

JOYCE STUDIES IN ITALY

13

**WHY READ JOYCE  
IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY?**

Edited by  
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## CONTENTS

Enrico Terrinoni <i>Preface. Why read Joyce at all?</i> .....	p.	13
Spurgeon Thompson <i>Returning to political interpretation: a communist Finnegans Wake</i> .....	»	17
Claire Culleton <i>Strick's Ulysses and war: why we read Joyce in the 21st Century</i> .....	»	37
Paul Fagan <i>"a mixer and wordpainter": Finnegans Wake in the age of remix culture</i> .....	»	49
Jonathan McCreedy <i>The Death of a Joyce Scholar and The Further Adventures of James Joyce: the crossroads of two reading publics</i> .....	»	69
Erika Mihálycsa <i>Horsey women and arse-temises: wake-ing Ulysses in translation</i> .....	»	79
Benjamin Boysen <i>Joyce's "politicoecomedie": on James Joyce's humorous deconstruction of ideology in Finnegans Wake</i> .....	»	93
Ilaria Natali <i>Joyce's "corpo straniero": the European dimension of Irishness in four border crossings</i> .....	»	105

Maria Vaccarella <i>A medical humanistic exploration of James Joyce</i> ..... »	121
Emanuela Zirzotti <i>Have you ever “seen” Joyce? The role of the Internet in the popularization of the man and his work</i> .....	» 131
Patricia Pericic <i>The limits to literature in Ulysses in the 21st Century</i> ..... »	145
Ivu I-chu Chang <i>Ulysses backed against the sea: Taiwan’s alternative modernity in Wang Wen-hsing’s Backed Against the Sea</i> ..... »	155
Thierry Robin <i>Joyce’s “ghosts”..., Flann O’Brien, Samuel Beckett and John Banville</i> ..... »	169
Maria Grazia Tonetto <i>The body of finitude</i> .....	» 185
Federico Sabatini <i>Contemporary Joyce: Joycean themes and stylistic techniques in William Trevor’s writings</i> .....	» 193
Andrea Binelli <i>Joyce and what is to become of English</i> ..... »	209

ULYSSES BACKED AGAINST THE SEA:  
TAIWAN'S ALTERNATIVE MODERNITY  
IN WANG WEN-HSING'S *BACKED AGAINST THE SEA*

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**I. James Joyce's influence on Wang Wen-hsing:  
a comparative study of *Ulysses* and *Backed Against the Sea***

James Joyce's great influence on the Chinese novel can be best exemplified in Wang Wen-hsing's *Backed Against the Sea*. The book shares many stylistic similarities with *Ulysses* typical of literary modernism: interior monologue, stream of consciousness, antihero, anti-romanticism, elaborate imagery, and symbolic structure. While Joyce spent eight years completing *Ulysses*, it took Wang Wen-hsing 24 years to complete the two volumes of *Backed Against the Sea*, with each volume focusing on the protagonist Ye's life on a specific day in a isolated fishing village on Taiwan's east coast. No less than Joyce's idiosyncratic approach, Wang's maze-like rhetoric devices cryptically hide meanings that could have been conveyed in easier ways, by challenging readers to put together the pieces of puzzle as in a state of semi-consciousness. Being obsessed with wordsmith and the acoustic effect of writing, Wang devises a psycho-acoustic system of signifying symbols by systematically employing graphic variation with a massive use of underscore, punctuation, typesets, as well as the repeated use of particle and syntactical manipulation. In so doing, he intends to simulate the tone, emotion, voice modulation, and speaking habits of individual characters of different ages, genders, classes, and ethnicities. All these voices are orchestrated into the protagonist Ye's one-night monologue that combines his self-entertaining word juggling and mumbling with contradictions, paradoxes, and insights. This seduces the readers with the pleasure/pain of wordplay and role play. In the vein of mockencyclopedia, Ye, a mainlander veteran and pseudo-

intellectual who makes a living as a fortune teller, blends theological interrogation, Chinese aphorisms, mockery of local bureaucracy and the burlesque of his perverted desires and pathetic love affairs, undercutting the literary traditions and paradigms of the novel.

Comparing Joyce's creative efforts in *Ulysses* with those of Wang Wen-hsing's *Backed Against the Sea*, Tzeng Li-ling points out that the decade-long writing process, the time lapse and the time-space distantiation in both writers' works not only mark the routes of modernist literature respectively in Dublin and Taiwan, but also result in the stylistic versatility and multiple narrative voices in both novels (2001, 171). Joyce's self-imposed exile in Trieste, Zurich and Paris allowed him a prismatic projection of his experience of urban flaneur onto Bloom's adventures as an ad canvasser in Dublin. Time-space distantiation compels Joyce to meticulously embroider the tapestry of Dublin and mock the epic of everyday life. Similarly, the writing of *Volume I* of *Backed Against the Sea* was begun in 1974 and accomplished in 1981, while *Volume II* was completed in 1999. In those twenty five years, Wang was well-known for his idiosyncratic and fastidious writing habits: being obsessed with the innovations of literary style, he only managed to write 70-80 words per day. Though he spent a total of twenty five years writing the two volumes, the plot of *Backed Against the Sea* spans only two days, with Volume I focusing on Ye's interior monologue from midnight on February 12 to the early morning of February 13 and Volume II from midnight on February 20 to the early morning of February 21, 1962.

*Backed Against the Sea* has been considered the Chinese counterpart of *Ulysses* not only because Joyce's trademark stream of consciousness and the aforementioned modernist literary techniques were intensively employed by Wang Wen-hsing, but also because Wang shares Joyce's concern with questioning the mimetic convention and the linguistic transparency of the realistic novel. Like Joyce, Wang arbitrarily alters the association between signifier and signified as well as between word and world. With different typesets, underscores, and phonetics, Wang aims at deconstructing the Chinese literary tradition while constructing polyphonic narrative voices through performance and difference in language. As Chang Sung-sheng notes, Wang Wen-hsing "widens, in a sense, the space between language and its referents. This approach easily jeopardizes the basic mimetic function of fictional language as conventionally understood, a not uncommon phenomenon in late modernism" (1993, 75). Wang arbitrarily distorts lan-

guage to create peculiar sound patterns that either please or annoy the ear, creating “an effect of libidinal gratification” (*Ibid.*, 75).

The pleasure/pain of reading both novels derives from the dynamic of narrative and heteroglossia composed of psycho-acoustic signifying systems. Joyce’s *Ulysses* consists of eighteen chapters, each one a parody of those in Homer’s *Odysseus*, in turn narrated by Stephen, Bloom, Molly, and anonymous narrators, interweaving stream of consciousness, interior monologues, dialogues, catechism, and pseudo-scientific accounts. Similarly, Wang’s *Backed Against the Sea* consciously incorporates various speech genres as Ye’s interior monologue delves into the voice modulations and emotive qualities of characters of different ethnicity and class. Sharing Joyce’s authorial manipulations, Wang claims that his language is intended to “capture the subtle essence of speech manners with its peculiar accents” rather than superficial mimesis. In other words, he strives at “*shen-ssu*, a likeness in spirit or essence, rather than *hsing-ssu*, a likeness in form” (*Ibid.*, 76). As a result, his experimental language is characterized by “repetition, distortion of syntax, graphical alteration of ideograms, use of sound symbols or onomatopoeic words, and coinage of new word combinations” (*Ibid.*, 113). As the narrative goes on, the awkward and idiosyncratic language style “aggravates” with the increasingly troubled mental state of the tormented hero.

Both the protagonists of *Ulysses* and *Backed Against the Sea* are wandering outsiders, which allows them to scrutinize their surroundings with detachment, ambivalence and critical attitudes, and hence to generate alternative cultural visions. The fundamental absurdity of life, this “wandering at home” without having a proper homeland, and the discrepancy between the center and the margin, are obliquely implied in the use of elaborate images, metaphors, symbolic structures, and dynamic narrative discourse rather than direct thematic formulation. In “Wandering Rocks,” Joyce attempts to paint a vivid portrait of the city of Dublin and its people. An episode revolving around Irish politics, the rock imagery symbolizes futility and doom, implying that the Dubliners wandering here are not really “at home”. Furthermore, Bloom’s Jewish identity simultaneously marginalizes him as a wandering outsider while allowing him to retain his independence from the failed Irish struggle for Home Rule as well as from the “shadows” of British hegemony represented by the Earl and Lady of Dudley in the episode.

In *Backed Against the Sea*, Ye is also a “wandering rock” in Shengkeng’ao (Deep Pit Harbor), a destitute fishing village on Taiwan’s east coast. Ye

is a middle-aged mainlander veteran representing the middle- and lower-class émigrés who followed the KMT regime in retreating to Taiwan after the KMT army was completely defeated by the Communist army in the 1949 Civil War. Settling in Taiwan, Ye's only social connection is with the people from his own province. In 1962, ten days prior to his night-long monologue, he flees from Taipei—the center of Taiwan's modernization—to Shengkeng'ao to escape the adverse consequence of his embezzling and gambling. Shengkeng'ao is a fictional village modeled on Nanfang'ao on Taiwan's east coast, where Wang Wen-hsing fulfilled his compulsory military service. Unlike Joyce's meticulous portrait of Dublin, Wang Wen-hsing's depiction of Shengkeng'ao resembles Nanfang'ao more geographically than topographically (Lin Hsiu-ling 2001, 50). However, it represents the impoverished villages in Taiwan's marginal rural area during the economic take-off in the 1960s, where Ye's solitude and alienation allow him to contemplate the meaning of materialism and poverty in all their coarse vitality, piquant wit, and childlike fascination. The harbor is a pit with mountains on three sides, and the only modern-looking architecture is a Catholic church on the top of the mountain, contrasting with the wooden cottages and straw huts underneath. A Matsu (Protective Goddess of Fishermen) Temple is located on the mountainside, and down in the valley are groceries, food vendors, teahouses and brothels. Living a penniless life, Ye learns to appreciate the art of minimalism: his only furniture is a bathtub which can be converted to a desk, a bed, and maybe a coffin and a tomb awaiting his departure.

In the village, religion, food and sex are three major trades. Food and sex are the most genuine and straightforward pursuits of happiness, enjoyed by poor and rich alike. He disapproves of the American life style and materialistic culture, ridiculing Americans who spend their life time working hard in order to purchase machines—car, television, freezer, washer, film projectors, lawnmowers. He reaches the conclusion that life is not to be “used” but to be “cherished” and appreciated with leisure. Ye's criticism of materialism might provide a philosophical basis for his decision to settle among poverty and unemployment. However, shortly afterwards, he admits that “I am a big, big, big contradiction”, confessing that he is also fascinated with wealth, fame and beautiful women. Complaining that everything good has been packed and shipped to Taipei—delicious seafood, fruit and even good looking girls, Ye regards “pastoral” and “primitive” as euphemisms of “poverty” and romantic imagination as the result of sheer ignorance.



Compared to Bloom, Ye in *Backed against the Sea* is a more self-contradictory double: he combines the “Noman” status of Bloom and the self-righteousness and menace of the Citizen, an anti-Semitic Irish patriot. In “Cyclops”, the anonymous narrator ironically recounts Bloom’s altercation with the Citizen. As the drunk Citizen continues his verbal attack on him on account of his Jewish identity, Bloom is forced to defend himself and his Irishness, as Noman-Odysseus confronting Polyphemus. Bloom’s “Noman” status implies that he is both a wandering outsider and a man emasculated by his wife’s adultery.

Combining the characteristics of both Bloom and the Citizen, Ye in *Backed against the Sea* is more capricious and dubious than Bloom. Wang recapitulates Ye’s cacophonous night-long monologue for the readers to peep into his inner labyrinth, innate perversity, shaky good intentions and self-justified vicious attacks. Ye’s “Noman” status as a wandering outsider is compounded with his status of a penniless “nobody”. The protagonist has no name and “Ye” is his self-designated address, meaning “master” in Chinese, in ironic contrast to the “Noman” status of an underprivileged mainlander émigré and escapist to a fishing village. Moreover, his alienation from the local society is aggravated by his quasi-intellectual background combining Chinese and Western learning. This seems incongruous with life in the fishing village. In a sense, his exposure to the “enlightenment” of western modernity is suggested by the four western masterpieces he carries in his luggage: Dostoevsky’s *Note from the Underground*, Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Gide’s *Fruits of the Earth* and Tolstoy’s *Resurrection*. In addition, his familiarity with the Chinese classics has been displayed by his fluent recitation of Chinese poetry or improvised euphemism. However, the gap between his self-referential knowledge and the local milieu provides him with no exit but leads to his further alienation and degradation.

Ye’s self-contradiction and cultural schizophrenia are exemplified in the monologue’s incessant oscillation between his rationalist religious quest and his barking and swearing with biting sarcasm and frenzy. Being aware of the fact that his words won’t change the world one bit, Ye compares his murmurings to a dog’s barking. His rationalist religious quest is revealed by a series of paradoxical questions posed by him as an excuse to approach a Catholic father in order to borrow some money. Having not done away with his instrumental rationality, Ye is skeptical about God: if God is almighty, why does he let the poor suffer? If everything is destined, what is the meaning of free will? Are disasters and catastrophes made by God or the Devil?

In Wang Wen-hsing's *Backed Against the Sea*, the curious and skeptical Ye poses questions using specific terms, jargon, and nouns in parenthesis, with marked stress and punctuation, which makes his narration redundant and sound like pseudo-scientific discourse. This over-precision impoverishes the meaning of words and reduces Ye's spiritual conundrums to neat formulas and observations. This reminds us of what happens in "Eumaeus". The dissipated, wandering style of the narrative evokes the listlessness of the weary travelers. The sentences are long and winding, fragmented with parentheses and accentuation, as in pseudo-scientific texts.

As Molly in *Ulysses* likes to question the use of words in everyday language in advertisements, politics, religion and medicine, Ye in *Backed Against the Sea* also derives pleasure from making fun of maxims, distorting idioms, twisting set phrases, deliberately naming and misnaming the situations. Ye ridicules the obsession of the bureaucracy with identification of human beings designed to prove one's existence. Recalling that once he begged the poker-faced staff for a medical certificate documenting his ulcer in order to relieve himself from military service, Ye sarcastically makes fun of the situation: "it's just as if a baby had to have a birth certificate tucked in its tiny fist when it first comes into this world whining and crying before it could be recognized as born." (Wang Wen-hsing 1981, 11)

In "Penelope", the obsolescence of epic and heroism is depicted as the decline in sexual purity and devotion in marriage. Molly's monologue is the closest approximation to the stream of consciousness, with the narrative skipping from fragment to fragment without punctuation. Joyce's avant-garde style deeply influenced Wang Wen-hsing. In an interview with Shan Der-hsing, Wang recalled that he had originally attempted to make *Backed Against the Sea* a novel without any punctuation (Shan 2000, 184; Tzeng 2001, 166).

Bureaucracy and the passive victims of institutions are criticised by both Joyce and Wang as they paint the larger-than-life-size portrait of the trivial and tedious office routine in modern life. This happens in "Aeolus", a chapter divided into sixty three sections with a hyperbolic headline for each section to exaggerate the narrative action. Similar to Joyce, Wang Wen-hsing makes use of the technique of hyperbole to depict the Dialect Bureau Office where Ye eats regularly and attempts to get a job. In Ye's words, the employees of the bureau are mostly those unqualified staff "dispersed" by the Central Bureau in Taipei. Ye describes how the staff in the Dialect Bureau keep create jobs in order to survive—their jobs even include compiling

the history of their own bureau. With a sense of superiority, Ye amusedly depicts in detail how those despicable creatures kill time by childishly fighting and attacking one another, routinely turning the office into a madhouse. Not without disdain, he exaggerates every trivial and tedious detail until the whole farcical spectacle turns to be slapstick and burlesque.

If we look into the personal history of the bureau members, we find that more or less everyone suffers from some chronic illness—mental or physical. Among the staff, Yu Shih-liang seems to deserve some sympathy. Yu Shih-liang's story is narrated by himself as his words in quotation interrupt Ye's account of the routine farce in the bureau office. Like Ye, Yu is also a mainlander émigré who married a local Taiwanese girl in an arranged match by paying the girl's family a large sum of money. Not knowing why, Yu's wife has been insane for years and he has had to send their four children to different orphanages. Yu recalls that once his wife was so worried about the shortage of food at home that she wielded a kitchen knife at their third child, the plumpest one of all the children, claiming that she'd chop him up to make some sausages for Chinese New Year. Fortunately the child was saved by the eldest son, who stood between his mother and younger brother, offering to be killed in place of his brother. This ended up awakening her maternal love. Yu's life is full of regrets and sorrows: he betrayed his wife by losing the borrowed money through gambling instead of purchasing the blood needed to save her life; he stealthily buried the miscarried infant at the Moon Festival while other families were enjoying family reunions and moon cakes. Yu's mishaps were not uncommon to many mainlander émigrés at that time. The contrast between the gravity of the matter and the contained narrative tone reinforces the black humour of the tragic-comedy, adding a somewhat unbearable lightness. Hyperbole and humour used in both Joyce and Wang in portraying this farcical bureaucracy and its passive victims are not only the sarcastic commentary of the absurdity and the misfits of modern institutions, but also test the readers'/bystanders' moral decency.

## II. Taiwan's Modernist Trend and the Literary Movement

Since the publication of *Volume I* (1983) and *Volume II* (1999), *Backed Against the Sea* has provoked criticism and debates along two main axes: some scholars analyze its form and style with an emphasis on the influence

of western modernism, while others attempt to explore the vernacular features and place-based consciousness of the novel. The polarized responses to this novel reflect Taiwan's multiple colonization in the past as well as the consequences of multiple modernity introduced from the West, mainland China and Japan. Under such circumstances, the retrospection of the creative transformation of *Ulysses'* legacy will provide us with the vantage point of the rooting and routing of Taiwan's modernist literature as well as the co-existence of pre-modern, modern and post-modern conditions in Taiwan.

With regard to the history of Taiwan's modernist literature, Wang Wen-hsing is one of the pioneers who introduced western modernist literature to Taiwan. Wang began to publish short stories in *Literary Magazine* in the late 1960s and co-founded *Modern Literature* with Pai Hsien-Yong in the 1970s, introducing and translating the works of Kafka, Thomas Mann, Joyce, Henry James Camus, Hemingway and so on. Sparing no effort, Wang and his literary colleagues were engaged in employing modernist literary techniques in their creative works, in which they explored the existentialist status of human beings, the fundamental absurdity of life, the rationalist conception of moral relativism, and the individual's futile rebellion against family, society and even destiny. Aside from the influence of these pioneers, a mushrooming number of publishers, like New Wave (*Xinchao*), Buffalo (*Shuiniu*) and Literary Star (*Wenxing*), which systematically published Chinese translations of western literary and philosophical works of modernism, existentialism, and liberalism, were also greatly influential for college students and intellectuals. As a consequence, many scholars and intellectuals regard this wave of modernist literary movement as a movement of enlightenment, linked to western modernity, which carved the way out of the dominant anti-communist literature and propaganda promoted by the KMT government after the KMT government's retreat to Taiwan in 1949.

Examined in Taiwan's socio-political context, the emergence of this modernist trend in the 60s and 70s was magnified by Taiwan's economic take-off, the back-flow of emigrated intellectuals, the lack of "high culture" in the Taiwan's cultural desert and a need for a radical intellectuals forum in the post-1949 era. Given that the KMT ideological state apparatuses banned leftist Marxist works or those Taiwanese works bearing the legacy of the former Japanese colonizer, the modernist literary project inspired by a broadly defined-liberalism was tolerated by the KMT government, though with many restrictions. In a stagnant cultural context over-saturated with political propaganda, the modernist project breathed a liberal spirit with a

notion of emancipation into the cultural landscape. As Chang Sung-sheng points out, the modernists are cultural elites who “challenged the excessive neo-traditionalist moralism with iconoclastic individualism” and whose galvanized quest for professionalism, artistic as well as institutional, was the reaction against “the perceived lack of ‘high culture’ under the destitute cultural environment of the 1950s and 1960s” (Chang 1993, 4).

Nevertheless, Taiwan’s modernist trend began to ebb in the 1979 Nativist Literary Movement, which arose as a reaction against the KMT government’s losing its political legitimacy in the international community: in 1978, The United States severed diplomatic ties with Taiwan and normalized their relationship with the PRC in mainland China; in 1979, ROC in Taiwan was forced to withdraw its membership from the United Nations. Given a series of diplomatic setbacks and the backward legitimization of the KMT state, some intellectuals and literary people called for a looking inward to think about the people, the living and the land in Taiwan. Nativist literature, represented by a style of social realism, was regarded as a counter movement to government-supported anti-communist literature and modernist literature. The Nativist Literary Movement of the late 70s emphasized anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism; it included workers and farmers as its social base; it was rooted in the love of the people and the land in Taiwan. Under such circumstances, progressive intellectuals subscribed to the Nativist verdict of modernist literature as reactionary in relation to Marxism or neo-Marxism. In the heated debates of the Nativist Literary Movement during 1978 and 1979, Wang Wen-hsing and his “modernist” peers were stigmatized as “cultural comprador” by the Chinese and Taiwanese leftist intellectuals. The discontent even lasted until the mid-1980s. Lü Cheng-hui, in an essay entitled “The Tragedy of Wang Wen-hsing” written in 1986, identifies Wang as a member of Taiwan’s most westernized generation of the 1960s, who voluntarily submitted to the Western cultural imperialism, a consequence of the KMT government’s dependence on the United States. Lü distinguishes Wang from those western modernists, who distanced themselves from the highly materialistic capitalist society. Wang’s self-imposed alienation from Taiwan’s society, Lü asserts, is caused by Wang’s elitist self-image of a progressive and westernized intellectual in the third world milieu (1986, 113). Turning to the mid-1980s, at the peak of the Opposition Movement and the Nativist Movement advocating Taiwan’s self-determination or independence from mainland China, though Wang Wen-hsing and his modernist colleagues were still the targets of at-

tack, Modernism's alleged affiliation with capitalism was no longer a critical issue. Instead, Wang and his peers, of whom most were mainlander writers, were criticised because the political contest was "primarily targeted at the Sinocentric cultural narrative of the mainlander-controlled Nationalist government" and intended to "reconstruct a Taiwan-centered literary genealogy" (Chang 1993, 6).

### III. *Ulysses Backed Against the Sea: the Allegory of Taiwan's Modernity*

If we take into account James Joyce's influence on Wang Wen-hsing, Wang's pioneering status in Taiwan's modernist literature, and his ambivalent relationship with Taiwan's literary movement, we are intrigued to read *Backed Against the Sea* and its cultural phenomenon as an allegory of Taiwan's modernity. Among those essays investigating the relationship between modernist literary styles and Taiwan's multiple modernity in Wang's novel, Edward Gunn's "*Backed Against the Sea: the Principles of Translation*" and Liao Ping-hui's "Four Modes of Modernity in Taiwan's Literature: in the Case of *Backed Against the Sea, Volume II*" are most noteworthy. Gunn, an English translator of *Backed Against the Sea*, notes that the heterogeneity inherent in the novel's hybrid language and the Bakhtinian heteroglossia deriving from the competition of various signifying systems (image, graphics, geography, terminology and archaism) not only deconstruct the totality of rationality and the vision of a united nation-state but also reflect the protagonist Ye's diasporic status as a mainlander in Taiwan as well as his intellectual oscillation between his westernized and non-westernized selves (Edward 2001, 132-133). However, eventually, the polyphonic narrative and heteroglossia are subsumed by Ye's self-referential monologue, which connotes the existential no-exit or de/ontological closure.

As critic Liao Ping-hui points out, *Volume II* of *Backed Against the Sea* represents four modes of modernity: the alternative modernity, singular modernity, multiple modernity and repressive modernity which co-exist in Taiwan (2001, 83). Liao associates Ye's Sinocentric mindset to "singular modernity" which excludes others and leads to Ye's degradation. Ye, a mainlander veteran and wandering outsider, is a misfit in the fishing village. Being Sinocentric, he has a sense of superiority when facing local villagers. In his love letter to the prostitute Red Hair, he refers to himself as a royal persona in search of beauty, which is a cliché in Chinese classical romance.



He considers Chinese civilization the only modern civilization. Ye despised his admirer Tsai Su-chen, a Taiwanese girl, because he considered himself an intellectual who deserved something better: his ideal wife should at least be a primary school teacher. On the other hand, he was in love with Red Hair, belittling himself in a masochistic way to beg for her love. As Liao indicates, Ye's symptomatic behaviour in dealing with women is indicative of "repressive desublimation" as he uses Red Hair to relieve his own repressed sexual desire and to project his yearning for intimacy, love, and identity. Through the psychic mechanism of "repressive desublimation", Ye transfers his frustrated heroism and sense of loss caused by his marginalized social status to out-of-proportion romance and fantasy. With Ye's "singular" modernity and his sense of superiority, he is alienated from society and it is difficult for him to get along well with people around him; he becomes jobless and gets involved in gambling, theft, and extortion. As Ye's inflated self-image is contradictory with his increasingly degraded social status, he introjects his anxiety, depression and melancholy, losing himself in metaphysical contemplation, posing endless theological, metaphysical and personal questions. He finally acts out his repressed desire and anxiety by joining the members of Cao's Family in killing a stray wolf hound, with the dog's death ominously foreboding Ye's own death in a surprise ambush shortly after. The repressed desire and violent ending of Ye's life allegorize the epistemological violence of his exclusive "singular" modernity.

Taiwan's "repressive modernity" compounded with capitalism is embodied by Dong Yu-tang's exploitation of local labor. Dong Yu-tang is a new acquaintance of Ye and a mainlander veteran who traveled from Taipei to Shengkeng'ao, looking for opportunity to expand his business. Like Ye, Dong followed his uncle to Taiwan after the 1949 Civil War. Having learned how to make use of dehumanizing military-style management in running his two "grand systems" of manufacture and distribution in a rice ball business, Dong becomes a millionaire. Ye's recount of Dong's success implies the author's comments on Taiwan's economic take-off with family-run factories and hard-headed entrepreneurs whose success was based on the exploitation of rural regions.

Dong's story suggests that Taiwan's "repressive modernity" has been intertwined with the capitalist exploitation of local labor. In addition, Taiwan's "repressive modernity" was supported by martial law from 1949 to 1987, and aided by an extensive network of overt and covert quasi-military security agencies to repress "cacophony" and to persecute dissidents and

intruders. The “cleansing-off” and political persecution is allegorized in the hyperbolic dog-killing scene. The grotesque atmosphere, the excessive cruelty and the serious and acquiescent attitude of the participants elevate the dog-killing scene to the symbolic level of a ritual act that reinforces the cohesion of the community and family through the subjugation and disposal of any dangerous intruder and threat from outside. Literature scholars and critics such as Liao Pinghui regard the dog-killing scene as the allegory associated with the White Terror persecution, the February 28 Massacre and the ubiquitous quasi-military security agencies.

Moreover, the complex and contradictory co-existence of four modes of modernity is embodied by the hybrid style of the novel and Ye’s ambiguous identities, his precarious conditions and cultural ambivalence. Through Ye’s monologue, the author Wang Wen-hsing subtly and vividly delves into the tone, voice, and emotive qualities of prostitutes, fishermen, bureaucrats, Catholic priest, scholars, entrepreneur, vendors, money mongers etc, portraying a great diversity of life styles, attitudes, and values, with their dialogues interweaving “multiple modernity” as the consequence of multiple colonization. This linguistic hybridity combines Mandarin, Taiwanese dialect, Chinese written with English syntax, Japanese, aboriginal dialect, punctuation, and signifying systems; the Bakhtinian heteroglossia is made possible by the presence of various narrative discourses within and outside the novel, employed to lay down the routing of Taiwan’s “alternative modernity”.

Lin Hsiu-ling, a student and fan of Wang, though acknowledging Wang’s artistic achievement in terms of modernist literary techniques, attempts to deconstruct the dichotomy between modernism and Nativism. Calling for “re-politicizing modernism”, she works as a guest editor of the special issue on Wang Wen-hsing and his works (*Chung-Wai Literary Monthly*, Vol. 30, No.6, November 2001). She also made a special field trip to Nanfang’ao (the model of Shenkeng’ao), interviewing local people and collecting local documents in order to identify the local customs, landscape, grassroots culture and vernacular consciousness reflected in *Backed Against the Sea*. At the end of her essay, she even wishes for the invention of a literary tradition named “Ye’s day” in Nanfang’ao, an imitation of “Bloomsday” on June 16 in Ireland in memory of James Joyce, with literary tours and marathon recitals of *Backed Against the Sea* by Wang Wen-hsing’s fans.☒

Wang Wen-hsing’s *Backed Against the Sea* and its impact over the years not only mark the development of Taiwan modernist literature in a crea-



tive transformation of James Joyce's legacy, but also exemplify the predicament and possibilities Taiwan has faced when emerging from colonialism in search of alternative modernity.

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