Polylinguality and Transcultural Practices
ISSN 2618-897X (print), ISSN 2618-8988 (online)
Полилингвиальность и транскультурные практики

2022 Том 19 № 1 28—35
http://journals.rudn.ru/education-languages

DOI 10.22363/2618-897X-2022-19-1-28-35

Research Article

Translingual Poets in Colonial and Postcolonial Taiwan

E. Wong

Trinity University,
1 Trinity Place, San Antonio, Texas 78212, USA
✉ ewong@trinity.edu

Abstract. In the mid-1940s, Taiwan underwent a change of ruling power from colonial Japan to the Kuomintang Party from China. Both governments implemented monolingualization on the Taiwanese population. In this article, we examine the situation translingual position in a historical aspect, dwelling in detail on the work of the outstanding Taiwanese poet Chen Qianwu. We come to several conclusions that may be useful to researchers in the field of translingual literature. 1. Taiwan's translingual poets, born in the 1920s, found themselves in a situation of permanent code switching: using the local dialects of Hokkien and Hakka in everyday practice, they were trained in Japanese and used Japanese in a wider society. 2. Although the switch between one monolingual paradigm and another violated the creative result of translational authors, this did not exclude the experience of multilingual realities and interlingual influences that they experienced from the fragmentation of local identities, especially during the development and formation of Taiwanese linguistic consciousness. 3. The literary intermediaries between the paradigms were: the classical Chinese writing, brought with the first immigrants from China; vernacular Chinese writing, influenced by the New Literary Movement in the 1920s; Taiwanese writing based on the most common dialects, Hokkien and Hakka (the idea of speaking and writing in unison); Japanese writing, which was originally studied in school along with Chinese, but supplanted it. The switch from Japanese, the colonial official language, to Mandarin Chinese, the postcolonial official language, led to a so-called "translingual generation" of literary writers. While the switch from one monolingual paradigm to another disrupted the creative output of the "translingual generation", it did not prevent these writers from developing a Taiwanese consciousness. As illustrated by the poet Chen Qianwu, language crossing experiences strengthened the translingual generation's assertion of their local identities.

Key words: translingual literature, code switching, Taiwanese literature, Chen Qianwu

Article history: received: 04.12.2021; accepted: 06.01.2022

Conflict of interests: none

For citation: Wong, E. 2022. "Translingual Poets in Colonial and Postcolonial Taiwan". *Polylinguality and Transcultural Practices*, 19 (1), 28—35. DOI 10.22363/2618-897X-2022-19-1-28-35

Научная статья

Транслингвальные поэты в колониальном и постколониальном Тайване

Э. Вонг

Университет Тринити,
1 Тринити Плэйс, Сан-Антонио, Техас 78212, США
✉ ewong@trinity.edu

Аннотация. В середине 1940-х годов власть на Тайване перешла к партии Гоминьдан из Китая. В связи с деколонизацией Тайваня политика, в частности языковая, изменилась. Переход с японского, официального колониального языка, на мандаринский китайский, постколониальный официальный язык, привел к появлению так называемого транслингвального поколения литературных писателей. В данной статье мы рассматриваем ситуацию литературного транслингвизма («между монолингвальными парадигмами») в историческом аспекте, подробно останавливаясь на творчестве выдающегося тайваньского поэта Чэня Цяньву. Мы приходим к нескольким выводам, которые могут быть полезны исследователям, занимающимся транслингвальной литературой. 1. Транслингвальные поэты Тайваня, рожденные в 1920-х годах, оказались в ситуации перманентного кодового переключения: используя в повседневной практике местные диалекты хоккиен и хакка, они проходили обучение на японском языке и в широком социуме использовали японский. 2. Хотя переключение с одной монолингвальной парадигмы на другую нарушило творческий результат транслингвальных авторов не исключило опыта мультилингвальных реалий и межъязыковых влияний, который они переживали, от дробления локальных идентичностей, в особенности в процессе развития и становления тайваньского языкового сознания. 3. Впоследствии литературными посредниками между парадигмами стали классическое китайское письмо, принесенное с первыми иммигрантами из Китая; вернакулярное китайское письмо, которое должно было занять место классического, подверженного влиянию Нового литературного движения в 1920-х; тайваньское письмо, базирующееся на наиболее распространенных диалектах, хоккиен и хакка (идея говорения и письма «в унисон»); японское письмо, изначально изучавшееся в школе вместе с китайским, но вытеснившее его. Как показал в своем творчестве поэт Чэнь Цяньву, опыт пересечения языков усилил отстаивание транслингвальным поколением своей локальной идентичности.

Ключевые слова: транслингвальная литература, переключение кодов, тайваньская литература, Чен Цяньву

История статьи: дата поступления в редакцию: 04.12.2021; дата принятия к печати: 04.01.2022

Конфликт интересов: отсутствует

Для цитирования: *Вонг Э.* Транслингвальные поэты в колониальном и постколониальном Тайване // Полилингвиальность и транскультурные практики. 2022. Т. 19. № 1. С. 28—35. DOI 10.22363/2618-897X-2022-19-1-28-35

Introduction

The change of ruling power in Taiwan in the mid-1940s from colonial Japan to the Kuomintang (Nationalist) Party from China led to a drastic change of language policy.

Japanese, which increased in dominance during Japan's occupation of Taiwan in 1895—1945, was replaced by Mandarin Chinese as the official language and written Chinese as the print medium under Kuomintang's rule. The switch created a so-called "translingual generation" of literary writers who were born in the 1920s, grew up speaking Hokkien or Hakka dialects at home while learning Japanese at school, and wrote solely in Japanese. After Japanese was banned from public use in 1946, these writers were faced with the decision of either giving up writing or learning to write in a new language. Those who made the switch underwent years of hiatus before they resumed publishing, not only due to the time and effort needed to acquire proficiency in Chinese writing but also because of postcolonial political suppression. Their insistence on writing, despite in one imposed language after another, and their language crossings strengthened their awareness of their subject positions as Taiwanese people, as well as of the importance of writing for and as the locals.

Discussion

In this paper, I use Yasemin Yildiz's [1] conception of the monolingual paradigm to scrutinize the impacts of the linguistic switch on poets from the translingual generation in Taiwan, with a focus on the poet Chen Qianwu (1922—2012). I argue that while the switch from one monolingual paradigm to another disrupted the creative output of the translingual generation of poets, it did not prevent the multilingual realities and cross-linguistic influences experienced by these poets from continuing to shape their local identities, particularly in developing and asserting a Taiwanese consciousness.

Linguistic Landscape in Early to Mid-Twentieth Century Taiwan

During Japan's colonization of Taiwan, the Japanese language was imposed on Taiwan's population consisting of mostly ethnic Chinese, who spoke mainly Hokkien and Hakka dialects, and a smaller number of indigenous peoples who spoke Austronesian languages. In 1937, all forms of Chinese were prohibited from public use in Taiwan. In the previous two decades or so, literary works appeared in a diversity of mediums in Taiwan, namely classical Chinese writing, the traditional writing medium that early immigrants from China brought with them; vernacular Chinese writing, a new form of writing advocated by reformists to replace classical Chinese under the influence of the New Literature Movement in China in the late 1910s; Taiwanese writing, which was based on Taiwan's most widely spoken dialect, Hokkien, and was promoted under the idea of "speech and writing in unison" (*yen wen yi chih*) in the 1930s; and Japanese writing, which was first taught in schools alongside with classical Chinese and later became the sole medium of instruction [2. P. 18].

In the 1930s, the presence of Japanese in Taiwanese literature grew as a medium of expression. Japanese literary influences also increased. It is worth noting that while Chinese and Taiwanese were the languages of anti-colonial resistance, Taiwanese writers working in Japanese also wrote about the hardships and injustices experienced by their fellow colonial subjects [3. P. 67].

In 1937, Japanese colonial authorities tightened Taiwan's language policy, banning Chinese from public use. This brought an end to literary production in diverse mediums.

After Japan was defeated in the Second World War in 1945, the Kuomintang party from China led by Chiang Kai-shek took control of Taiwan. The Kuomintang government designated Mandarin Chinese the new official language. Mandarin Chinese became the only language allowed in public use as Japanese and Chinese dialects were banned in 1946 and 1949, respectively. The monolingualization, or Mandarinization, was not relaxed until the lifting of a 38-year martial law in 1987 [4. P. 529—530].

The Concept of Monolingual Paradigm

In *Beyond the Mother Tongue: The Postmonolingual Condition*, Yasemin Yildiz puts forth the concept of monolingual paradigm, which functions to structure individuals' lives and interactions in a society through prioritizing monolingual perspectives and developments. According to Yildiz, such a monolingual paradigm "has functioned to obscure from view the widespread nature of multilingualism, both in the present and in the past" [1. P. 2]. While Yildiz's discussion focuses on Europe and locates a direct link between monolingualism and one's mother tongue, I find the monolingual paradigm constructive in understanding how Taiwan's translingual generation coped with two monolingualization policies imposed by external ruling powers. In particular, I foreground Yildiz's observation that "processes of monolingualization" take place "without fully eliminating multilingualism", with the aim to explore the linguistic space in which poets of the translingual generation made sense of their world [1. P. 2—3].

The Switch from Japanese to Chinese by the Translingual Generation of Poets

Following the ban of Japanese by the Kuomintang government, a number of poets in their twenties who had written only in Japanese decided to make the switch. Some examples are Zhan Bing (1921—2004), Chen Hsiu-hsi (1921—1991), Chen Qianwu (1922—2012), Lin Hengtai (1924—), Yeh Shih-tao (1925—2008), Tu Pan Fang-ko (1927—2017), and Jin Lian (1928—2013). Lin Hengtai coined the term "the translingual generation of poets" in retrospect to describe those, himself included, who "faced the loss of a linguistic medium in which they were proficient. Once again they resolved to make another leap — to renew their study of Chinese and make breakthroughs in the expressive capacity of Chinese. This is very difficult, especially for people who are no longer young" [5. P. 384]. During the transitional period, it was common for the translingual poets to resort to various extents of translation, from translating a Japanese first draft to Chinese, to mentally translating Taiwanese or Japanese ideas to Chinese words. Most of the aforementioned poets took nine to twelve years to begin publishing their works in Chinese. The majority of the translingual writers played a key part in forging a Taiwanese identity rooted in historical, cultural, and social conditions. One of them was Chen Qianwu.

Chen Qianwu was the pen name of Chen Wuxiong, who also took the pen name Huan Fu. He was born in a Hokkien family in central Taiwan. His Japanese-language school days gave him not only linguistic competence but also first-hand experience of colonial discrimination and oppression. Chen started writing poems in Japanese in 1939 when he

was eighteen years old and had his first few poems published in a newspaper. Later, Chen was drafted by the colonial government and was sent to the Pacific War in Java in 1945. Fighting alongside with Japanese troops deepened his colonial resistance. After the Retrocession, Chen learned to write in Chinese. He published his first Chinese poem in 1958 and his first Chinese poetry collection in 1963. Chen and a group of writers, most of whom from the translingual generation, founded the Bamboo Hat Poetry Society and Poetry Bimonthly in 1964 to promote a nativist spirit in literary pursuits, symbolized by the bamboo hats worn by Taiwanese peasants [6].

According to Chen, whether he wrote in Japanese or Chinese, his mother tongue, Hoklo, which is another term for Hokkien, was always at the heart of his writings:

> My mother was conversant with Chinese history and fiction. She told stories and recited classical poems in Hoklo. I was nurtured by Hoklo until I was seven, but Hoklo was banned when I started grade school. [...] I had two languages. At home, Hoklo was my life, my blood, my day-to-day living, my interior. At school, Japanese was my knowledge, my means of existence, my medium of expressing thought, my exterior. Later, I used Hoklo to think and Japanese to write poetry. [...] Now, whether I use Taiwanese, Mandarin Chinese, or Japanese to speak or write poetry doesn't make much difference to me. This is because thinking in Hoklo is still the basic [literally 'maternal'] substance of my poetry (English translation mine) [7].

From this passage, it is obvious that neither Japanization nor Mandarinization succeeded in creating a linguistic identity in Chen that aligned with the respective monolingual paradigms. Chen's sense of self was rooted in Hoklo, and his demarcation between Hoklo as an internal (spoken) language and Japanese and Chinese as external (written) codes helped him develop a Taiwanese consciousness. As a novice poet writing in Japanese, Chen contemplated on the asymmetrical power relations between the ruling and the ruled in poems such as "Dadu River" [8], which depicts an incident that when Chen was rafting with a few friends, a man in military uniform demanded that they take him across the river; "Oil Painting" [9], in which he questions his fate while being detained at school for mobilizing students against adopting Japanese family names; and "Coolies" [10], which reflects on his job of supervising laborers at a sackcloth manufacturing plant. After switching to Chinese, Chen continued to call for an awakening by the Taiwanese people and construct a Taiwanese identity through a nativist perspective informed by his war experience. One of his early Chinese poems, "Walking in the Rain" [11; 12], depicts the dominated people as spiders locked up in a prison made of spider silk:

A thread of spider silk straight down
Two threads of spider silk straight down
Three threads of spider silk straight down
Thousands of threads of spider silk straight down
Surrounding me in
— a prison of spider silk
Countless spiders cast to the ground
Each turns a somersault, making a show of defiance
Then imprints my face, my clothes, with marks of sadness
I am stained all over with the marks of bitter struggle.

Ah, mother, I am so restless and homesick
I miss your gentle hands brushing away
These threads of troublesome rain that entangle me.

Published in 1961, this poem subtly alludes to the domination not only of the colonial Japanese rule but also of the postcolonial Kuomintang government.

Despite the fact that to Chen, there were clear limits defining his use of his native language and imposed languages, all of these languages were sites where relations of meaning in language crossings contributed to an intersubjectivity that, in Nick Crossley's words, was the fabric of social becoming [13. P. 126]. Without doubt, the monolingual paradigms introduced by Japan and Kuomintang respectively played a key role in exercising symbolic domination in the construction of national identity. However, the monolingual paradigms did not and could not guarantee "control of the representations of reality" — a reality that continued to unfold against a multilingual backdrop [14. P. 348]. While the monolingual paradigms were sources of repression, they also generated intersubjective spaces where Chen as a translingual writer made sense of Taiwan's colonial and postcolonial reality, formed his own perspective against cultural hegemony, and subverted symbolic domination.

Chen's subversion of the symbolic power signified by the monolingual paradigms can be seen in the Taiwanese imprints he left in his Chinese poems and his Japanese translations of his own Chinese works. When Chen began writing in Chinese, he wrote in a kind of what he called "Taiwanese Mandarin" as he mentally translated ideas he formed in Hokkien into Mandarin Chinese sentences [15. P. 125]. The resulting writing tended to be more colloquial, with occasional Hokkien expressions and grammatical constructions. Chen's Taiwanese imprints were more obvious and deliberate when he translated his Chinese poems into Japanese since the 1970s. Instead of using conventional kanji, which is one of the three scripts in Japanese writing and which comprises Chinese characters borrowed into Japanese centuries ago, Chen directly imported some of the Chinese characters from his Chinese poems to his Japanese translations, especially place names in Taiwan [15. P. 124]. This practice was similar to the "hybrid form" adopted by Taiwanese authors writing in Japanese in the colonial period [16. P. 144—146]. In this way, not only did Chen write in a kind of Taiwanese Mandarin, he also practiced a kind of Taiwanese Japanese, claiming the hybridity that has always been there under the monolingual paradigms.

Conclusion

In a broader scope, Chen recognized linguistic hybridity as an essential element of Taiwan's literature. In 1970, he proposed a framework of "twin roots" for the beginning of modern poetry in Taiwan, instead of the single root more widely recognized at that time, i.e. the one from China's modern poetry introduced by poet Ji Xian and his Modernist School in the 1960s. The other root Chen identified was the Japanese-language New Poetry in the colonial period instigated by Yano Houjin and Nishikawa Mitsuru [17. P. 255—256]. However, acknowledging the Japanese-language root doesn't mean Chen gave "the recognition by the dominated of the legitimacy of domination" [18. P. 5].

Rather, it was from this root that a Taiwanese consciousness grew in the dominated, especially in Chen and the translingual generation of poets.

References

1. Yildiz, Ya. 2012. *Beyond the Mother Tongue: The Postmonolingual Condition*. Fordham University Press. Print.
2. Lin, Pei-yin. 2017. *Colonial Taiwan: Negotiating Identities and Modernity through Literature*. Brill. Print.
3. Ji, Biduan. 2014. *Bei zhiminzhe de jingshen yinji: zhimin shiqi Taiwan xinwenxue lun* [The spiritual imprints of the colonized: on colonial Taiwan's new literature]. Taipei: Showwe. Print.
4. Sandel, T.L. 2003. "Linguistic Capital in Taiwan: The KMT's Mandarin Language Policy and Its Perceived Impact on Language Practices of Bilingual Mandarin and Tai-gi Speakers". *Language in Society* 32: 523—551.
5. Lin, Hengtai. 2014. "The Translingual Generation of Poets: Beginning with the Silver Bell Society". Translated by Hayes Moore. *The Columbia Sourcebook of Literary Taiwan*, edited by Sung-sheng Yvonne Chang, Michelle Yeh, and Ming-ju Fan. Columbia University Press. Pp. 383—385.
6. Wu, Ying. 2010. *Xinge: wenxue, rensheng, Chen Qianwu* [Carrier pigeon: literature, life, and Chen Qianwu]. Taichung Cultural Bureau. Print.
7. Chen Qianwu. 1990. "Wo de muyü [My mother tongue]". *Selected Works of Chen Qianwu*. Taichung: Taichung County Cultural Center. Reprinted in Poetry Road, 14 Dec. 2006. Web. URL: http://faculty.ndhu.edu.tw/~e-poem/poemroad/chen-chianwu/2006/12/14/我的母語(代序一)/
8. Chen Qianwu. "Dadu Xi [Dadu river]". In 6. Pp. 57—59.
9. Chen Qianwu. "Youhua [Oil painting]". In 6. Pp. 63—64.
10. Chen Qianwu. "Kuli [Coolies]". In 6. Pp. 69—70.
11. Chen Qianwu. 2008. "Yu zhong xing [Walking in the rain]". *Ershi shiji Taiwan shixuan* [An anthology of 20th century Taiwan poetry], edited by Malmqvist, N.G.D., Michelle Yeh, and Xiang Yang. Ryefield. P. 145.
12. Chen Qianwu. 2001. "Walking in the Rain". Translated by Jim Weldon and Michel Hockx. *Frontier Taiwan: An Anthology of Modern Chinese Poetry*, edited by Malmqvist, N.G.D., and Michelle Yeh. Columbia University Press. P. 104.
13. Crossley, N. 1996. *Intersubjectivity: The Fabric of Social Becoming*. Sage. Print.
14. Gal, S. "Language and Political Economy". *Annual Review of Anthropology* 18: 345—367.
15. Chen, Tsaiyu. 2011. "Huayu Taiwan wenxue yu Riyu Taiwan wenyue de jiaohun — yi Chen Qianwu de ziyi zuowei li [Hybridity between Chinese-language Taiwan literature and Japanese-language Taiwan literature—as illustrated by Chen Qianwu's self-translated poems]". *Journal of Kao Yuan University* 17: 117—127.
16. Lee, Yu-lin. 2009. "Language Experiments and Subjectivity in Modern Taiwan Literature". *Cultural Discourse in Taiwan*, edited by Chin-Chuan Cheng, I-Chun Wang, and Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek. Kaohsiung: Center for the Humanities and Social Sciences and College of Liberal Arts, National Sun Yat-sen University. Pp. 138—160. Print.
17. Chen, Qianwu (Huang Fu). 2014. "The Twin Roots of Poetry". Translated by John A. Crespi. *The Columbia Sourcebook of Literary Taiwan*, edited by Sung-sheng Yvonne Chang, Michelle Yeh, and Ming-ju Fan. Columbia University Press. Pp. 255—256. Print.
18. Bourdieu, P., and J.-C. Passeron. 1977. *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*. Sage. Print.

Bio Note:
Elaine Wong is a Visiting Assistant Professor at Trinity University in San-Antonio, Texas, USA. She received a Ph.D. in English from the University of Texas at San-Antonio. Her scholarly

writings, original poems, and literary translations from the Chinese can be found in L2, TAB, Asymptote,Chicago Review, Chinese Literature Today, Indiana Review, Modern Poetry in Translation, and elsewhere. E-mail: esiwong@gmail.com
ORCID: 0000-0002-8014-295

Сведения об авторе:
Вонг Элейн — приглашенный доцент Тринити Университета в Сан-Антонио, штат Техас, США. E-mail: esiwong@gmail.com
ORCID: 0000-0002-8014-2951