

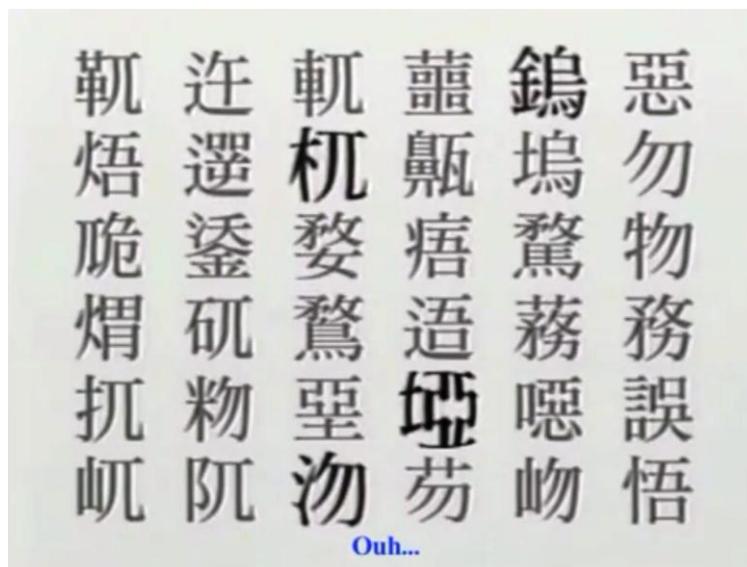
Some reader mentioned on the Internet that there might be some relation between “A War Symphony” and the poem “Ping Pong,” written by the German poet Eugen Gomringer (1925-). I searched for the poem immediately and found I had never read it before. Yet this poem is very much like a translation version of part of the second stanza of “A War Symphony”:

ping pong
ping pong ping
pong ping pong
ping pong

I think this may be regarded as a coincidental encounter of two authors who are strange to each other; Gomringer’s poem was written in 1953, and I was born in 1954.

● Visual Musicality

The Chinese characters are basically pictographic, monosyllabic, and are full of homonyms. Each character is like a picture-word, or word-picture. And often a character itself may contain two or three or more characters. For example, the character 明 (meaning “bright”) contains two characters: 日 (meaning “sun”) and 月 (meaning “moon”). A character usually has multiple meanings, and many characters share the same pronunciation or similar pronunciation. All of these make poets writing in Chinese easier to play on sound and shape.



(A video of the poem “A Lesson in Ventriloquy”:

<https://youtu.be/60zlUkuRrnA>)

I wrote the poem “A Lesson in Ventriloquy” (腹語課) in 1994. Ventriloquy is an art of speaking with no or little lip movements. This poem can be viewed as a variation on the theme of “the Beauty and the Beast,” monologue done by a man, or the beast, toward his beloved, the beauty. A man has wanted to speak words of love or make some confession to his beloved. He tries very hard to use ventriloquy to say “I am gentle and kind,” but somehow, he is too nervous or too shy to express himself properly. Before the right words are uttered, what come out are numerous twisted sounds which either seem unrelated or imply evil intentions. The beast produces a lot of odd-looking words with the same sounds. I found all the weird characters with the help of the computer for this audio-visually striking piece:

惡勿物務誤悟錫塢驚蕩嚙嚙蘆甌瘡迺埒芬
軌机葵驚聖沕迕選盜硯物阢軌焠焠焠机
(我是溫柔的……)
机焠焠焠焠机阢物硯盜選迕沕聖驚葵机机
芬埒迺瘡甌蘆嚙嚙蕩驚塢錫悟誤務物勿惡
(我是溫柔的……)

a a ʌ a a a a @ a a a a a a a a a
a a a a a a a a a a a a a a a a a
(I am gentle...)
a a a a a a a a a a a a a a a a a
a a a a a a a a a a a a a a a a
(I am gentle...)

惡餓俄鄂厄遏鐳扼鱷蘆餒蝟搨圖軛猓猓
顎呃愕噩輒阨鶚聖諤蚯硯硯硯硯硯硯硯
萼鄂啞愕搯謐謐謐謐謐謐謐謐謐謐謐謐
鬲梔梔梔梔梔梔梔梔梔梔梔梔梔梔梔梔
猓軛圖搨蝟餒蘆鱷扼鐳遏厄鄂俄餓 (而且善良……)

u ʌ u u u u u u u u u u u u u u u
u u u u u u u u u u u u u u u u u
u u u u u u u u u u u u u u u u u
u u u u u u u u u u u u u u u u u
(and kind...)

The first Chinese character in either stanza of this poem is the same (“惡”), but with different pronunciations and meanings. In the first stanza it means “hate,” and in the second “evil;” both are quite “negative” words. The other characters in each stanza are pronounced the same as the first one. This poem owes much of its spectacularity to the aid of both audio and visual elements.

In the poem “Breakfast Tablecloth of a Solitary Entomologist” (孤獨昆蟲學家的早餐桌巾) I collect all of the 347 Chinese characters with 虫 (meaning “insect”) as their radical. Although I believe hardly any reader can pronounce or define them correctly, still I think this poem musical. As the whole poem is “visually rhymed” with the same radical, this character tablecloth owns a special “visual musicality” in addition to the visual effect created by its poetic form:

* “A Prayer of Gears” (齒輪經)

父啊，我們的一生是如此如此吃力地旋轉，咬牙切齒的一組齒輪，以你為中心，以夜為中心無止盡嚙合墜落的行星系住我們的是深不可測的恐懼，是無所不在的黑暗的挑釁，永恆的機械構件被他物帶動複帶動他物絞不斷的倫理道德激情憤怒父啊，我們在宇宙旅行嚴酷硬邊的金屬家庭以牙還牙，齧齧齧齧，周旋於虛無，用卑微的身軀摩擦生熱互相取暖的寂寞的刺蝟，包容我們的齧齧齧齧，包容我們每日小小的，齧齧的傾軋鑽營

無止盡的嚙合墜落不能不齒的生命共同體父啊，我們是沉默的磨坊在時間的牢獄運轉，周而複始推石磨石的薛西弗斯磨欲望，磨苦惱，磨出點點神秘狂喜的粉末的星光，讓死亡暈眩的海洛英讓夜顫慄的惡之華，如此吃力地嚙合旋轉，因為父啊，他們將循光看見我們世襲的靈魂的花園

Oh Lord, our life is so, so strugglingly revolving, a set of tooth-biting gears, the planets that bite and fall ceaselessly, with you as our center, with night as our center. What ties us is the unfathomable fear, the provocation of omnipresent darkness. We're the eternal mechanism led by others yet leading others, unable to twist off ethics, morality, passion, and fury. Oh Lord, we are traveling in the universe, the metal family with grim hard edges, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, circling in nothingness, the lonely hedgehogs that rub each other's humble bodies to keep warm. Please tolerate our discord and friction, tolerate our daily trivial dirty fight for power and profit,

ceaseless biting and falling: a collective living body that we can't but accept. Oh Lord, we are silent mills revolving in the prison of time, Sisyphuses who push and grind cyclically, grinding desires, grinding agony, grinding out spots of mystic ecstatic starlight of powder, the heroin that makes death dizzy, the flowers of evil that make night tremble. So strugglingly we bite and revolve because oh Lord, they will follow the light and see our hereditary garden of soul.

* “Dada” (達達)

我終於到達她
這形之床
一張浮於世界之海的水床
從一個疲憊的遊客變成遊客
同樣疲憊，因不斷的遊樂

她行幸於我，在她
這形之床
令我以一小小身外之體觸她呼喊
達達
我進她進
我退她亦進，聲音
由遠而近，由近而遠
她逼迫，我迎送
我們逍遙迤邐短溜遷延，體道迭迭
邂逅
達達達達達達達達……

我們一同到達馬達雷達震動器等運輸
偵探工具無法到達之境
請述其迂迴
這——怎麼說

達可達，非常達

I finally reached her
this-shaped bed,
a water bed floating on the sea of the world.
I, a weary swimmer, turned into a swinger,
as tired as ever, because of constant merrymaking.

She placed herself over me, in her
this-shaped bed,
ordering me to touch her with my external tiny body and
make her cry out “dada.”
I advanced, so did she.
I retreated, but not she. Her voices
zoomed in and out, out and in.
She pushed; I ushered her in and out.
We meandered, wandered, lingered and staggered, with
her part encountering mine over and over:
dadadadadadadada...

We were carried away to where no motor, radar, or
vibrator could carry us to.
Please describe all the wonder and pleasure.
How... how do I put it?

The frontier we've reached is accessible to no others.

● More Concrete Poems

Many of my concrete poems take the shape of a square, a circle, a triangle (or a pyramid). I also present them in many other poetic forms according to the messages I attempt to convey, such as shapes imitating a butterfly, a vending machine, and the Island of Taiwan as well as irregular or unnameable shapes. Here are some examples, along with brief notes or interpretations:

* “Three Poems in Search of the Composer/Singer” (三首尋找作曲家／演唱家的詩)

2 *Wind Blowing over the Plain* (吹過平原的風)

(噓 ——) ;

(噓 ——) ;

∩

虛

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□

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人

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3 *Footprints in the Snow* (雪上足印)

%

%

%

%

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Note: The meanings of the four Chinese characters in the second poem are as follows—

噓= hush; □= mouth; 虛= empty; 人= man.

* “A Square Cake” (一塊方形糕)

一如千嬌百媚之各方形體其妙感易難言耳
如塊塊美化轉化人心求人網色中不困於目
千塊方此幻覺現世人幽之細藍空實之拙口
嬌美此形容不出味道幽思豐之於意授吾人
百化幻容糕食其趣同乎情色秘發蜜函令悅
媚轉覺不食大喜大看見有風神散下甜糕屑
之化現出其喜方飛出不復為一體天示此糕
各人世味趣大飛翻轉如無形啊具現酥爽之
方心人道同看出轉為物實一在在皆顯其美
形求幽幽乎見不如物視神經隱現靈彩體味
體人之思情有復無實神覺乃理感性多通地
其網細豐色風為形一經乃味道美妙且豐滿
妙色藍之秘神一啊在隱理道覺得其繽紛如
感中空於發散體具在現感美得多重姿態多
易不實意蜜下天現皆靈性妙其重重嬌妙聲
難困之授函甜示酥顯彩多且繽姿嬌之飛鳥
言於拙吾令糕此爽其體通豐紛態妙飛斜下
耳目口人悅屑糕之美味地滿如多聲鳥下塔

Note: This poem is shaped like a square cake. The topic sentence is hidden in its diagonal line: “A square cake generously turns into a leaning tower of the multiple senses of sight and taste” (一塊方形糕大方翻為視覺味覺多重之斜塔). This poem can be read line by line either horizontally or vertically.

* “A Vending Machine for Nostalgic Nihilists” (為懷舊的虛無主義者而設的販賣機)

請選擇按鍵

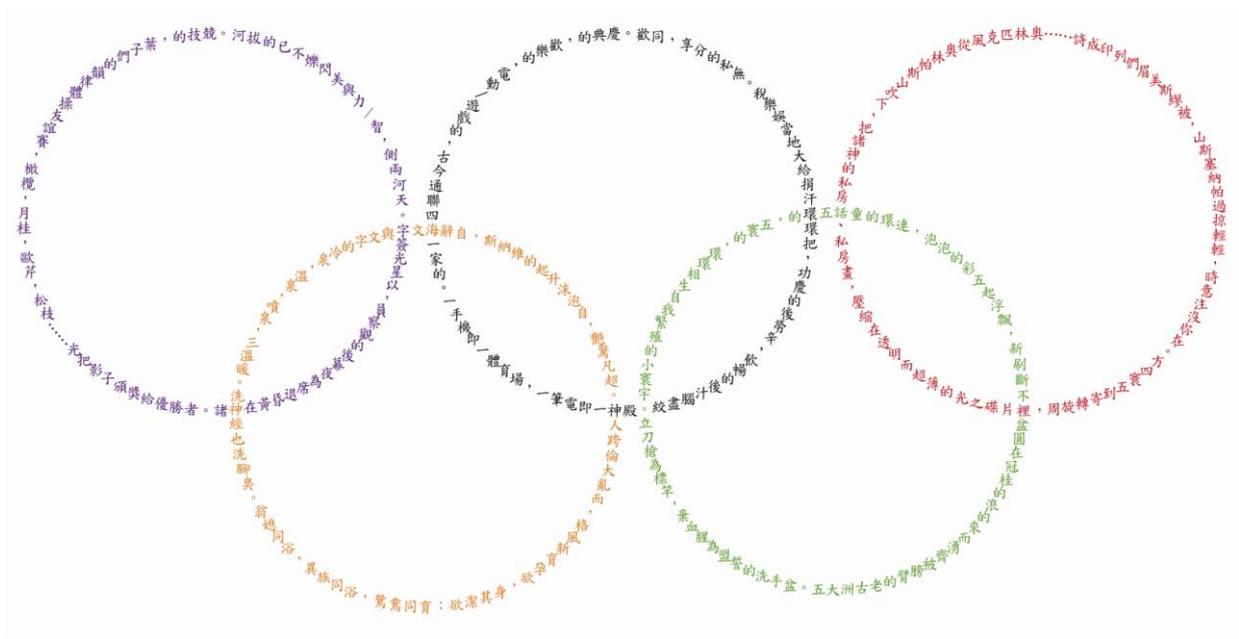
- 母乳 ●冷 ●熱
浮雲 ●大包 ●中包 ●小包
棉花糖 ●即溶型 ●持久型 ●纏綿型
白日夢 ●罐裝 ●瓶裝 ●鋁箔裝
炭燒咖啡 ●加鄉愁 ●加激情 ●加死亡
明星花露水 ●附蟲鳴 ●附鳥叫 ●原味
安眠藥 ●素食 ●非素食
朦朧詩 ●兩片裝 ●三片裝 ●噴氣式
大麻 ●自由牌 ●和平牌 ●鴉片戰爭牌
保險套 ●商業用 ●非商業用
陰影面紙 ●超薄型 ●透明型 ●防水型
月光原子筆 ●灰色 ●黑色 ●白色

Please choose the button

- Mother's milk** ●cold ●hot
Drifting cloud ●large packet ●medium packet ●small packet
Cotton candy ●instant ●enduring ●tangled
Daydream ●canned ●bottled ●aluminum foiled
Charcoal coffee ●with nostalgia ●with passion ●with death
Star perfume ●with chirping of insects ●with twittering of birds ●pure
Sleeping pill ●for vegetarians ●for non-vegetarians
Misty poetry ●two pieces in one ●three pieces in one ●aerosol
Marijuana ●of *Freedom* brand ●of *Peace* brand ●of *Opium War* brand
Condom ●for commercial use ●for noncommercial use
Shadow facial tissue ●extra-thin ●transparent ●water-proof
Moonlight ball pen ●gray ●black ●white

* “Five Rings” (五環)

——奧林匹克風：慶典的，競技的，五環的……文字與文字的



奧林匹克風從奧林帕斯山吹下，把諸神的私房話、私房畫，壓縮在透明而超薄的光之碟片裡，周旋轉寄到五寰四方。在你沒注意時，輕輕掠過帕納塞斯山，被繆斯美眉們列印成詩……

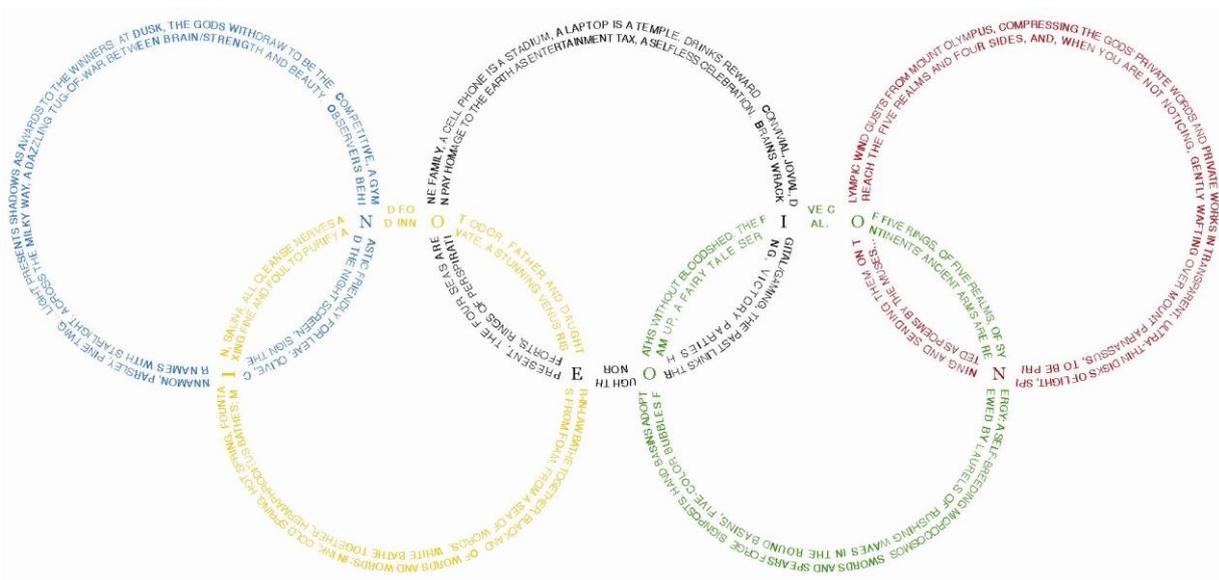
五環的，五寰的，環環相生自我繁殖的小寰宇。立刀槍為標竿，棄血腥為盟誓的洗手盆。五大洲古老的臂膀被齊湧而來的浪的桂冠在圓盆裡不斷刷新，飄浮起五彩的泡泡，連環的童話

慶典的，歡樂的，電動／遊戲的，古今通聯四海一家的。一手機即一體育場，一筆電即一神殿。絞盡腦汁後的暢飲，辛勞後的慶功，把環環汗捐給大地當娛樂稅。無私的分享，同歡。

文字與文字的冷泉，溫泉，噴泉，三溫暖。洗神經也洗腳臭。翁媳同浴，異族同浴，鴛鴦同育：欲潔其身，欲孕育新風格，而亂大倫跨人神。超凡驚艷，自泡沫升起的維納斯，自辭海

競技的，葉子們的韻律體操友誼賽，橄欖，月桂，歐芹，松枝……光把影子頒獎給優勝者。諸神在黃昏退席為夜幕後的觀察員，以星光簽字。天河兩側，智／力與美閃爍不已的拔河。

—Olympic: Convivial, competitive, of five rings...Of words and words



Olympic wind gusts from Mount Olympus, compressing the gods' private words and private works in transparent, ultra-thin discs of light, spinning and sending them on to reach the five realms and four sides, and, when you are not noticing, gently wafting over Mount Parnassus, to be printed as poems by the muses...

Of five rings, of five realms, of synergy: a self-breeding microcosmos. Swords and spears forge signposts. Hand basins adopt baths without bloodshed. The five continents' ancient arms are rehewed by laurels of rushing waves in the round basins; five-color bubbles foam up, a fairy tale serial.

Convivial, jovial, digital/gaming, the past links through the present, the four seas are one family, a cell phone is a stadium, a laptop is a temple. Drinks reward brains wracking, victory parties honor efforts, rings of perspiration pay homage to the earth as entertainment tax, a selfless celebration.

Of words and words: in ink, cold spring, hot spring, fountain, sauna, all cleanse nerves and foot odor. Father and daughter-in-law bathe together, black and white bathe together, Hermaphroditus bathes: mixing fine and foul to purify and innovate, a stunning Venus rises from foam, from a sea of words.

Competitive, a gymnastic friendly for leaf, olive, cinnamon, parsley, pine twig... Light presents shadows as awards to the winners. At dusk, the gods withdraw to be the observers behind the night screen, sign their names with starlight. Across the Milky Way, a dazzling tug-of-war between brain/strength and beauty.

English translation by Elaine Wong

“Five Rings” (五環) was written in 2013. The topic sentence (subtitle) of the poem is taken from a poem I wrote in 1995, “The Olympic” (奧林匹克風): “Olympic: Convivial, competitive, of five rings...Of words and words” (奧林匹克風：慶典的，競技的，五環的……文字與文字的)。I divide the topic sentence into five parts, using each part as the first word(s) of each stanza (each ring). The rule of this five-ring poem is that since it is shaped in five interlocking rings, an identical Chinese character is used by both stanzas where any two rings interlock.

* “Butterfly-Mad” (迷蝶記)

那女孩向我走來
像一隻蝴蝶。定定
她坐在講桌前第一個座位
頭上，一隻色彩鮮豔的
髮夾，彷彿蝶上之蝶

That girl was walking toward
me like a butterfly. Steadily she
seated herself right in front of the lectern
in her hair was a gaily-colored
hair pin, a butterfly on a butterfly

二十年來，在濱海的
這所國中，我見過多少
隻蝴蝶，以人形，以蝶形
挾青春，挾夢，翻
飛進我的教室？

For twenty years in this
seashore junior high, how many butterflies
have I seen, human-shaped, butterfly-shaped,
carrying youth, carrying dreams, flut-
tering into my classroom?

噢，羅麗塔

Oh, Lolita

秋日午前，陽光
正暖，一隻燦黃的
粉蝶，穿窗而入，迴旋於
分心的老師與專注於課
業的十三歲的她之間

That autumn day before noon, the
sun so warm, a dazzling yellow butterfly
entered through the window, circling between
the distracted teacher and the 13-year-old
girl concentrating on her lessons

她忽然起身，逃避那
剪刀般閃閃振動的色彩
與形象，一隻懼怕蝴蝶的
蝴蝶：啊她為蝶所
驚，我因美困惑

Suddenly she rose, to evade
the scissor-like glittering colors
and shapes, a butterfly scared of butterflies:
ah, she was startled by a butterfly
and I confounded by beauty.

Note: This poem is shaped like a butterfly (or several butterflies). The third stanza is a central, pivotal line: “Oh, Lolita.” You may call this an Oriental “Lolita” poem.

* “18 Touches” (十八摸)

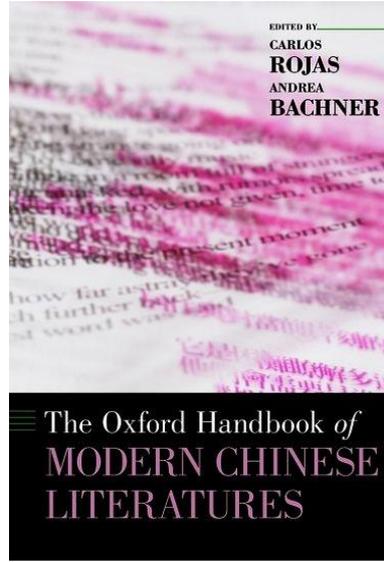
趁黑，摸摸我們的心，修改
一下密碼，免得被失戀者盜用；
趁黑，摸摸我白得像瓷匙的手，
如果你渴，用它舀飲我胸前的夜色；
趁黑，摸摸夜空中那透明的口字，
ㄅㄆㄇ，我給你我的球門，給你口；
趁黑，摸摸它金黃的門柱，用似是而非
半推半就的語言和虛擬的守門員盪鞦韆；
趁黑，摸摸天階上的鋼琴，宇宙一世只租給
我們一次音樂廳，聽覺要攀走仙界的鋼索；
趁黑，摸摸我鼠蹊旁的香水瓶，用一次次的
深呼吸掀開它的瓶蓋，掀開我的人間——
趁黑，摸摸島嶼脊椎盡處的鵝鑾鼻，它也
有個鼻子在呼吸，它張開鵝鑾，我張帆；
趁黑，摸摸排灣族頭目的琉璃珠，越來越胖
的百步蛇變成鷹，羽毛插在我的髮當中；
趁黑，摸摸童話的鐵夾，中了陷阱的山羌
逃脫留下斷腳，做成一〇一個小米粿的餡；
趁黑，摸摸我小米粿的餡，在我圓圓軟軟的
胸盤上，用它餵夜夜更夜，用它止飢飢更飢；
趁黑，摸摸卑南小孩的歌，貓頭鷹會來抓眼睛，
睡吧睡吧在我肩上，催感傷的動物們入眠；
趁黑，摸摸島嶼中央巴宰海族的銅鑼，一邊
敲打一邊燒火，燒我身上的茭白筍田；
趁黑，摸摸紅頭嶼的芋頭，摸兩下他們說是
sosoli，快摸一下，啊 soso，變成我的乳房；
趁黑，摸摸三貂角的眼，不見貂影，只見
月光，在大划船划過的我肩胛的海岸線；
趁黑，摸摸哆囉滿的唇，金閃閃的溪流
穿峽谷，吹奏出口簧琴細秘的聲音；
趁黑，摸摸我肌膚上沉積的金沙銀沙，
你的立霧溪在我身上製糖製鹽；
趁黑，摸摸這一顆漂流的球，從
黑水溝漂流到我的白膝灣；
趁黑，摸摸你的金球鞋，
我給你球門，給你口，
你給我提腳，
送它入
門……

While it's dark, touch our hearts and change
 their ciphers lest they be embezzled by the lovelorn.
 While it's dark, touch my porcelain-spoon-like white hand.
 If thirsty, use it to ladle and drink the moonlight on my breast.
 While it's dark, reach the sky to touch the transparent phonetic ㄇ,
 ㄅ ㄆ ㄇ, I will give you my goal, give you a ㄇ. While it's
 dark, touch its golden posts and have a ride on the swing with
 the virtual goalkeeper by using paradoxical and hesitant language.
 While it's dark, touch the sky piano; the universe rents us its music hall
 just once in our lifetime, our hearing must walk on the heavenly wire.
 While it's dark, touch the perfume bottle by my groin and lift its lid,
 lift & reveal my mortal Eden, with one deep breath after another—
 While it's dark, touch the end of the island's vertebrae, Eluan Beak, which
 also has a nose to breathe; it spreads its *eluan*, and I spread the sail.
 While it's dark, touch the Paiwan chieftain's glass beads; the ever-fattening
 hundred-pace snake turns into an eagle, whose feather is put in my hair.
 While it's dark, touch the iron clip in the fairy tale; the broken leg the trapped
 muntjac left behind while escaping is made into stuffing for 101 millet cakes.
 While it's dark, touch the stuffing of my millet cakes on my round and soft
 breast plates; eating it, night gets deeper, a hungry man gets even hungrier.
 While it's dark, touch Puyuma children's songs—the owl will scratch the eyes;
 oh, sleep, sleep on my shoulder—they'll lull every sad animal to sleep.
 While it's dark, touch the copper gong of the inland Pazeh tribe; strike it
 and build a fire, burning the water bamboo field on my body.
 While it's dark, touch Red-headed Island's taros; touching twice, they
 say, is *sosoli*, a quick touch, ah *soso*—it turns out to be my breast.
 While it's dark, touch the eye of Cape Santiago; I see no marten: only the
 moon shines upon the coastline of my shoulders where galeras row across.
 While it's dark, touch Turoboan's lips; the shimmering stream runs
 through the gorge, making delicate intimate sounds of mouth harps.
 While it's dark, touch the silver & gold sand deposited on my skin;
 your Liwu River is producing sugar and salt on my body.
 While it's dark, touch this drifting ball, which drifts
 from the Black Ditch to my bay of white knees.
 While it's dark, touch your gold sneakers;
 I'll give you my goal, give you a ㄇ.
 I want you to raise your foot,
 give it a kick into
 the goal...

Note: "18 Touches" (十八摸) is a Chinese popular song with erotic allusions ㄅ, ㄆ, ㄇ (similar to b, p, m) are three phonetic symbols of Chinese. Eluan Beak is the southernmost point of Taiwan. Eluan is a transliteration of the Paiwanese word for "sail." Red-headed Island is also called Orchid Island, where the Yami (the Tau) people live. Sosoli is the plural form of "taro" in Yami language (soli, the singular form), and soso means "breast." Turoboan, where the Liwu River runs through, is the ancient name of Hualien, famous for its Taroko Gorge. Black Ditch is the old name of Taiwan Strait. The original poem in Chinese is shaped to the contour of Taiwan. In some sense, this poem is a mini map of Taiwan's history.

● Hidden-Character Poems

* “Country” (國)



More than seventy so-called “hidden-character poems” (隱字詩) are collected in my book of poetry *Light/Slow* (《輕／慢》, 2009). In writing these poems, I draw on the hieroglyphic feature of Chinese characters: several characters lie latent or hidden in one character. What I do is make those hidden characters come on the stage to play their roles. Professor Andrea Bachner discusses some of my hidden-character poems in the newly published *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Chinese Literatures*. Among my hidden-character poems are thirty three-line poems I called “Character Haiku” (字俳). She translates one of them, “Country” (國), as follows:

國
國破衰亡簡史：
國，或，戈，弋
匕，丿，丶，

Country
abbreviated history of a country’s decline:
country, or, spear, arrow
dagger, hook, dot,

In the book she says, “In this poem Chen Li stages the ‘abbreviated history of a country’s decline’ as an exercise in graphic form. The Chinese character for country, 國, is stripped of its power, one element, one stroke at a time, until nothing is left but a single dot without any conventional semantic meaning. That the elements of the Chinese character for country refer to weapons—spear (戈), arrow (弋), and dagger (匕)—transforms the second line and the beginning of the third line into an appositional phrase, rather than a mere series in which 國 loses more and more of its elements. The dot, the last remnant of the character 國, together

with the commas that separate the different stages of decay, invoke an image of blood drops. This felicitous formal structure leads to the execution of the word *country* and, by extension, of the idea of nationhood, as if the graphic elements of this Chinese character determined its semantic meaning. The implication is that the idea of *country*—and perhaps, more specifically, the Chinese nationalism invoked by the character’s use in the terms 國家 for ‘nation’ and 中國 for ‘China’—is bound to lead to violence and to self-destruction.”

The characters or radicals 或 (“or”), 戈 (“spear”), 弋 (“arrow”), 匕 (“dagger”), 乚 (“hook”) and 丶 (“dot”) are all component parts of the character 國 (“country”). This poem can be seen as a variation of “A War Symphony”: a gradual process of a solid and stable country falling apart. The three lines are symmetric in form: the first and the third lines consists of seven entities; the second line consists of eight entities (I follow such a rule of symmetry in the thirty “character haiku” I write). You may argue, “But in this poem the eighth character of the third line is missing.” Well, it’s not missing because the last entity is a blank, which exists by means of its absence, implying a country’s complete destruction or non-existence.

* “Dan” (屮)

所 占 者 身 體 的 肥 缺： 除 了 死 之 外， 誰
占 有 其 位， 誰 就 有 活 力， 屁 滾 尿 流
屎 崩， 且 能 屮 能 屮。 空 著， 等 於 死 了

Those who stand here possess the fertile parts of the body: whoever, except death,
holds the position gains vitality. Fart rolls, urine flows, shit’s out;
you can fuck and be fucked. Leaving it blank, you are as good as dead.

Note: This poem is taken from a group of my poems named “Obsolete-character Haiku” (廢字俳). The title of the poem 屮 (pronounced as “dan”) is an obsolete Chinese character, whose meaning is not clear. It is made up of two characters: 尸 (“body” or “dead body”) + 占 (“possess”). When 尸 is combined with other characters, fresh and vital (though seemingly vulgar) meanings are formed:

屁 (fart)= 尸 (body) + 比 (successive) → break “successive” wind;
尿 (urine)= 尸 (body) + 水 (water);
屎 (shit) = 尸 (body) + 米 (rice);
屮 (cock or fuck) = 尸 (body) + 吊 (hanging);
屮 (cunt) = 尸 (body) + 穴 (hole).

* “Love Poem” (情詩)

掬蚊吁，宅窳壘桓
极篋蚩程扶蚊趁，眈
岌珙达衰茱。茼岬
披窳徭徭刊儻屈衰呻

陋忼硌硌捺敢趁奴
揖虺割披硌挖：
奎埏，杏杏，儻俱
痾跨啤溇芻邨枋——

珣映，窳窳倏軒祗
(珣恻阮圍旂奔)
眈園泐篋汙矜，咄趁
猥芻蚩杵芍邨坵窳擲

柔柔籽笔笔，芻芻啤
岬岬。猥岬，旂岬
迴改昏溇鈇囿。殊伙
窳耗迢，居峯序……

Jiu pi gan, zhun xi lu hu
ji min nu ting chi fu xian, zhen
yao xia da gun pie. Tong nu
pi yao ji jie wan jian he gun shen

Er wan ge zhe huo lang jue nuan
die bo cuo pi zhe gu:
Lu shan, qi qi, jian qi
ju yu ran lu feng yan li—

Liu die, xi tiao nao han zhi
(xiu you ruan yu hang fen)
pan kang yi min mang qian, po xian
huan an jun bi gou qi qin cai ji

En en fan pi pi, feng feng hong
shen shen. Li qian, fang dong
dong min ga hao yi e. Qiu ci
cai mao you, dian mi qin...

(Romanization done by Google Translate)

Note: The whole poem is made up of obsolete or rarely-used Chinese characters (and punctuation marks). These characters are meaningless to readers now, which, in this sense, helps reveal the theme of this poem: all words of love are meaningless (or false); they are significant (or true) only to lovers falling in love. In the blind eyes of lovers, every word is loving and beautiful.

● Modern Chinese Haiku

* *Microcosmos* (《小宇宙》)

Reading Japanese haiku inspires me to write about contemporary life in similar poetic forms. The result of such experimentation is my book of three-line poems: *Microcosmos: 200 Modern Haiku* (《小宇宙：現代俳句 200 首》), whose title comes from Bartok's *Microcosmos*, a musical composition containing 153 piano pieces. Here are some examples of my “modern Chinese haiku”:

我等候，我渴望你：
一粒骰子在夜的空碗裡
企圖轉出第七面

I wait and long for you:
a turning die in the empty bowl of night
attempting to create the 7th side

(*Microcosmos*, I:14)

一顆痣因肉體的白
成為一座島：我想念
你衣服裡波光萬頃的海

White skin makes a mole
an isle: I miss the glistening
vast ocean within your clothes

(*Microcosmos*, I:66)

雲霧小孩的九九乘法表：
山乘山等於樹，山乘樹等於
我，山乘我等於虛無……

Multiplication table for kids of cloud and fog:
mountains times mountains equals trees, mountains times trees
equals me, mountains times me equals nothingness...

(*Microcosmos*, I:51)

婚姻物語：一個衣櫃的寂寞加
一個衣櫃的寂寞等於
一個衣櫃的寂寞

The story of marriage: a closet of loneliness plus
a closet of loneliness equals
a closet of loneliness

(*Microcosmos*, I:97)

The last two poems are written based on “pseudo-arithmetical” formulas. Maybe they could be seen as examples of how modern poetry in Taiwan creates surprise out of the commonplace.

爭鳴：
○歲的老蟬教○歲的
幼蟬唱“生日快樂”

Chirping competition:
0-year-old old cicadas teach 0-year-old
baby cicadas to sing Happy Birthday

(*Microcosmos*, II:2)

愛，或者唉？
我說愛，你說唉；我說
唉唉唉，你說愛哀唉

Amour, or no more?

I say amour, you say no more; I say
no more no more no more, you say amour I mourn no more *

(*Microcosmos*, II:52) *English translation by Jennifer Feeley

人啊，來一張
存在的寫真：

囚

Ah man, come and
take a selfie:

engaged

(*Microcosmos*, II:58)

Note: The Chinese character “prisoner” (囚) looks like a man (人) engaged.

I presented previously two versions of my poem “Footprints in the Snow”: one of them seems a translation version of the other, written in non-character symbols and punctuation marks only. A similar self-translation appears in *Microcosmos*:

你的聲音懸在我的房間
切過寂靜，成為用
溫度或冷度說話的燈泡

Your voices suspend in my room
cutting through silence, to become
a bulb speaking with heat or chill

(*Microcosmos*, II:47)

.....

。

,

(*Microcosmos*, II:48)

The latter poem is a visualization version of the former poem. The Chinese punctuation mark “。” (a period) is very much like a bulb which gives off sound in silence or with silence.

* “Tang Poetry Haiku” (唐詩俳句)

9

床前明月光，
疑是地上霜，
舉頭望明月，
低頭思故鄉。

——用李白〈靜夜思〉

Bed front bright moon light	(In front of my bed: bright moonlight)
Wonder is on floor frost	(I wonder if it's frost on the floor)
Looking up see bright moon	(Looking up, I see the bright moon)
Dropping head miss home town	(Dropping my head, I miss my home town)

——using Li Po's "Still Night Thoughts"

12

慈母手(線)遊子身上衣，
臨行密密縫，意恐遲遲歸，
誰言寸草心，報得三春暉。

——用孟郊〈遊子吟〉

Loving mother (and in line) & wandering son's shuck on coat	(Lines of thread in the hand of a loving mother make the coat on the wandering son's back.)
Before left intensive stitches made, fearing he slow to return	(Before he left she made intensive stitches fearing that he would be slow to return.)
Whose talk inch grass heart, enough for all spring sunshine	(Whose talk is it that the gratitude of the inch-tall grass is enough for all the sunshine of spring?)

——using Meng Jiao's "Song of a Wandering Son"

One day in 2008, I spent a whole night skimming through the well-known Chinese collection *300 Tang Poems* on the Internet and completed 12 poems which I called “Tang Poetry Haiku.” The following is my rule: with the original classical poem visible on the page, I made some characters faded or faint to highlight the characters I selected. The highlighted characters, combined in sequence, formed a new modern poem. However, I had problem with the twelfth poem. I came across a good poem but failed to transform it with the rule I set for myself. A good idea struck me: why not use an S-shaped proofreader's mark to change the order of the characters? In this way I exchanged “線” (line) with “遊子” (wandering son),

transforming the traditional sewing line of thread into the modern internet line, twisting a Tang poem into a contemporary haiku: “Loving mother & wandering son’s online intensive talk.”

(The English translations of Chen Li’s poems here are done by Chang Fen-ling and Chen Li unless otherwise stated.)

Chen Li 陳黎 was born in Hualien, Taiwan, in 1954. After graduating from the English Department of National Taiwan Normal University, he returned to his hometown and taught in junior high school. He also taught creative writing at National Dong Hwa University. In recent years he has been the organizer of the Pacific Poetry Festival in his hometown. He is regarded as “one of the most innovative and exciting poets writing in Chinese today.” A winner of many important poetry prizes in his country, Chen Li has published 14 books of poetry and is also a prolific prose writer and translator. With his wife Chang Fen-ling, he has translated over 20 volumes of poetry into Chinese, including the works of Sylvia Plath, Seamus Heaney, Pablo Neruda, Octavio Paz, and Wisława Szymborska. He was listed as one of the “Top Ten Contemporary Poets of Taiwan.” In 2012 he was invited to the Olympic poetry festival (Poetry Parnassus) in London as the poet representing Taiwan. He was invited to the International Writing Program at the University of Iowa in 2014, to Athens World Poetry Festival, Singapore Writers Festival and International Poetry Nights in Hong Kong in 2015, and to Le Printemps des Poètes in France in 2016.