"Bang Chhun Hong" A study of the Taiwanese Folk Song as Compared with Western Poetry and Folk Songs

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I. Introduction:
The purpose of this study is to analyze the Taiwanese folk song *Bang, Chhun, Hong,* aesthetically, through which, it is hoped, the people in other parts of the world will be able to increase their understanding of the people living on this small island, Taiwan (Formosa). It is a well-known fact that one of the best approaches to the understanding of the peoples in the world is through the singing or reading of their folk songs, because a stock of folk songs is "a precious badge of identity for people" who have produced them. Some might argue that a body of folk songs reflects the ancient world, not modern society and it is, accordingly, misleading to see other peoples through their folk songs. It is true that folk songs are the outcome of a long duration of time, thus representing the social structure in the past, nevertheless, it is also irrefutable that modern society is built on the past. Nothing can be established from nothing. People having lost their long-preserved identity and unique spirit are like dried leaves blown from trees. It is, therefore, essential, in the understanding of a people, not to know them superficially, but to penetrate the external film in order to understand their inner identity and spirit through the body of folk songs.

Folk songs are widely accepted as "communal poetry," a product of a people on the whole. Gummere argues that "crowds, communities, races, have an individuality of their own," and ballads or folk songs are the products of the "communal mind." According to Wen-Hsiung Yen, folk songs are the natural products of the communities; their authors are usually unknown, and the subject matter is the daily life and emotional expression of the people. Since they are the results of the "communal mind," they preserve the folk emotions and folkways. Thus, in reading or singing a people's folk songs or ballads, one can familiarize oneself with the people emotionally and spiritually.

For the purpose of preserving the Taiwanese identity through
folk songs, the Folk Music Center was founded, in 1967, by Su Wei-Liang, who died recently, Hsu Tsang-Hwei and others, which was closely followed by an ardent movement of a vast collection of folk songs in Taiwan. A similar collection was almost simultaneously launched by Wei-Hsuing Yan alone, and, as a result, there appeared the publication of Taiwan Folk Song, in two volumes, in which Bang, Chhun, Hong is incomprehensibly classified as one of the amusement folk songs, instead of the love folk songs.

Bang, Chhun, Hong is one of the most popular folk songs among the common people in Taiwan. Yet, it suffers negligence and rejection among dignified moralists and is, therefore, seldom sung in concerts. A study of the variants of the folk song can make it clear that some alteration on the part of diction seems to be based upon a certain ethical reason, and the result of that alteration is, strictly speaking, a blemish rather than an improvement. On the other hand, from the aesthetic point of view, the folk song is a skillfully-constructed lyric poem or ballad requiring careful scrutiny and analysis. Thus, the following interpretation can also be regarded as a justification of the value of the folk song taken as a lyric.

II. BANG₂ CHHUN₂ HONG₅ in the romanized Taiwanese and its version in English:


B. A lonely Lamp me does find
Facing the Spring Wind.
Though mature I'm lonesome quite;
With a youth in sight,
So pretty and so snow-white,
"Well, whose son are you?"
My heart, too timid to say,
The guitar did play.

With you as my other part,
I have love in heart.
Why don't you come to pluck soon?
I'm now in full bloom.
On hearing someone outside,
I ope the door wide,
But Moon teasing us do find;
We're fooled by the Wind.

III. Interpretation.

"Bang Chhun Hong" can be classified, within the scope of poetry, as a love lyric. A grown-up girl, having met a young handsome man, sits facing a lamp, listening to the wind blowing and thinking about the man; then, the love she cherishes for him suddenly be-queiles her into mistaking the rustling sounds of the wind for the approaching foot-steps of her beloved one. Joyfully and thoughtlessly she sets the door open, only to find nobody but the bright moon hanging in the sky.

Simple and, probably, naive as the story is, the poem, taken as a whole, is compact and coherent. First, the main idea, as mentioned in the previous paragraph, is presented by means of a dramatic device. As night falls, the speaker becomes conscious of the tranquility surrounding her and, then, finds herself as lonely as the lamp (a kind of Chinese oil lamp) burning in front of her, probably on a table (lines 1 and 2). The speaker’s awareness of their homogeneity in loneliness prompts her to communicate with the personified "Lamp." Then, when the passion in her heart is enhanced by the revelation of her secret to her mute but sympathetic partner, she turns, in the second stanza, to address her absent lover, making an appeal to him to accept her as his lawful wife. Yet, the speaker is so passionate and earnest in the "apostrophe" that she whimsically opens the door to greet her lover. Then, the personified "Moon" in line 15 is fantastically introduced to help her
obtain a sudden disillusionment. In the final four lines (13-16), it is difficult to determine who the addressee is; he may still be her lover, or the reader or listener. Besides, the application of goan, "us" or "we" in line 15 serves as a clue to the knowledge that the speaker still remains in her world of imagination, fancying both she and her sympathetic "Lamp" are fooled by the "Wind."

The use of apostrophe is frequently found in poetry, for it can usually vivify the scene and strike the reader or listener as mysterious so that he may read on, be all ears for the disclosure of the speaker's secret. Even in daily life, people, especially introverts, are seen to talk to themselves, to concrete objects or imaginary abstract ideas, to animate beings or inanimate things. Iona in Anton Chekhov's "The Lament" unbooms his sorrows over the death of his child to his horse in a stable. William Blake in his "To Spring" appeals to "Spring" to

... scatter thy pearls
Upon our love-sick land that mourns for thee.

The apostrophe is, therefore, the best and safest way for the outflow of one's feelings. Under the long and persistent influence of Chinese culture and ethics, Taiwanese women in the pre-war (World War I) society were extremely stoical and resigned, and the ability to suppress their emotions was always regarded as one of the virtues. It was, therefore, natural for a Taiwanese woman to find a vent for her passion, by talking, orally or silently, to the irresponsive "Lamp." Thus, the dramatic device utilized in this folk song is psychologically justifiable.

Second, the unity of the poem is strengthened by the echoing of the main image, the "Wind," initiating as well as ending the poem. With the "Spring Wind" blowing gently over her face, the speaker makes a clean breast of her troubled thoughts to "a lonely Lamp." After the presentation of the setting of time and place in the two lines, there comes a short introduction of the speaker herself in line 3, to be followed by an outflow of her confused thoughts in the next five lines, in which she narrates her past experience of coming across a youth. In the second stanza, the listing of two ideas in lines from 9 to 10 and from 11 to 12 respectively, with the latter reinforcing the former, creates a kind of suspense, rising to the climax of the narration,

Thia_i^2-ki_p goa_s-bin_s u_s lang_s lai,
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Khui, mng, kai, khoa, mai,
Goeh- niu, chhio, goan, gong, toa, tai,
On hearing someone outside,
I ope the door wide,
But Moon teasing us do find;

Then, the poem is closed with the dénouement in which the speaker
realizes her own stupidity of being

Ho, hong, phian, m, tsai
... fooled by the Wind.

Moreover, imagery is adroitly applied in this folk song, so that
the central meaning of the poem is vividly reinforced by carefully-
chosen images. It is well-known to poets that, for the sake of vivid-
ness, beauty and meaningfulness, the abstract and intangible in
poetry demand the "helpe of earthly images". Based on this theory,
the speaker's expectation for love in this poem is symbolized in the

title Bang, Chhun, Hong, "Expecting the Spring Wind." Here, Chhun, Hong, "Spring Wind" not only means the gentle wind in spring,
but also carries some sexual image. Unfortunately, the implied
sexual image might be the main reason for the devaluation of the folk
song in the modern Taiwanese society, and while the so-called mor-
alists are calling for the purification of arts, this poor folk song can
not escape the surge of the purification. Thus appears a different
version of the text nowadays. In Wen-Hsiung Yen's Taiwan Folk
Song II, and Wang Rong-Wen's Hsiang-tru Tsu Cheu the second
line of this folk song is changed into

Chheng, hong, tui, bin, chhue,

Facing the clean wind.

thereby erasing the sexual connotation. The morally dirty spring
wind is thus purified into the clean wind. Yet, to one's puzzlement,
they still keep the sexually-connotative title Bang, Chhun, Hong,
"Expecting the Spring Wind," thus resulting in ridiculous incongruity
between the title and the content of the poem.

Chinese people seem more reluctant than westerners to talk
about sex in public. For example, sexual imagery is often found to
play an important role in the poetry of some English major poets. Sir
Thomas Wyatt in the 15th century explicitly reveals sexual imagery
in his poem "They Flee from Me" in which the second stanza runs as
follows:

Thanked be fortune, it hath been otherwise
Twenty times better; but once, in special,
In thin array, after a pleasant guise,
When her loose gown from her shoulders did fall,
And she me caught in her arms long and small.
Therewith all sweetly did me kiss,
And softly said, "Dear heart, how like you this?"

The imagery of sexual chastity and violation is even seen in John Donne's "Holy Sonnet 14," seriously addressing to "three-personed God,"

... for I,
Except You enthrall me, never shall be free,
Nor ever chaste, except You ravish me.

Later, Andrew Marvell, while developing the theme of "carpe diem" in his famous poem "To His Coy Mistress," gives a sexual image, too, by saying

Let us roll all our strength and all
Our sweetness up into one ball,
And tear our pleasures with rough strife
Thorough the iron gates of life.

In the twentieth century, William Butler Yeats considers sex as a power of regeneration in his poem "Leda and the Swan" to illustrate his theory of the "Great Wheel."

How can those terrified vague fingers push
The feathered glory from her loosening thighs?
And how can body, laid in that white rush,
But feel the strange heart beating where it lies?

A shudder in the loins engenders there
The broken wall, the burning roof and tower
And Agamemnon dead.

The sexual image in the Taiwanese folk song Bang, Chhun, Hong, as compared with those in the above passages, is more subtly rendered. There is, therefore, no need for the feelings of repulsion and disgust in reading or singing the folk song, nor is there any necessity for purification as far as the diction is concerned.

In fact, the "Spring Wind" in the western cultural background is
also suggestive of life-animating force, although it does not obviously carry an image of sex. For example, in "Ode to the West Wind," Percy Bysshe Shelley seems to designate his dark period of life, for the year 1818 was his year of ill health and sorrows, yet he has the knowledge that

Thine azure sister of the spring shall blow
Her clarion o'er the dreaming earth, and fill
(Driving sweet buds like flocks to feed in air)
With living hues and odors plain and hill.

"Thine (addressing to 'wild West Wind') azure sister of the spring" is the "Spring Wind" which, accordingly, possesses the animating and evocative power to illuminate his dark life and death thought. It is mentioned by some critics that Shelley seems to disclose in his poem his great disappointment in people's negligence and accusation of his pursuit of "ideal love." For Shelley, "love" is a guiding star to "truth" and the "Spring Wind" is a natural element to bring him love for the rebirth of his thought. Thus, in Shelley's poetry, the "Spring Wind" is somehow related to "love". It is, therefore, a force to bring forth regeneration of life.

In the Taiwanese folk song, the "Spring Wind" in line 2 does mean the wind in spring blowing softly over the speaker's face, with the connotation that her youthful (Spring) love is stirred up by the "Wind." Then, in lines 13 and 14, the wind is dramatically mistaken for someone who is so attractive as to draw her out of her house, and in the final line, the "Wind" is elevated and personified as the man who can so easily play a trick on her. The speaker's susceptibility to be deceived might suggest a fact that her lover, after flirting with her for some time while they were together, promised to pay her a visit in the evening. Thus, the title Bang Chhun Hong is not only suggestive of "facing the Spring Wind" but also symbolic of "expecting the visit of her lover."

The pi, - pe, in line 8 is a Chinese four-stringed musical instrument, having an oval belly and a long and narrow neck topped with a crooked head. Conventionally, stringed instruments are often metaphorized to be the hearts of the people in love, partly because hearts resemble somewhat the instruments in shape, and mostly because the soft music of the instruments can fully express lovers' inner feelings, thereby creating a beautiful, romantic and mysterious atmosphere. The speaker in James Joyce's "Araby," while narrat-
ing his confused adoration for his neighbor girl, compares his body to "a harp" and "her words and gestures" to "fingers running upon the wires." In H. Trotére's "In Old Madrid," it can be seen that the light guitar sighs of love softly as follows:

Long years ago, in old Madrid,
Where softly sighs of love the light guitar,
Two sparkling eyes a lattice hid,
Two eyes as darkly bright as love's own star!

In the case of Bang, Chhung, Hong,, the speaker could only play her inner guitar, having confused thoughts, because, while they were together, she was too shy to ask her lover about his background. Here, it should be mentioned that the knowledge of the other party's family is very important, for it can be followed by the arrangement of marriage through a match-maker. But the speaker in the folk song has lost the chance of asking more about her lover, and now can only play the guitar softly and secretly for her sympathetic "Lamp."

Another conventional image applied here is the "flower" image in lines 11 and 12, a symbol of the female beauty and charm. In the Spanish folk song "The Violet," girls are compared to a variety of flowers. The comparison of girls to roses might be based on beauty and arrogance, whereas that of the girl to a violet is grounded on inner beauty, shyness and humbleness. Here is the first stanza of the folk song:

Violet, all in-vain so humbly yourself you hide,
There in the garden-corner, far from the roses' pride.
Thinking yourself unnoticed, turning away your face--
Sweetness of scent reveals you, tells me your hiding place.

Nevertheless, the comparison of a girl to a flower designates not only similarity in beauty and its transience but also passivity. Sappho in about 600 B. C. notices the passivity of a girl in her poem "One Girl," assuming her to be

Like the wild hyacinth flower which on the hill is found,
Which the passing feet of the shepherds forever tear and wound,
Until the purple blossom is trodden into the ground!

The passivity of girls in their love affairs is generally taken for granted by the public. But what differentiates these two illustrations
from the Taiwanese folk song is that the persons making the comparisons are not necessarily the girls themselves, whereas in the Taiwanese folk song, it is the speaker herself who compares herself to a fully-blossomed flower. The acknowledgement of female passivity by girls themselves can further be exemplified by Robert Burns' "Bonnie Doon" as follows:

Oft have I strayed by bonnie Doon,
To see the rose and woodbine twine;
Where ilka bird sang of his love,
And fondly saw did I o' mine,
With lightsome heart I pulled a rose,
Full sweet upon its thorny tree;
But my false lover stole the rose,
And left the thorn behind to me.

The images of the personified "Lamp" and "Moon" also create a sharp contrast. The speaker's identification with the "Lamp" is suggestive of their burning passion and its extinguishability. On the other hand, the "Moon" is addressed as Goeh, niu. (Madam Moon). The word "niu," is a respective address to a lady, usually an elder or one's Mother. Thus, the "Moon" is pictured as a well-experienced lady, bright, illuminating, dispassionate and never-extinguishable, who poises in the sky, high above the speaker, illuminating her naive and foolish thoughts with friendly smile and profound wisdom. Then, the poem fantastically ends with the disappearance of the contrast; the infusion of the wisdom of the "Moon" into the speaker extinguishes the speaker's burning fire and, paradoxically, brightens her inner mind.

The speaker's recognition of her foolishness in being "fooled by the Wind" does carry a tone of resignation. Being cheated, she does not even express an inkling of indignation, and, instead, blames herself for the absurd action—the opening of the door to greet the empty wind. At the sight of the bright moon, she becomes aware of her own inexperience and stupidity, and the disillusionment leads her to accept with resignation that man's flirtation is nothing but the playing of the "Spring Wind." If Robert Burns' "Bonnie Doon" is analyzed again, a tone different from that in the Taiwanese folk song can be found, for the speaker in "Bonnie Doon" is melancholy in her narration. On women's passivity, a tone of melancholy is also found in a Russian folk song "Woman's Sad Lot" whose second stanza goes as follows:
Still I trudged across the stubble.
Woman's life is full of trouble.
Woman's sad lot! Oh,
Woman's sad lot!

Finally, the following analysis of the versification of this folk song is my first attempt, a tentative one which does not come to a well-satisfied conclusion but which, I hope, will lead to a better understanding of the versification of Taiwanese folk songs and poems. From II. A., it can easily be perceived that the whole poem is constructed on two rhymes, namely e and ai, ending all the lines in the two stanzas respectively. With the two rhymes, two units of thoughts are formulated accordingly: the speaker's confidence about her condition to the personified "Lamp" and her expectation and disillusionment to her absent lover.

The poem is written in an octave stanzaic form, consisting of two octaves in alternate three and two feet. The lines in three feet are composed of two bisyllabic feet and a three-syllable foot, and the lines in two are divided into a bisyllabic foot and a three-syllable one. The bisyllabic feet are either iambic or trochaic, whereas the three-syllable ones are anapestic, dactylic or amphibrachic. The following scansion of the folk song is based on the system that Taiwanese tones 4, 5 and 7 are classified as high tones, equivalent to the English major stresses, primary and secondary, that tones 3 and 6 are low tones, similar to the English weak stress, and that tones 1 and 2, comparable to the English tertiary stress, can be regarded as high or low tones, depending upon their environments. Thus, the poem can be scanned as follows:

```
  x ' | x x | ' x x
  x ' | " x | '
  x ' | ' x | x ' x
   ' x | " x | '
   ' x | ' x | x x '

   10
   ' x | ' x | x x
   ' x | x x x
   ' x | ' x | " x'
   ' x | " x | '
   ' x | ' x | x x '
```
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\[
\begin{align*}
\text{'x'} & | \text{'x'} \text{'x'} \\
\text{'x'} & | \text{'x'} \text{'x'} \text{'x'} \\
\text{'x'} & | \text{'x'} \\
\end{align*}
\]
15

From the scansion, it is rather difficult to find a fixed pattern of rhythm yet, the poem is highly musical, partly because of the identical end-rhymes and partly because of the variety of tones and the slight pauses between the feet. What deserves special discussion in the scansion is the phonetic contributions to the meanings of the poem. The pyrrhic in the second foot of line 1 is to reinforce the atmosphere of loneliness set up by the first foot, because \( ko^2 - toa^2 \) and \( bo^2 - phoa^2 \) are identical in meaning. The latter is, therefore, a tautology used as an echo of the former. In line 8 where a pyrrhic is followed by an anapest and in line 10 where a trochee is followed by three low tones, the reader can have the feeling that the speaker is talking softly about her love hidden deep in her inner heart. Contrary to the pyrrhic, there is a spondee in line 15, signifying the climax of the narration—the speaker's realization of her empty dream. Finally, several feet bearing two high tones separated by a low tone, as in lines 2, 11 and 16, imply a subtle contrast between the playful lover and the naive and whimsical speaker. In the second foot of line 16, it can be observed that the stressed \( phian \), "cheat" and the other part \( m_s - tsai_s \), "without any knowledge)" create a contrast: the "Wind" (her lover) cheats whereas the speaker remains ignorant.

IV. Closing remarks:

In short, \( Bang_s - Chhun_s - Hong_s \) is a well-constructed love lyric which has an organic unity of thought with vivified images contributing to the central meaning of the poem. The implied sexual imagery is not a morally dirty spot for rejection. Instead, it justifies the speaker's action and helps to make the poem natural and consistent in terms of psychology. In the poem, it is also found that the speaker's inner stream of thought and her external behavior interweave each other, thereby achieving a plausible action of the poem.

Since \( Bang_s - Chhun_s - Hong_s \) is a love lyric, the whole poem except lines 13 and 14, is to be read or sung softly, thus achieving a romantic and mysterious atmosphere. Once, an American was asked to sing a Chinese folk song on the television, he sang \( Bang_s - Chhun_s - Hong_s \) and danced energetically to the music in a western style. At first, it looked funny to see him sing and dance simultaneously. Then, a strong sense of incongruity was developed. \( Bang_s \)
Chhun, Hong, is, strictly speaking, a folk song not for entertainment, but for a secret outflow of personal tender feeling for one's lover. It is universally true that people, especially Taiwanese women in the past, who live in the society where moderation and stoicism are regarded as virtues tend to find a vent for their secret feelings in addressing either to an absent person or to an imaginary or inanimate entity. Thus, in reading or singing Bang, Chhun, Hong, one can get closer to the understanding of some Taiwanese folkways.

APPENDIX

Expecting the Spring wind

F 4/4

| 5 5 6 1 | 2 1 2 3 |
A Lone-ly Lamp me does find
With you as my other part,

| 5 3 3 2 1 2 |
Fac-ing the Spring Wind.
I have love in heart.

| 3 5 5 3 5 1 2 2 |
Though ma-ture I'm lone-some quite;
Why don't you come to pluck soon?

| 5 3 3 2 1 1 |
With a youth in sight,
Now I'm in full bloom.

| 2 2 3 2 1 6 6 5 1 |
So pret-ty and so snow-white,
On hear-ing some-one out-side,

| 6 1 2 1 3 5 |
"Well, whose son are you?"
I ope the door wide,

| 5 5 6 5 3 3 2 1 6 |
My heart, too tim-id to say,
But Moon teas-ing us do find;

| 5 3 3 2 2 1 1 |
The gui-tar did play.
We're fooled by the Wind.
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NOTES

1. Bang, Chhun, Hong (望春風) is formally pronounced as Bong Chhun, Hong. The Taiwanese spelling system in this study is adopted from that developed mainly by Rev. W. Campbell in his "A Dictionary of Amoy Vernacular." But, the spelling of words and their tone numbers are in accordance with the natural daily speech spoken in the southern part of Taiwan. The following is the tone sandhi in Taiwanese, including a comparison between the tone numbers used in this study and the tone marks used in "A Dictionary of Amoy Vernacular."

Tone numbers: kau٤, kau٤, kau١, kau٤, kau٤, kau٢, kau٢
Tone marks: kāu kāu kāu kāu kāu kāu kāu

The arrows in the tone sandhi are applied to show Taiwanese tone change. If two or more Taiwanese syllables or words are read together to express a sub-unit of thought, all the tones the syllables or words carry except that for the last syllable or word should be changed to other tones respectively according to the arrows shown above.


4. Leach and Coffin, p. 25.

5. Wen-Hsiung Yen (顔文雄), Taiwan Folk Song II (台灣民謠 =), 中華大典編印會印行, 1969, p. 2.

6. 民族音樂中心

7. 史念亮

8. 許常惠

9. Translation by the author of this study.

10. The interpretation is based on the folk song in Taiwanese, not that in English.


14. Translation by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, slightly revised.

15. See Note 1.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


