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ABSTRACT

History and Memory: The Poetic Odyssey in Luo Fu's 'Driftwood'

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Born in mainland China in 1928, Luo Fu (洛夫) began his life as a poet in early 1940s when he had not yet realized being part of the exodus of millions of Chinese to Taiwan in 1949 meant 40-year-long separation from homeland, nor had he foreseen the immigration into Canada from Taiwan in 1996. Nevertheless, thanks to the two exile experiences which generated abundant poetical nourishment, Luo became one of the most marvellous poets in the field of contemporary Chinese poetry and created "Driftwood," a 3000-line poem, in his 70s. "Driftwood" was then deemed as a landmark in both Luo's career and the modern literary world, especially admired by diaspora. This article argues that Luo Fu portrayed three identities – an exile, a poet and a philosopher – in "Driftwood," and they organically interweave in the fabulous and touching poem. Firstly, an exile. Luo's personal experience was an epitome of the collective memory of a generation of Chinese people in a specific historical time, and this grand history in return reflected individual's desire because of the poem's emotional form of expression. Secondly, a poet. The representation of thoughts requires the appearance of languages. However, languages are the clarification meanwhile the obstruction of meaning. By using symbolic poetic language, Luo approached unspeakable meaning of time and life in ontological philosophy, theology, Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism. The last identity is a philosopher. Luo's quotation from the works of Qu Yuan, Nietzsche and himself at the beginning of several sections was to interpret these lines with that of "Driftwood" where he intended to construct a general situation of exiles beyond the boundaries of time and national borders.