**Utopia and nostalgia : convergence of two ideals in Chen Yingzhen and Chen Ruoxi short stories**

Utopia is the name Thomas Moore gave to the imaginary world he conceived, a world where people lived in peace, happy and wise, in a perfect society. Utopia is at the same time the written hypothesis of a better world but also, a country ‘s shape, its form.

Further as *ou-topos* « no-where », according to Louis Marin « Utopia is not in this world, but in the same way, it is issued from this world » This second conception can be linked to the Chinese conception of Utopia, in the Da Tong, or « Great Harmony ». Kang Youwei in the Nineteenth century described a kind of existence in which complete happiness would materialize through the unity and equality of all men, this kind of society has its roots in a remote golden age.

Nostalgia, on the other hand, is a « pathos », a sickness, a homesickness whose remedy is inscribed in its name itself, « nostos », which means to go back to one’s country. This country at the same time is not a fancied one, it must exist. But Nostalgia is also a pain with no remedy, for which returning home could not compensate the missing. According to Jankelevitch it is « the symbolic and metaphorical localization of an undetermined desire » and Nostalgia, as the longing for returning home, exists only until the country of Utopia has not yet been reached, and until one has not yet returned home.

Chen Yingzhen, committed political writer, who has been in jail for his political ideas and communist ideals, is also a writer of Memory. While we could expect that his short stories take the shape of Utopia, homesickness more often prevails. In order to appreciate as exactly as possible the tension between Utopia and Nostalgia in his works, I will first choose two short stories which are representative of our issue, it is *Guxiang « Native country »* written in 1960 and *Guixiang « Coming back home »*, written in 1999. The two titles have in common the term « xiang », native country, which refers to a small village of Taiwan. Those two novels are written at an interval of 30 years. In between, the separation between Mainland China and Taïwan is over, it is now possible to come back in one country...
or another. The first short story « Guxiang » doesn’t mention homesickness, at the contrary it’s the evocation of the will of not coming back home. In this short-story the principal character, a young man who has just finished his studies in the United States has to face the question of going back home or not.

« I have used up all the money of the life-insurance of my father, my four years of studies are over, now I’m not afraid of searching a job, of future, or of the military service, what I’m afraid of is that I have no pretence anymore for not returning back home, where I have not been for four years. »

The idea of returning back home is a nightmare for this young man. Indeed, after his father’s death, the family felt into decay, and the brother who was a young utopian, who had learned medicine in Japan but preferred to help the workers than to open his own office had, in between lost all his illusions and eventually opened a gambling-den, where he spent his everyday time gambling.

In Chen Yingzhen short stories, most of the time, we find the opposition between a character full of ideal and a materialistic one. The first one has always to face disillusion, and the second one is made sick by remorse.

The main character admired his brother for his pure ideal, for his faith in God, his social engagement, but he simply betrayed him in keeping for himself the money of their father’s life-insurance. The brother deceived by him had to forsake his proselytical activity.

This very short short story doesn’t lay stress upon the feelings of the two brothers, it just emphasizes the possibility or the impossibility of returning home. The short story is only concerned by the tension between the will of not returning home and the fact of being back home. Indeed, if at the beginning and at the end of the story, the protagonist revolts himself against the idea of returning home, at the middle, on the contrary, in a flashback, the returning is effective. It has happened once, but it will not happen again anymore. At that time, the brother stayed aside, in silence, refusing to welcome him.
It means that if the main character is not allowed to come back home, it is not only that he doesn’t want to. He has betrayed his brother and he is condemned to exile.

The theme of « native country » has a place in most of the works of Chen Yingzhen, written between 1959 and 1964. When the return is possible, it is in order to show clearly that returning home gives rise to disillusion, to the impossibility of returning to the same. Here, returning is not possible, the separation with the family which represents also the native land is an ultimate one. The main character assumes his position, assumes this break and the story finishes with these words : » I don’t want to come back again anymore. I have no more native country. »

The refusal of returning leads to loss, to renounce every relationship. The young man is condemned to wander, from a town to another. In taking the meaning of Nostalgia against the grain it reveals its essence : the impossible return : once we have left a place, there is no possible return, just because of the irreversibility of time. Every one who left his country becomes a betrayer.

Utopia closes the doors to Nostalgia. This interposition appears in other short stories, it reveals the fact that Utopia and Nostalgia are linked together, the disappearing of one element leads to the disappearing of the other element.

The return to the native country would be the return to an ideal country, a country of Great Community where family relationships are a microcosmic paradigm for social relationships. A difference appears between Utopia in China and Utopia in the West. In our world there is not a real place where Utopia has already been effective. In the same way, the returning back home is not possible, even for Ulysses, when he returns back home only his dog recognizes him and just after dies, Ulysses is no more the same. His journey has a metaphysical dimension, it is a journey towards death. This metaphysical dimension doesn’t appear in the ideal of Great Community. The journey to one’s home doesn’t mean the journey to death, it is almost the return to indistinctness.
In « Guixiang » short story, written in 1999, in spite of a strong political meaning, it is also a short story about homesickness, the desire to return to native country.

It is the story of a man named Yang Bin, coming back to Taiwan fatherland after having stayed 47 years on China mainland. We will not talk about the question of Identity which is very important here, but we will just talk about Nostalgia linked with Utopia. The main character Yang Bin was born in a proletarian family, for this reason, as a young man, he joined the army and was sent to China by the Guomindang to fight against communist army. After the downfall of the Guomindang, he joined the communist army and stayed in China where he married. Although during the cultural revolution he was criticized as Taiwanese, he survived and when the relationship between China and Taiwan has been restored, he expressed the desire to come back home.

His family does not recognize him anymore, first because he is considered as a communist betrayer and secondly because his family thought that he would never come back anymore (he must have died) and his brothers have shared the family’s property without him.

Further, he has a very strong accent of mainland China, he cannot speak Minnan hua nor Japanese. This old man has suffered a lot from homesickness for 40 years. « During forty years on Mainland, I thought about my country for 40 years. » But after coming back home, the question of what is a native land is still asked.

The climax of the short story happens when he goes visiting his parents’ grave. Nostalgia is sustained by the desire of seeing once more one’s parents, even after their death, to come back near them. It is this very visit to the parents’ grave that may alleviate homesickness.

It’s near the grave, also, that the brother realizes that the old man belongs to the same family as him. Native country must be defined as the place of the parents’ grave, the place of the ancestors. At the very moment of the visit, the old man has the feeling of being back home. But just after this climax, it seems that the situation is reversed. He lived all his life in China, and now he is asking himself if China is or is not his home. Also because he has turned to a perfect stranger for his family. « if I come back in
Taiwan and live here with my wife, I am old now, I will suffer much more thinking my grandchildren, my son and my daughter in law. », he said. Homesickness is a sickness which has no remedy. If it is not more a nostalgia for the past it is nostalgia for the future. If the returning back home leads to disillusion, it is not because the lack can never been filled but because the character has two homes: “Taiwan and China together are my home laojia, isn’t it ?” In English it is possible to say that he has a motherland and a fatherland, anyway, he is condemned to wander between these two points the rest of his life.

« Guixiang », the first short story finishes with « I will never more go back home », I have no more native country ». With « Guixiang » on the contrary, there is the possibility of living in two countries. In « Guixiang » utopia is no the main theme, but it has a subjacent position in the story, because, if the main character Yang Bin considers China as his home (first or second) although he has been criticized during the cultural revolution, it means that he still feels in tune with the Chinese government and the communist ideology.

In these two short stories which have as main theme nostalgia, utopia has no influence on the conception of native country. In the two cases, the country of Utopia and the country of Nostalgia actually exist. Both join themselves in the shape of an idealistic country of harmonious family relationships.

Another two novels of Chen Yingzhen deal more directly with the theme of Utopia, respectively the story of Judas, Taihuoren Youda gushi and Yongheng de ditu, « Everlasting land. »

In the first one, CYZ deals with Jesus as a man who wants to spread a social and political revolution. First of all, Judas wants to follow Jesus for this very reason but after he loses all his illusions because he understands that the kingdom from which Jesus talks is not on earth but in heaven. Jesus draws towards him people of the lower class, criminals, prostitutes in order to promise them everyday’s bread, work and justice. Judas realizes that Jesus is only a dreamer, on one hand he proclaims a religion of love but on the other hand he proclaims himself as the son of God. Judas will
betray Jesus because he doesn’t trust him anymore. This interpretation of CYZ is disclosing for more than one reason. It reminds us that the history of China is constantly crossed by popular revolutionary movements, lead by spiritual leaders of Taoism obedience who proclaim Great Peace and Great Community. As in Chinese tradition the ideal society must exist on earth, the kingdom of heaven has no real value, it appears as an empty promise. For this reason, CYZ has considered that the story of Jesus and Judas could be easily linked with his favourite theme.

But the true allegory of Utopia and Nostalgia must be found in the short story called « Everlasting land ». It reveals the ambiguity between Utopia and Nostalgia, it symbolizes their encounter. The place for returning home is the place of Ideal, it is the native land but also an everlasting land. Utopia could be represented as the Nostalgia of Future, but it means above all the relativity of time, the land of Utopia can exist neither in the future nor in the Past but in the present time, in a country from which the protagonist is separated (namely here, China and Taiwan). In this way, Utopia has to fulfil a lack, an absence « it prepares and delimits under the shape of a lack the place of its emersion » said Louis Marin. Another dimension of Utopia appears, it is at the same time a complete dream and a real necessity.

In the short story « Everlasting land » the native land is the land of the father, a wide land property of an aristocratic family. The father stays in bed all day long at the second floor, his only thought is coming back home. His son lives at the first floor, he is fat and has heart’s trouble, he is submitted to his father’s dream but at the same time he tries to escape from it. The story is very progressive and reveals step by step all the variations of Nostalgia and Utopia.

« Everything was far from him (the son) now, out of reach, he has no more native land, at the same time he wanders without homesickness »

The son doesn’t feel homesickness, but he feels something which has no name: « my little I, because of a malediction believes that I have shamefully ruined our family. I cannot help dreaming of returning back home, coming back to our native land, for which I don’t feel homesickness »
What can be this feeling, this desire of coming back home which is not nostalgia? Is it also a form of pain? The son is conscious of the beauty of the family’s property, it is for him the most beautiful place in the world. Behind this, we can find the conception of Utopia as Eutopia, a « land of Bliss ». Indeed, in this short story, the land of Nostalgia is not a land of political Utopia, it corresponds only to an individual aspiration. But let’s go deeper in the particular dream of the son: « when the weather will be fine, I will go back there with my father, says the son. His mood becomes suddenly dark, imperceptibly. « Coming back where? Towards which immensity of despair? 

« Coming back where » here we face the impossibility of nostalgia, there is no « nostos », no fatherland, there is only a boundless emptiness which takes the place of the family property.

The contradiction between the hope of coming back and the lack of nostalgia, between the beauty of the land and the immensity of despair, this contradiction represents the history’s break between China and Taiwan, a break which cannot find any resolution.

The son, in spite of his guilt would like to find some root in this new country, he says « But, I, I want to live quietly this very life ». He is in love with a Taiwanese prostitute, who has also her own dreams.

This woman offers another image of Utopia. First she dreams of a land of happiness very far from here. It is some foreigner men who has told her about it. They said that a colourful country exist at the other side of the world. But after, we are informed that the woman is pregnant. The son is not the father, nor the foreigner men she admires. The father is a man of her native country who describes their native place as a marvellous one: « in our country birds are singing very well, flowers have marvellous fragrance »

This short-story offers a vision of the future full of hope, because a child will be born. He will live in his country considered as a marvellous place. The country of Bliss is also the body of the lady. In Thomas Moore’s Utopia as well, the island of Utopia was described as a woman’s body, as a symbol of fertility.
We therefore find here the elaboration of an image of Utopia: it is a pregnant woman, who symbolizes the future of an independent Taiwan. She is a woman who has chosen to live in her own country as a country of Bliss. At the contrary of the image of Nostalgia which is the visiting to the ancestor’s tomb, Utopia is symbolized by a womb, the expectation of a new life. The true land of Utopia is not situated in the old times of China anymore, the country of Utopia is an island which belongs to the future. In this story the son has no place, he lives in the no-where of wandering, he has no real native land, no real future in the island. He is sacrificed, rejected by both father and woman.

CYZ has gift for tragedy, he prefers a situation which has no issue, this kind of situation in fact reveals a deep feeling about human existence. For him, in the same way, Utopia and Nostalgia are fated to disillusion and wandering.

Before drawing a conclusion, we will turn to Chen Ruoxi’s story which will first serve as a counterpoint. Chen Ruoxi is born in 1938 in Taiïwan, in a proletarian family. Exiled in the U.S.A she is considered as an overseas Chinese writer, rejected both by China and Taiwan, but we can say that she is a writer of nostalgia because she said: everyone is linked to the place where he is born, and thinks about it when he leaves. ”

But before this time Chen Ruoxi has felt the desire to return back to a country where she was not born, where she had no family, and where she had never been. Chen Ruoxi in her autobiographical short-stories, talks about the experience of Utopia in a country which for this reason has turned into her country. If China appears to her as her fatherland although she is born in Taiwan, it is because of her proletarian origin.

In her collection of short stories named « Yin prefect », the main characters are a couple of Taiwanese intellectuals who came in China in order to live the communist dream, because they wanted to serve the people.

In « Night service », the main character, a Taiwanese named Xiangdong feels disillusion. Whereas in her short stories the characters are generally born in China, Chen Ruoxi talks very kindly about them, as compatriots sharing the same destiny under the law of communist ideology. In an
atmosphere of distrust, of flabby submission, she looks at them as companions of misfortune but not as enemies who, in fact, because of political reasons, often are. So, the main character Xiangdong remembers suddenly his native land:

« Over there when the moon rises behind the dull clouds, she seems very close, as if we could touch her, but here, in the infinite space of this plain as wide as the Universe, we feel very tiny and lost. More and more, recently he feels overwhelmed by his own powerlessness, he feels that he was not like this before, he feels suddenly terrified, when he thinks how much he has changed since the time, one year ago, he has returned back to China, to his fatherland. »

He considers China as his fatherland, but it is not because of homesickness that he came back. If he considers China as his fatherland, it is not only because of cultural tradition, but furthermore because China has become the place of utopia.

But as we can see, when Utopia begins to weak, Nostalgia appears. First, it was from the United States that China looked like the country of Utopia. It was in the wide American countryside that Chen Ruoxi and her husband could sing maoist slogan: « if you want to see real hero, look at we today ! »

But in approaching the country of Utopia, not only Utopia removes, but also the idea of native country becomes more hazy. Although she came back to her native country, it appears that it was not the country she was longing for. Utopia disappears, but Nostalgia reminds, may be stronger than before. For Chen Ruoxi, the idea of fatherland is linked to China, when she talks about her feeling of exile, she talks of « 5000 years of Chinese culture » and not about a country. She said « I have always lived in the Idea that when we are born Chinese, we must die as Chinese ». It is a very particular point of view. China still exists or it is only the name of Utopia?

But coming back to the short stories, there is also an important remark of a Taiwanese character named Geng Er in « Geng ER in Beijing », this man has forsaken all intellectual aspiration to devote himself to revolution, but eventually he has to face disillusion and he says : » Finally I am Chinese,
my feelings don’t concern anyone lese but me, I have before all to protect the dignity of my fatherland », in fact it is a nice practical application of the dialectic principle of one can divide in two, *yi fen wei er* (which means that everything has two aspects)

This principle agrees well with our theme, it allows the continuous passage from Utopia to Nostalgia. Geng Er can at the same time feel disappointed by his country and still support it, at the same time he feels disillusion for political Utopia and still feels Nostalgia.

Yang Bin, in Chen Yingzhen short-story, in the same way has two homes, China and Taïwan.

Utopian feelings as it refers to a Golden Time rooted in old times is linked with Nostalgia. There is no more break between past and Future. Further, the closer we approach the country of Nostalgia and Utopia, the more it removes. Coming back to the place of Bliss is impossible, the man who wanders, hopeless, and without illusion still sets out in search of an ideal place. He is the closest to an unattainable country. Nostalgia is in the same way a journey to a country which doesn’t exist anymore.

In Chinese culture, Utopia and Nostalgia appear very close to one another. This is because Utopia depends on a place located in China in the ancient times, the value of the country, on the land itself, is very deep. It is a concrete feeling, which cannot be cut easily. It absorbs all aspirations, individual or collective, but we can see also, because of the ambivalence of the meanings of Utopia and Nostalgia, that the identity of a person is divided in two, like in the saying « *yi fen wei er* », social identity and personal identity. This is this division, may be; which allows the encounter between Nostalgia and Utopia.