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The Historical Home in Luo Fu's "The Non-Political Totem—Visiting Dr. Sun Yat-sen's Former Residence"

For a border subject, the way to arrive at identification is very often the one that hopes for a return to "homemade" security before boundary crossing. Home, as Nikos Papastergiadis rightly observes, is "the metaphor for the center, in terms of both origin and destiny" (93). It provides the certitudes that promise an incontestable identity to the self. The absence of home, such as what happens in the displacement from homeland, on the contrary, always implies an enforced rupture between self-identity and collective subjectivity. This is indeed the case for many mainlanders who leave their homeland and henceforth get involved with the ambiguous relationship between Taiwan and Mainland China.[1] As is well known, the two political entities bear some cultural similarities in difference. Their connection and separation at the political level makes the cultural bondage between them all the more intricate and undeniable. To be a Chinese Taiwanese, therefore, where must the self be so as to build an unequivocal identity in a homecoming journey after decades? Is it in a place that once was called home? But where is the home in a country that becomes different from that in memory? Is it housed in the landscape that ceases to be what it was? The locality of home is suspended as the geopolitical boundary of the country unsettled. So is the self that defines its identity against the fixity of home. This paper attempts to respond to the questions by examining a border subject's attempt to reconstitute self-identity in the border journey from Taiwan to Mainland China. Luo Fu's long poem, "The Non-Political Totem," to be sure, is the text that helps to carry out the task.

1 In this paper, mainlanders refer to those Chinese people who relocated from the Chinese mainland to Taiwan around 1949, the year of Communist takeover.

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Since the civilian cross-strait relations between Taiwan and Mainland China resumed in 1987, the public debate over unification and independence on the island has been intensifying. Many of the writers following the ROC government in retreat have been prompted to reexamine their identities endorsed by the post-war sociopolitical realities on both sides.[2] Written in 1989, Luo Fu's "The Non-Political Totem" articulates a returning mainlander's complex about his self-identity in relation to contemporary Chinese history. The critical force of the long poem lies in a historical consciousness that underscores the "entangled images of reality and history, individuals and their time, a great man and China's fate" (Luo Fu 85). These images, moreover, are accomplished through the "non-political totem," or "Sun," the simplified character of Dr. Sun Yat-sen's family name. Accordingly, the historical consciousness is mainly that of Dr. Sun's revolution and his founding of the Republic of China. It is to this history, the "origin" of the Republic in split, that the first-person speaker strives to return from the "destiny" of displacement. In one way, the coming of "I" from Taiwan to Dr. Sun's "former residence" in the mainland is a border journey in quest for the "center" that ever held the identities of the collectivity and the individual from falling apart.

Read in this way, the poem witnesses a returning native's quest for continuous history and concordant identity. Only when the speaker enters into history as fully as possible is he really closer to "home" for establishing his identity. Put differently, the speaker's returning is oriented to disclose the "truth" of the totem and to rediscover beneath it a historical home for his disrupted identity. It is less the totem itself that is important in this quest than the representations that are made of it. Indeed, self-identity in this poem is constructed through the speaker's refusal to acknowledge the representation, or, to read the totem as a "non-political" one. A study of the historical home in "Totem" thus brings together the variability of the interrelated history, representation, and self-identity. '

I.

"Totem" opens with a quest in a turbulent reality: "Running after a hat blown away in the strong wind / I blundered into / An undefended history" (1-3).[3] The hat covers the head, which activates thinking. Running

2 The ROC government was officially the government of the Republic of China until 2000. It was designated sometimes as the KMT or Nationalist government, named after the ruling party, Kuomintang.

3 "Totem" is collected in Luo Fu's *The Angel's Nirvana* 85-102. Throughout this paper, the parenthetical reference for the quoted poem designates the line number in the English version, which is my tentative translation.

after the hat that is "blown away" in the "strong wind" initiates the speaker to "brain wash" his original thinking and readiness for a startling one. It is during this absence, of the previous ideology, that he must try to redefine his relation to the "undefended history."

Hence are the lines in which the speaker stands "now" "in the heart spot of it [history] / To read altogether / Its childhood, youth, middle age, old age, / Lineage, chronicles, records of ancestry, and diversities of time" (14-17). As the past history becomes synchronous with the moment of reading, the speaker's relation to history begins to change. Like an archaeologist, the speaker is occupied with the task of discovering not so much the personified history as his own self that is embedded within the historical background. His reading thus enables the poet to exemplify the returning mainlander's struggle to recover self-identity through the ruins of history.

The struggle is furthered in the lines touching on the conflict between Taiwan and the Mainland:

> Except for making the bombs, the republic, and roses
> What can we learn from a revolutionary?
> A bomb
> And
> Another bomb
> Have been staring at each other for long.
> A Republic
> And
> Another Republic
> Have been silently facing each other.
> In between, except for emitting love's electric wave,
> What else can the rose say? (21-32)

The signifying potential of the questions resides in the implicit juxtaposition of love and politics. The images of "the bombs, the republic, and roses" symbolize violence, the ideal, and passion that are usually common in pursuit of love and power. Both aim for a close association and may end at either violating or consummating the relationship between the self and the other. Obviously, the speaker's questions are ironic answers to the complex of hegemony between Taiwan and Mainland China. The two political states "learn from" the "revolutionary" only the "making" itself. While Dr. Sun destroys the conventional Chinese political system in order

to establish a democratic one, the states split from the founded republic cease doing violence to each other. They see the difference between them as a deviation from their dominance and are concentrated on obtaining military superiority. Yet, a danger is imminent here too. Their "staring" and "facing" made possible by physical closeness render impossible a clear view of the situation they are engaged with. They are too close to exempt themselves from the threat posed by the bombs. "In between" "what else can the rose say?" With "rose," an image known for piercing love, Luo Fu recalls a promising relationship that ends at destructive antagonism. The displaced mainlanders' yearnings for uniting Chinese and Taiwanese cultural affinities are constantly thwarted by the political conflicts between Taiwan and China. Consequently, many of them are to go "in between," unable to identity themselves with, or, more poignantly, to be identified by, either of the two. Herein lies the urge to find a historical home that exists before the Republic splits.

II.

Indeed, such a home cannot be achieved in the present since the significance of the revolutionary who helps founding the Republic is diminished in reality. This is well revealed in the following lines:

> The young collector points to
> The character "Sun" that has been simplified for forty years and says:
> This is a harmless
> Non-political totem.
> And, Renminbi is never a taboo.[4] (41-45)

The simplified version of the character "Sun" is composed of two characters that mean literally "a little guy." Obviously, the simplified character is a stark contrast to "a great man,"[5] which the poet uses to refer to Dr. Sun in his foreword to the poem. Its simplified strokes show that Dr. Sun's grand spirit has been misrepresented and misunderstood. Concealed within this character is the tragedy of enforced separation and helpless waiting and aging. It is a history unable to be fathomed by the post-war generation, to which the "young collector" belongs. For the generation, Dr. Sun's family name is taken economically as a tool for earning money from sightseeing visitors. For the poet, whose generation suffers the national predicament of war, however, "Sun" may sum up all those grievances and anguish that pass on to the present. The younger generation's approach to it

4 Renminbi, or, "people's money," is the currency of Mainland China.

is really too "simplified." Like the bombs and republics discussed earlier, the totem expresses actually the armed conflict in microcosm. In *The Space Between Literature and Politics*, Jay Cantor states that "words to us now are absence of something" (21). Similarly, the totem testifies to the absence rather than to the presence of an acknowledged continuity of history. It is precisely this very absence that necessitates a fixed gaze on the "Sun" in order to authorize its meaning—"a harmless / non-political totem"—in political representation. That is, the character is rewritten and manipulated, in Claire Colebrook's words, to "enable a culture to represent itself as legitimate" (215).

"A word can only signify," Colebrook comments, "if it is recognized, and recognition occurs with familiarity and repetition" (214). For the totem to be recognized, the "Sun" has to be circulated and the narratives on it reiterated. "Thus, with fifty cents" (46) the speaker "buy[s] the boundless desolateness of the half afternoon" (47). The history that radiates from the "harmless" totem is traded with "Renminbi" that is said to be "never a taboo." The monetary images serve to demonstrate the material ground of the memorial hall. The images, moreover, suggest that the totem will not be taken as a dangerous taboo only when it is approached economically but not politically. The political significance of the totem is ironically exposed. This becomes all the more evident through the parallel wordings of "fifty" and "half." The wordings bespeak a Republic that is cheapened and divided. More importantly, they imply that the memorial hall holds only a part, and presumably a partial view, of the history associated with Dr. Sun. The totem is therefore anything but "non-political." The speaker's sense of "boundless desolateness" forecasts the falsehood of the "non-political totem."

The falsehood bears an ironic overtone to give the title an enriched meaning that would otherwise be lost. The "non-political totem" indicates, to borrow from Robert Phillips, "a failure of memory," or, a "denial of history" (72). It is employed as a political act without regarding its historical past. Rather than a continuous whole, the reality demands for temporary specificity only. The ideal of the National Father, to reform and create a democratic nation, is willfully forgotten and excluded from the totality of the totem. For many displaced mainlanders like the speaker, the homecoming visit to Dr. Sun's "former residence" is also "a pilgrimage" (Luo Fu 85) to search for the origin of the history that is later disrupted and renounced. The way on such a pilgrimage is paved by a hope for reuniting the rupture between the national identity and the individual one.

Unfortunately, a close reading of where the history has been carried on can turn the residence to a "haunt."

In the memorial hall, indeed, all that occurs before and after Dr. Sun's revolution haunts the speaker: "'What a nice day!' says the curator. / But what in my mind are those years of disasters" (59-60). Famine, death, corruption, violence, and humiliation—the buried truth of Chinese history—remain intersected with the speaker's living moment. Instead of heeding what the curator says, the speaker bends over to "listen to / the echoes of the sinking history" (86-87). Forgetting the present, he remembers the past at the expanse of memory. His memory disallows a settled, complacent living at any moment. The speaker is obliged to live in a drifting time, crossing the temporal horizon now and then. This typifies a border subject's predicament. The displaced native travels across the border to reach his homeland after decades, only to prove his fear: what has been cherished is irreversibly lost. The China in reality is not the same with that in memory and, as some may come to find reluctantly, not even favorably comparable with Taiwan. A journey over the temporal horizon is very often set off to escape from the discovery, or, to plunge into a doomed recovery of a mainland that one called home.

Interestingly, such disillusion occurs after the speaker lapses into sleep and realizes that "Because / We have been sleeping, / Civilization regresses and / Politics degenerates" (91-94). The conflation of the private and the public inertia brings together also an intersection of the past and the present. This is demonstrated by the spacing layout of "we have been sleeping" and an immediate passage of prose-like lines. The typographical shape captures the speaker's vision of Chinese history in its "recent few hundred years" (88) that is worthy of quoting:

> We have
> Been
> Sleeping
> Sleep
> Ing. . .
>
> As soon as the tape recorder is clicked on, our sleeping heads are awakened by Dr. Sun's nail-like Mandarin with Cantonese accent, awakened from one year before the year before the intermittent pain of 1924; from the impending earthshaking drums of the South, from the collapsing sounds of the opium mattress, from the nightmare as long and black as pigtails, from the numerous bondages of those rubbish, nonsense, shameful, disgusting, damned treaties that humiliate the nation and surrender its sovereignty, from the first gun shot at Wuchang Pavilion in the Xinhai year, from the falling of the gray clothes under the Lugou Bridge, from the frequent breaths of Japanese cannons, from the blood-thirsty thorns, from the hastily rustling footsteps of the refugees, from the bloody flash burst out of the clash between the corrupted, selfish right hand and the cruel, fighting left hand, from a large bag of cocaine hidden in *Quotations from Mao Zedong*, from many bubble-like lies, from the students' last words, from the rumbling of the tanks running over the square,
> From the mumbling thunder at Cuiheng Village in the afternoon,
> I suddenly awake. (95-114)[5]

The speaker's vision is the memory of history put to sleep. History comes over when the listener hearkens to the narrative out of noise. The last line quoted here, "I suddenly awake," thus is critical to the transformation from slumber to attention. Read carefully, the line announces a state of mind awakened not just from the mechanical recordings of history but also from the sounds and furies submerged in the narrative. Because the speaker is awake, the narrative is interpreted with a difference. To grasp his interpretation, it is necessary to discuss the interrelated identities of China, Dr. Sun, and the speaker revealed in the passage.

The national identity of China in this passage is a lamentable other even to its citizens. China is seen as suppressed and exploited with regard to political imperialism and the Sino-Japanese war. In addition, it has an identity best described as degenerate, corrupt, and self-destructive in the lines referring back to the decaying politics of the Qing dynasty and to the contemporary political division and tyranny. What gives China a likeness of alterity is not just an intrusion that removes its original outlook but also the result of its own efforts. Chinese people are metaphorically hallucinated, poisoned, and literally killed by their own government. "The tanks running over the square" toll the death of those who disagree with the nation-state.[6]

5 In the Chinese version, the second stanza here is divided into two parts. The first part is a prose-like paragraph. It runs into several lines based on the printed form rather than on the poet's arrangement as it is in the second part that is deliberately composed of two lines only. To follow this format, the lines of the first part, when translated into English, do not appear like the ones in the second part, which form an obvious unit according to punctuation or syntax. Taking into consideration the format of this paper, I do not change the font and spatial arrangement of the first part I quote to match its translated version. If so, the indentation and spacing of the quotation will be changed so much as to sacrifice the impression given by the prose-like paragraph. For the sake of reference, however, the line numbers put in parenthesis still follow the exact ones in translation rather than those appearing here.

6 The image of "tank" may derive from the June-Forth Event on Tiananmen Square, to which the poet refers in the foreword and the poem itself. The Communist

It is the tragic ending that gives Dr. Sun's voice a significant role in both the spiritual and physical sleep, or rather, death. "Speech," Kerby believes, "is called forth by a social situation" (110). Conversely, speech recalls the reality that brings it into being. Dr. Sun's "nail-like" speech reiterates what the Chinese people have painfully gone through. His voice, once projected to awaken people to establish a republic, is played now in the deformed republic that puts people to permanent sleep. His presence, manifested in the voice, moreover, enhances the tragic irony. Identified as a patriotic revolutionary, Dr. Sun, dead, is incorporated into a political institution that refuses to listen to the students' demand for reform. He started a revolution to change the identity of China in his time. Its identity in the speaker's time, however, does not match Dr. Sun's idea of it. His own identity, which is constructed out of the destiny of China then, is employed furthermore to represent the identity of China now as authoritative and legitimate.

The opposition between an ideal China in Dr. Sun's vision and the real China is what comes to the speaker's mind. The recorded words are intersected with his consciousness of the recent events in the mainland. It is impossible for the tape to hint at the political persecution through "the rumbling of the tanks." Therefore, the suggestion comes from the speaker's own words as a substitution for the played words. The speaker's consciousness thus has the task of revising the narrative he hears; the consciousness expands on the narrative to include a perspective that undermines it from within. Ushered in by Dr. Sun's "nail-like Mandarin," the narrative is meant to restate how the Chinese people have established a powerful country in accordance with Dr. Sun's ideal. Concluded by the tanks, however, the message of the narrative is ironically questioned and the government endorsed by the narrative, distrusted.

The implicit disruption between the recorded narrative and the revised one corresponds to the speaker's disintegrating mind, which sinks progressively into indignation and delirium. The preposition "from" in the prose-like passage is followed several times by phrases of violent experiences. Instead of waking immediately "from" a doze, the speaker descends "from" reality to a delirium, in which he sees consecutive images of buried truth. When he strives physically to awaken, the images come one after another to enclose him within an era that "regresses" and "degenerates." The speaker at this stage is unable to hold the chaotic

government allocated tanks to suppress and kill the students who asked for a dialogue with the concerned authority in order to promote a democratic reformation of the mainland.

experience of violence at a distance. He visualizes the experience and is plunged emotionally into its "chronicles."

He awakes from his own vision only after "the mumbling thunder at Cuiheng Village in the afternoon" is heard. The "mumbling thunder" is resonant with the "rumbling" tanks. The two sounds are similarly low and deep. The similarity enables the suggestion of death to echo from the tanks to the thunder. To "awake" "suddenly" from the "mumbling thunder" is hence to awake from the fear of being threatened and killed. It follows that the speaker does awaken to a sense of understanding. The more he sees the "*Quotations*," "lies," "last words," and atrocities in the present reality, the more he understands the silence on its surface—the nation-state puts heterogeneous voices to literal death. Again, the awakening indicates a turning away from reality to history for shelter, for home, in effect. This becomes more conspicuous when the speaker comes to identify himself with Dr. Sun, who ever protected Chinese people from imperial and autocratic oppressions.

III.

In the fifth section of the poem, the speaker visiting the residence is accompanied by a figure who gradually emerges to be Dr. Sun in the speaker's imagination: "I scratch my head again, / Getting a handful of dandruffs, / A handful of fossilized thoughts. / In this way, / I follow the host to enter his former residence" (118-22). "Following the host's pointing finger" (145), the speaker finds "a bed of heroic dream startled every night by the sword's howl" (151) among "a kettle" (146), "a furnace" (147), "a bowl" (148), "a ladle " (149), and "a chair" (150). The finger points to a shift of focus, in which an immediate, experiential world of the hero is visualized. The world is embodied in artifacts; it is both externalized in their juxtaposition and internalized by the phrase that modifies their singular forms. The blank between the singular noun and the phrase emulates the brief moment when the speaker's visualization of the hero's inner world takes place. The speaker's view of the bed, for instance, is associated with Dr Sun's desire for change. He is seen alone, in the night, turning wide-awake by a metal cry for action. From the bed to the sword, the speaker has been exploring Dr. Sun's mind in the immediacy of his gaze. In doing so, he is emptying the self out for the admittance of the other.

The other occupies the self as shown in the lines capturing the motion of Dr Sun's body. The speaker "follow[s] him to *enter* the study (152) and sees "In the midnight, he *sat* straight as a cool and solemn peak, / *Searching* up and down, in quest of / A sharp surgical scalpel" (155-57; emphasis

added). The intent observation reflects the speaker's growing identification with Dr. Sun. His "study" of Dr. Sun's mind furthers this argument:

> He expected a storm,
> Just as he expected the dawn.
> He would make a steel-like spirit
> For the people without trousers;
> Instill the daybreak protein
> For the skeletal and impotent tomorrow. (161-66)

The study discloses a shared expectation to the extent that the speaker's own desire for an alternative finds an outlet in Dr. Sun's dream of making possible a powerful China. Indeed, it is a study based on the speaker's vicarious experience of Dr. Sun's anxiety and hope. A catastrophe at night should come first and lead to a promising tomorrow. The reconstruction of China ought to be paid for by its undergoing destruction first. The study thus retrieves Dr. Sun's decisive revolution from a predicament. The successful attempt to reform China is what the speaker longs for and, yet, is found only as absent within his own world, invoked only within the self. The suppressed longing encourages the speaker's identification with Dr. Sun, which enhances the longing in return. More importantly, the interrelated longing and identification betray the contrast between the Republic and the one split from it. The more the past of expectation and fulfillment is evoked, the more the present of stillness and futility is apprehended.

In a way, the interrelation is mediated through the speaker's profound understanding of reality. Only when he probes beneath it and unearths the startling fact of repetitious regression is he compelled to sense the demand for change. Chinese history seems to reach the moment that is in need of a figure like Dr. Sun. The moment, however, allows only the "non-political totem" that is abstracted from Dr. Sun's name. His spirit of altruism, of devotion, of resolve to ask for a bright tomorrow, fails to survive political confrontation and oppression in disguise. History on account of such a deceptive reality situates the speaker in a helpless demand he should not have felt if he had not read the "heart spot" of history in the first place. Because he reads it, he hears "China's irregular heartbeats" (176) and works out Dr. Sun's mind in ever challenging the sociopolitical reality. Though implicitly, "the bitterness of reality" (Luo Fu 85) is so desperately revealed that it foreshadows the speaker's looking for a spiritual residence by returning to the homeland.

For such residence is difficult to find in the country that arouses intense longing for change. Again, the longing is inseparable from the speaker's identification with Dr. Sun, especially when he shares Dr. Sun's concern over the destiny of China in the following lines: "I try hard to check a sneeze, seeing / Him, passionate in the face, bang up by the study desk" (169-70), "Caressing the scattered stuff left on the desk—" (174), and "A writing brush: Li Hongzhang, alas, allow me to speak about the rise and fall of our country" (178). When the speaker sees Dr. Sun's "face," he also sees Dr. Sun's passion. The speaker's consciousness discloses the inner states of himself and Dr. Sun. Like Dr. Sun, the speaker is also lifted up by a tide of patriotic fervor. The tide, which the speaker is obliged to submerge as he has to "check a sneeze," is set free by Dr. Sun's banging in reverberation with passion. Dr. Sun's face thus holds up a mirror to the speaker's mind of eagerness. Through an optical projection into the other's mind, the speaker encounters the self in the end of his "sightseeing." Dr. Sun "caressing the scattered stuff" brings into view, in fact, the speaker himself. He is about to touch the brush because of an urge to articulate the "rise and fall." Dr. Sun's writing to Li Hongzhang thus verbalizes the speaker's longing for an alternative.

IV.

Yet, the political climate arrests the desire to burst into words. This is implied through the hideous weather condition:

> The rain cleans up the desire in the summer, washes away
> The disarranged footprints of the one who reads history,
> And, exposes the deeper wound under the mud. (195-97)

Throughout the whole poem, the speaker is compelled to keep silent; his throat is "stuck" (50) and his sneeze "check[ed]." He sees, reads, thinks, asks; and yet, he does not speak out what he learns and doubts. The "rain," or, "a burst of summer downpour" as indicated in line 189, is predicted by the "mumbling thunder" and, likewise, may also fall down with a threat. In this respect, "the one who reads history" is confronted with the climate that threatens to terminate the reading and even the reader. Accordingly, "the disarranged footprints" stand for the reader's "perturbed and timorous" (56) states of mind in a protest against, or escape from, the threat. Whether it is escape or protest, the attempt is rendered futile in the end. The thundershower "washes away" the footprints and, concomitantly, the reading and the reader. History becomes a text bereft of interpretation. It is left alone—"undefended." The "undefended history," into which the

speaker "blundered" at the beginning of the poem, paradoxically defends itself against criticism. As such, it is this defensiveness that covers history "under the mud." The debased aspect of history is exposed when the reader is thunderstruck, stunned by the "injury" (115) inflicted on those who approached history.[7] The more he gets involved with the reading, the "deeper wound" he gets.

No reader is immune from the hurt. The temporary retreat of the first-person singular suggests the shared destiny. When the speaker appears in the succeeding lines, his movement epitomizes a serious reader of Chinese history:

> Putting up a tattered umbrella,
> I rush out of the cold and damp history.
> Looking up at the sky,
> In a haze, I seem to perceive
> A castrated dragon coming from the clouds,
> But not the departing traces of the solitary walker in the rain. (198-203)

The "cold and damp history" depicts not just history itself but the reader of history. After a close reading, the speaker's mind is changed to be "cold and damp." This is anticipated by the speaker's taking a breath to prevent himself from sneezing; it is then actualized by the image of the "tattered umbrella," which must fail to protect him from the downpour. He has to "rush out" of the history he "blundered into" lest he be overwhelmed by the study.

The leaving casts the speaker into a profound sense of loss, or, "desolateness," in Luo Fu's own word. "Looking up at the sky," the speaker seems to ask speechlessly a god above why history has turned "cold and damp."[8] The answer is "a castrated dragon coming from the clouds." On the realistic side, it is the murky clouds that are seen to take a dim and partial shape of a dragon. Symbolically, it signifies a consciousness of an overcast, mutilated China. As is well known, to Chinese people the dragon is conventionally associated with prestige and divinity. The most obvious

7 Together with the succeeding lines, the line from which "injury" is quoted refers again to the June-Forth Event: "Injury got in *June* / Still hurts in July. / Not until August did they know some flowers were not to be picked" (115-17; emphasis added).

8 To Chinese readers, the gesture of "Looking up at the sky" could be associated with the looker's articulated or silent lament about humanity, misfortune, or punishment when the looker is rendered so helpless as to question divine justice in relation to human sufferings. In fact, Luo Fu employs the Chinese character 天, tian, which not only denotes "sky" or "heavens" but also connotes "god" or "divinity."

case is its being taken as a totem to represent Emperor and Empire. Contextualized in the poem, the dragon is hence related to the "non-political totem," the Republic of China, as well as its founder, Dr. Sun. A "castrated dragon" suggests that the Republic of China is split and Dr. Sun's ideal defaced. Granted that the sky, like Hugh Ruppersburg's interpretation of the wilderness in Warren's "Brothers to Dragons," is "a blank space" "with no inherent meaning of its own" (52), the very shape of the clouds is projected from the speaker's consciousness of an impotent China. Truly, the "castrated dragon" carries a message of the speaker's vain wish for variation and wholeness—for restoring the historical home in reality.

The "departing traces" expose the vain wish further. For a moment, the speaker is carried away by an expanse of cloudy heaven. Coming back to himself, he notices that "the departing traces of the solitary walker in the rain" have vanished from sight. The belated discovery retraces a double movement in opposite direction. At the sight of the "castrated dragon," the speaker is recalling, thinking backwards about, the divided Republic; turning away from history, he senses the loss of traces and comes to remember what was recollected just now. His sightseeing trip is a border journey moving to and fro between history and reality. Together with his momentary immersion in the undercurrent of history, the movement exemplifies a Chinese returning native's difficulty in struggling through the emotional tension between the past and the present. The speaker's visit is, indeed, a border-crossing activity that constantly traverses time and space.

The historical home, in this respect, is always beyond reach, located neither here nor now. Consequently, the hope for feeling at home and building through it undisruptive self-identity remains unattainable. When the speaker loses "the departing traces," he finds simultaneously "the solitary walker in the rain." The concurrence is important to the full revelation of his estrangement. In the poem, history is spatialized. It is metaphorically a passage for the speaker to "blunder into" and "rush out;" the narrative about it is displayed in the village, the memorial, the residence, and, finally, in the "cold and damp" rain. The speaker's losing sight of the "departing traces" bespeaks, hence, more than a literal loss of direction. It signals a symbolic loss of the self in history and, accordingly, its vain attempt to constitute its identity upon the historical home. The walker thus proves to be the speaker "who reads history." A deep concern with the National Father's lost ideals has doomed him to loneliness. Helpless and alone, the speaker takes sight on himself as someone isolated in history. Concluding the poem in this way, Luo Fu creates a border subject that

returns finally to the moment preceding the boundary crossing. The "former residence" exists only as a simulacrum of the "home" that ever housed and secured a continuous self-identity.

Could the lost self find a way to relocate its footprints? Where can the speaker in "Totem" be situated? In short, what kind of Chinese identity is anticipated by the speaker's "departing traces" at the end of the poem? A subdued renunciation as it is, the departure points to a possibility of moving on. In a sense, history becomes the speaker's way. The ending of the poem paves a way for the beginning of a new course. This accounts for what Luo Fu says in the foreword: "In recent years, Chinese on both sides of Taiwan Strait have the opportune moment of making history in hand" (86). Chinese identity, as it were, would be revealed at the end of one historical epoch and at the dawn of another. Indeed, it is on the way to change and is, in fact, always changeable. "Identity," Kerby remarks, "must be redefined within the context of the person's appearance within the sociolinguistic arena" (114). The way of change is included in the reality changed. The speaker's departure from the mainland, and leaving for Taiwan, will engender some transformation of identity. The coming identity of the lost Chinese thus belongs to the history of the republics on both sides of the Taiwan Strait. Whether the future promises home for the displaced is a question for another subject to dwell on.[9]

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9 It is noteworthy that in 1997, eight years after the publication of "The Non-Political Totem," Luo Fu immigrated to Canada. The Chinese republics during the years in between had caused the poet to take a flight and settle down as an overseas Chinese. Since then, however, Luo Fu has visited Taiwan several times. The "departing traces" are repeatedly overlapped by the coming "footprints." Like many border subjects, Luo Fu crosses the boundary to move forward and, yet, is unable to forget what is left behind. Luo Fu's immigration bespeaks, hence, a Chinese identity that is "seethed with mixed feelings" (Luo Fu 85). No matter how "non-political" the decision to leave once was, it would be continually impinged by the change of history and reality in the republics. And this, of course, has been transforming the identity that asks for redefinition.

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