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Ravaging COVID-19 and Sandy R.S. Chen's Science Poems Reviewed from the Chinese Malaysian Perspective

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Abstract

While COVID-19 is raging, four science poems written years before the outbreak of the pandemic by the Taiwanese poet Sandy Ruey-shan Chen (陈瑞山) are reviewed in this paper in light of Critical Discourse Analysis to expose hidden or unknown connections and causes as well as intervention within the lines. Besides this framework, the

poems are factually looked into from the perspective of a Chinese Malaysian with Taiwan experience to demonstrate pluralistic vision of Chinese descendants speaking the same language from diverse contexts since the discussions are thought to be one of insightfulness during this pandemic-rampant period.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, Modern Chinese Poetry, Science Poem, Taiwanese Haiku

Introduction

Sandy Ruey-shan Chen (陈瑞山), a retired professor from Taiwan, is also a prolific poet as well as a modern music lover. In 1986, Sandy Chen was awarded the Excellent Younger Poets Prize of Taiwan. He earned his PhD majoring in Comparative Literature in the University of Texas at Austin in the States back in the nineties. Since his return to Taiwan in 1996, Sandy Chen had taught courses in creative writing, literature, and translation at National Kaohsiung University of Science and Technology, and also served there as chair of the Department of English and director of the Graduate Program in Interpreting and Translation. Sandy Chen has published books of poems, translations, and essays. Upon retirement in 2020, he devotes himself in the preparation and construction of a modern Chinese poetry homepage vowing to further present modern Chinese poetry to the world through translation. In this study, four of his science poems written before 2019 thought to be relevant with the rampant COVID-19 pandemic—marked by the use of science-related elements or vocabulary to analytically inform happenings or outline complex emotions—inclusive of one Taiwanese Haiku are examined in light of Critical Discourse Analysis, let alone that from the perspective of Chinese Malaysian of the author.

Constant Consolidation and Synchronization for Chinese Malaysian Literature

Chinese Malaysians—grammatically, in the English language, the 'noun as adjective' always comes first; therefore, the succession of words for '马来西亚华人' should be 'noun as adjective' + 'noun', that is, 'Chinese Malaysians' rather than 'Malaysian Chinese' (Dorall, 2020) ^[8]—to begin with, are Malaysian citizens of ethnic Chinese. In 2021, Malaysia's population is 32.75 million people. According to the Department of Statistics Malaysia Official Portal, in 2021, Malaysian citizens consisted of the ethnic groups Bumiputera 20.9 million (69.7%), Chinese 6.7 million (22.5%), Indians 2 million (6.8%) and others 30 thousand (1%). Chinese formed the second largest ethnic group after the Bumiputera majority—predominantly ethnic Malay (*Oriental Daily*, 27 May 2021).

Most Chinese are descendants of Southern China immigrants who made an entry into Malaysia between the early 19th century and the mid-20th century due to the Chinese civil war between the KMT government and the communists. The ethnic subgroups of Chinese people in Malaysia include Hokkien, Cantonese, Hakka, Teochew, Hainan, Foochow and Kwongsai. Different Chinese dialects are spoken and used in Malaysian towns and cities: in Kuala Lumpur, Ipoh and Sandakan Cantonese is dominantly used; Hokkien is commonly used in George Town, Klang and Kuching; Hakka in Kota Kinabalu, Teochew in Johor Bahru, Foochow in Sibul, Miri and Sitiawan and Hainanese in Kuala Terengganu (Gabaccia and Hoerder, 2011) ^[13]. Nonetheless, Mandarin Chinese is now widely used as a working language and is the common tongue among the different Chinese ethnicities, in particular within the younger generations.

The national language of Malaysia is Bahasa Melayu. After Malaysians earned her independence from 150-year British colonization in 1957, the three major ethnic groups—Malay, Chinese and Indian—were able to enjoy government-funded mother tongue education from primary to secondary level. The ‘1961 Education Act’ however placed a demand on all schools to use either English or Bahasa Melayu as a medium of instruction. Chinese secondary schools which failed to observe this implementation were penalized by the government and were declared ‘independent’ overnight with government funding subsequently terminated in 1962. Eighteen out of the then 55 Chinese secondary schools nationwide were affected (Manual of Malaysian Chinese Education, 2009: 12)^[7].

In 2019, the total student population of independent Chinese secondary school nationwide stood at 81,797. The sixty schools are represented, led and directed by the United Chinese School Committees’ Association of Malaysia (commonly known as Dong Zong) established on 22 August 1954. Generally, Chinese-versed graduates from independent Chinese secondary schools opt to do tertiary studies in Taiwan hence having connections with and assimilating the cultural traditions of this Chinese-dominant island; of which, many ‘became poets and whose creations dealt with the Taiwan experience and native home from different perspectives and contexts’ (Khei, 2019: 22)^[15].

From the curricular perspective, consistent updates of contemporary Taiwan and mainland China cultural evolution and literary creations are reckoned to be important as they, not only can consolidate the entire Chinese ethnic identity of Chinese Malaysian, but also synchronize the modernization of Chinese literature simultaneously.

Critical Discourse Analysis and COVID-19

Additionally, Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1989 and 1992)^[11, 12] is adapted for the purpose of review on the discretionarily selected poems in order to contribute yet another research within this paradigm in response to Khei’s (2019)^[15] claim that ‘...few of these (modern Chinese) poems are examined by Critical Discourse Analysis’ (Khei, 2019: 22)^[15].

Concurrently, amidst the writing of this research, COVID-19¹ is raging the world and the ‘most vaunted COVID-19 defense of Taiwan keeping the coronavirus pandemic at bay for almost 18 months of nearly unblemished success’ (*Time*, 21 May 2021)^[25] was thought to be the major reason of the later surge of COVID-19 cases and the shortage of vaccines in democratic Taiwan against the backdrop. The self-boasted successful COVID-19 defense of Taiwan (*Time*, 21 May 2021)^[25] was exposed in a rather cruel way as the delay in the purchase of vaccination ended up opposing voices across the country on social media and physical demonstrations in front of the Presidential Office Building (*Taipei Times*, 2021)^[23]. In fact, the political sparring between the KMT (The Kuomintang, Chinese Nationalist Party) and the DPP (Democratic Progressive Party) government for the past decade has to a certain extent shrouded the nations and undermined her national integrity and harmony. The ruling DPP government is constantly seeking independence by uniting like-minded allies abroad in the process while unanimous agreement has not been reached nationwide. Today’s Taiwan is predominantly that of a populist rhetoric. Unlike the KMT regime in the past, regional terms and dialectic expressions are now accepted at

institutional level; on trains and Mass Rapid Transit, the additional

broadcast of Hokkien and Hakka dialects beside Mandarin Chinese and English likewise has become a norm. Despite having difficulty getting the COVID-19 vaccines resulted from late order placement among others, the refusal to receive free doses offer from mainland China clearly shows the determination of the ruling Taiwan government.

Meanwhile in Malaysia, the surge of COVID-19 pandemic cases nationally and the seemingly non-controllable outbreak notwithstanding the preventive measures taken by the ‘back-door’ Perikatan Nasional government (*BBC*, 5 March 2020)—forming of a new government by asserting majority seats and support in the lower chamber of the bicameral Parliament of Malaysia without a general election due to the sudden resignation of the then Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad—had witnessed anxiety, despair, suicides and deaths, not to mention the distortion of humanity and the development of hopelessness at a national level triggered by Covid-19 distress. Statistically, as of 7 July 2021 in Malaysia, the total infected cases were 792,693 with a daily 7,654 cases and a total death toll of 5,780. (*Worldometer*, 7 July 2021). Attributed to this deadly pandemic outbreak, jobs are lost across the country and people are starving desperately; yet encouragingly, a growing number of soup kitchens are set up and food banks for free food generated by philanthropists after witnessing the ‘white flag’ campaign—marked by waving white flags to convey distress about the financial crunch they have had to deal with amid the lockdowns due to Covid-19 (*The Indian Express*, 7 July 2021)^[24].

In reality, this COVID-19 pandemic which throws the world into disarray 102 years after the Spanish influenza is equal to a war without physical fights and military deployment. ‘One after another, leaders across the world are drawing parallels between war and the coronavirus pandemic’ (Kumar, 2020)^[16].

To date, the earliest plague in the west was recorded in 542 CE during the reign of Justinian I in the Byzantine Empire (also known as the Eastern Roman Empire). It swept through the Mediterranean world for over 220 years, and finally coming to a halt in 750 CE. The Black Death, which was later proved to be the same virus, ravaged Europe and Asia including north Africa after 800 years in 1346 (Roy, 2020)^[21].

With the Delta, Delta Plus, Epsilon, Beta and Lambda variations of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) spreading like wildfire and getting stronger each day, what lies ahead for humans is everything but not peace of mind. Whether this nanorobotic-like coronavirus, together with its variants will overshadow the world in a migratory way like what a Chinese American medical doctor had raised (article posted on WeChat later deleted by the author: mp.weixin.qq.com/s/4_ml_dceJxeJWx2HX3Jo0g) is contentious. The good news being, nanorobots set to be sent into humans’ arteries to interact with neurons in bid to protect cells and molecules to keep us healthy and transmit our brains onto the Cloud are tangible as claimed by Ray Kurzweil (Reedy, 2017)^[20]. Hopefully in the very near future, these nano armies could be deployed to withstand and terminate the killer coronavirus.

Frameworks of the study

As a framework for discussion, science poem in this study is

taken as “a poem (1) which is inspired by and/or informed by scientific facts, phenomena, principles, questions, observations, and experiences; (2) which utilizes quantitative and qualitative data to describe scientific phenomena, principles, questions, and observations and experience; (3) which is science-subject based, utilizing scientific vocabulary, concepts, principles and knowledge; and (4) the poem appears to be about science at first, but then ‘leaps’ to say something more” (Colfax, 2012: 53) ^[4]. Combining Colfax’s (2012) ^[4] definition, Leach and Rayner (2020) have also arrived at their own definition for science poem: It is “any verse in which the author has correctly used scientific terminology, concepts, principles or knowledge to provide an analytical view of the world or surrounding universe. Importantly, the poem need not be about science. Instead, it may use science to further the expression of the writer”. Take for instance, in Richard Brautigan’s *Poker Star* written in 1968 (Poetry Foundation, 2021) ^[3], though no scientific vocabulary is found in the description of a poker game played among shepherders in the mountains, it eventually leads readers to the term ‘constellation’:

It’s a star that looks
like a poker game above
the mountains of eastern Oregon.
There are three men playing.
They are all shepherders.
One of them has two pair,
the others have nothing.

Nonetheless, the unidentical characteristics of science and poetry can complement each another. Truth be told, art and science has been viewed as broad disciplines overlapping and intersecting each other since the early 19th century in society (Schatzberg, 2012) ^[22].

Alternatively, ‘Chinese Malaysian’ in this paper is defined within the scope of independent-Chinese-secondary-school-educated and not national-school-educated or otherwise. In other words, Chinese Malaysian in this research refers merely to independent-Chinese-secondary-school-educated Malaysians of Chinese ethnicity.

CDA is perceived as a various-dimension-power-focused research tactic (Fairclough 1989, 1992; Van Dijk, 1996) ^[11, 12, 26], apart from revealing ‘hidden or unknown connections and causes as well as intervention’ as the word ‘critical’ implies.

By the same token, as suggested by Fairclough (1989) ^[11], there are three levels of discourse for the possible texts analyzing procedures: ‘firstly, social conditions of production and interpretation (social factor); secondly, the process of production and interpretation (how the text is produced and how it effects interpretation); and finally, how the text, being the product of the previous two stages, comments on the above’. Although Judith Duchan (in Bloom et al., 2015) opines that Discourse Analysis similarly discloses the sociopsychological characteristics of a person rather than the text structure, CDA is not herewith defined.

For this study, it is understood that ‘Western influence and borrowing on writing techniques in modern Chinese poetry’ is evident (Khei, 2019: 20) ^[15]; thus, Courtney and Ullmer’s (1970: 3) ^[5] helpful outline of the common characteristics of most modern British poetry is henceforth attributed: ‘(a) Conversational quality in verse and the use of colloquial language and rhythms. Usually, the colloquial lines are

given intensity by being compressed. The rhythm, though seemingly casual, is often highly organized; (b) Use of ambiguity and paradox; (c) Use and development of private symbols (partly in response to the feeling that public symbols had become meaningless; and (d) Frequent use of ironic tone’.

Despite the characteristics, ‘it is impossible to characterize poetic language narrowly, for poetry, which is after all the art of language, covers the widest possible range of linguistic possibilities’ (Gwynn, 1998: 9) ^[14] since the ability of poetry is ‘to tell stories or summarize complicated emotions in a few well-chosen words’ (Gwynn, 1998: 2) ^[14]. In democratic Taiwan, ‘dominant modern poetic discourse (a subgenre of Modern Chinese Poetry) has advanced including the infusion of Taiwanese Haiku’ (Khei, 2019: 21-22) ^[15] which is the outcome of the 50-year Japanese colonization (1895-1945) and its education policy. Nowadays, ‘many Facebook-based modern Chinese poetry websites² are available in Taiwan to promote modern Chinese poetry writing and appreciation, including publication’ (Khei, 2019: 22) ^[15], along with latest Taiwanese Haiku creations either two-lined or three-lined accepted in the dominant poetic discourse.

Objectives of the study

The objective of this study is the review of Taiwanese poet Sandy R. S. Chen’s science poems under the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis from the perspective of a Chinese

Malaysian with Taiwan experience amid the COVID-19 pandemic. As it is believed that with this supplementary Chinese Malaysian perspective, pluralistic vision of Chinese descendants speaking the same language from diverse contexts can be evinced. Concurrently, the engagement of CDA in the study likewise reveals the readable orientations of Chen’s poems: for instance, the traces of influence from both Japanese Haiku and western prose poetry; his unwitting scientific awareness and subliminal search process; and the many possible interpretations of his science poems, inclusive that of COVID-19.

The rationale to discuss his poems composed long before the outbreak of COVID-19 is threefold: Firstly, Sandy Chen’s structurally prosaic and preservative poems have deep concern for space achievements globally which essentially shows his macro world view along with a ‘scientific’ touch which is relevant with the current pandemic ravage; secondly, being a professor cum chair of department teaching and experimenting modern Chinese poetry for the past few decades as well as having published books of poems, translations, and essays among others, Sandy Chen is constantly exchanging views with the younger generations and may inspire them or vice versa; therefore, by discussing his poems actually translates its inspirational role for younger poets in Taiwan as well as revealing the understatement of his science poems. Finally, in terms of Chinese Malaysian literature, this discussion may inform poets and men of letters in Malaysia about the current development of modern Taiwanese poetry thus bridging the gaps between the subgenres of modern Chinese poetry.

Analysis of Sandy R. S. Chen’s Science Poems

The Wireless Mouse

The Wireless Mouse is Taiwanese Haiku in form yet modern Chinese poetry in essence as mentioned earlier. Unlike the

diversity of themes among the many Haiku schools in Japan, the themes in Taiwanese Haiku are restricted to those glorifying the beauty of the seasons, as well as the flora and fauna. Despite similarity in form and structure—two-lined, limited to ten words at times—Taiwanese Haiku is not Japanese Haiku in the strictest sense (吴昭新/Wu Zhaoxin, 2014) [28]. Comparatively, the traditional Japanese Haiku poem composes three lines with a total of 17 syllables, a season word or image, and a sudden or intuitive enlightenment or perception of nature. In traditional Japanese Haiku, the first line has 5 syllables, the second, 7, and the third, 5. Since the Chinese language is monosyllabic, it is relatively easier to use one single Chinese character as an equivalent to the syllable in converting the Japanese Haiku into the Chinese version. However, Sandy Chen's Taiwanese Haiku as a modern Chinese poetry creation consists of an equivalent form to that of the Japanese Haiku, with the first line having 5 characters, the second 7 characters, the third 5 characters, and words or images adhering to season or nature (modern technology).

无线小滑鼠	The Wireless Mouse
频啮虚拟网 头晕脚软探头鼠 快喂能源棒	Chewing constantly on the virtual net the cursor feels dizzy and limp on foot with hunger wanting a quick energy bar (Translated by the author)

The Wireless Mouse being a modern technology is notably inspired from an authentic mouse. Mice are annoying and disgusting to most people, yet in her poem entitled *Mice*, Rose Amy Fyleman (English children writer, 1877–1957) claims 'mice are nice' though 'They run about the house at night/They nibble things they shouldn't touch/And no one seems to like them much' (PoemHunter.com, 2021) [19].

As the lines reveal gradually in *The Wireless Mouse*, after having surfed and worked hard on the Internet for a rather long period, the electronic mouse succumbs to dizziness (the cursor is its head metaphorically) and its feet limp with hunger, craving for an 'energy bar' (a battery perhaps) to rejuvenate. By all means, this poem is characterized by keen awareness of technological realities.

Shedding light on the poem under CDA, the author being the observer is watching what the electronic mouse does from the detached third-person narrative point of view. The electronic mouse virtually is used to relate how hard the poet has been working and surfing on the net. Untold power drives or forces the operator to run the cursor all over the desktop and subsequently she/he succumbs to fatigue and hunger and desperately needs to eat and rest to rejuvenate.

In addition, *The Wireless Mouse* can be read as a science poem as it is an analytical view of the world and depicts scientific facts (the use of computer) as well as utilizing scientific vocabulary (cursor, wireless mouse, energy bar) to tell a story. It is about science at first (surfing the net with a wireless cursor on the desktop), but says something more after the mouse gets worn out—could be assignment from superior, obligation towards others, commitment to a task—about the pushing power behind this hard work.

To a Chinese Malaysian at this juncture, *The Wireless Mouse* is a timely and faithful record of the daily activity for computer/laptop accessors, resulted from the Movement

Control Order lockdown prompted by the surging number of COVID-19 cases in Malaysia; it is aimed for cutting the virus from airborne spreading.

In places where movement is allowed, complying with mask mandates, washing hand frequently and keeping social distancing are to be observed strictly. The 'new normal' in fact has sadly contributed to the lockdown of cities, adaptation of working from home, online learning and teaching, loss of job and lives, surge of depression patients, folding of enterprises and restaurants, etc. at a global scale. Besides the science consciousness revealed in the said Haiku-like poem, Chen's awareness of scientific activity, though unwittingly, can further be identified in his other poems. For instance, in a poem called *God Is the Giant Spider* (上帝是只大蜘蛛), also the title of his book of poetry collection (陈瑞山, 1986) [30], the images of the American space probe *Pioneer 10* and the space shuttle *Challenger* are depicted as human's efforts to explore the infinite universe; while in an often-quoted poem *Ode to the Halley's Comet* (咏哈雷彗星), the entrance of the 1985 Halley's Comet was associated with the 75-76 year-long life circle of the birth and death of Mark Twain.

Jade Rabbit Thinks of Emigrating

Soon after the successful landing of Chinese rover 'Chang-e' on the moon in 2013, Sandy Chen composed the poem *Jade Rabbit Thinks of Emigrating*, in which the Chinese mythological figures in the Milky Way, the cowherd and the weaving girl³, urge the lady Jade Rabbit⁴ to 'hurry up, don't falter,' by borrowing a light-speed ark from Jesus' Father to avoid being polluted by the hydrocarbonic smog discharged from human's space rover, in order to protect her immortality elixir. The science terminology appeared in the poem are identifiably 'crater', 'space rover', 'radar', 'hydrocarbonic smog' and 'light-speed'.

Jade Rabbit's 'emigrating' wish seems to analogically reveal humans' hankering migration dream to other planet with perceived better living conditions and outlook. To correlate the poem with the raging pandemic, Jade Rabbit's wish can be justified as the hydrocarbonic smog discharged from the moon-landing ship—translated as COVID-19—is threatening its life thus it should leave at once. To attain this goal fast and swift, the light-speed ark of Jesus' Father was recommended by the cowherd and the weaving girl. At this point, the deliberate interlap of eastern (two separate ancient Chinese legends) and western world (asking the Jade Rabbit to borrow a light-speed ark from Jesus' Father) is to infer the absence of discrimination and otherness with the hint of borderless harmony and unity.

Further, it goes that if the Jade Rabbit intends to preserve 'ancient Chinese legend and the elixir of immortal life' (access to the detached macro world with possibilities and longevity), she has to 'rush across the Milky Way', meaning, to go beyond this attached micro world. Nonetheless, the space rover with the name *Chang-e* likewise expresses the sender's wish to clarify the plausibility of the thousand-year-old legend.

Analogously in passing, following the 'strong and powerful' national image of the Twin Towers, in the poem *Random Reflections on the Aftermath of the 911 Attacks on the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York City* (纽约世贸大楼 911 劫后随想), Chen adopts high technologies,

such as Hubber Space Telescope, satellite-guided nuclear-powered aircrafts, to resemble the ever edge-cutting image of the United States (陈瑞山, 2003) [32].

玉兔想移民	Jade Rabbit Thinks of Emigrating
1 月阴的陨石坑 嫦娥号雷达启动 找玉兔	1 Among the craters on the far side of the moon the space rover <i>Chang-e</i> started up its radar searching for Jade Rabbit
2 登月艇排放碳氢化合物 烟霾 坑里的玉兔探头问问 牛郎與织女 想移民去当邻居	2 When the moon-landing ships discharged hydrocarbonic smog Jade Rabbit looked out the crater, asking the cowherd and the weaving girl about the possibilities of emigration to their neighborhoods
3 玉兔呀, 快走, 别缩脚 向耶稣的爸爸借一条 光速方舟 奔渡河汉, 呵护华夏 的神话与灵药	3 Hi, Jade Rabbit, hurry up, don't falter Go borrowing a light-speed ark from Jesus' Father Then, rush across the Milky Way for the preservation of ancient Chinese legend and the elixir of immortal life (Translated by the poet)

As a science-minded intellectual, Sandy Chen is constantly keeping an eye for the latest advancement in science. His consciousness of humans' science achievement discloses his macro world view. To him, what is happening on this globe reflects an 'attached' micro world and a step beyond the globe like the landing of spaceship on the moon is the manifest of the access of a 'detached' macro world.

From the aspect of CDA, the hidden power assuring the breakthrough can be humankind's constant dream as well as science competitiveness between powers or uncontrollable pandemic. The achievement similarly implies a break away from the past and obsolete which henceforth opens up new possibilities for earthlings yet outstands who bosses the Earth symbolically. And it all begins only when minds are opened up, like the way Walt Whitman (1819-1992) describes how hearing a heavy astronomy lecture opens up a student's mind to the wonders of the night sky in his short poem *When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer*.

With hindsight, notwithstanding the celebrating achievement of humankind, issues like hydrocarbonic smog polluting the outer space and floating debris of spaceship stand to threaten the galaxy. That is possibly what worries Sandy Chen the most though human activities in the outer space have been very mesmerizing and inspiring to him. Looking upward 'at a certain height' (metaphorically) towards what humans are working on (scientifically) can explain the line 'It asks of us a certain height' in Robert Frost's poem *Choose Something Like a Star*: supposedly the origin of the poet's sublime inspiration and imagination since all these outer space activities witness the extension of great intellectual potential of mankind. In actual fact, in another title poem of a book collection of poetry (陈瑞

山,1998)—*The Earth Is a Space Shuttle* (地球是一艘大太空梭)—Chen talks about the constituents of the Earth, namely, Gold, wood, water, fire and earth, and the earth's back-and-forth everlasting and boring journey in the solar system. Consequently, humans started to launch space ships as entertainment.

Tea Leaves

Tea Leaves is basically a faithful description of how tea is made and brewed. It is a science poem as tea making being the theme is itself a scientific process. Probably due to the fact that tea leaves are anthropomorphized as the 'body', this poem is often read as a 'verse on thing/object'—a sub-genre of classical Chinese poetry. To Li Wenru from mainland China (李文儒, 2020) [29], the phrase 'when its body turns around' hints the eventually paid off tortures which outlines 'the true character of the Chinese people', that is, the patience and readiness to stand up to trials and tests in life. Moreover, tea drinking is a daily routine of the Chinese and thus suggesting its characteristic universality. That may well justify why the poem has been well-received and widely cited by Chinese readers in mainland China.

茶叶	Tea Leaves
火烤的煎熬 水烫的煎熬	Fire grilling torments Water boiling torments
一翻身	when its body turns around
完成 一片芬芳	it accomplishes a room of aroma
	(Translated by the author)

Visually, the degree of the torture is stressed through the use of the word 'torments' twice and the space between the stanzas is left to hint at the time consumed in the process. As implied within the well-chosen words, one has to go through tortures and trials of various sorts and levels prior to eventual success. Framing it within the Buddhist view, the hidden power in light of CDA operating on the happenings can be karma the universal causal law, which infers that good or bad actions determine the future modes of an individual's existence. As the images further reveal, entity as small as an individual or as large as a country will subsequently enjoy the joys of life (the aroma of brewed tea) with persistent efforts and hard-work put into after having experienced trials in life (fire grilling and water boiling) when time comes (its body turns around).

Chinese tea drinking may be common among Chinese Malaysians, but not the younger people, thus reading the poem from this frame, it can only be a procedural description of the brewing of Chinese tea, from the grilling of dried tea leaves to an aromatic cup of tea after brewing them with boiling water; by all means, the poem can be read as a symbolical account of something which will finally be paid off after a trying period.

In this uncertain period with fatal pandemic besetting almost everywhere, the closest interpretation derived from the poem is that it in some assuring way sends out a hope-giving signal. It gives hope to people losing their jobs and threatened by the disease, seemingly to ascertain that a better world will arrive 'when its body turns around' in the

near future. Despite being tortured by ‘grilling fire’ and ‘boiling water’ for the moment, one must have faith and be *patient as it is the only way out*.

After Fermentation

For the change of state, the poet’s personal emotions in *After Fermentation* are ‘objectified’ through the fermentation of grapes, flour, love and the disobedience of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. ‘Objective correlative’ is a process of ‘objectifying’ the emotions by searching for the ‘objective correlative’ as T. S. Eliot proposed in his *Hamlet and His Problems* (Eliot, 1964)^[10]. To Eliot, the only way to express emotion in art is by finding an ‘objective correlative’; in other words, “a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked” (Eliot, 1964)^[10].

Similar to what Eliot posits, this poem ‘is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality’ (Eliot, 2019). Comparatively, the Chinese literary phraseology ‘to perfectly blend/intermingle emotion with scene’ (qingjing jiaorong 情景交融) has been considered the highest writing technique. Yet, it differs from Eliot’s ‘objective correlative’ in that ‘qingjing jiaorong’ keeps the state of equilibrium between the poet’s emotion and the thing (scene) whereas in ‘objective correlative’, the poet’s emotion and personality are subjugated to reason.

After Fermentation*	
發酵後	Grapes once fermented cannot go back to what they were
愛心 一經發酵後 就回不到原狀了	Flour once fermented cannot return to what it was
葡萄 自動發酵後 就回不去了	Love once fermented cannot return to what it was, either
麵粉 他助發酵後 也回不到原狀了	Humans after the Garden of Eden cannot go back to innocence
人類 伊甸園裡發酵後 就再也回不去了	*Note: After a discussion with the American poet Cory Brown, the order of stanzas (in English) is adjusted in order to make better sense to English readers.
	(Note provided and poem translated by the poet)

The word ‘fermentation’ in the poem, being the title, theme and a science terminology, shows its science relevancy. Taking the third-person narrative, the poet moans over the unreturnable bygones of life in many aspects. These objects, situation as well as chain of events are objectified in the form of grapes, flour, love and event to express the recallable emotions and personality of the poet subjugated by reason (only the poet knows what it means to want to escape from them) at that particular juncture.

In life, when bygone is reviewed afterward, it can be anything but unchangeable bygone. Lament stays eternally if it is a regret. The pushing and operating force and power hinted from the CDA perspective, to be specific, can be your then state of mind making the decision and, the force majeure which pushes you to arrive at that situation. Moaning and lamentation stand in retrospect and nothing can be done to rectify, just like ‘grapes, once fermented (turning into wine), cannot go back to what they were’, ‘Humans, after the Garden of Eden (having experienced sex), cannot go back to innocence’(chastity). Associating the theme with the raging pandemic in light of CDA, the poem clandestinely cautions it is the decision humans had made previously—could possibly be the devouring of wild animals carrying fatal viruses—for what they are suffering now.

Conclusion

Drawing what is clear from the discussions, it is only fair to say that Sandy R. S. Chen exhibits the unique way he senses the world as well as demonstrating his concerns over science achievements through his rather preservative, linguistically rule-abiding science poems.

His science poems are preservative in that no run-on-lines or daring experimental elements are seen, but only rule-abiding syntaxes and lines. The four poems, all written in the third-person narrative, show traces of foreign influences like Japanese Haiku and stanzas alike. The true meaning within the texts in these science poems are metaphorically hinted through words or phrases employed: electronic mouse, cursor, emigrating, light-speed ark of Jesus’ Father, elixir of immortal life, tea leaves, grilling, boiling, aroma, fermentation and Garden of Eden. Despite perspectival differences, science poems unite poets in general through human’s fascination with the natural world and the will to learn.

As informed by Khei (2019)^[15], in democratic Taiwan, previously the priority of literature was in the preservation of language use. Yet after the rule of the DPP government for more than a decade, evolving modern Taiwanese poetic discourse together with two or three-lined Taiwanese Haiku creations posted on Facebook-based websites (Note 2) generally have become more regional in structure, with an increase number of colloquial elements spotted in content though embedding foreign elements and experimental rhetoric. But these features are not prominent in Sandy Chen’s science poems as his are prosaic and preservative in appearance with little room for readers to add on or fill in. Take for instance, in both *The Wireless Mouse* and *Tea Leaves*, the story was told in successive steps with no missing parts while engaging strong ties with classical diction (for example, phrases like 頻啣; 探頭; 奔渡; 呵護); much will emerge and light of hope implied at the other end of the tunnel only when the images are metaphorically inter-contextualized by the readers, in particular during this period of pandemic when staying alive and getting vaccinated seem to be unreachable and intangible for many. Per contra, *The Wireless Mouse* may be a well-timed narrative of the daily activity for computer/laptop accessors working or studying at home, resulted from the surging number of COVID-19 cases worldwide; whereas in *Jade Rabbit Thinks of Emigrating*, the hydrocarbonic smog discharged from the space rover—COVID-19—prompts it

to run away fast. *After Fermentation* is relevant to the pandemic when it posits decision humans had made—in this case, eating of coronavirus-carried wild animals—contributed to what they are experiencing just yet; while *Tea Leaves* implicitly encourages desperate people caught amidst the pandemic to have faith and patience for the arrival of a better time.

Moreover, though there is clear evidence of Japanese Haiku and western influence on writing techniques in Sandy Chen's poems which could be seen in his use of lines, stanza, visual employment of words, including punctuations, his poems demonstrate an unusual strong connection to science and keen concern for space achievement at macro level, yet not deviating from the language norm as evidenced in the foregoing; and it is these features of his that make the poems unique and significant in their own right.

In a personal exchange, Sandy Chen posited, "As a general principle, when I write poems/prose, the language I use, in addition to creativeness, imagination, adequacy and pertinence, should at least be capable of communicating with readers. Even when figure of speech, like simile, metaphor, allusion, allegory, symbol, synecdoche and metonymy, is applied to defamiliarize an expression (the term 'defamiliarizing' is the artistic technique of presenting to audience common things in an unfamiliar or strange way so they could gain new perspectives and see the world differently coined by Viktor B. Shklovsky in 1917)."

Like what Shklovsky (Crawford, 1984)^[6] had proposed, or to fabricate a transcendental or a surrealistic realm, Sandy Chen always abides by a rule in his writing—not to deviate from the language norm—that is, a form of logic with which nature endows humans. This may in quick conclude Sandy R. S. Chen's insightful science poems and his attitude towards poetry writing.

Notes

1. Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus. Most people infected with the COVID-19 virus will experience mild to moderate respiratory illness and recover without requiring special treatment. Older people, and those with underlying medical problems like cardiovascular disease, diabetes, chronic respiratory disease, and cancer are more likely to develop serious illness. Globally, as of 6:27 pm CEST, 6 July 2021, there have been 183,934,913 confirmed cases of COVID-19, including 3,985,022 deaths, reported to WHO. As of 5 July 2021, a total of 2,989,925,974 vaccine doses have been administered (World Health Organization, <https://covid19.who.int/>).
2. For instance, Xin Shi Lu 新诗路: 3,600 members, Wenxue Nongchang 文学农场: 1,100 members, You He Wenxuezhazhi Tougaoyuandi 有荷文学杂志投稿园地: 1,000 members, and Yejianghua Yaji 野薑花雅集: 994 members, HuaiYing•Xinshi Xuetang 怀鹰•新诗学堂: 808 members, etc., of which "Shiren Julebu 诗人俱乐部" is perhaps the biggest Facebook-based website with some 4,300 members altogether.
3. The fairy tale of the Cowherd and the Weaving Girl is a classic love story of ancient China between a fairy and a

human being. The seventh day of every seventh month of the lunar calendar is thought to be the only time when they meet and it has since been seen as Chinese Valentine's Day. The legend goes that a cowherd (an earthling) and a weaving girl (a fairy) fell in love with each other. They then wedded and were later forced to part and blocked by the Milky Way. Out of compassion for them, on the seventh day of the seventh lunar month each year, flocks of magpies fly to form a bridge with their bodies over the Milky Way, facilitating the lovers to meet physically.

4. In yet another ancient Chinese mythology, Jade Rabbit is believed to live on the moon. When Jade Rabbit is not busy making immortality elixirs, she spends time with the beautiful goddess Chang-e in the Moon Palace.

Postscript

Things dramatically evolved after this paper was completed in July 2021. On 20 August the same year in Malaysia, CNBC reported that "Malaysia gets a new prime minister—the country's third in 3 years"; whereas on 24 November, the Central Epidemic Command Center announced that "Taiwan's first-dose vaccination rate has passed 77 percent, while almost half of the population has received two doses" (CNA English News). On 27 November 2021, a variant of COVID-19 discovered in South Africa resistant to extant vaccines named 'Omicron' shocked the world yet again. In 2022, BA 1, BA 2, BA 3, BA 4 and BA 5—variants of Omicron—were found spreading fast, contributed to a registration of 606,459,140 confirmed cases of COVID-19 on 10 September 2022 with a death toll of 6,495,110 worldwide. To address worsening economy and the Russian Ukraine conflict among others, coexisting with the virus was the global approach.

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