FOREWORD

by Kuo-ch'ing Tu

The Taiwan Literature Series in English translation is published with the purpose of introducing to English readers voices of Taiwan literature from recent publications in Taiwan, namely, Taiwanese writers' and scholars' viewpoints on their own literature. This is to promote a better understanding and effective knowledge among scholars abroad of the current state and tendencies of literature as it has developed in Taiwan, as well as to enhance the study of Taiwanese literature from international perspectives. For the time being this is an annual journal, and, if funding permits, will be semi-annual. The contents of each issue comprise critiques, fiction, essays, poems, and studies; and publication, selection of articles, and translation into English are carried out by the Forum for the Study of World Literatures in Chinese under the aegis of the Interdisciplinary Humanities Center of the University of California at Santa Barbara.

The historical experience of the Taiwanese people in the past 100 years has shaped a unique character in the development of Taiwan literature. In a nutshell, historically Taiwan was ceded to Japan by the Manchu Government in 1895 as a result of the first Sino-Japanese war, and was separated from China as a colony of Japan for fifty years. In 1945 at the end of WWII Taiwan was returned to China, but its direct relation with Mainland China lasted only four years, until 1949, when the Nationalist government retreated to Taiwan, having been defeated in the civil war by the Communists. Taiwan was again separated from Mainland China and has been for almost fifty years to this day. To achieve the goal of national unification, in the early eighties, Yeh Chien-ying, member of the Standing Committee of the National Peoples Congress, declared nine points of a peace proposal, adopted an open-door foreign policy, and reasserted that Taiwan is an inseparable part of China. As a consequence Taiwan literature became a prominent subject of study among scholars in China. On the other hand, in Taiwan at the end of the eighties, scholars responded to this phenomenon in the mainland, as well as to increasing concerns about the history and future of the island, by directing their deepest attention to the study of their own literature and culture; and thus, as it appeared, they also attracted the attention of scholars in Japan and Germany to focus their research on Taiwan literature, which has more and more become a distinct field of international scholarly endeavor in the nineties.

With such a historical background, the unique character and the diversity of Taiwan literature bear an important significance as a research subject in the following respects:

Taiwan literature during the Japanese occupation offers new ground to be reclaimed by research. The development of Taiwan New Literature began in the early twenties under Japanese rule. Although it was influenced by the New
Literature Movement of May 4, 1919 in China, it also received a baptism from modern Western literature via Japan, and thus from the very beginning it carried within itself the adaptability of cosmopolitanism and the complexity of a multicultural origin. In other words, Taiwan literature has developed under the influences of three major modern cultures: Chinese, Japanese, and Western. Looking back over the last 100 years, we see that the influences from Japan and China are equally divided, each for fifty years, and the influence from the West, direct and indirect, has never been interrupted. However, under the autocratic rule of the rigidly China-oriented KMT, the study of Taiwan literature during the Japanese occupation period was taboo until 1987, when martial law was lifted, and only then did Taiwan literature become an object of research in reality. Taiwan literature of the Japanese period, which has become a favorite research subject of many devoted scholars in Japan, is now, so to speak, a new field of study, awaiting continuing effort and discovery from scholars to come.

Comparative study of literatures of Taiwan and China is a promising and challenging field. The history of literature in Taiwan and that in Mainland China bear many similarities and differences (preceding or following one another) that merit comparison. Before the end of the Cultural Revolution in China, Taiwan represented China in the international arena and was often taken as a paradigm for study of China. For a mainland researcher, modernist literature, which emerged in Taiwan during the sixties, is an indispensable page in the history of modern Chinese literature in its integrity, because it fills the blank in creative writing caused by the Cultural Revolution. In the eighties, after China adopted a new open policy, modernist literature came into vogue with the appearance of capitalistic social forms, distantly reflecting the modernism glowing in Taiwan in the sixties.

As for the duet of literary phenomena of post-modernist society echoing on both sides of the Taiwan Strait, its merit for comparative study goes without saying. Taiwan literature received the influence of Western modernism in the early thirties at the same time as the Japanese literary world. Its experience of precedence in the course of modernization, in contrast with the development of modern literature in China, provides an interesting comparative topic that is certainly worthy of exploration.

Taiwan literature is an important member of world literatures in Chinese. During the twentieth century, Chinese all over the world have formed a cultural diaspora, and have naturally expanded the geographical area of literature written in Chinese. The development of literature written in Chinese has become a worldwide phenomenon that is attracting attention in the nineties. Many "overseas writers" originally came from Taiwan. Their works, as long as they are related to the writers' experience of Taiwan, should be taken as part of Taiwan literature. In the domain of world literatures in Chinese, whether in quality or in quantity, Taiwan literature occupies an important position. Basically Taiwan has been an emigrant society, subject to foreign influences, and therefore the
development of Taiwan literature and that of literature in Chinese elsewhere in the world share similar emigrant characteristics. Moreover, because of the common cultural tradition, the study of Taiwan literature will provide a valuable reference to the study of other literatures in Chinese in the world.

It seems that the growth of literatures in Chinese hereafter will occur on a par with that of literatures written in other major languages, and thus the importance of the study of Taiwan literature can be perceived without further explanation. In fact, the history of Taiwan literature itself is so much imbued with foreign elements and international influences that its study must be free from narrow provincialism and develop a better international perspective to achieve a more realistic understanding. We hope that the publication of this series in English will help promote such an approach in research and enhance mutual understanding between different cultures worldwide. For the pieces included in the first issue, we specifically selected those that reflect the society of Taiwan and convey their authors’ views on Taiwan literature. In addition, we particularly recommend two articles: one "The Colonial and Postcolonial Dilemma of Writers: From Taiwan's 'Imperial Subjects' Literature' to German Literature after Unification--A Tentative Comparison" by Professor Helmut Martin of Ruhr University Bochum, Germany; and the other, "The Study of Taiwanese Literature: A Conflict in National Identity" by Professor Lin Jui-ming of Ch'eng-kung University, Taiwan. The former gives an example of observing a literary phenomenon in Taiwan from an international perspective, and the latter effectively describes the specific character of Taiwan literature within a dual structure of nationalism, as well as the background and reference materials for its study; for students interested in this field it is a valuable guide.

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