



Lai Ho, Wu Cho-liu, and Taiwan Literature

K. C. Tu

Since 1996, when this journal was first launched, we have asserted that Taiwan literature be studied from international perspectives. For each issue in the past, we have selected a theme to illustrate a conspicuous feature of Taiwan literature, such as Taiwan literature under Japanese rule, aboriginal and nativist voices of Taiwan literature, social concerns, urban literature and the fin de siècle, travel and returning to the homeland, nature and environment, folk literature, children's literature, women's literature, history, and folklore and festival. For this issue, however, we have chosen to focus on two representative writers in the history of Taiwan literature: Lai Ho and Wu Cho-liu. This has primarily been done to celebrate the occasion that, after more than seven years of biannual publication, *Taiwan Literature*, has finally gained recognition by the international academia and the appreciation of a group of Taiwanese-Americans who, with the goal of promoting Taiwan-related studies in the United States and internationally, have generously provided an endowment to permanently establish the Lai Ho and Wu Cho-liu Endowed Chair in Taiwan Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara. The University officially appointed Professor Kuo-ch'ing Tu as the first chair for this endowment in April, 2004. This is the first endowment of this kind in the United States; its significance warrants the dedication

of the theme for this issue of the journal to honor these two outstanding Taiwanese writers and culture figures, whose names have been used to establish this endowed position.

Lai Ho (1894–1943), the first modern writer in Taiwan and pioneer of Taiwan’s new literature, has been called the “Father of Taiwan’s New Literature.” He was born at Changhua, in 1894, when the First Sino-Japanese War broke out, resulting in the cession of Taiwan to Japan the following year. He died in 1943, two years before the colonial rule of Taiwan ended. Therefore, his lifespan almost corresponded to the fifty years of Japanese rule in Taiwan, making him the most representative figure in the early period of Taiwan’s new literature.

Lai Ho attended the Japanese public elementary school at the age of ten and started to learn classical Chinese at a private school at fourteen, laying down a solid foundation of traditional Chinese classics. In 1910, at the age of sixteen, he entered the Taihoku Medical School, graduating in four years. He started his career as a physician in Chiai and established the Lai Ho Clinic at Changhua in 1916. With great sympathy he treated poor people and used most of his income to help the poor who were in dire straits; at the end of each year he would burn all the medical bills owed by his poor patients, and those who had benefited from his generous spirit regarded him as the Matsu Goddess of Changhua. In 1917, he went to Amoy to work at Boai Hospital, and fell under the influence of the May Fourth New Literature Movement. After returning to Changhua in 1919, he plunged into national and new literature movements. He participated in organizing the Taiwan Culture Association, the first large-scale cultural organization in Taiwan that enlisted students of Taihoku Medical School and young intellectuals as members, and he was elected as a council member. Involved in the so-called Incident of the Violation of the Police Law for Public Security, which was intended by the authorities to maintain control over the political movement for a national assembly, he was arrested and imprisoned on December 16, 1923. After serving more than twenty days in jail, he was acquitted on January 7 of the following year.

On December 8, 1941, the day following the Harbor Incident, after an investigation by the Japanese military police and the

Bureau of Police Affairs, Lai Ho was again imprisoned for more than fifty days. While in jail, he wrote *A Diary in Prison*, which reveals his genuine personality. Due to his serious illness, he was released in January 1942 and after a year, he died of heart disease at the age of fifty on January 31, 1943. In April, the special issue in memory of Lai Ho published in *Taiwan bungaku* [Taiwan Literature] (vol. 3, no. 2), featured tributes written by contemporary writers Yang K'uei, Chu Shih-feng, and Yang Shou-yü. In his article "Huiyi Lai Yun xiansheng" [In Memory of Lai Yun (alias Lai Ho)], Chu Shih-feng eulogized Lai Ho with "Console the Spirits of Taiwanese Compatriots in Resistance against the Japanese," included in Wang Hsiao-po, *Bei diandao de Taiwan lishi* [The Inverted History of Taiwan].) On April 25, 1984, a grand ceremony "In Commemoration of Mr. Lai Ho's Ninetieth Birthday and His Rehabilitation" was held in Changhua. On the commemoration of Lai Ho's centennial birthday in 1994, the Lai Ho Culture and Education Foundation was established. In 1995, at the original site of the Lai Ho Clinic, "The Ho Garden," a building named after him, was constructed, and the tenth floor was devoted to the Lai Ho Memorial Museum. In June 1997, the museum was moved to the fourth floor of the building across the street, where it currently houses and displays a complete collection of Lai Ho's mementos—his books, calligraphy, manuscripts, and related documents.

Lai Ho's first piece of creative writing was an essay, "Wuti" [Without Title], which was published in August 1925. Although it was in prose, it includes a poem of more than thirty lines in the new style, expressing his disappointment with old-fashioned marriage and his agony over love. His first new poem in colloquial Chinese was "Juewu xia de xisheng—ji Erlin shijian de zhanyou" [A Resolute Sacrifice—Dedicated to the Comrades of the Erlin Incident], published in December 1925. His first story, "*Dou naore*" [Festival High Jinks], came out in early 1926, and was followed immediately by "Yigan 'chengzai'" [A "Steelyard"]. These two stories are recognized as the cornerstones of the new literature in Taiwan. They reflect the miserable condition of the common people and expose the ruthless, tyrannical colonial rule, as well as the dark and corrupt feudal system.

Lai Ho's lifelong creative writings include fifteen short stories,

thirteen new poems, sixteen occasional essays and prefaces, and more than one hundred poems in the traditional style. His highest achievement lies in fiction. His works demonstrate a strong humanism in spirit and realism in style. His language is simple; abundant colloquialisms describe Taiwanese characters and surroundings and show a strong and distinct local color. His representative work, “Shan song ren de gushi” [The Story of a Person Good at Litigation] (1934), adopts its material from a folk legend of the Qing Dynasty, to depict how a country intellectual, with the support of the masses, helped the poor in a brave struggle to reoccupy land seized by the landlord. Yeh Shih-t’ao, in his “Taiwan de xiangtu wenxue” [Regional Literature of Taiwan], praised it as “presenting an articulate model for regional literature.”

Lai Ho’s poetry is primarily based on important historical events. “A Resolute Sacrifice” (1925) sings the praise of the heroes of the Erlin Incident, the first uprising of the anti-Japanese struggle by Taiwanese peasants. “Liuli qu” [A Song of Wandering Refugees] (1930), reflecting the misfortune of a large group of peasants whose land was seized under the colonial policy, has been eulogized as the longest and most touching poem in Taiwan’s new literature during the Japanese occupation period. “Nanguo aige” [An Elegy of the South] (1931) depicts the world-shaking Musha Incident, an armed insurrection against the Japanese in 1930. In addition, some of his poems carry such titles as “Xin yuefu” [New Music Bureau Folksongs] and “Nongmin yao” [Ballads of the Peasants], echoing his literary conviction, which centers on the common people and cries out for the oppressed.

Lai Ho was an important advocate of Taiwan’s new literature. During the debate on the new and traditional literature, he echoed Chang Wo-chun, criticizing the old literature and promoting the new cultural movement, and gave strong support for the new literature to come. Lai Ho used literature as a means for resistance and struggle. He joined the activities of the anti-Japanese groups of the time, such as the Taiwan Culture Association, the People’s Party, and the Federation of Taiwanese Writers and Artists. At the same time, he joined efforts with other writers in launching new magazines and edited literary columns, encouraged promising young writers, and advocated new thought in opposition to feudalism and

colonial rule and demonstrating a strong nationalism and cultural criticism. More importantly, as a writer he devoted himself to creative writing and left behind a substantial collection of outstanding works, thus laying a solid foundation for Taiwan's new literature. Throughout his life he insisted on writing in colloquial Chinese and, as a pioneer in the history of Taiwan's new literature, he stood above all his contemporaries. He maintained the option of colloquial Chinese, which was played down during the war period dominated by the Japanese language and then restored as the medium of literary creation after the war. Having taken such an important role in the early period of Taiwan's new literature, he fully deserves the honor of the title, "Father of Taiwan's New Literature."

Wu Cho-liu (1900–1976) is another representative Taiwanese writer. He came from a family of Hakka speakers originally from Jiaoling County, Guangdong Province. He was born in Hsinpu Township, Hsinchu County, and died in 1976 at the age of 77. In the history of Taiwan's new literature, his distinction lies in his status as a spokesman for his times, the realistic style of his works, and the transitional position he occupied between the latter part of the Japanese occupation and the two postwar decades under the Chinese Nationalist Government.

Wu Cho-liu was from a scholar-gentry family and he received a classical Chinese education. His literary activities started with his writing poems and lyrics in the classical style—more than one thousand pieces—but most influential were his works in fiction. After graduating from the Normal College, he started his career as a teacher. In 1940, as the result of his futile protest against a Japanese supervisor openly insulting a Taiwanese instructor, he resigned indignantly. In the following year, he went to Mainland China, and worked both as a reporter for the *Tairiku shinpô* [Mainland Newspaper] and as an interpreter for a Japanese commercial and industrial office. Disappointed and dissatisfied with the common practices of society under the Wang Jingwei regime, he returned to Taiwan the following year and served as a reporter for *Nichinichi shinpô* [Daily Newspaper], *Taiwan shinbun* [Taiwan News], *Shinseihô* [New Life Daily], and *Minhō* [The People's Press], respectively. Ever since then, his job as a newspaper reporter gave his creative writing a distinct journalistic quality.



In 1936, at the age of 36, Wu cho-liu wrote his first short story in Japanese, “Kurage” [Jellyfish], published in *Taiwan shin bungaku* [Taiwanese New Literature], and in the same year, another story in Japanese, “Dobu no hiri” [A Goldfish in a Ditch], was the first prospective winning piece of work in a contest sponsored by the *Taiwanese New Literature* magazine. “Jellyfish” depicts the colonial Taiwanese intellect, Jinkichi, who had received a middle-school education at the end of the 1930s. As a Taiwanese employee without hope for promotion and under the heavy burden of daily life, Jinkichi saw no future as his dreams eroded and his ambition wore down—typically reflecting the social atmosphere of the times. This maiden work demonstrated the talent, style, and temperament of Wu Cho-liu as a writer and set the key features of his fiction as it later developed, namely, the distinct characteristics of ethnic consciousness and social and political concerns.

Wu Cho-liu’s fiction can be divided into two distinct periods with the 1945 Retrocession as the line of demarcation, displaying a historical panorama from the outbreak of the second Sino-Japanese War in 1937 to the society of Taiwan in the 1970s. His early works, using life under Japanese rule as the setting, acutely depict the social life in Taiwan at the time and describe the misfortune and miserable fate of the Taiwanese people, especially the intellectuals who suffered the consequences to their spirit of resistance to Japanese rule. The representative works of this period are “Xiansheng ma” [The Doctor’s Mother] and *Yaxiya de gu’er* [Asia’s Orphan]. “The Doctor’s Mother” was written in 1944 and published in *New Life Daily*. It describes the conflict between a mother and son: The mother maintains an unyielding integrity as a traditional Taiwanese while the son shows his servility in every aspect of behavior during the Imperial Subject Movement of the Japanese occupation period. With a sarcastic and humorous touch and an undertone of judgment and contrast—praise and censure, good and ugly—the author exposed the hypocrisy and slavishness of the servile gentry serving the Emperor and, at the same time, portrayed a mother image with strong cultural identity, confidence, an awe-inspiring righteousness, and national integrity.

Wu Cho-liu’s first novel, *Asia’s Orphan*, is an epic masterpiece in Taiwan’s modern literature. Originally entitled *Hu Tai-ming*,

the name of its main character, it was written over a period between 1943 and 1945. At a time when the war had entered its most severe stage, under the close watch of the Japanese military police, the anti-Japanese masterpiece was written at a tremendous personal risk but could only wait for some other time for publication. After the war, in 1946, it was divided into four parts and published in Japan with the title changed to *Hu Zhiming*. However, these are the same Chinese characters used for writing the name of the Vietnamese Communist leader, Ho Chi Minh. So, later on “to avoid misunderstanding because of the coincidence of the name, the title was again changed,” and when published in Japan, it was called *Ajiya no koji* [Asia’s Orphan] (1956), and *Yugamerarejima* [Distorted Island] (1957). For the Chinese version published in Taiwan, we have *Gufan* [A Solitary Sail] translated by Yang Chao-ch’ih (1959) and *Yaxiya de gu’er* [Asia’s Orphan] translated by Fu En-jung (1962). Throughout the protagonist Hu Taiming’s lifetime—full of frustrations and spiritual search—this fiction portrays the agony, grief, and indignation of the Taiwanese people under Japanese rule; the hardship and bitterness of their lives; and the hesitation and anxiety of intellectuals under the pressure of Japanese domination in their confused expression of national sentiment and cultural identity toward Taiwan, Japan, and China as the motherland. It has been highly extolled as “an epic full of power and grandeur.”

His later works primarily take the postwar social life in Taiwan as a background and focus his criticism of the brutal behavior and despicable fraudulence of the ruling class and their servile followers, represented by *Bocitan kezhang* [The Potsdam Section Chief] (1948), “Jiaoyuan” [The Sly Ape] (1956) and “Choutong” [The Stink of Money] (1958). The novelette *The Potsdam Section Chief* portrays a section chief of the special service under the traitor Wang Jingwei’s regime in China, who absconded with public funds after Japan surrendered and escaped to Taiwan with a new identity—a government official charged with taking over properties from the Japanese. He extorted money from the people and received bribes, but finally, because of his heinous crimes, was unable to escape the hand of justice. It is a very successful satirical fiction of social realism.



“The Sly Ape” portrays a swindler, Chiang Datou, in Minghu Village during the Japanese occupation, who practiced sorcery by blowing a bull’s horn and made his living by selling quack remedies for which he claimed miraculous powers. After the Retrocession of Taiwan, he rapidly rose in the world by means of deception and obsequiousness until he became a township representative and then a provincial assemblyman. However, in the end, he was implicated in a business collusion with government officials and was thrown into prison. As a masterpiece of Wu Cho-liu’s latter period, this story depicts many benighted and deluded small characters, and forcefully exposes the contemptible conduct and chicanery of bureaucrats and politicians after the Retrocession. “The Stink of Money” portrays a congressional representative, Shen Guoda, who arrived in Taiwan after the war and accumulated wealth by hook or by crook. He died atop his hoarded money hidden beneath the Buddha Dais, but people did not know he was dead until the corpse and money began to smell.

In the development of Taiwan’s new literature, the particular position Wu Cho-liu occupied can be seen from three perspectives. Foremost, his writing strongly reflects the historical context of the time. Wu Cho-liu’s life extended from the Japanese occupation, through the Second World War, to the 1970s. His first work was published in 1936, the year before the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945). The language he used for writing was primarily Japanese, although he started to write in Chinese after the war. He personally translated his major works in Japanese into Chinese, and he can be considered a writer who crossed cultural and linguistic boundaries in reality as well as in name. The time he lived in represents a unique period in the history of Taiwan literature, which is embodied in his works as a particular characteristic of Taiwan literature.

Second, Wu Cho-liu’s fiction is characterized by typical realism and serves as a link between past and future in the development of Taiwan’s new literature. Wu Cho-liu’s personality is upright by nature. He hated injustice, regarded evildoers as enemies, and possessed an unyielding nationalistic spirit. As described by the critic Peng Jui-chin, Wu Cho-liu “had a chivalrous character . . . was a literary knight errant who brandished his pen as a sword.” (See

“Preface” to *Wu Zhuoliu ji* [Collected Works of Wu Cho-liu] in *Taiwan zuojia quanji* [Complete Works of Taiwanese Writers], Qianwei edition). His famous dictum is: “Licking somebody’s boots is not literature.” He never bowed to any old ideologies and powers, never compromised with the hideous realities. Moreover, with the sharp insight of a professional journalist, he squarely observed the surrounding conditions, exposed the malpractice of the time, and wielded his mighty pen to satirize and mercilessly denounce social evils such as corrupt officials, governmental bribery by the local gentry, greedy gold-diggers, and those fond of the pleasures of the flesh. Wu Cho-liu has left behind three novels: *Yaxiya de gu’er* [Asia’s Orphan], *Wuhuaguo* [The Fig Tree], and *Taiwan lianqiao* [Taiwanese Forsythia], as well as eighteen short stories and novelettes. Each of his works expresses stern criticism of social reality and exposes evils with a pronounced sense of local color and profound sarcasm. His personality, with a clear demarcation between whom or what to love and whom or what to hate, has lent a particularly realistic style to his work, which maintained Lai Ho’s cultural criticism and spirit of resistance and was later succeeded by the nativist literature movement of the 1970s. Wu Cho-liu’s literary belief is eloquently expressed in the purpose of *Taiwan wenyi* [Taiwanese Literary Art], which he established with his own funds in 1964 to emphasize and carry on the tradition of Taiwan’s new literature, reflect society and life, attach importance to the local color of the native land, and promote the spirit of realism. *Taiwanese Literary Art* continued the traditional line of Taiwan literature and, in 1969, he sold all his assets to establish the “Wu Cho-liu Literary Award” to cultivate new writers and promote the writing of nativist literature. Wu Cho-liu’s contributions to the development of Taiwan’s new literature have established a lasting example and made him the most important supporter of Taiwan’s new literature during the postwar period.

Last but not the least, Wu Cho-liu’s representative work *Asia’s Orphan* bears a certain special significance in the history of Taiwan literature. This novel takes the broad societies of Japan, Mainland China, and Taiwan under Japanese colonial rule as its background and depicts the contradictory national sentiments and the perplexed situation of national identity faced by Taiwanese. This is a



legacy that the Taiwanese struggled with and which, even today, influences every Taiwanese in making an individual choice. Wu Cho-liu never forgot his position as a Taiwanese and therefore this fiction expresses not only the national contradictions during the war against Japan, but also articulates the dilemma that Taiwanese have carried in the last one hundred years—caught between the adversaries, China and Japan, and the difficult road a Taiwanese is destined to take with all the attendant implications. Among the masterpieces of Taiwan literature, this novel presents a macroscopic view of the circumstances of the Taiwanese people closely related to their history, geographical position, and society, and hence became one of the most representative works in Taiwan literature. From Wu Cho-liu's biographical memoirs, *The Fig Tree* and *Taiwanese Forsythia*, we can trace the development of his Taiwanese consciousness. His experience of visiting China and his observation of the February 28 Incident connected him to many contemporary political figures and have made him the most direct and forceful eyewitness in the modern literary history of Taiwan. Wu Cho-liu's historical position as a novelist in the development of Taiwan literature is unassailable and will last forever because of the specific historical juncture in which he lived, the distinct style of social realism of his works, and his uncompromising position as a Taiwanese.

Regarding the selections for translation in this issue, “A ‘Steelyard’” by Lai Ho and “The Doctor’s Mother” by Wu Cho-liu were chosen because they are the writers’ most representative works. Although they have been translated into English (See *The Unbroken Chain: An Anthology of Taiwan Fiction Since 1926*. Ed. Joseph Lau. Indiana University Press, 1983), we asked the renowned translators, Howard Goldblatt and Sylvia Li-chun Lin, to render new translations with their expertise, which we believe will be appreciated by the reader. “The Jellyfish” and “A Goldfish in a Ditch” are the early works written in Japanese by Wu Cho-liu, which reveal the tender, romantic sentiments of the author, quite different from his later works which are highly critical of society and the ways of the world. These two pieces have been translated by Robert Backus; the precision and eloquence of his English translations bring the stories to life, especially when compared to the Chinese translations.



The other two short stories by Wu Cho-liu, “Meritorious Dog” and “The Stink of Money,” extremely satirical of social reality, are translated by Sue Wiles, whose style is ingeniously lively and skillful, making a remarkably smooth reading. John Balcom and Yingtsih Hwang, who are well recognized in the English translation of Taiwan literature, have lent their hands to translate four stories by Lai Ho, “Making Trouble,” “An Unsatisfying New Year,” “The Homecoming,” and “Returning from a Spring Banquet.” The last piece was selected to show that Lai Ho, as a cultural hero, also had some of his own decadent experiences or observations, beyond his Confucian image. The other two translators, Lloyd and Shu-ning Sciban have collaborated in translating two essays, “Progress” and “A Diary in Jail” by Lai Ho, and a critical study by Professor Lin Jui-ming, “Where There Is Rock, There Is the Seed of Fire.” Another critical study selected is “The Eyes of an Orphan: Gazing at the Self and Imagining the Other in the Travel Diaries of Wu Cho-liu,” written by Professor Chien I-ming. Consistent with the journal’s mission, these two articles were selected to promote the study of Taiwan literature from international perspectives. The translator of this article, Margaret Hillenbrand, Chuan Lyu Fellow in Taiwanese Studies at the East Asia Institute of the University of Cambridge from 2001–2003 and currently teaching at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, has recently joined our translation team as a new force.

Although an English translation of *Asia’s Orphan* has yet to appear, for essays, we selected the preface to Wu Cho-liu’s Japanese version of the novel, which provides the background for it. Another essay selected is “Street Sketches of Nanjing,” which reveals the author’s observations of “the other,” and should be read together with Professor Chien I-ming’s article “The Eyes of an Orphan.” As suggested by their titles, the two critiques, “May our Bugler Play a March to Inspire the People” by Lai Ho and “Literature is Literature, Not a Tool” by Wu Cho-liu reveal the writers’ basic views on literature. David Hull and James Howard, our graduate students in Asian Studies at UCSB, translated these; their effort to help with translation is part of their learning experience and worth encouragement and appreciation.

As for poetry, Wu Cho-liu has written more than a thousand



poems in classical Chinese style and published his *Zhuoliu qiancao ji* [A Collection of One Thousand Poems by Wu Cho-liu] in 1963, from which we selected only six poems as a sampling. Lai Ho has written poems in both classical and colloquial styles, of which we selected two of each and purposely included an example of a new poem written in the Hoklo dialect. Indeed, Lai Ho proved himself to be the father of the new literature in Taiwan and, as a pioneer, opened a new trend for others to follow.

In conjunction with the establishment of the Lai Ho and Wu Cho-liu Endowed Chair in Taiwan Studies, we have dedicated this issue of *Taiwan Literature: English Translation Series* to Lai Ho and Wu Cho-liu with translations of their works. Accordingly, we have included as an appendix the speech Professor Kuo-ch'ing Tu delivered on April 30, 2004, at the inauguration of the Lai Ho and Wu Cho-liu Endowed Chair in Taiwan Studies on page 245 as a reference.