Foreword to the Special Issue on Lung Ying-tsung

Kuo-ch'ing Tu

Lung Ying-tsung (1911-1999) is an outstanding Taiwanese writer of the period under Japanese rule and, as a representative author of his generation, his position in the history of Taiwan literature is secure. This special issue aims to introduce to the English reader the characteristics of his works in general, and, through his works, an understanding of his circumstances and thoughts as a Taiwanese writer during his lifetime under the Japanese occupation.

Lung Ying-tsung is the penname of Liu Jung-tsung. When read according to the Japanese pronunciation, both names, although written with different characters, come out the same: Ryū Eisō. Lung Ying-tsung was born to a Hakka family of a small merchant at Peipu, Hsinchu. At thirteen when he was in the fifth grade of a public elementary school, his teacher Mr. Narimatsu initiated him into literature with the anthology of Japanese verse, Man'yōshū [Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves, 7th and 8th centuries]. At sixteen, he started to read the Japanese poets Shimazaki Tōson (1872-1943) and Kitahara Hakushū (1885-1942), the Chinese poet Du Fu (712-770), and the German poet Heinrich Heine (1798-1856). At twenty, he entered Taiwan Commercial and Industry School and began to read classics of world literature, especially Maupassant (1850-1893), Zola (1840-1902), Flaubert (1821-1880), Dostoyevsky (1821-1881), Turgenev (1818-1883), and Chekhov (1860-1904). Through Japanese he came into contact with the Japanese literary tradition and the cream of world literature. After graduation he worked as a bank clerk until he retired at the age of sixty-six.

In April of 1937, Lung Ying-tsung's maiden work Papaya no aru machi [The Town with the Papaya Trees] won an outstanding award at the ninth contest sponsored by the magazine Kaizō in Japan. In June he went to Tokyo and made the acquaintance of people in literary circles and started to publish his works in Bungei shuto [Metropolitan Literature] and other periodicals in all genres of fiction, poetry, essays, and critiques to make a brilliant show of his talent. In July, on the way back to Taiwan, he learned of the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese war. Since then the enforcement of Japanization in the society of Taiwan became intensified, and the literary world turned its direction in response to the situation. In December of 1939, Nishikawa Mitsuru (1908-1999) gathered Japanese and Taiwanese writers to establish the Taiwan Bungeika Kyōkai (Taiwan Literary Men's Association), and Lung Ying-tsung was invited to be a member; in January of 1940 the association organ Bungei Taiwan [Literary Art Taiwan] was founded and Lung Ying-tsung was a member of the editorial committee. Lung Ying-tsung's creative activities in Japan began in 1937 when the war started and continued until 1946 after the war when the Japanese column in Zhonghua ribao [China Daily] was abolished. In November of 1943, he published a volume of literary critiques entitled Kodoku na shimi [The Lonely Bookworm]; in an essay with the same title included in the volume he expressed his views on life and literature, which was translated and published in the 19th issue of this journal in July 2006.
In 1942 Lung Ying-tsung quit his job at the bank to become an editor of Taiwan níchinichi shinpō [Taiwan Daily News]. In the same year, he and Nishikawa, Hamada Hayao (1909-1973) and Chang Wen-huan (1909-1978) participated as representatives of Taiwan writers in the first Dai Tō-A Bungakusha Taikai (Greater East Asian Writers Convention) held in Tokyo. Lung Ying-tsung, Lü Ho-jo (1914-1951) and Yang Kuei (1906-1985) were the most important writers of the war period, and all of them were inevitably targeted and dispatched to various areas to experience military life in order to enlighten the people of Taiwan and enhance morale by their descriptions of Taiwan at war.

In the first few years after the war, Lung Ying-tsung continued to write stories and critiques in Japanese. In 1946 he was in charge of the Japanese section of China Daily until the Japanese column was terminated in October of the next year, when he returned to the banking business as a clerk at a cooperative bank until he retired in 1976. Since he could not adapt himself to writing in Chinese, his creativity decreased sharply. In 1978 he published his novel Hongchen [Red Dust], written in Japanese and translated into Chinese by Chung Chao-cheng, which was serialized in Minzhong ribao [People's Daily] but discontinued due to poor reception. In 1987 his first collection of stories in Chinese, Du Fu zai Chang'an [Du Fu in Chang'an] was published. Although it attracted attention from literary circles again, time had run out for him as his works in Chinese were not on the same level with his early works. In 1999, he died of lung cancer at the age of eighty-nine.

As a writer, Lung Ying-tsung's position in the history of Taiwan literature and the characteristics of his works can be summarized as follows:

1) As one of the most important writers of the period under Japanese rule, Lung Ying-tsung was influenced by various trends of world literature and arts, such as French and Russian Realism, Naturalism, and Modernism, and the Japanese New Sensualist School, and his most important work was no other than the award-winning story of 1937, "The Town with the Papaya Trees." The distinctive characteristics of this story lie in its artistic use of the New Sensualist verbal expression and Naturalist detailed depiction to analyze the life frustration of an urban petty intellectual who had no hope for the future and no way to change reality and, in broken spirits, became decadent and met destruction. Such a Modernist-like moody introspective character reflects the frustrated psychology of a Taiwanese toward the end of Japanese colonial rule, together with the agony and spiritual devastation of the intelligentsia, a striking contrast to the literature of resistance based on the national consciousness in the earlier period. As we know, the new Taiwan literature launched by Lai Ho in the 1920s was based on national consciousness and leaned toward realism, with subject matter and dominant theme intending to reflect social reality, resist colonial rule, and criticize feudal ideology. As Ozaki Hotsuki remarked in his essay "Taiwan bungaku ni tsute no oboegaki" [A Note on Taiwan Literature: Three Works by Taiwanese Writers, 1961], in a comparison of Lung Ying-tsung's "The Town with the Papaya Trees," Yang Kuei's "Newspaper Carrier," and Lü Ho-jo's "Oxcart," "If we read through these three works in chronological order, we get a sense of being able to follow in some degree an awareness of Taiwanese writers shying away from resistance and tending toward resignation and even submissiveness." However, Lung Ying-tsung's works, different in interest, opened up a new path with delicate sensibility and a penetrating mind to explore a modern individual's frustrated psychology and doubt about life. As remarked by the critic Yeh Shih-t'a'o, Lung Ying-tsung was "a writer of the Japanese period who had a world view broadest in scope;" "his
modern intellectual temper and penetrating mind” have opened up “a more avant-garde and profound world” for new Taiwan literature.

2) With his award-winning debut and as a rising writer recognized by the central literary circles in Japan in 1937, Lung Ying-tsung was active for a period of eight years from 1937 with “The Town with the Papaya Trees” published to the end of the war in 1945, altogether about twenty-three stories produced. In addition to Bungei Taiwan [Literary Art Taiwan] run and controlled by Nishikawa, the major periodicals that had published his works include Taiwan geijutsu [Taiwan Arts], Taiwan shin-minpō [Taiwan New People’s News], Bungei shuto [Metropolitan Literary Arts], Taiwan nichinichi shinpō [Taiwan Daily News], and Taiwan bungaku [Taiwan Literature], making him a well-recognized writer of the time. In January of 1940 when Literary Art Taiwan was founded, Lung Ying-tsung as a writer was invited to be an editorial committee member. The journal had sixty-two members, among whom sixteen were Taiwanese, and there were only two Taiwanese writers on the editorial committee: Lung Ying-tsung and Chang Wen-huan. The publisher and editor of this journal was Nishikawa, whose inclination to aestheticism and exoticism tended to develop a style emphasizing “artistry and local taste.” In other words, those “naichijn” (people of the metropole) living in Taiwan, in their creative works, wrote about their life experience in “gaichi” (overseas territory), expressed their nostalgia as foreigners, and described the local conditions, customs, and cultural scenes of native peoples in an attempt to develop the literature of Taiwan into an exotic “gaichi bungaku” (colonial literature) as an extension of the history of the motherland Japan’s literature. According to a study by Luo Ch’eng-ts’un, Ryū Eisō kenkyū [A Study of Lung Ying-tsung], an M.A. thesis, Tsukuba University, 1984, Lung Ying-tsung’s position in the group of Literary Art Taiwan in the school of “colonial literature” seemed to be one of a misfit. Once he wrote a critique on the path taken by “gaichi bungaku” in Literary Art Taiwan [Vol. 1, No. 5, October 1940], saying that “in general most of them are works running counter to life.” In an article, “Taiwan bungaku no tenbō” [A View of Taiwanese Literature] published in Ōsaka asahi shinbun [Osaka Asahi Newspaper], February 1941, he brought forth his view on “gaichi bungaku” as follows:

The so-called “gaichi bungaku” is not the kind of literature that aspires to make its presence felt in literary circles of this land. It should be a literature written for this land, not a literature in imitation of this land, nor is it an exotic literature that gives a superficial description of a foreign land. The nature of “gaichi bungaku” is neither nostalgia nor decadence, and it should be the literature written to advance the local literature by those who grew up in this land, will be buried in this land, and have a strong love for this land. This kind of literature is not consumers’ literature but producers’ literature. (See Issue No. 19 of this journal, July 2006.)

From the above we can see that the “gaichi bunkau” in Lung Ying-tsung’s mind is in fact “hondo bungaku” (nativist literature). He considered that the flower that bloomed in the colony Taiwan was not an extension of Japanese literature, but “a variety of the flower of Japanese literature.” It appears that his literary view was quite different from the “exoticism” perceived by the writers of the metropole Japan. Involved in the group of “gaichi bungaku,” his literary belief and the path he took for creative works looked united
with Japanese writers but differed at heart, and his solitary situation is not hard to imagine.

3) Lung Ying-tsung's creative activities basically correspond to the war period, especially from 1941 when the situation entered preparedness for war, a time when writers could be requested at anytime to respond to the situation in cooperation with the military. Naturally the relation of Lung Ying-tsung's works with the war has become a major concern of research among scholars. In 1943, Lung Ying-tsung prepared a collection of stories to be published but had to give it up due to interference from the government-general. According to Luo Ch'eng-ts'un, the collection contained ten stories dealing with the daily life of the common people in Taiwan; although there were two stories with the war situation for a setting, the rest were aloof from the times or society. The publication was banned perhaps because it was not relevant to the war. The literary characteristics of escaping from reality, remaining detached from the times and place with history nonexistent, namely the phenomenon of escapist literature, after the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese war, could also be found in the "gaichi bungaku" written by Japanese writers, or even in the works of Realist Taiwanese writers such as Chang Wen-huan and Lü Ho-jo. Once the society entered the set-up for war, literature had to cooperate with the state of affairs, and one could not but feel the spiritual burden of a heavy and boundless darkness on the back of the writers during that time.

Following the advance of the "Japanization movement" until the end of the war (1937-1945), Lung Ying-tsung did not write a story with becoming a Japanese as its subject matter, and distinguished himself diametrically from other Taiwanese writers who contributed to the promotion of "kōnin bungaku" (imperial subject literature). However, the story "Gozen no gake" [A Precipice before Midday] describes an intellectual who sees at a train station the spectacle of a crowd sending off soldiers leaving for the front and feels "unbearable shame," because the soldiers are going to die for a noble cause and yet he is preparing to commit suicide over a woman. This story subtly suggests war cooperation and in his essays, critiques, and poems we do find some utterances in cooperation with the war. We have specifically selected some poems that reflect the war situation and a story that directly deals with the suffering caused by war, "Moeru onna" [Woman on Fire]. "Renbu no niwa" [The Wax-Apple Garden], published in 1943, describes the close relationship of a Taiwanese "I" and the family of a boy Fujisaki, taking care of each other without racial prejudice or class conflict. Later on Fujisaki goes to the battle front and when he returns, he doesn't mention the war but expresses how much he has missed "I" and his family after the separation. The theme of the story apparently transcends race difference and the war situation at the time, and even implies anti-war sentiment.

4) Lung Ying-tsung's "The Town with the Papaya Trees" not only was the work that brought the author instant fame but also was the prototype of his later works. The antagonist Chin Yusan was a petty intellectual of colonial Taiwan, who struggled for life in the society, felt hopeless for the future, and in disillusion sank into skepticism and nihilism toward life. The theme and the type of character like Chin Yusan continue to play a role in his later stories, including "Kō-ka" [The Huang Family], "Yoizuki" [Evening Moon], "Kaikō" [A Chance Encounter], and "Baku" [The Tapir].
The theme of characters suffering defeat is carried on in “Evening Moon,” published in 1940, which can be seen as an extension of “The Town with the Papaya Trees.” The antagonist Hō Eikon was an idealist in high school but lost enthusiasm for work after entering the society as a teacher, and in despair gradually fell into an abyss of skepticism, negative, and nihilistic, and eventually ended with the disintegration of his identity. The protagonist of “Tapir” not only found his dreams eaten by the beast but also his feelings, and completely fell into a cold and nihilistic world. However, in 1941 when “Shiroi sanmyaku” [White Mountains] was published, this type of character became a compromiser of fate and reality, seeing a dim light flickering in the vast darkness. At the end of 1941, to escape from the war situation, Lung Ying-tsung started to write a series of stories with To Nan’en as the protagonist, including “Shiroi sanmyaku,” “Ryūsetsuran to tsuki” [Century Plant and the Moon], and “Umi no yado” [A Home at Sea], and at the same time he started to write stories with Taiwanese women as the object, including “Shirarezaru kōfu” [Happiness Unknown to Others], “Aru onna no kiroku” [The Record of a Woman], and “Gake no otoko” [A Man on the Cliff]. The protagonist To Nan’en was a meek and docile person, who “became a romantic in order to forget his reduced circumstances in reality.” Those stories have a strong characteristic of the “l-novel.” In the 1980s, Lung Ying-tsung acknowledged: “To Nan’en was me.” In this series of stories, the protagonist was seeking a way out, a belief to live on. In a story of “White Mountains,” which contains three independent short stories, when To Nan’en came to a small town on the east coast and saw a touching scene of an “unfortunate” family, an elder sister carrying her retarded younger brother on her back, and their mother watching the sea, he could not but feel “a picture of happiness combined with a heart-warming profound affection.” In the ordinary life situation, once a true feeling of life is revealed, whether mother love, affection between parents and children, or intimate relations of lovers, once one discovers the good of human nature, he is surprised to feel “the happiness unknown to others,” which arouses a desire to cherish life and live on.

“The Record of a Woman” and “Happiness Unknown to Others,” both published in 1942, depict the fate of a “simpu-a” (adopted daughter or adopted child bride), which was common in Taiwanese society. The former records the miserable life of a woman from one year old to the end of her life at fifty-four and describes her indomitable strength against her predestined fate; while the latter, which is even more touching, describes a woman who met a man plain-looking and physically ill but good-natured. They had pity for each other and got married. After more than twenty-years, the man passed away and she believed that she was “a vicor of life,” and recalled that the man often told her to be close to nature, and gave her a faith in life: “There is a profound revelation of life in nature, and nature will never betray us.” He was weak but good-hearted and had a deep attachment to nature and life. From their poor and ordinary life, the protagonist discovered the noble quality of human nature, which she cherished and from which she felt “the happiness unknown to others.”

In a life that may look “unfortunate” to others, one feels “unknown happiness.” The love that penetrates human nature becomes the theme of Lung Ying-tsung’s fiction in the later period. His protagonists were able to transcend despair, overcome nihilism, and come out of the enclosed world to find a way of redemption to be connected with the outside world and social reality. Lung Ying-tsung’s fiction of the later period thus transcended the limits of the war situation and found a universal theme of literature: Notwithstanding the hardships over time, love and nature support human life, which must live on.
Through his life, Lung Ying-tsung published more than one hundred sixty stories and numerous miscellaneous essays, poems and critiques, and can be considered the most prolific writer of the time under the Japanese occupation. In June 2006, the National Museum of Taiwan Literature hosted a celebration on the publication of Long Yingzong quanji [Complete Works of Lung Ying-tsung] in Chinese, eight volumes, and I happened to be in Taiwan to participate. Mr. Liu Chih-fu recalled the course his father had taken in pursuit of literature and mentioned that he didn't know until grown up that his father was a famous writer during the Japanese period, revealing a great deal of secret hardship and sorrow Lung Ying-tsung must have stored up kept for long after the war. On that occasion I said that Taiwan Literature: English Translation Series would like to come out with a special issue of Lung Ying-tsung's works in English. It took more than five years until now for my wish to be fulfilled.

As mentioned above, regarding Lung Ying-tsung's works, we have published in the previous issues of this journal two stories: "A Chance Encounter" (No. 2, December 1997) and "The Tapir" (No. 16, January 2005), and two essays: "A View of Taiwanese Literature" and "The Lonely Bookworm" (No. 19, July 2006). In this issue, we have selected six representative stories, including "The Town with the Papaya Trees," which were all translated from Japanese; we thank the translators, Dr. Lili Selden and Professor Robert Backus, the English editor of this journal, for their hard work and contributions. Due to a funding problem, from the last issue on, this journal has been published by the US-Taiwan Literature Foundation, a non-profit organization, and we are thankful for the editorial assistance provided by the Center for Taiwan Studies. We are also very grateful to Professor Hsu Chun-ya of the National Taiwan Normal University and Ms. Hsu Su-lan of the National Museum of Taiwan Literature for their help in obtaining the copies of the original texts in Japanese in a timely manner that facilitated the process of publication. This journal has now been in publication for fourteen years, twenty-eight issues to date, and we know there are still many works and writers that deserve to be translated. Along with the development of the US-Taiwan Literature Foundation, we will exert every effort to continue to publish.