 (Taipei: Taiwan Xueshen Publisher, 1992), 245.
nostalgia and imagination, exists only in their minds and not in reality, since the past can never be recaptured. They transform this deepest sorrow and the most acute emotion of rootlessness and alienation into their literature since such a process is a consolation for their loneliest yet most desperate psyche. These writers are obsessed with words because of the need to be 'heard', 'identified', and 'recognized' as a part of the Chinese ethnicity through self-knowledge from words. The overseas Chinese literature, also referred to as writings at the margin, has not been treated as part of any literary mainstream. It is a literature that is both neglected by Chinese conventions and unrecognized in the foreign host country. Its struggles for recognition and its own identity at the margin are often reflected in the overseas writers' self-images in exile. It is shaped by the recognition of identities of the writers at the margin.

The main focus of my thesis is on the overseas Chinese writers who are removed, either voluntarily or forcefully, from their native land while refusing to give up their Chinese identities. The tragic sense of marginal writers' self-images in their work while in exile will be emphasized. My discussions will not include, however, those writers who have ceased to be identified with Chinese culture and history, or those who have adopted lives in their new surroundings and ceased to regard themselves as exiles. I will concentrate on the continuity of the ancient exiled poet, Qu Yuan 屈原, whose tragic sense of life is projected in the self-images of two contemporary overseas writers, Zhang Cuo 张鑒 and Wang Dingjun 王鼎鈞. I do not intend to apply the complex notion of tragedy to these exiled writers. However, I do wish to register one manifest characteristic of the tragic hero that is perceptible in them: the individual is inevitably doomed, through a greater collective force, including the nature of fate, social factors and human
conditions, by his/her conscious choice. The pathos is derived from the devastation of what is most valued, that is, the worth of personhood. Their tragic sense comes from the predicament in which dignity, self-worth and eternal fame are obtained at the price of perpetual struggles in exile. Although the circumstances surrounding each writer are different according to his/her own unique experiences, as each writer interacts with distinct cultural representations in each different country, the themes of rootlessness, search for identities, redemption and displacement remain the most powerful ideas conveyed through his/her writings. Therefore, my approach is not to group the overseas writers by methods of geoliterature, i.e. by the countries in which they reside. Instead, I will place my emphasis on the parallel self-expressions in which the overseas writers portray themselves for their audience. This will be presented as a case study in the overseas Chinese writers' search for meaning and identity enclosed in the tragic yet heroic self-image of exile.
I. Exile

The Condition of Exile

Exile is a condition of human existence. It is an estrangement one feels towards his or her environment. In other words, it is the alienation a person feels from what he/she does, or what he/she is; a person "who inhabits one place and remembers or projects the reality of another." It represents a form of reminiscence, from our current isolated standpoint, of our past, our youth, private happiness, individual values and personal dreams. Life itself is a journey. From the moment of birth, one is forced into exile from the mother's womb. It is a common mentality for all human beings to trace back their identities to their origins, and from which they affirm their worth as persons. Edward Said describes in his "Reflection of Exile," that to be in exile is an irremediable tear compelled between a mind and its true home, a body and its rooted place. It is a discontinuity in the state of being. Such irreparable rupture is carried within exiles. Exile is further an inner feeling: to be identified, rooted, accepted and to have a sense of belonging is a very important need for all human souls. Being in exile is to be removed and to suffer the alienation from where we feel belonging or rootedness. The physical removal from one's own native place becomes the manifestation of this inner fact. One needs to be connected to a place with a sense of belonging. Even though it may not be the actual native place, in the minds of the exiles, that native place is where they are connected, to a familiar past, people, and habitation.

Migration in the modern era is the most common form of exile. Such exile is a combination of both external and internal, or physical and spiritual alienation. Even

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though to emigrate could be a self-imposed choice, once a person chooses to be in exile, it is like an etched mark fractures a person from their sense as a whole. The state of exile is a division that breaks one’s life into two almost completely separated fragments. The fundamental response to this caesura of being is to reconnect with the broken self. That is to search for one’s identities. This rift from one’s familiar past, displacement from one’s native land, and isolation from one’s source of identities, propels an exile to reconstitute his/her divided life through desperate self-discovery and self-searching. In order to reconfirm his/her identities, one has constantly to look into one’s past. It is only through connecting with the past that an exile is affirmed with an ethnicity, with a familiar group, with a place to belong, even though this connection only exists in the memory. The past serves as the only shelter for emigrants, as opposed to the reality in which they tolerate the alienation from both their rooted place and the host country, in both their minds and their true homes.

However, the past can never be recaptured in reality. Memories of the past are the exiles’ treasure boxes but they are also the sources of their anguishes. On one hand, these memories are the basis of their identities, beliefs and values from which the exiles have been shaped as persons. On the other hand, memories are the records of the past and the exiles are compelled to live in the present foreign surroundings. This dilemma that lies in the centre of an exile’s predicament is accepted as a destiny, by the same token as we accept an irremediable sickness. Therefore, for an exile, there will not be a ‘homeland’ but a place to reside. The true home only locates in one’s mind.
Exile in the Chinese Context: From Qu Yuan to Overseas Chinese

The concept of exile has a long history in Chinese conventions. As early as the Warring States (475-221 BC), the poem "Encountering Sorrow" 離騷, which is attributed to Qu Yuan, marked the first lines of Chinese exile poetry. During the Han Dynasty (206 BC – AD 220), the theme of deracination, of a traveler’s homeward longings is repeated constantly in the Nineteen Old Poems 古詩十九首. These are the earliest poetic records of Chinese exiles and from there on, the theme of exile is perpetually recurrent in literature. In imperial China, there were many officials banished from the imperial court in the capital to remote areas. Within the Chinese tradition, Qu Yuan is one of the most emblematic figures that represents the Chinese exiles. He is the first recorded exile-poet and outcast official in Chinese history. Since his only formal biographical account in Historical Records 史記 seems to be a patchwork drawn from unofficial and unidentified sources by Sima Qian 司馬遷, whether Qu Yuan is only a mythical or a real figure is still an unsolved controversy to date. Moreover, in the account of Qu Yuan, Sima Qian depicts Qu Yuan as a hero who has suffered a great alienation in a nonchalant world while retaining his own beliefs and integrity regardless of the consequences. Sima Qian not only looked up to Qu Yuan as his hero but also "identified" himself in the same role with Qu Yuan. Hence, this sole formal account of Qu Yuan becomes a highly subjective one. Nonetheless, "Encountering Sorrow" is a first-person monologue that delineates the drama of its writer in exile. It is through this poem that later poets admire Qu Yuan as the great tragic exile-poet. Sima’s biographical account on Qu Yuan is obviously influenced by the drama in this poem but the biography in Historical Records has also intensified the authenticity of this figure.
Qu Yuan incomparably represents Chinese exiles in many ways. As read from both his biographical account and poem: this protagonist is alienated conceptually, mentally, and finally physically. His sense of alienation comes from both the process of deracination and from the inner estrangement between the collective and himself, between his ideals and the muddled reality. According to Sima, Qu Yuan had already been excluded from other officials due to different political proposals even before he was banished to the wild lands of his state. When he was ostracized for being slandered by others, he experienced not only internal exile, but also further underwent the physical expression of exile—being removed from his rooted place. By refusing to blend into the muddled public in order to maintain his virtues, he isolated himself from his corrupt surroundings. Because he was banished, he was incapable of achieving his goals to make good government. It becomes a tragedy in which "the individual [is] pitched against a far greater collective force (the social system, fate, and so on) as the result of a conscious, painful choice." His sense of tragedy derives from a predicament in which self-worth and pride are achieved at the price of slander, exile and death. Therefore, his self-image as a tragic poet is often quoted by later poets and has become a model for Chinese exile literature.

Chinese emigration is considered to be a phenomenon of the modern era when its relation with the West is concerned. The Chinese phrase, Overseas, literally means beyond the sea, over the China Seas. The earliest document on the Chinese emigrating over the China Seas is chronicled in the Historical Records: First Emperor of Qin 秦始皇 (r. 221-210 B.C.) commanded thousands of youths to go overseas seeking the methods of

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4 Michelle Yeh, "The Poet as Tragic Hero," in Modern Chinese Poetry (New Haven: Yale UP), 30.
longevity. These youths reached and dwelled at Penglai where Japan is today.

Although moving overseas has such a long history in China, it was still a rare practice before the Opium War (1840) when this long self-sufficient ‘Middle Kingdom’ was finally forced to open its doors to the West during the European colonial period. Therefore Chinese mass emigration is often considered to be a phenomenon of the modern era.

In 1848, during the imperial Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) in China, gold mines were discovered in California. A number of Chinese peasants, mostly from the south coast, moved ‘beyond the sea’ to escape the turmoil and hardships back home and to pursue their American dreams. These Chinese immigrants had high hopes that they would strike gold in this land of plenty and return home in glory. Instead, they were forced into manual labor to help construct the Pacific Railway. They were discriminated against, and many failed to escape and had lost hope of ever returning to their homeland.

When Japan invaded China in the late 1930s, some people fled to Southeast Asian countries, such as Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia. Most Chinese of the diaspora were illiterate, thus few writings were composed during that period. It was not until the late 1950s and early 1960s that a considerable number of Chinese intellectuals and professionals migrated to Western countries to withdraw from the political confusion and ordeal back in their motherland. In the 1970s, studying abroad even became a fashion for post-secondary students from Taiwan, thus more Chinese moved to the United States and other Western countries.

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5 This historical reference is taken from Sima Qian 司馬遷, Shiji Jinzhu 史記今註, annotated by Ma Chiying 馬持盈 (Taipei: Taiwan Commercial Press, 1979), 214.
Ever since political separation took place between China and Taiwan in 1949, the Chinese have been destined to be in a state of deracination mentally and for some, physically. The typical Chinese emotional complex is entangled with the idea that the mainland is one’s true homeland. Notably, however, many overseas Chinese were actually born in China and moved to Taiwan with the Nationalist Party 国民黨 in 1949. To them, the mainland and Taiwan are incommensurable. These overseas Chinese are inevitably doomed with the constant struggles of alienation caused by this national identity crisis. Homecoming is a drama that only occurs in their dreams but it is forever impossible in reality. It is not only because they always feel the difference from those who are not in exile; nor because they are changed imperceptibly by their wandering; nor because they remember and feel remorse for the lives from which they were removed. Rather, it is because the past can never be resumed and they were distanced from their old lives to such an extent that returning there would be inconceivable. This leads the Chinese of the twentieth century to a close version of modern-day tragedy: they are unavoidably doomed through the destiny of their nation, through their ethnicity, through their endless search and suffering in the ambiguity of national and personal identities. Consequently, to be in exile for today’s Chinese is no longer a choice. It is a tragic destiny combined with the complication of the modern Chinese ethnic and national identity crisis. Professor Leo Ou-fan Lee remarks, “In this transnational and cosmopolitan framework, the old spatial matrix of centre and periphery no longer has much validity. Even the notions of exile will have to be redefined.”

The famous overseas Chinese prose writer, Wang Dingjun 王鼎鈞, also asks:

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“Who would voluntarily choose such a path? How do they manage to survive on such a winding path? How much anguish and discomfort do they have to experience on such a road of abandoning the past, striving for the future? They’ve never composed the music. They are only singing. They’ve never directed the play. They only perform the roles. The history of these past forty years clearly lies all impotently before you.”

谁都主动选择这样一条路呢，这样曲折的一条路他们是怎样走过来的呢，在这抛弃过去寻找未来的路上要受多少折磨呢。他们并未作曲，只是演唱；他们不是编导，只是担任指定的角色。四十年的历史在那儿明摆著。7

Today, the Chinese are inevitably suffering in alienation for they have lost their continuity as persons. They can only walk forward without looking back. The conflict thus develops between forgetting and adopting. Their defeat is the fact that they cannot divorce themselves from the burden of the past that has shaped the way they are. It is the origin of identity. As Wang Dingjun describes, they only perform the roles in the framework of destiny. Therefore, the true home of today’s Chinese is perhaps located only in their minds.

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II. China

Nationalism vs. Exile

The Chinese character for a state and nation is 国 which is made of different components: an army 兵, a population 人口, in an enclosed space 家. The overseas Chinese, who live outside the contained space 家, are outside of the barrier. They are at the margin and are thus in exile. This interplay and tension between the two contraries, nationalism and exile, creates the most conflictive struggles of humankind in the midst of searching for one’s existential identity. However, like an object and its shadow, they necessarily coexist, yet cannot be mutually exclusive. They need each other to be explicitly defined.

A home is a place where one lives and to which one feels attached. Every human being needs a home as a base. That is in turn associated with a nation, which is constituted by a group of people who share the same communal habitation—a distinct cultural and social way of life, a common origin and language, a particular territory under one government, and a unique history and ethnicity. A nation is built on a belief of separating and excluding others who do not share the same communal habitation. An exile is the one who feels he/she been compelled by exclusion and separation.

However, the common principles, namely, language, culture, religion, geographical boundaries, government and ethnicity (that an exile shares with his/her homeland) are still adequate to form a nation. In fact, the notions of both nation and exile merge in a radically equivalent way:

A nation is a soul, a spiritual principle. Two things, which in truth are but one, constitute this soul or spiritual principle. One lies in the past, one in the
present. One is the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories; the other is present-day consent, the desire to live together, the will to perpetuate the value of the heritage that one has received in an undivided form... The nation, like the individual, is the culmination of a long past of endeavours, sacrifice, and devotion... A heroic past... upon which one bases a national idea. To have common glories in the past and to have a common will in the present... these are the essential conditions for being a people.8

Like the idea of exile, nationalism is also a conceptual theory from which we form the awareness of a nation. Parallel to the formation of a nation, an individual is affirmed and shaped as a person from one’s past and from one’s memories. Exile, on the other hand, is a discontinuity in the state of being which prevents the individual from being a continuous whole. Exiles thus need to reconnect themselves by sharing the view with nationalism so that the nation is the origin of personhood. Nationalism is about groups, whereas exile is the individual experience of being outside of the groups.

Being in exile deprives one of the most basic needs of all human souls: to be identified, recognized, rooted and accepted. This compelled division affects the exiles’ psyche deeply and the struggle in the search for meaning often surfaces in exile literature and dominates its themes. A marginal writer’s broken life is reconnected as a whole only through the memories in which one’s home is recorded, and in which one’s nation is imagined. The past is always the only shelter for exiles with which they are sutured with themselves, with a place, with an ethnicity, and with a home. As a result they tend to scrutinize their memories, reinvestigate their own languages, reexamine their native

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cultures, connect themselves with issues back home even more attentively, and engage themselves in any activities that are related to their nations. All this strenuous effort and stubborn determination to correlate with one’s origin is derived from the most anxious yet the most basic human need: to belong. Nevertheless, without a nation, there will be no borders; without the border, there will be no margins; without the margin, there will be no exile. By the same token, nationalism involves excluding the “others” who don’t belong. Because if there is a center, there will be a periphery; if there is an “us”, there will be “the others.” Exiles, after all, do not consider themselves the “others” when they speak, they still speak in relation to “ourselves.” They are the ones at the margin. They are the ones between groups. They exist because there is this place called “homeland” to which they think they belong.

Both exile and nationalism take the same narrative forms and share analogous dialectics. Without nationalism, there will be no exile. With the exile, nationalism is defined. Therefore, exile and nationalism coexist with each other, opposing and constituting one another.

**Split China—ambiguity of “nationess”**

Today the Chinese are destined to be in a state of deracination as a result of the following three components: the May Fourth cultural formation of modern China, the political split between the mainland and Taiwan, and the effects of the Chinese diaspora. The synthesis of these three causes embodies an ambiguity of “Chineseness,” the identity of China, which brings orphanhood alienation to today’s Chinese.

The May Fourth movement was named after an incident on May 4th, 1919 in which the students of Peking University protested against the Japanese imperialists’
occupation of some Chinese territory. It was the first large-scale manifestation of Chinese nationalism. However, “nationalism is not the awakening of [a] nation to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist.”9 “Modern China” has turned into an obscure notion, when the intellectuals of the May Fourth movement tried to seek a new identity for China to replace traditional and autocratic Chineseness. Hu Shi 也 referred to this movement as the Chinese Renaissance in 1933. The anxiety of this modernization process, along with the ambivalent relationship between the traditional and the modern, converted the Western ideas into “weapons in the attack on tradition and to fill the ideological vacuum left by that attack.”10 The formation of modern Chineseness thus gives rise to a national and cultural identity crisis and creates anxiety in the search for personal identity.

The Chinese are accustomed to identifying their ethnic and cultural centre with a land-based reference—the mainland. As such any physical uprooting or spiritual displacement from this centre would cause an identity crisis. This was exactly what happened when the Communists and Nationalist parties provoked the political separation of the mainland and Taiwan in 1949. The Chinese centre has split. Many Chinese intellectuals left their hometowns to follow the Nationalist party to Taiwan. They became exiles who were not allowed to return to the mainland until the two governments resumed unofficial contacts in the late 1980s. The displacement of this Chinese centre caused much despair in many expatriates who were compelled to emigrate to Western countries, mainly the United States. These “double-exiles” are characterized as the

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“rootless generation”\textsuperscript{11} and the “wandering Chinese.”\textsuperscript{12} It is clear that the political split has a broad impact on the shifting of the traditional centre that directly causes the isolation between the Chinese people and Chinese culture. Moreover, the superior economical developments in both Taiwan and Hong Kong over the mainland have also contributed to the displacement of this centre. A different perspective between the centre and the margin is thus derived. Today’s Chinese suffer from the alienation that exists not only when one moves beyond the physical boundary of the Chinese territory, but more importantly, when there are cultural rifts at the traditional centre of their Chineseness.

Since the May Fourth movement and the political division between Taiwan and the mainland, the Chinese nation and state have changed into a disjoined entity. Chineseness is coloured by the nostalgic imagination of the Chinese diaspora but the Chinese geographical state does not parallel this imagination. Migration is a modern phenomenon for the Chinese that has dispersed them across the world. These emigrants have become the bridges between the West and the East. Moreover, the transnational Chinese capitalism of Asia Pacific has benefited and increased living standards in both Southeast Asia and China. These diasporic effects have hence contributed to a great dynamism on forming Chinese modernity. The Chinese diaspora promotes the only traditional centre of its ethnic and cultural identity to many centres. Modern Chineseness is no longer ascribed “to long-standing roots in China native places”, i.e. land-based, “or


\textsuperscript{11} The phrase was first used in Yu Lihua’s \textit{Again the Palm Trees, Again the Palm Tree} 又見棕櫚又見棕櫚. It applied to the generation of young Chinese in the Sixties. They were uprooted from their homeland, drifting with cultural vulnerability and homecoming was impossible. See Hsin-sheng C. Kao, “Yu Lihua’s Blueprint for the Development of a New Poetics: Chinese Literature Overseas,” in \textit{Nativism Overseas: Contemporary Chinese Women Writers}, ed. Hsin-sheng C. Kao (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 82-126.

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 84. The term was inspired by Yu’s “rootless generation.”
to the heritage of China’s civilization." Rather, today’s Chineseness is inflated with political confusions, diasporic cultures, and transnational subjectivities. By the end of this Century, modern China will be integrated into the greater China that embraces Taiwan, Hong Kong, and periphery (overseas Chinese). The “obsession with China,” as C.T. Hsia describes, or the Chinese complex, has become a moral burden for all Chinese: the traditional ethnic chauvinism that requires an absolute loyalty to China regardless of one’s place of abode. In reality, the ‘homecoming’ for these expatriates is impossible in the context of modern globalization. Chinese migration has shaped modern China into a mere imagined nation.

**Postcolonial theories and critics**

In order to understand exile and nationalism, postcolonial theories become the substrate. They set up the opposition for exile and nationalism. Moreover, they shed lights on the predicament of “Chineseness.”

Postcolonial theories present an awareness of power relations between the colonizers and the colonized, the majority and the minority, the center and the periphery. The designation “postcolonial” has been used to describe literary practices based upon colonial experience arising outside Europe and as an effect of European expansion and exploitation of “other” worlds. “From a postcolonial perspective, Western values and tradition of thoughts and literature... are guilty of a repressive ethnocentrism”; moreover,

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the models of Western thought and literature “marginalize or exclude non-Western traditions and forms of cultural life and expression.” The theories have made further associations between the comparable ideas that have resulted from internal colonization, such as suppression of minority groups. These theories deal with the juxtapositions of subjects, including class, gender, religion, and ethnicity. In terms of class, power shapes the powerless. Men dominate over women in many societies today. The majority oversees the minority from the political to social to cultural levels. It is the juxtaposition of two opposing forces positioning themselves, one at the centre and the other compelled to the margin. The theories have stirred up an anxious quest for “identity” with reference to their relative positions grounded from histories in a broader multicultural framework, and have drawn attention to the predicament of the “postcolonial intellectuals.” Since Western values, thoughts, and literature have dominated world culture, as a parallel to all attitudes of the colonizers to colonized, only through the deconstruction of the mainstream and the representation of the “other” can the long neglected culture and literature resurface. The method to correct and remove Western hegemony is “first to assert and affirm a denied or alienated subjectivity.” that is, the non-Western cultures. Postcolonialism attempts to shift the emphasis from the centre to the periphery. It is a strategy of reading, to propose the inadequacy of the mainstream from the missed “other”. Postcolonial theories seek to rewrite and rectify the Occidental-made history. “To be colonized,” according to Walter Rodney, “is to be removed from history” and postcolonial theories fight their way to write back into

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17 Ibid., 222.
history. However, postcolonial criticism does not abolish Western hegemony, it recognizes the necessary heterogeneity and diversity to define the “identity” within the differences.

As previously mentioned, modern ‘Chineseness’ is highly affected and shaped by Western modernity. The intellectuals of the May Fourth movement called for a change from traditional China to a new China. They attacked inwardly the orthodoxy of Confucianism and reached outwardly for new knowledge beyond their own borders. Western ideas have become both the weapons that attack traditional Chineseness and the model for Chinese modernization. The birth of modern Chinese literature synchronized with this grand-scale sociopolitical and cultural reform, which was asserting itself in order to replace the foundation of traditional Chinese civilization. This “modern literature would have to borrow from many sources; it would be a kind of synthesis of spoken Chinese, the traditional vernacular, and some lexical and syntactic elements from Western languages.” Therefore, the modernization of Chineseness was highly influenced by Western powers; and the transition from traditional to modern Chinese politics, culture, and literature, was similar to Westernization or Occidentalization. This process has marginalized original Chineseness and repressed its possible unique developments toward the modern. Furthermore, modern China is merging as a new nation and it has pressed on the quest for Chinese “identity.”

Even in China today, there are many different forms of internal colonialization, including men colonializing women and the Han-ethnic colonialization of the aboriginal people in Taiwan. Many minority groups are double or triple colonized. For instance, the writing of an aboriginal Taiwanese woman is double-colonialized literature in
postcolonial discourse. Western scholars often overlook Chinese literature in Taiwan, although it is indeed another branch of Chinese literature and bears its own characteristics. The West perceives Chinese literature as coming from the mainland, and not the greater Chinese literature, which embraces all the Chinese literature in the mainland, Taiwan, and the periphery/overseas. Therefore, Chinese literature in Taiwan is also double colonialized by the mainland and the West. Literary criticism today is nonetheless dominated by Western concepts as we try to apply Western critiques and theories to analyze and evaluate Chinese literature. This is not only problematic but also incongruous. In order to resolve this predicament, the colonialized Chinese should “turn to [their] tradition itself to develop theories of criticism indigenous to [their] cultures;” to restore the ethnic centre and the periphery.

The famous postcolonial critic, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, addresses herself as “an anomaly.” She is “sometimes regarded as a ‘Third-World Woman’...a convenient marginal...special guest, the eminent but ‘visiting’ American Professor...as the Bengali middle-class exile...She cannot be simply or singly positioned, or ‘centred’, biographically, professionally or theoretically: and yet she is, ... to the conditions and rationale of the ways she herself is named by her others, as an ‘other’, or as the same.”

Her postcolonial discourse draws attention to the question of identity located in a multicultural and cosmopolitan framework. The overseas Chinese writers, such as Zhang Cuo and Wang Dingjun, are different from Spivak even though they are also named by their “others” and have no single centre for their identities. The fundamental difference

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19 Denton, Modern Chinese Literary Thought, 115.
20 This proposition is put forward by the African-American critic Henry Louis Gates Jr., as quoted in Selden, Widdowson, and Brooker, Contemporary Literary Theory, 233.
21 Ibid., 225.
between the overseas Chinese writers and Spivak is that they have the Chinese as their audience and compose their work in Chinese. They want to be “identified” and their literature “recognized” as part of the holy place where they think they belong, even when they are at the margin and are the exiles. However, with reference to the host society they are in, with what kind of identities are they regarded, with what type of status are they seen? Zhang Cuo is identified by his vocation as a professor and maybe a “Third-World” scholar in his host country, the United States. Along with the desperate search for personal identity in his exile, his centre (as a part of the Chinese ethnicity) is physically dislocated, but his identity as a writer is recognized and his work is sent back to the land-based Chinese centre. He is unlike the prominent American-Chinese writer, Amy Tam whose work is composed in English and has been accepted as part of American literature, despite the fact that she is an anomaly, namely a Third-World woman writer. The overseas Chinese writers write in Chinese. Is this non-Western literature written in the West counted as an “other”, according to postcolonialism, that is needed to construct the mainstream literature to be more complete and fully embracing? Is it possible that this literature carries a more important mission: to reaffirm the values of the thoughts and cultures of the minorities resisting autocratic Western colonialization? Like the writers’ self-images in exile, struggling and fighting for the meaning of existence, marginal literature battles for its own identity at the periphery. As a literary formation, overseas Chinese literature is written and shaped at the periphery. Only time can reveal what it will become.
China or Chineseness?

The designation of "China" represents the Chinese nation in relation to other countries in this modern international framework. There was no "China" in antiquity but a crowd led by the Son of Heaven around the hinterland of the two main rivers, the Yellow River and Yangzi River. To date, even when Chinese speak of the "homeland" 故鄉, "homecoming" 還鄉, and "homeward longings" 思鄉; these terms refer to a person's rooted place or the former village where a person used to live. The concept of China being a nation is not implied in them. Instead, the rooted place to which a Chinese person belongs has been emphasized and it defends the person's identity. All early official historical accounts illustrate evidently the concept of the rooted place as opposed to nation. For instance, in Historical Records, it always opens with a person's background, including where he comes from, to identify the person in the biographical accounts. Only by the end of the Imperial China when the Chinese orthodox was challenged by the European Colonialism, did the concept of Middle Kingdom as a nation amongst all the other nations emerged.

The father of Chinese exiled poetry, Qu Yuan, was patriotic and loyal to his King and rooted place. He was born in a period when nationalism was an unknown concept. The Warring States era was a time of sociopolitical upheaval, when any man ambitious enough to work for a government would travel from state to state seeking someone who would appreciate his knowledge and abilities. Qu Yuan's steadfast loyalty later on becomes a model of the Confucian scholar-official's idea of honour—not serving two lords in one's lifetime and to be patriotic to one's rooted place. During Imperialist China, the Chinese did not have the awareness of themselves as being Chinese. They used to
identify themselves with the rooted place or their native villages. Only in modern times did this thought convert to the Chinese complex: born as Chinese, die as a Chinese ghost/spirit 生為中國人 死為中國魂.

In this modern international backdrop, nationalism presents a unitary identity for human beings to assert themselves with a cultural and social representation. Along with the narrative evolution with History, China is thus educed as a nation. Overseas Chinese share a strong sense of nationhood and are conscious of China as a nation in the worldwide framework. Furthermore, if the basic human necessity is to be rooted, one is by default identified with one’s nation that in turn becomes the source of a person’s identity. Because the overseas Chinese are at the margin, they hold the cross-cultural perspective that again asserts the consciousness of being “Chinese” and of China as their homeland.
III. Marginal Literature

Overseas Chinese Literature

The theme of alienation in exile is always recurrent in Chinese literary conventions. It can be traced back as far back as the Nineteen Old Poems of the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.-220 A.D.) as previously mentioned. In addition, the “Encountering Sorrows” is the emblematic poem written from the peripheral perspective. “Without Qu Yuan / How could there be a Lisao?” is how he is praised by Liu Xie 劉勰 (b. 465-522 A.D.) in Wenxin Diaolong 文心雕龍. There is nothing else that can better represent and narrate Qu Yuan’s drama more thoroughly and completely than the one in “Lisao” or “Encountering Sorrows.” Equally, there would not be Qu Yuan, if “Encountering Sorrows” were not this brilliant. His biography is constructed from the poem; he would not exist without it. Despite the controversy over the biography of the first exiled poet, Qu Yuan, in the Historical Records, the profound moving struggles of the protagonist against this glorious framework of poetry trigger the deepest pathos in the minds and hearts of the audience. Thus he has become the father of Chinese exile poetry and his sense of tragedy is often projected and invoked in later exiled poets.

Homesickness and nostalgia for one’s origin is entwined with the Chinese “born as a Chinese, die as a Chinese ghost/spirit” mentality. The narrative imagination of one’s rooted place has become the true home in the exiled writers’ minds. This narration serves as a special homecoming for the marginal writers because their imagined home is not tangible in reality. Both the Nineteen Old Poems and “Encountering Sorrows” are the

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earliest poetic sources of Chinese exile literature and from there on, the theme of
displacement is continuously repeated.

Modern Chinese marginal literature emerged during the latter half of this century.
Most of the Chinese immigrants of this era are well educated and a few of the
contemporary overseas writers have formerly published some literary works in Taiwan
before they moved abroad. In the 1970s, when waves of Chinese students studied
abroad, the culture shock and their nostalgia contributed to the motifs and purposes of
writing. Because these overseas Chinese students usually wrote about their foreign
experiences and their work revolved solely around Chinese issues, Taiwan became the
centre of publication. These overseas writers’ audience were actually their people back
home, therefore, they became a bridge between the East and West and as well shed light
on modern thoughts and concepts of the West for their native people. The works written
by these writers are collectively called “overseas Chinese student literature”
留學生文學23 for this distinct nature. It did not take too long for these writers to grow
out of the ‘student status’ and neither did it take long for their writings to develop beyond
the theme of studying abroad. As more people immigrated overseas, the Chinese
literature written outside of geographical China has generally come to be called
“overseas Chinese literature” 海外華文文學. Literally, it means Chinese literature in
Chinese beyond the seas and it conveys the idea: “any creative writing or literary work
that is written in Chinese from any area or country outside of China,”

在中國以外的國家或地區, 凡是用華文作爲 表達工具而創作的文學作品,

23 Zhao Shunhong 趙順宏, The First History of Overseas Chinese Literature 海外華文文學初編 (Xiamen:
Lujian, 1993), 5.
and that remains identified with Chinese heritage. Unlike those American-Chinese writers who compose their work in English, which is considered part of American literary mainstream, these overseas Chinese writers write in Chinese; have Chinese readers as their audiences; and moreover are expected to take a position in the Chinese literary field.

The condition of exile for overseas Chinese writers is often self-imposed. Most of them do not suffer from any political persecution, neither are they forbidden to return to their native lands, nor are they banished from their country. Why then, do they choose to go through such emotional turmoil?

Life itself is a journey and every one of us is an exile from the moment of birth. However, the predicament of today’s Chinese is not only a matter of trying to assimilate into a foreign world. It is further the perplexity of an ambiguous ethnic and national identity crisis that prevents the Chinese from having a sense of belonging. For a Chinese exile, home is neither here, nor there. He/she will not find absolute security and happiness of belonging in foreign surroundings because “there was no happiness in his country.” Being in exile is being uprooted from one’s native environment. The torment that is produced by this process is equally frustrating as an exile tries to compromise and assimilate with the foreign culture. Exile is a division that breaks a person’s life into two, the previous and the present life:

“It is said that this year I am sixty but I often feel like I was only thirty-nine. Two lives being one person, everything that had happened before thirty-nine was like my previous life. And the previous life is a cleanly-wiped

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24 Ibid., 7. This definition is quoted and translated from Chinese.
blackboard... thirty-nine years... this blackboard is hung there waiting to be written again”

as Wang Dingjun described his own experience of exile. For the marginal writers, not only the past is irreconcilable but also their new lifestyles and vision have brought them to a great barrier against their own society. It is like having one love but with two statuses.27

To be in exile is to be in a state of solitude. Its corollary, loneliness, motivates the marginal writers to express themselves through writing. Writing is also a way to console the anxiety in the marginal writers’ own hearts. Living abroad, for most Chinese overseas writers, they have to go through the course of conflicts between assimilation and resistance. To adopt a new set of values, a new vision of perspectives, a new language and a new home, however, is often rejected by the exiles. The fact that they are displaced at the margin with isolation from both sides has created the kind of narcissistic masochism that refuses to assimilate, acculturate and reform.28 The exiles always feel their peculiarity no matter where they may reside. Especially when the ‘homeland’ can only be recalled from the memory box, homecoming or returning is out of the question considering that the past can never be assembled as it was. The homeland is preserved


26 Wang, “Light from the Extinguished” 明滅, in Left Ventricles Whirlpool, 3.

27 It is a metaphor used by Zhang Cuo 張錯 in his poem, “Maple Seal” 榄印, in The Wanderer 飄泊者 (Taipei: Erya, 1986; reprint, with a new preface, Taipei: Shulin, 1994), 207-213.
untarnished only in one’s memory while, in reality, everything is constantly turning and changing. Time is a flowing river and nothing waits in stillness. For most of the Chinese overseas writers, they are not prohibited from returning to their native land. However, once one chooses to be in exile, it is like permanent rupture interrupting a person’s single whole. This dilemma that lies in the centre of an exile’s predicament is accepted as a destiny by the same token as we accept an irremediable sickness; it becomes the closest version to modern tragedy. Therefore, for an exile, there will not be a ‘homeland’ but a place to reside. The true home is only located in one’s mind, and for writers, in their writings.

Authors of Overseas Chinese literature still need special treatment and attention even though exile literature has always grown with their history, because the external exile they experience in this modern era is cross-cultural, transnational, and more alienated than ever. Their work has just begun to receive some studies and attention in the early 1990s. It bears a unique characteristic—usually dealing with the contemporary Chinese issues, and reflecting Chinese social, political and cultural realities—whereas today’s Chinese literary mainstream, including mainland and Taiwan, has been wrapped up with social and political complications (Cultural Revolution in mainland and the Prohibition on Newspapers in Taiwan).\(^2^9\) Comparatively speaking, the overseas writers enjoy a greater degree of freedom and privilege in their choice of subjects and the fact of being abroad provides a wider perspective for them to observe the Chinese reality more comprehensively. We are accustomed to seeing the modern era itself as an age of


\(^2^9\) The suppression on freedom of literature during the Culture Revolution period in mainland has caused a long lasting effect on the development of the mainstream literature in mainland today. Moreover the
‘homelessness’, a period of anxiety and alienation due to the effects of modernization versus human consciousness. The Chinese overseas writers not only have to surmount the anxiety caused by modernization but also the isolation from their own communal habitation, and they are basically left with themselves and their own mother language. The modern tragedy is consequently portrayed in literary convention as an aggregation of shattering isolation and the world’s indifference. For these Chinese marginalized writers, their self-images in exile are usually depicted as tragic heroes. Exile is an inner fact and exile writers transform this anxiety into words. Their writing is a pacifier for their hearts and minds, as well as a justification of their positions and relations with their native country.

To be divorced from one’s origin, either physically or psychologically, is like departing from a citizen’s obligations to one’s native land. This consequently brings certain aspects of liberation to exiled writers. The most obvious freedom these overseas writers enjoy is the privilege to write about whatever kind of subjects they may choose. They are not constrained by the law back home, nor are they suppressed by the long conflict across the Taiwan Strait. They are, after all, in exile. Paradoxically, there was no absolute freedom of writing before both sides of the Taiwan Strait started more cordial interactions in the late 1980s and before the emancipation of the Taiwanese state of martial law in 1987. Since Chinese-language publication overseas was very limited, Chinese writers’ main opportunity to publish still relied on either side of the mainland or Taiwan. The tension between the two political authorities promoted fear in overseas writers, who were writing on contemporary Chinese situations, to be labeled as traitors.

Prohibition on Newspapers 報紙 in Taiwan was liberated in 1988 following up the emancipation 解嚴 from the State of Martial Law 戒嚴時期 in 1987.
from either side by the governments. Throughout this time of political progress, the two governments have increased contacts, and overseas writers now enjoy a freedom of writing more than ever.

Another form of liberation the marginal writers possess is the fact that they write for the sake of literature, for the sake of expressing their emotions, and for the sake of themselves. Overseas writers cannot make a living by composing alone because of the lack of an audience abroad. These writers are scattered all over the globe and are minorities in the countries in which they stay; therefore it is very difficult to develop a market for a local audience. Despite the unfavorable material value and the lack of appreciation for their work, overseas writers persist in writing and they are usually more prolific than the native writers by virtue of the need to express the intense emotions derived from exile. Accordingly, these overseas writers still follow the precepts of the Chinese traditional literary canon—"[t]he Poem articulates what is on the mind intently"30 and "The literary pattern carries the Way"31 文以載道. They don't write to serve any particular purpose, neither do they write to correspond with the literary movement back home. They write only to express themselves truthfully. This kind of writing "is not the 'object' of its writer: it is the writer, the outside of an inside"32. This is indeed another form of literary liberation. Through such writing, the Chinese ethos is kept alive in exile as well.

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Zhang Cuo 張錯

Zhang Cuo is the pseudonym of Zhang Zhenao 張振翱, otherwise known as Dominic Cheung. He was born in Macao and studied Chinese Classics with private tutors when he was in elementary school. At the age of eighteen, he moved to Taiwan to study at the National Zhengzhi University 國立政治大學 where he received his BA in English. There, he was already a very active poet, who wrote under the pen name Aoao 翔翔, and founded the Constellation Poetry Club 星座詩社.\(^{33}\) After graduating, he moved to the United States to pursue further studies and received his MA in English from the University of Iowa, and his Ph.D. in comparative literature from the University of Washington. Currently he is a professor of both Chinese and comparative literature at the University of Southern California.

Being a Chinese born in Macao rendered him an ambiguous national and personal identity. His choice to be nomadic was thus inevitable but it was also self-imposed to a degree. He moved to Taiwan with hopes to resolve this identity crisis and to pursue his studies. During that period, he found a sense of belonging in Taiwan, which he perceived as his ideal homeland.\(^{34}\) However after graduating from university, he again left his ‘homeland’ for America to continue his education. Being in exile was the driving force behind Zhang Cuo’s autonomous writing style and artistic vocation. He does not suffer from political oppression. He is neither forbidden to return to his native land, nor

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banished from his country. Nonetheless, his inner experience of being in exile remains ever present. In the new preface to his reprint of *The Wanderer* 飄泊者, he writes:

The most difficult choice of the twentieth-century Chinese is not to live or to die. Rather, it is to reassure and recognize their identities in hindsight. Being Chinese in form used to be as simple as seeing the mountains as mountains, and waters as waters. However, the fallacy of history, the displacement of the country’s destiny, the erratum of Time, the mutation of Space, and all the extrinsic and artificial factors make me feel the mountains are not mountains, nor the waters are water. In 1988, I collected a wanderer’s emotions and returned to the embrace of Taiwan... But by the falling of a leaf, one knows it is autumn. Some of the responses [on his returning and poetry] still make me tremble. Perhaps my whole lifetime is destined to wander. ‘How could two separated hearts/minds correspond with each other? I will journey afar to keep myself estranged.’35 I always have a city waiting for me in which to reside. I will never have a true home.

廿世紀的中國人最艱辛的竟不是生死懸崖,而是身份的確定與追認,
去做一個中國人本來就簡單得見山是山,見水是水,但歷史的謬誤,
國運的乖離,時間的失誤,空間的調變,種種人為因素的陰錯陽差,
卻讓我感到見山非山,見水非水o一九八八年我收拾好一顆飄泊的心,
重返台灣懷抱,並以一卷〈檳榔花〉作爲宣言,可是一葉知秋,
一些反應仍然令人寒捨o也許我的命運註定就是終身飄泊,

35 It is a couplet from Qu Yuan’s "Encountering Sorrow" 離騷.
Exiles always feel estranged when they return to their homeland. The homeland that they know and that they have once left behind remains only in their memories. Zhang Cuo felt isolated when he returned to Taiwan in 1988, after wandering at the margin for more than twenty years. The experiences of being in exile during those years, including the assimilating processes into the foreign land and the transnational visions, have only widened the gap and further isolated him from his own people in his own native environment. The China that he once knew continues to exist only in his memory, being intensified by his own imaginations and nostalgia. For him, there will only be places to live, but never places that he can call his home.

Exile is a watershed that divides Zhang Cuo's life into two separate fragments. This inconceivable experience has transformed Zhang Cuo into a tragic poet. The change of his pseudonyms also marks this significant watershed of his life and poetry. He used to write under the pen name, Ao Ao 翔翔, when he was a university student in Taiwan. Ao, a character of his birth name, literally means to soar. After more than ten years of wandering at the margin, he adopted the new pseudonym, Zhang Cuo, to symbolize the change in his writing style. Not only Zhang is his family name, but also Cuo further suggests the meaning of an error, a misprint and bewilderment. This contrast between these connotations sheds the light on the evolution of his poetry. Moreover, it embodies the changes within Zhang Cuo's state of mind and his self-image as a whole.

张国，《“新序”》在《流浪者》12版.
Qu Yuan, of course, is a symbol of the Chinese tragic hero who is doomed for his isolations and the world's indifference for his struggles. Many exiled writers, from the banished in the old times to the self-imposed of the modern, often identify themselves with him. Zhang Cuo is no exception. He defines this relation as thus: “I just attempt to discover a mutuality in the people and the events between the past and the present. Subsequently, I may unite the past and the present as a whole.”

Therefore, we often see the incorporation of classical poetry and integration of historical anecdotes in his writing. Moreover, his most obvious association with the classical is plotted in a rather unique way: the liberal use of the epigraphs, quoting from the literary tradition, prior to his poems. Of special note is the anecdote of Qu Yuan, which was not only quoted as epigraphs, but also used extensively to derive Zhang Cuo’s own tragic sense of life: “The exile of Qu Yuan still possessed a home and country. In spite of the longings for his hometown, it was in reach of his soil and language... But today” 屈原之被逐, 尚且有家有國, 雖然望鄉, 仍是自己的泥土與語言...可是今天³⁷ his own tragedy comes from an irremediable identity crisis in a completely foreign surrounding. The frustration and anxiety that Qu Yuan experienced empowered his creation of “Encountering Sorrow”. Zhang Cuo’s ambivalent emotions for China and his inner alienation from the outside world also encouraged his poetic artistry.

In addition he remarks that “China is the consort of my life,” 中國是我一生的婚配³⁹ and he sees himself as an “incurably subjective ethnicist”

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³⁸ Ibid., 9.
³⁹ Zhang, Sonnets of Error (including Double Jade Ring Grievance), 157.
This firm belief was the basis for his pathos of exile. The endless quests for personal identities in his exile are painfully enduring. To be in exile is as being removed from one’s own history to another and one’s own culture to another. Therefore, he often portrays himself as an abandoned orphan carrying some ambiguous identities. He also shapes himself in the projection of Qu Yuan to derive his own tragic sense. He furthermore defines the modern tragic hero in his own terms. We will examine the poems under the melancholy pen name, Zhang Cuo, and see how he portrays his self-image as a tragic poet in exile. The pathos comes from his deprivation of satisfied attunement to earth, because his homeland is not in tangible existence.

Wang Dingjun 王鼎鈞

Wang Dingjun was born in Shandong 山東, in 1925. He was well-versed with the Chinese classics at an early age. In his teenage years, he was highly inspired by Bing Xin's 冰心 work. Bing Xin, a popular story and poetry writer in Chinese Republican era, was famous for her melancholy and gentle poems. At the age of fourteen, Wang Dingjun attempted to write poetry. At fifteen, he tried to annotate Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio 聊齋志異. By age sixteen, he had already finished writing a commentary on the poems of the Red Bean poets. Before his high school graduation, he joined the army for the Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945). In 1949, when the Communists took over China, he followed the Nationalist government to Taiwan and started to earn his living by his writing. He worked for several prestigious publishers, and was once the chief editor for the China Time Supplement 人間. Wang was a very productive writer. He composed a

40 Zhang, Spring Night Silence. 9. By “ethnicist 民族主義者,” I mean Zhang identifies himself as the part
variety of literary works, including literary criticism and theories, TV/ radio scripts, short stories, and prose. Among them, his prose was his highest and most well recognized achievement. In the 1970s, being in his fifties by then, he immigrated to the United States. Currently he lives in New York, making him a ‘double exile’ from his native land.\footnote{Zhao, 
\textit{The First History of Overseas Chinese Literature}, 697.}

Wang Dingjun is a double-exile. The Communists first uprooted him from his native land to Taiwan. Then, he left this familiar Chinese environment to another foreign land. His life has always been overshadowed by the sociopolitical hardships: the Chinese Civil War during his childhood, the Sino-Japanese War during his youth, and finally the political division between the mainland and Taiwan. Through his life’s sufferings and turmoil, he developed a distinctive and extensive insight in his artistic proficiency. Even though he is not able to receive higher education because of the misfortunes of his generation, he is rich in life experiences. Political division caused his first exile and he was ostracized without a personal choice. His second exile, however, was motivated by his individual decision. As quoted previously, this decision is derived from the inevitable destiny of losing ties with his roots. The rift from his roots has also compelled him to wander and seek a new life-style. Unlike Qu Yuan or Zhang Cuo, Wang is more enlightened in transcending from the disastrous national and personal identity crises, and from the inescapable wanderer’s fate:

I have not truly lost my homeland. The year when I left home, I had concealed my native place in my eyes/pupils—to travel to the end of the world, to
carry it to the end of the world. As long as there is one square inch of soil, one square inch of pure soil, I will then be able to plant my homeland there.

我並沒有失去我的故鄉。離家時, 我把那塊土生土長的地方藏在瞳孔裏, 走到天涯, 帶到天涯。只要一寸土, 只要找到一寸乾淨土,就可以把故鄉擺在上面

He no longer searches for a physical homeland because he has learned that a person’s home is derived from one’s inner self. “Homecoming to me, what could it still mean? For me, isn’t that like going from this foreign country to the next?” Wang has become increasingly enlightened as his exile experiences accumulate. He no longer commits himself to the prejudices of assimilation or resistance. Rather, he concentrates on embracing the experience that renders freedom and that accompanies new knowledge.

The bond between Wang’s prose and Qu Yuan’s work is more cerebral than textual. He uses many allusions and metaphors from traditional conventions. Wang’s prose is a blend of different genres such as short stories, plays, and poems. He often inserts little anecdotes in his prose to better convey his ideas to his audience. In his prose titled as “The Last Poem” 最後一首詩, he converses with someone who carries Qu Yuan’s image. Through the conversation, he is able to comprehend the idea of Qu Yuan’s tragedy and to cast his own self-image in Qu Yuan. It is very subtle yet powerful. He never ceases to be in exile despite his attempts to sublimate the physical homeland into a spiritual notion. He certainly shares the same frustration and anxiety with other exiles, by reflecting his profound nostalgia and homesickness in many of his prose and

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essays. However, he is capable of transforming the anguish to new strength by portraying a new spiritual anchorage to his audience. He also takes his writing profession as a form of consolation—“I write to sculpt myself, and I write to heal myself” for this irremediable rift of his life.

The despair that accompanies the experience of exile obviously contributes a great dynamism to Qu Yuan’s, Zhang Cuo’s and Wang Dingjun’s writings. It is only through their strong emotion and obsessions with words that these writers are able to produce the literary work by which the audience is so deeply moved and touched.

43 Wang, “The Heart of River” 水心, in Left Ventricles Whirlpool, 11.
Their Tragic Sense of life:

Their Self-images in Exile

There is a yearning
That spells cannot restrain
Nor rest subdue.
A question
Is repeated in the wind:
"Why did you make and then leave me?
Why did you forge my timeless love in steel
With your ephemeral flesh and blood?
Why did you, in the impulse of a short
lifetime,
Leave me to eternal helplessness?"

In this modern age of "multiculturalism" and "globalization," overseas Chinese writers are endowed with cross-cultural identities and visions. Their exile has taken place in a large international framework and thus has acutely instigated the desperate searches for roots from which they form their beliefs, morals, and worth of their personhoods. To the exiles, memories from the past are both treasure boxes and the sources of their anguishs. On one hand, these memories form the basis of their identities, beliefs and values from which the exiles have been shaped as persons. On the other hand, memories are merely records of the past and the exiles are compelled to live in the present foreign surroundings. However, the exile writers' steadfast character in holding fast to the past is a necessity for them to reconfirm and reconnect themselves with a place to belong, with a clear identity and with their self-worth as persons:

Without examining the map, you can still determine how long and far I have traveled. You can still speculate that I indeed have my calamity and misfortunes. I ponder how fortunate I am to have concealed my memories so deeply. My heart is like a piece of film—once it is exposed to the light, other
images will no longer be able to invade/penetrate. To all instigation, seduction, and aggression, I won't be able to produce their necessary reaction. Whatever kind of totems, charms, ritual implements, they have not yet to touch my soul. In the space of my heart, there is no longer the spare room to place another shrine properly.

As Wang Dingjun has described, he is shaped by his own past regardless of how distressed it is. In other words, the memory is he; the past is he. It has shaped the present him. From this connection with their past, the overseas writers thus live in conflict with the present. Their tragic sense comes from such dilemmas between the past and the present, the identity and displacement, the ideal and reality. Such a rift in their existence as persons has further provoked desperation in the search for their meanings and identities. It stirs up the most devastating needs for human souls: to be accepted, recognized and have a sense of belonging. More importantly, it has brought the overseas writers to portray themselves with a melancholic sense of life. Their endless search for identity reflects the marginal literature’s struggles for recognition at the periphery. Ironically, this marginal literature, ignored by both centres of Chinese and the host

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country, not only carries the continuity of the traditional Chineseness but also embodies the Western literary theories and cross-cultural views.

The orphanhood self-image in Zhang Cuo’s poetry

Exile incites a discontinuity of existence that triggers the most arduous struggles for overseas writers at the margin. The exiled writers usually entwine the inner emotions of longing for a home and the miserable experiences of wandering without roots in their writing, in order to pacify their anxious psyche. Their tragic sense lies in the predicament of lacking attunement with their surroundings. This anxiety often surfaces in their self-images. The sense of being lost and the feeling of homeless instinctively drive them to relate themselves to castaways.

Zhang Cuo’s self-image frequently takes the form of orphanhood. He needs a place to belong to and to have a dependable base. He longs for his motherland like a lost and hungry child desperately trying to return to the mother’s embrace but also afraid of rejection:

Taiwan,

My mother,

Let me express deeply my affections for you.

台灣，

我的母親，

讓我深沉訴說我對你底眷戀，

.............

Taiwan,
You are the most lonesome and helpless
Yet the only mother on whom I depend and long for.

台灣，
你是我最孤獨無助
而又唯一能依賴和思念的母親。

Oh Mother,
Have you ever accepted my
Hands that are reaching out to you?
I thrust my body unto you, mother.
Would you hold me to embrace?
When I weep, would you wipe off my tears for me?
When I fight, would you acclaim for me?
When I am wounded, would you heal me?
Even when I die, would you be proud of me?
I'm your long-separated son from the outside,
Yet expect your most dear affection and caring.

母親啊，
你可曾接納過我
向你伸出的雙手？
我俯身投向你，母親，
你可會把我擁抱？
我泣，你可會為我拭淚？
Here Zhang Cuo pleads his intense yearning to the mother and hopes to receive her profound affections. “The exile, to be happy, must be born again: he must change his moral climate and the inner landscape of his mind.”⁴⁶ However, Zhang Cuo refuses to change his mindset on Taiwan as his home, and to adopt the new values in his new environment. Such is the dilemma he faces: longing to return yet fearing to awaken from his dreams since the homeland in his memory may no longer exist in reality. This dilemma affords the development of his ambivalence toward Taiwan. He sees Taiwan as his mother and he is the long-lost son from the outside. By asserting all these hypotheses of self-tormenting, he longs for special attentions. For the last hypothesis of his dying for such a mother suggests his willfulness to sacrifice himself for the mother, if she would be proud of him. At the time Zhang Cuo still had prospects of homecoming, thus he longed deeply for the motherland’s attention and affection. He was forced to wake up from this dream of the utopian homeland he had pictured in his mind, when he finally returned to Taiwan in 1988.

Being in exile marks the watershed of one’s life. The exiles are doomed in the discontinuity of existence, the rift in the state of being. When Zhang Cuo returned to

Taiwan in 1988 to search for and to reaffirm his lost identity, he recognized the impossibility of recapturing the past as he realized the rift between him and the non-exiles. The sense of tragedy comes from the lack of prospects in homecoming and the loss of hopes in recovering from the fate of deracination. He noticed the rift between him and the non-exiles:

Why do we have to be separated, China?
Taiwan, why must we have to be further separated?
Mother, why must you let a son,
Who traveled a lifetime but has returned,
Feel ashamed, unfamiliar, and powerless?

為什麼我們要分裂, 中國?
台灣, 爲什麼我們還要分裂?
母親為什麼您一定要讓一生流浪
歸來的兒子感到慚愧, 陌生, 而無力?48

Zhang Cuo’s sense of orphanhood is intensified by consciously being aware of the dichotomy between the non-exiles and himself. Zhang Cuo’s anomalous status was most deeply felt when he returned to his ideal homeland, Taiwan. He was the long-departed son who finally return to his mother’s embrace, nonetheless, he felt insignificant and unloved even when he stood on the earth of his motherland. There was little appreciation of his poetry and of his person. The unique exile experiences have widened the gap between him and the non-exiles. His transnational and cross-cultural visions have prevented him from blending into the collectives on either side of his homeland and host

48 Zhang, “Puppet Show” 布袋戲, in Betel-nut Flowers 檳榔花 (Taipei: DaYan, 1990), 54.
society. His marginality has forced him to identify with two centres, Taiwan and the host country. He was able to neither redeem his broken identity, nor to settle down in Taiwan completely. Therefore his orphan-image is frequently derived from the impression of being abandoned by the motherland. This inspires the audience to empathize with his lost security and status:

Although I am not good at tracking the time,
The duration of separation
Is already measured by years.
Must it be your final abandonment of me
That reveals my everlasting sorrow?

The pathos is educed from being abandoned as an orphan by his mother. The audience participates in the commiseration by relating the sorrows of having no alternatives and to being incompetent to change the fate in reality.

The same self-portrait is repeated in another poem, "楓印", but with a more rhetorical imagery:

You are one of the infinite numbers of fallen maple leaves,
As red as the bloodstain.

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You are the silent pain in the heart of China,
Wandering outside,
And could only attribute all this to be the fate of autumn,

你是無數飄落楓葉的一片，
血漬嫣然，
你是中國心中的一陣隱痛，
流落在外，
而把一切歸諸於命數的秋天。\(^\text{50}\)

This art of using the iconographic and metaphoric images triggers the emotions in the hearts and minds of the audience. The picture that Zhang Cuo depicts himself as here is a fallen maple leaf flapped away from its forever-embedded roots. Its powerless and irreparable identity as part of the tree connotes Zhang Cuo’s own predicament of being a national and ethnic orphan. Being in exile is a discontinuity of life. Because one’s identity is never reassembled in the same way, an exile always remains out of place.

The theme of displacement and redemption carries the exiles’ conflicts to a further degree. The tragic complex in Zhang Cuo’s exile is in addition caused by his ethnic and national consciousness and his invalid position to take part in either ceasing to be in exile, or contributing his abilities to his homeland. Zhang Cuo perceives himself as a faithful and loyal character ignored by today’s Chinese. He refuses to accept the choice of ceasing to be in exile by changing his centre from Taiwan to the new surroundings. Ironically, his ideal homeland is shaped with his own nostalgia and imagination just as Wang Dingjun has defined for marginal writers. Zhang Cuo’s source of identities is not

\(^{50}\) Zhang, “Maple Seal” 楓印, in The Wanderer, 212.
in tangible existence. He thus faces the conflicts between assimilation and resistance in exile, between the individual and the collective in his native environment, and between his ideal and the reality. His tragic poet image is portrayed from the dilemma in lacking the prospect of homecoming along with the loss of hope in recovering from the fate of deracination, and his steadfast belief in his Chinese identity:

In this age of aiming to seek profits
I often persist in the mind of a deserted lord or an abandoned child.
Yet this is also a period of an avaricious world,
I can only live alone in frustration by the river.

在這個利欲熏心的時代
我常懷孤臣孽子的心
可是這又是貪婪世俗的時代
我只能獨自困居在江邊

More than once Zhang Cuo has illustrated the collective values to be profiting one’s self regardless of others. He sketches himself as an upright character that can only stand distantly from the public for his deracination:

In this age of selfishness,
There are many capable slanders,
Wandering prodigals,
In order to admire the glory of other powerful countries
They betray and abandon you.
Facing your silence from afar,

But during the other lonesome nights in a foreign country,

Taiwan,

My mother,

Do you ever hear the calling from the depth of my heart?

They have all changed into new outfits.

They talk in a lofty strain.

The eyes of the whole world

All fall on their deceptive beauty.

I, sublimely standing at the corner,

Am despised by the whole world!

可是在另一些異國的長夜。

台灣,

我的母親,

你可聆聽到我對你深沉的呼喚?
He emphasizes that the selfish people in a disoriented world have ignored his virtuous character. He distinguishes himself from the muddled world, however, by rejecting the collective perspective and values, he alone suffers the alienation from both sides of his new environment and Taiwan. An exile always feels his/her peculiarity regardless of where he resides either within or outside of his/her homeland. Zhang Cuo certainly feels his exceptional qualities but its collateral, isolation, prevents him from having a sense of home as a base.

As we've mentioned earlier, Zhang Cuo rapidly invokes Qu Yuan in describing his notion of tragedy. Like Qu Yuan, Zhang Cuo forgoes the possibility in acclimatizing with his new surroundings. Instead, they both focuses attentively their concerns on the situation of the “others” (the non-exiles and the collectives back home) and him:

Those petty men seek transient indulgence by hook or by crook
Taking the dark and narrow dangerous path.

52 Ibid., 24-28.
All compete forward to engage in craving and avidity

Never tired of seeking and extorting.

They excuse themselves, and expect others to treat them the same way.

With scheming ideas to squeeze others out from the competition.

Never tired of seeking and extorting.

They excuse themselves, and expect others to treat them the same way.

With scheming ideas to squeeze others out from the competition.

The eagle's being without need for gregariousness

Since the previous life has naturally been this way.

How can the contours of a square and a circle match

And different paths consent?

Here Zhang Cuo's self-image projects the ideals of Qu Yuan. (At some point, you may want to quote some Li Sao to show how closely Zhang Cuo mirrors its language.) They are both isolated from the collective for holding fast to their own beliefs and values. Besides, they both illustrate the collective values as being self-advancing regardless of others. Moreover, they sketch themselves as the exceptional beings that refuse to blend
into this muddled world. Both narcissistic sentiments are parallel. This alienation provides Zhang Cuo the inner ongoing struggles of being stranded at the margin because of his conscious rejection of assimilating into either the host country or today's China. For him, ethnicity not only transcends the political labels between Taiwan and the mainland; it also transcends national borders. More importantly, it goes beyond time and history. He stubbornly holds fast to his ideal Chinese status but in the real life, he suffers in the impossibility of resolving this perpetual search for such an origin. The internal struggles of retaining his Chinese values and identities correspond to that of Qu Yuan, who has long been a symbol of the Chinese scholar's honour—being faithful, loyal and patriotic to one's own rooted place. However, this search of identity will never end for Zhang Cuo's character of holding fast to something that is not substantial. His tragic poet image is defined by his inner struggles between his unsolved identity crisis against his strong national and ethnic consciousness. His defeat is derived from his incompetence in taking a role of his preferred position in where he feels rooted.

Qu Yuan, the father of Chinese exile literature, is often projected in marginal writers' work to drive their own tragic sense of life, as we have described previously. “Encountering Sorrows” is the first-person monologue that delineates the drama of Qu Yuan. It opens with Qu Yuan's self-introduction as a noble man who is a descendent of the yellow Emperor and ends with the last line describing his shattered isolation in an insensitive world, which leads him to a self-consolation of following the holy dead.

Although Zhang Cuo often identifies himself with Qu Yuan, he has further stated that modern exile is more alienating and frustrating than the one Qu Yuan suffered.

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Zhang Cuo argues that wherever Qu Yuan goes, he's still encapsulated with his own people, language, and landscape. Zhang Cuo's own displacement, on the other hand, takes a broader international frame. According to him, Qu Yuan's level of frustration could never measure up to his. In order to manifest his projection of Qu Yuan, Zhang Cuo often invokes Qu Yuan as part of his poems. He quotes Qu Yuan’s anecdote generously and transforms it into part of his own artistic creation. Therefore, Qu Yuan is an important model or inspiration for Zhang Cuo’s tragic self-image. Here the parallelism that Zhang Cuo deliberately plotted not only emphasizes his projection of Qu Yuan’s image, but also magnifies his intrinsic frustration in his existence as an exile:

No matter where he is exiled, it is still within his own country.
However resentful the words are, they are still in his own language.
However he travels, it is still within his own landscape.
However deserted it is, it is still his own fields.
However peculiar it is, it is still his own myth.
However decayed it is, it is still his own temple.
However weak it is, it is still his own incense burning.
However silent they are, they remain his own gods.
However muddy or clear they are, they are still his own rivers.
However awake or drunk it is, it is still his own crowd.
Whoever the fisherman is, it is still his own fog upon the lakes.
Whoever the woodsman is, they are still his own mountains and forests.
However tattered they are, they are still his Upper State’s garments.
However abandoned, they are still the king and lords of his court.
Zhang Cuo has stressed that despite that Qu Yuan was banished, he was still within his own country and people. To better interpret this poem, we need to pay special attention to its title, “Questions to Qu” 屈問. In the epigraph of the poem, Zhang Cuo quoted Wang Yi’s 王逸 55 preface of “Heavenly Questions” 天問, also attributed to Qu Yuan, and his intent is significant. Since the Heaven or the gods are unquestionable, in his preface Wang Yi has already explicated the reason of such a title as opposed to “Questioning Heaven” 問天. Zhang Cuo “Questions to Qu” reflects the same indication: Qu Yuan is

54 Zhang, “Questions to Qu” 屈問, in Spring Night Silence. 19-20.
55 Wang Yi (b. 89-158 A.D.) is the compiler of Cu Ci Anthology 楚辭章句.
unquestionable. Zhang Cuo further adopts the questioning format of "Heavenly Questions" to derive his own sense of misfortune. Even though it is titled "Questions to Qu," the questions read more like Zhang Cuo’s personal justification of Qu Yuan’s exile. Zhang Cuo has not only adopted the structure of Qu Yuan’s writing but he has also borrowed his phrases and language. Such as "muddy and clear/rivers" 清濁/江渚, "awake and drunk/crowd" 醒醉/眾人, and "fisherman" 漁父, are all taken from the prose piece, "Fisherman" which is also attributed to Qu Yuan. By shedding lights on the contrasts between Qu Yuan’s exile and his own, he is able to convince the audience that Qu Yuan’s anxiety can never measure up to that which he experiences. Moreover, the middle part of this poem is a miniature of a romantic fantasy compared to that in Qu Yuan’s "Encountering Sorrows". Finally Zhang closes the poem with the spirit awakening back to reality 魂兮歸來 and he states, "no matter how he ends his life, it is still within his rivers and lakes" 如何自盡仍是自己的江湖. Moreover, he has attached an “ending song” 亂曰 foreshadowing his decision: Enough! / Return to Taipei / or Hualian / or even Yilan 己矣哉! /回去台北 / 或者花蓮 / 或甚至宜蘭…. The structure is fundamentally similar to Qu Yuan’s “Encountering Sorrows.” The striking parallel with Qu Yuan that Zhang Cuo purposely draws not only endows his projection of Qu Yuan, the father of the Chinese exiled hero, but also additionally enriches the theme he tries to convey. This conscious effort in invoking Qu Yuan completes the self-portrait that Zhang Cuo uses to shape his own self-image.

Zhang Cuo’s self-image as an orphan displays the great despair and anxiety inflicted in those wandering at the margin, and shapes himself as a tragic poet. His

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rootless frustration, in turn contributes greatly to the dynamism in his artistic creativity as this orphan-image has shaped him as a tragic poet.

**Wang Dingjun's Self-images of Transcendence**

It is, therefore, a source of great virtue for the practised mind to learn, bit by bit, first to change about invisible and transitory things, so that afterwards it may be also to leave them behind altogether. The man who finds his homeland sweet is still a tender beginner; he whom every soil is as his native one is already strong; but he is perfect to whom the entire world is as a foreign land. The tender soul has fixed his love on one spot in the world; the strong man has extended his love to all places; the perfect man has extinguished his.  

As these exquisite lines written by a Saxony monk, Hugo of St. Victor suggest, Wang Dingjun's transcendence, in his national and personal identity crises from the inescapable wanderer's fate, has led him to embrace his exile experience fully. His self-image in exile appears to be enlightened. Although he is a double-exile burdened by his ponderous past, he manages to focus on the issue of spiritual anchorage rather than a geographical home. Exile is the irremediable tear of being that triggers the most arduous struggles and conflicts between the assimilation and rejection of the old and new environment. It is based on the existence of bonding with one's homeland and with one's longing of the homeland. Over time, Wang Dingjun's exile experience has slowly progressed from being the tender beginner to becoming the perfect man but he has not lost the bond with his homeland. It has been preserved in his heart, and certainly in his writing.
The past is an exile's personhood. In other words, the past is that from which a person is shaped. Wang Dingjun is a double-exile who is inevitably driven out of his native place both physically and emotionally due to the sociopolitical upheaval of his time. Nonetheless, an exile like Wang Dingjun would never be able to move forward without looking back. The past is the source of his identities. Being exiled is a tragedy. It is like being forbidden to return to the Eden yet being burdened by the memories of the dispossessed identity source—the homeland. The tragic sense comes from the impossibility of homecoming tarnishing the forever engraved sweet memories:

I ponder how fortunate I am to have concealed my memories so deeply. My heart is like a piece of film—once it is exposed to the light, other images will no longer be able to invade. To all instigation, seduction, and aggression, I won't be able to produce their necessary reaction. Whatever kind of totems, charms, ritual implements, they have not yet to touch my soul. In the space of my heart, there is no longer the spare room to place another shrine properly.\(^{58}\)

The homeland is the place on earth that can never be obscured. Wang Dingjun remembers such a place and refuses to identify himself with it differently. His self-image completely embodies the form of an exile, wanderer, and traveler. However, from this rhetorical metaphor in "Amazingly Alive" 驚生, he describes himself as a piece of the exposed film; wherever he goes or whatever he is, he still maintains his Chineseness. "The distance of exile only intensified the faithful minuteness with which the home was recorded."\(^{59}\) He has this absolute loyalty to his memories and there is no other divine

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light capable of changing the images on the film. Because the beauty of homeland in the exile’s mind is intensified as he becomes more distanced and isolated, it appears to be even sweeter, like a mirage, and becomes even more unforgettable. There will never be anything more powerful in changing Wang Dingjun’s person for it is shaped by his first light—the past; there is nothing more powerful than the first light that flashes upon any unexposed film. Moreover, his native land, in reality, is enhanced purely by his imaginations from being so distant from it. He has appeared to be a tender beginner learning the first lesson of exile when his homeland seems to be the utopia on earth.

As his exile livelihood continues, Wang Dingjun eventually tastes the bitterness in bearing this sweet memory of home. He realizes that his utopian homeland is indeed a mere imagination: the past cannot be a repossessed moment and the distance of being in exile has sculpted his homeland with a nostalgic contour. With such a combination, it has turned his geographical homeland into a falsehood. The need of being rooted still surfaces profoundly in Wang Dingjun’s writing, however, unlike Zhang Cuo, Wang Dingjun actively seeks his spiritual homeland instead of longing for his native place:

Last night, I was calling the name of my homeland like calling for a missing child: Where are you? Oh homeland, the homeland that is forever etched on my mind, the homeland that pounds my chest! Homeland, you are the Holy Land that I kneel to kiss; the objet d’art that I have decorated and sculpted with my half lifetime’s imagination and nostalgia. You are my first love of Earth, thus I’m destined to long and dream for you for all my life yet not entitled to expect any further closure.
Wang Dingjun seems to be more enlightened than Zhang Cuo is. He reverses the situation to where he is the one who calls for his long lost native land to return. He sees his homeland as the lost child, because he knows the homeland that he has concealed in his memory is a synthetic artwork. Regardless of how he is affected by the homeland; how he has to bear the etchings of the homeland painfully; how he is destined to long and dream all his lifetime for such an intangible homeland; he understands that there is never a physical homecoming for him. There is never a reunion with a past moment. He has lost it forever in reality but he indeed retains it within his memories and in his writing.

Wang Dingjun no longer searches for a physical homeland because he has learned that a person’s home is derived from one’s inner self. He has grown stronger in discerning the homeland that he remembers and the China that exists presently as two separate substances. His true home only inheres in him:

I have not truly lost my homeland. The year when I left home, I had concealed my native place in my eyes—to travel to the end of the world, to carry it to the end of the world. As long as there is one square inch of soil, one square inch of pure soil, I will then be able to plant my homeland there.  

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60 Wang, “The Heart of River,” in Left Ventricles Whirlpool, 11.
61 Wang, Shattered Crystal, 9.
Wang Dingjun recognizes the impossibility in physical homecoming and has concealed its memory within him. He pursues a spiritual anchorage as long as he possesses his retained homeland in his heart. Therefore, wherever he goes, wherever he may reside, he is able to encounter the sense of homecoming. However, his conflicts come from this paradoxical act for he can never deny his past. Neither can he be satisfied with his present state of existence while being burdened by such a memory.

The tragic sense is brought forward by his inability to change the fact of no returning and the fate of homelessness; and at the same time, he embraces such a memory that perpetually reminds him of his lamentation. Hence Wang Dingjun uses the concept of death to illustrate this watershed of life:

It is said that this year I am sixty but I often feel like I am only thirty-nine.

Two lives being a person: everything that had happened before thirty-nine was like my previous life. And the previous life is a wiped-clean blackboard... thirty-nine years... this blackboard is hung there waiting to be written on again.62

To him, since the past is unattainable, everything that happened before his exile is in his previous life. Now he's reborn and lives in a completely different environment. It seems; however, his previous life is still there waiting for him to paint the colours and to continue. The distress surfaces from his memories of his previous life because living in exile is not exactly death, which eradicates all the continuities and memories with the state of being. Wang Dingjun is entangled in the straits of knowing that he has two lives. Even as he lives out his present life, the past and memories of his last life forever haunt him. Consequently, no matter how he is able to transcend the loss of roots, he is in the dilemma of involuntarily carrying a memory that provides both anguish and assurance.
As he stresses: “From this thirty-ninth year, my most difficult enigma is how truly to become as forgetful as the blackboard without regrets; how to watch the chalk disintegrate into floating dust yet be so still?” 三十九年以来, 我最大的難題是, 怎麼才真正像一塊黑板那樣忘情而 無怨呢? 怎樣看著粉筆化成飛灰而安之若素呢?

Through self-learning and self-discovering, Wang Dingjun finally perceives his fate of being exiled as an insoluble complex, an irremediability illness. The only solution to his predicament is to extinguish the desire of suturing his broken life by searching for the lost homeland. He needs the strength to watch the past disintegrate into the flowing dust and to realize the end of an era. He has to live on. The tragedy is that he has to move on and forever carry this eternal rift of life.

“Homecoming to me, what could it still mean? For me, isn’t that like going from this foreign country to the next?” Wang Dingjun seems to be increasingly enlightened as his exile experiences accumulate. He does not have the false hopes in physical homecoming. To date, he is not prohibited from returning back to the mainland but he recognizes the place he left behind is also transforming with time. He no longer distresses himself with the bigotry of assimilation and rejection. Rather, he concentrates on embracing the experience that provides freedom and that accompanies new knowledge. By embracing the differences between an exile and non-exile, the homeland and foreign place, the past and the present; he is able to transcend his rootless torment to a certain degree. He is able to reside at any place wherever he chooses to make it home. Nevertheless his obstacle still lies in carrying his past into the present while realizing there is no end to such suffering:

63 Ibid., 4.
You mentioned the hometown. You asked me the date of my return. How am I supposed to respond to such a question? How would you understand the script of my chanting! There is no hometown; there is no returning date.

你提起故鄉。你問我歸期。這個問題教我怎樣答覆你呢?

你怎能了解我念的經文呢。沒有故鄉，沒有歸期。65

Indeed, he may be able to make whatever place his home but he is incapable of forgetting the utopian homeland that he was dispossessed from. He cannot deny his own identity, his Chineseness. The subject “you” here refers to the non-exiles in the mainland. Again we see how exiles always feel their difference and believe that the non-exiles will never understand the frustration caused by uprooting. Wang Dingjun’s frustration is derived from the lack of reconnection with the hometown that is forever buried in the past. He does not have a substantial homecoming to suture his broken life. For him, there’s no such returning, nor such homeland.

Therefore, one of the most essential human needs is to be rooted. The exiles are the ones who have endured the incurable rupture of lives. They desperately search for an identity that can render the sense of belonging to a place, a group, and maybe a nation. For the national identity also provides the same security of the soul, in today’s multicultural framework, an exile is pressed with the need to be identified with a nation.

“In this book, the love for a nation and the reconstruction of oneself are progressing along the same track” 在這本書裏，愛國和自我的重建是在同一軌道上演進的，66 commented the Taiwanese critic, Yuan Muzhi 袁慕直 in the appendix of Left Ventricles Whirlpool.

64 Wang, “The Heart of River,” in Left Ventricles Whirlpool, 11.
65 Ibid., 10.
66 Yuan Muzhi, “After Reading Left Ventricles Whirlpool” 左心房漩渦後, in Left Ventricles Whirlpool, 254.
There is always a country or a nation that an exile identifies him/herself with, even though it may not be the spiritual homeland that one is searching for. Wang Dingjun consequently wrote such a passage:

...but the spirit of the moon never dies high up in the sky. If we can create some merit in the foreign land, even when the form vanishes the spirit will survive. The efforts will not be wasted. One day perhaps the homeland will also share our worth.

可是月魂在天終不死, 如果我們能在異鄉創造價值, 則形滅神存, 功不唐捐, 故鄉有一天也會分享的吧。67

To have accomplishments in the foreign land and to have the homeland sharing his worthiness have transformed Wang Dingjun’s loss into a postponed drama of homecoming. Since returning physically to the remembered homeland is impossible, having spiritual anchorage pacifies the soul of the wanderer.

The Notion Zhiying 知音

While the conditions of Zhang Cuo’s, Wang Dingjun’s and Qu Yuan’s exile are different, their isolation from the public and the internal alienation coincides in longing for a soul mate “zhi yin”, literally the one who knows the tune. According to the Chinese ancient literary thought, there are two mediums through which one’s inner sentiments are expressed most profoundly—music and poetry:

The poem articulates what is on the mind intently; song makes language last long.

詩言志 歌詠言68

68 As quoted in Stephen Owen, Reading in Chinese Literary Thought, 26.
from the *Book of Document*, “Cannon of Shun.” And

The affections are stirred within and take on form in words. If words alone are inadequate, we speak them out in sighs. If sighing is inadequate, we sing them.

The affections are stirred within and take on form in words. If words alone are inadequate, we speak them out in sighs. If sighing is inadequate, we sing them.

in the “Great Preface” to the *Book of Song*. When a person finds a “zhi yin,” he or she finds someone who can appreciate his/her talents and understand his/her emotions. Hence it is also called “zhi xin” 知心, the one who understand the mind/heart.

The fundamental response to the caesura of existence caused by exile is a search for identities and the need to be accepted, understood, and recognized. For more than ten years in exile, Qu Yuan never gave up on his beliefs and virtues even when he suffered such alienation, depression and physical deteriorotation. But by refusing to compromise his integrity and dignity with a depraved reality, he forced himself to the extreme of destroying his life in which there seemed to be know one who would understand his inner nature. Finally he committed suicide by drowning himself after stating:

Enough! In this kingdom there is no one who understands me

Why should I further long for such homeland?

Neither is there anyone worthy to join me in making fair government

I will pursue where Pengxian abides.

己矣哉

國無人莫我知兮

又何懷乎故鄉

既莫足與爲政兮

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69 Ibid., 41.
Qu Yuan has portrayed himself with exceptional qualities that make him stand out from the crowd yet there is no one whose feelings coincide with his own and no one who is able to understand his sorrows and dreams. If there were someone who would listen to his case, who would treasure his inner beauty and extrinsic cultivation; if there were someone who knew the tune that he was playing in his mind, he would not have chosen to follow Pengxian. Pengxian was the ancient sages who drowned himself in the river because his lord did not attend his remonstration. Qu Yuan must have empathized with Pengxian for he found his own desperation attuned with that of Pengxian.

By the same token, Zhang's frustration is intensified by not having a Zhiyin:

You are walking alone with your head down.

No one notices you.

No one respects you.

No one recognizes you.

你在踽踽低首而行，

沒有人注意你。

沒有人尊敬你，

沒有人認識你。^{72}

This a close variation from “Millet Flourish” in the Book of Songs:

My foot steps slowly drags on,

My mind is shaken within.

^{70} Ibid., 98.

^{71} According to Wang Yi in his Chu Ci Anthology, Pengxian was an official in Ying but it is also a controversy for there's no tangible evidence of this person's existence. See Ma, “Lisao,” 27.

^{72} Zhang, “Maple Seal,” in The Wanderer, 212.
Those who understand me say my heart is grieved.

Those who don't know me ask me what I'm seeking.

Far, Far azure,

who are these people?

行遇靡靡

中心搖搖

知我者謂我心憂

不知我者謂我何求

悠悠蒼天

此何人哉?

Here Zhang Cuo's tragic sense comes from the alienation. In the foreign land, no one could understand his spiritual music; meanwhile Zhang Cuo's poetry is neglected by those living in his ideal homeland:

Why is it that love

Can never be allowed to happen in two cities?

Must never happen in a generation of the split country

Embracing the regrets of the deserted lord and abandoned child?

Why are you always waiting for my prolonged vicissitude

As if you are waiting for the best poet,

To have chosen me?

為什麼有愛情,

千萬不能發生在兩個城市?
The Chinese canonical thought on poetry as a form of self-expression resurfaces here. Zhang Cuo's resentment towards his homeland is brought on by its apathy. There seems to be no one who would appreciate and understand his poetry, in which he suggests his anxiety to be recognized as Chinese, until he is completely afflicted and exhausted by the torment of being an exile. The overstatement, willful, and hostile tones are the characteristics of exile writings. Through such strong verbal expression, Zhang Cuo tries to compel the readers to accept his vision and feelings. His estrangement in being unable to make satisfactory contact with the world has further triggered his resentment towards his fate. Zhang Cuo's tragic sense of life in exile rises from his personal dilemma and the ambivalence he feels towards his native land. His tragedy is the ongoing struggle between his divided self stemming from the necessary impossibility of returning to where he once belonged.

Comparatively, Wang's aspect in seeking for the homeland's appreciation is from another perspective. He attempts to study and understand the scripts of his country and the episodes of his native land. In order to transcend his need for a confidant, he tries to grasp the frequencies of his land and play the same tune that the people are playing back.

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73 Yuan Yu An, annotated, "Millet Flourish" 棗粟, in Interpretation of Pomes in Book of Songs 譯詩詩經 (Taipei: Diqu, 1994).
home. By comprehending the culture, philosophy and the way of life in his homeland, Wang hopes to reveal himself for others to accept him:

Everyday I study the river as reading a thick philosophy book, by the same token, I study you as I study the river. I desperately reconvene every sentence you have said; interpret your every expression; scrutinize the dust animated by your trivial movement; recount the pieces of your hair entwined in wind, review the sparks in your eyes when you smile. I try to conceive your whole life. Just as the river, I believe you are united. Yet it is hard to study the river, harder to study you.

我每天讀那條江如同讀一厚冊哲理, 同時我讀你如讀那條江。
我拼命探索你說過的每一句話, 詮釋你每一個表情,
審問你細微動作所揚動的灰塵, 重數你臨風昂首時的頭髮,
溫息你微笑時眼中閃耀的光線。我想像你的一生。一如那條江,
我相信你是統一的。可是讀江不易, 讀你更難。74

The river is a symbol of Chineseness for the Yellow River is the origin of the Chinese ethnicity. The “you” he is referring to may be his lost homeland or the people who lived there. Everyday Wang Dingjun scrutinizes his past and memories carefully, unwilling to let go. He examines the details and reviews every episode, unwilling to forget. The tension lies between his belief of the united China and his difficulty of understanding “you,” suggesting the divided Chinese in the separated worlds. Wang Dingjun moreover advances to “you”:

How do you imagine your life? How do you measure other people’s lives? What is your confrontation? What is your concealment?…What kind of mystery are you? What type of dhyana (meditation) are you?

I have to carefully ask you. I wrote you…one letter after another and finished all the letter sheets I brought. I could have written as long as the river….I knew you would not have replied me anything. You are not the river. You are a closed book….

你怎樣想像自己的一生呢? 你怎樣衡量別人的一生呢? 什麼是你的表白? 什麼是你的隱藏?…你是一個什麼樣的謎? 你是那一種禪?

我要仔細問你o 我…給你寫信, 寫了一封又一封, 寫光了我帶的紙o 我可以寫得像江一樣長o…我知道你什麼也不會說 你不是江.

你是一本閉著的書o

It is not Wang Dingjun who doesn’t try to open himself to his homeland. It is the people’s insensitivity in his homeland that precludes him from being accepted and recognized, regardless of his efforts of trying. The homeland and the people in his mind are inconceivable. The “you” is a closed book refusing to reveal, or to accept. Wang Dingjun longs to understand the tune of his native sound. He feels as he has been rejected and left without a clue to continue his previous identity. Writing is a form of self-expression. It is only through writing, a marginal writer’s desperate psyche is pacified; is only through writing, a marginal writer’s homeland is recreated and homecoming is imagined. Qu Yuan, Zhang Cuo and Wang Dingjun all profoundly

75 Ibid.
express their obsession in words. Through their writings, they are able to fulfill and transform their broken lives into more complete drama.

**Hero of modern era**

The exiles' predicaments lie in the complex of the loss of identities and the lack of attunement with the surrounding environment. Their conflicts between forgetting and adopting, between assimilation and rejection, between the past and the present develop sorrowful struggles in their life. Their dilemmas contribute to their disastrous conclusions. Being in exile is a life so extraordinary, yet so calamitous. Qu Yuan’s drama has created the model of Chinese tragedy. The despair along with Qu Yuan’s exile drove him to his tragic end. The anxiety and frustration that he experienced during his exile proved to be fatal because his steadfast character did not permit him to accept his failure and helpless fate. Only by committing suicide was he able to end the exile and to reclaim his self-worth and pride. From the first line of “Encountering Sorrows,” Qu Yuan has built the audience an extraordinary image of himself. His choice of maintaining his purity in a depraved world and his decision of refusing to change his moral landscape inevitably lead him to his failure and death. The pathos of tragedy comes from the devastation of the most valued. At the end, he destroys his own self in front of the audience eyes. This grand destruction deeply moves the audience to empathize and admire him. This is the utmost power and charm of a great tragedy. Qu Yuan’s self-image that he creates us throughout the poem is compensated with eternal fame. His sense of tragedy comes from a predicament in which self-worth and pride are obtained at the price of slander, exile and death. Qu Yuan has therefore become the
father of the Chinese tragic hero and his writing set up the model of Chinese exiled literature.

The impression of orphanhood, the displacement for identities, the projection of Qu Yuan shape Zhang Cuo’s definition of tragic hero:

“Because one is a hero, one is encompassed with all the weaknesses that are to shape a hero. That includes the irony of bearing an overpowering compassion to protect others at all times and failing to protect oneself; ... and that includes one’s mistakes and ethical decisions”

因爲是英雄，才會充滿一切成爲英雄 不可或缺的弱點，包括宅心仁厚時時去保護別人而無法保護
自己的反諷，...包括他的錯誤與倫理選擇。76

This complication of being at the margin also forms Wang Dingjun’s philosophy of his living circumstances: “I have my personal calamities of fate…. Despite the moth’s thousand eyes, it always sees only the light but not the fire. This life is thus; the next life is thus. There is only ‘once we…,’ but there is never ‘if we…..’” 我有我自己個人的「浩劫」…飛蛾雖有千眼，總是見光 而不見火。今生如此，來生如此，只有「曾經」沒有「如果」77 Zhang Cuo’s tragic sense is drawn in the displacement of his identities and the fate of uprooting. In his poetry, he longs for a utopian homeland to anchor him both mentally and physically. Unfortunately, such a utopia is merely an intangible personal imagination of an ideal home. Therefore, his true home exists only in his writing. Zhang Cuo’s definition of modern hero carries the impression of self-sacrifice to protect his ethnicity’s advantages, whereas Wang Dingjun’s tragic sense is derived from the conflict

76 Zhang, Spring Night Silence. 5.
between his transcending character and the fate. Just as the moth, he can only perceive the light but not the danger behind. The moth is irresistibly attracted to candlelight, as he cannot help his inborn ethnicity to be today’s wandering Chinese. Even though their strong rootless and everlasting anxiety represents their defeat, we see how Zhang Cuo and Wang Dingjun portray their self-images in a heroic way—maintaining their dignity and courage when faced with such inevitably tormenting failure. This is perhaps the epitome of modern tragedy.

**Justification on writing**

To write, for many overseas Chinese writers, is a method of consolation. As Wand Dingjun has remarked: “I write to sculpt myself, and I write to heal myself.” These writers at the margin do not write to make a living because they are at the periphery of literary mainstreams and have little chance to publish their writings. Nor do these writers write to win the eternal names. They write for the sake of writing and expressing their desperate psyche. They write to heal the rupture of their lives to become a whole person. Finally, they write because they are able to anchor their souls by finding and creating their home through writing.

Both Zhang Cuo and Wang Dingjun take the writing vocation as the healer of their broken lives. Exiles cannot recapture their past but exiled writers create a literary space that bridges their past to the present. Zhang Cuo claims, “Writing poetry has finally become one of my beliefs,” for writing has created his anchorage and beliefs in his person. The ambivalent feelings towards Taiwan also contribute a tension and dynamism to Zhang Cuo’s poetry. He sees Taiwan as his homeland although exile is an

incurable tear. Regardless of where he resides, in or out of Taiwan, he always feels exiled. In his poetry, he often places himself in a poetic space of a combination of past and present, in the opposition of two paradoxes to reveal the continuity between the traditional and the modern. His poetry confirms the fact that marginal literature is an expansion of the land-based Chinese centre even though he is denied or he refuses to have a sense of home back in Taiwan. Thus, marginal literature carries a holy mission of representing the identity of the overseas writers, in a way representing its own identity at the periphery opposed to the centre.

To write, for Wang Dingjun, is a necessity for self-expression; it is a means to resolve his endless homeward longings. In his “Lesser Conclusion” 小結, he uses several metaphors to illustrate his philosophy on life and literature. The “heaven” in this epilogue depicts the homeland where people could be understood, accepted and rooted. When a person is at one time separated from the “heaven,” even though he/she still practices what he/she used to do, plays the tune that he/she used to play, he/she has forever lost the attunement with the his/her origin and past. Then he describes heaven could also be a complex “knot.” A man carries it along in his journey with enormous efforts because it is such a heavy burden that encompasses all the past and present. Perhaps the “knot” indicates the meaning Wang Dingjun tries to convey in his literary works. Perhaps, it represents the “China” of his mind, the “heaven” in his heart. According to him, the “knot” is displayed publicly for people to visit and leaves them with infinite wonders. This is how he justifies his writing to be the healer of his broken life. Because he writes, his broken life can be sutured as one. Writing is indeed the vehicle to restore his lost Eden, his lost heaven, and his deprived homeland.
On the other hand, life is a river that neither stops nor reminisces. It is like the overseas Chinese who travel on and on without a home. But only then, are they granted with a uniquely new perspective of life; they are able to reflect their struggles for meanings in their writings, as the marginal literature grows to shape its future. From the writings of both overseas Chinese writers, we see a declaration of their identity at the periphery. Both Wang Dingjun and Zhang Cuo refuse to change their inner landscape of having Chinese ethnicity as their centres of identity. It is analogous to an earlier note that only through the past are they able to connect with their roots. Coping with the divided selves is perhaps the most substantial dilemma that the overseas writers face. Their missing identities contribute to the lack appreciation of their writings, the marginal literature.
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