

Li and Modernism: the Development of a Poetry Journal

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1 Preface

During the 1950s in Taiwan three journals shared the field of poetic expression: *Xiandai shi* 現代詩 (Modern poetry), inaugurated by Ji Xian 紀弦 (1913–2013) in 1953, *Lan xing* 藍星 (Blue stars), inaugurated by Qin Zihao 覃子豪 (1912–1963) and others in 1954, and *Chuang shiji* 創世紀 (Epoch), inaugurated by Luo Fu 洛夫 (1928–2018), Zhang Mo 張默 (b. 1931), and Ya Xian 痲弦 (b. 1932), also in 1954. Thereafter, with the 1956 reformulation of *Xiandai shi* and Ji's proposal of "horizontal transplantation," and the 1959 expansion and surrealist redirection of *Chuang shiji*, modern poetry in postwar Taiwan moved away from "anti-communism" as a theme and ushered in a major wave of modernism.¹ The development of "modernist" discourse, however, not only involved the mainland poets who arrived in Taiwan after the Civil War, but was also embraced by homegrown poets, such as Lin Hengtai 林亨泰 (b. 1924), Huan Fu 桓夫 (b. 1922), Jin Lian 錦連 (b. 1928), Zhan Bing 詹冰 (b. 1921), and the like, who had overcome the language barriers of their education under the Japanese. These homegrown poets, who were translingual in multiple respects—whether through engagement with prewar Japanese materials or postwar translations—understood best the thinking that informed the development of Japanese modernism. The mainlanders poets, on the contrary, had different Western models from which they learned about modernism. The respective differences in their experience and education gave rise to the divergent emphases in their views on the methodology and aesthetic theory of modernism.

1 Editor's note: Most of the literary historical nomenclature in this chapter, including the terms "modernism" and "surrealism," appear in quotation marks in the original Chinese. The spirit of such diacritical marking is to alert the reader that simple use of the words has limited meaning unless specific contexts and even theories are thoroughly referenced. As Ruan's chapter itself contains ample such contextualization, we have removed the quotation marks for ease of reading.

By the middle of the 1960s, when *Xiandai shi* and *Lan xing* were showing signs of decline, and only *Chuang shiji* was left advocating surrealism and pure experience as guiding ideologies for a poetic society, *Li* 笠 (Bamboo hat) saw its first publication, presenting a fresh poetic style. The significance of the reform that it stood for should not be neglected.² *Li* provided a new site for reflection and criticism in the literary world of 1960s Taiwan and affords us a new perspective when exploring Taiwanese “modern poetry.”

Li was a signature poetry journal during the reemergence of postwar local, or nativist, poetry in Taiwan. It was founded by twelve writers: Wu Yingtao 吳瀛濤 (1916–1971), Zhan Bing, Huan Fu, Lin Hengtai, Jin Lian, Zhao Tianyi 趙天儀 (b. 1935), Xue Bogu 薛柏谷 (1935–1995), Bai Qiu 白萩 (b. 1937), Huang Hesheng 黃荷生, Du Guoqing (Tu Kuo-ch'ing) 杜國清 (b. 1941), Gu Bei 古貝 (b. 1938), and Wang Xianyang 王憲陽 (b. 1941).³ From the beginning, *Li* poets recognized that to create a poetry of the time, they needed to deepen their experience of real life, and extract from that experience essential elements that could be used in their poetry. The title, *Li*, in fact signifies the spirit of the journal: “a bamboo hat perseveres even in the presence of a withering climate with purity, honesty, primeval beauty, and universality—this is exactly the symbol of the island people’s diligence, freedom, and determination.”⁴ Previous studies and discussions of *Li* have focused mainly on its local and realistic content, largely overlooking matters of technique, poetic form, or other aesthetic accomplishments. It heretofore has rarely been observed that, since its first publication, *Li* has actually systematically introduced trendsetting views of Western and Japanese modern poetry, poets, and poetic theories to audiences in Taiwan. Additionally, some of the *Li* poets participated directly in the “Modernist Movement.” Bai Qiu, for instance, was active in all three camps—*Xiandai shi*, *Lan xing*, and *Chuang shiji*—while Lin Hengtai was one of the principal contributors to Ji Xian’s modernist theory. As Bai Qiu himself put it, “*Li* is a literary group that includes a modernist spirit within realism. It is more than nativist realism” (Chen Qianwu, “On the Establishment,” 306). The aim of this chapter is to revisit the founding history of *Li*, to explore and

2 On the establishment of *Li*, two messages were clear: (1) local Taiwan poets had overcome the language barrier and reasserted themselves in the realm of poetry; (2) they shattered the established trend of obscurity, pallor, and unintelligibility. *Li* advocated a style of toughness and intellectualism. The “new era” here refers to the historical significance of a new aesthetic representation inaugurated with the founding of *Li*.

3 Although the list consists of twelve writers, a few of the members are less directly related. Xue had never written for the journal or participated in any activity, and Gu and Wang had, respectively, withdrawn from the group within a year of the journal’s establishment.

4 Quoted in Chen Qianwu (pen name Huan Fu), “Tan *Li* de chuang kan,” 382.