The Nativist Voice of Taiwan Literature

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In the modern history of Taiwan, there are two epoch-making events that have great influence on the society and culture of this island, namely: the end of Japanese colonial rule in 1945 and the lifting of martial law under the Nationalist government in 1987. With the end of colonial rule, all political measures and the developments resulting from them have changed completely from a Japan-centered to a China-centered orientation, while the repeal of martial law permitted a Taiwanese consciousness to gain ground, and calls for a Nativist movement rose to confront the China-oriented leitmotiv which had dominated all social, political and cultural fields. In other words, since the end of World War II until the beginning of the seventies, literature in Taiwan claimed to be Chinese literature; but after the debate on regional literature in the seventies, Taiwanese awareness became ever stronger, and in the light of the social reality in Taiwan at the time, people started to reexamine Taiwan's native culture, which had been neglected heretofore. After the eighties, a new concept of Taiwan literature, which deviates from the view that it is Chinese literature, emerged, and ever since then, the definition of Taiwan literature and its orientation have become the focus of concern for many writers and scholars.

Going back to the origin, we note that the call for a Taiwanese consciousness in literary creativity started in the early thirties during the Japanese occupation period when "hsiang-t'u wen-hsüeh" (regional literature) and "T'ai-yan hua-wen" (Taiwanese vernacular) were advocated under the influences of the Proletarian literature movement in Japan and the vernacular literature movement in China. (See Yu Sheng-kuan, T'ai-yan wen-hsüeh pen-t'u-lun te hsing-ch'i yü fa-chan [The Rise and Development of Nativist Views of Taiwan Literature].) However, the call for a nativist literature taken up in the eighties was the opposite of the China-centered view of Taiwan literature, and the situation became one of confrontation between "Taiwanese consciousness" and "Chinese consciousness." Different standpoints entail different views, and these can be summed up as two polarized orientations, one toward China and the other toward Taiwan. One side holds that Taiwan literature should be defined within the category of Chinese literature, while the other tries to be free from the dominance of Chinese literature, emphasizing the fundamental position of Taiwan as well as the independence and autonomy of Taiwan literature. The former has been the position upheld so far, and it is not hard to understand; but the latter, asserted by the Nativists, which, along with the progress of the Nativist movement in political and cultural arenas, indicates a new turn in the development of Taiwan literature, deserves scholarly attention.

What the voice of Nativist literature in Taiwan asserts is that the time and place described in a literary work should be closely associated with the island of Taiwan and its people. Taiwan literature is a product of Taiwanese consciousness, which reveals itself in concern for the life and fate of the people living on the island, and identifies itself with the past, present, and future of the people, society, history, and
culture that exist on this land. Taiwan literature comprises literary works that express such a consciousness with artistic qualities. To take land and people as two essential elements in defining literature should be a matter of course, and nobody objects to it when it refers to the literature of any other place, whether of America or China. Nevertheless, in Taiwan, due to the tortuous route taken by the history of the island, many literary works exhibit no trace of the consciousness mentioned above. After martial law was lifted, Taiwan's society became diversified, many opinions are diametrically opposed to each other, and since the nineties the voice of Taiwanese consciousness as an essential quality of Nativist literature has become even more conspicuous.

Since the purpose of this journal is to introduce to English readers voices of Taiwan literature from recent publications in Taiwan, we made the voice of Nativist literature the theme of this issue. As a scholarly periodical, we hope to continue to introduce many other voices of Taiwan literature, so as to promote better understanding 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 Taiwan literature from international perspectives.

The view that Taiwan literature should be rooted in nativism finds typical expression in P'eng Jui-chin's assertion: "Provided that works sincerely reflect the history and reality of the lives of the people living on the island of Taiwan and are works rooted in this land, they can be called Taiwan literature." It makes no difference whether the writers were born in Taiwan or whether or not they reside in Taiwan; "as long as their writings establish a shared consciousness of common destiny with this land and their happiness, anger, grief, and joy are closely linked to the pulsating melody of this land, we can include them in the camp of 'Taiwan literature'." He considers this view to be a characteristic of "nativism" by which to scan and examine "Taiwan literature," and also a cornerstone for establishing Taiwan literature. P'eng Jui-chin's view is echoed by Professor Lin Jui-ming in his critique, "Wen-hsüeh ts'ung t'u-ti yü jen-min ch'u-fa" (Literature Originates from the Land and People). He holds that land and people are the outward manifestations of Taiwanese writers' conviction "shen-t'u pu-erh" (unity of body and land), and that this twofold spirit is the axis along which the history of Taiwan literature has developed as well as the fundamental characteristic of Taiwan literature. We especially introduce these two articles in the section of critiques.

Based on the view that land and people are the two main factors of literature, for fiction we have selected Hung Hsing-fu's "Wu t'u" (Our Land), Ts'ai Hsiu-nü's "Tao-sui lo t'u" (Rice Spikes Fallen to Earth), and an excerpt from Chan Ming-ju's Fan-tsai-wayte ku-shih (The Story of Huannawa) to reflect "the history and reality of the lives of the people living on the island of Taiwan." Hung Hsing-fu is recognized for his stories about the petty characters in the agricultural society of Taiwan after the war. Regarding creative writings, he once said, "To a writer with a sense of responsibility, literature is his religion. He will, at any cost, embrace the land and people he loves and cares about." He unfortunately died in a car accident in 1982. In memory of this talented writer who died young, the Hung Hsing-fu Hsiao-shuo Chiang (Hung Hsing-
fu Fiction Award) was established, and Ts'ai Hsiu-nü's short story "Rice Spikes Fallen to Earth" was the winner of the award in 1985. The selection of these two stories together, both rooted in the land, was done to have them supplement and enrich one another. Chan Ming-ju's The Story of Huannawa was the winner of the first million-yuan grand prize of the T'ai-wan Wen-hsüeh Chiang" (Taiwan Literature Award) sponsored by the Wen-hsüeh T'ai-wan Chi-chin-hui (Literary Taiwan Foundation) and the Ming-chung Jih-pao (People's Daily). It is a historical fiction reflecting the realities of life of the forefathers in the pioneering period of Taiwan history. In relation to this, we selected Chen Ming-ju's "Te chiang kan-yen" (Thoughts on Winning the Award) and Professor Ch'en Wan-yih's review and comment on the historical fiction in Taiwan. In addition, Yeh Shih-t'ao has been well recognized as a stalwart advocate of Nativist literature, and in his article "T'ai-wan hsiao-shuo te yüan-ching" (A Long-range View of Taiwan Fiction) he asserts: "Taiwan fiction should integrate all kinds of value systems, whether traditional, nativist, or foreign, to develop into works full of originality." He also maintains, "Fiction starts with describing unique encounters between human beings in a certain time and place, and, in the end, is able to express the eternal and universal human nature and the moral system with a worldwide perspective." This article was published in 1982, itself a historical document bringing out the concept of originality in Taiwan literature with a moderate and steady view and a global vision. Regarding poetry, we purposely selected the works of the Li (Bamboo Hat) poetry society, which represents the group of Nativist poets in Taiwan, to demonstrate their indirect and suggestive expression of their identification with the land and with its people's concerns about their life and realities. As for essays, the bird-watching expert Liu K'o-hsiang's "Sui niao tsou t'ien-ya" (Following the Birds to the End of the World), expressing concerns about the ecology and natural environment of Taiwan, also conforms to the theme of this issue.

Inasmuch as the Nativist view on Taiwan literature has been a link in the chain of the socio-political Nativist movement, it possesses a rebellious character in confrontation with the dominant influence at the mainstream, center, and supremacy of power, and often betrays the political implication of being oppressed, striving for the right to speak, and demanding independence. Taiwan literature under the Japanese rule was excluded from Japanese literature as "gaichi bungaku" (literature of an outlying region), and, as seen by the China-centered, it has been discussed in terms of "pien-chiang wen-hsüeh" (literature of the border area) as a tributary of Chinese literature. Therefore the appeal of Nativist literature in Taiwan implies the significance of root-searching, root-striking, and self-identification. Taiwan literature should be the artistic flower rooted in the land of Taiwan, but in the debate or discussion of the orientation of Taiwan literature, the discourse has often been dictated by consciousness of political power and cultural hegemony, and seldom phrased in terms of artistic quality and depth expressed in the works. To treat literary works simply as means of political struggle and ideological confrontation is a deviation often seen in the discourse on Taiwan literature and the viewpoints of the Nativists. From the articles translated in this issue, the reader will perceive that the editors have tried to select works that transcend ideology within a
politically sensitive theme. As we face the confrontation between the China-centered and the Taiwan-oriented, we hope that Taiwanese writers can transcend ideology and the entanglements of political struggle, and have the world in view beyond the horizon of Taiwan and China in order to create more artistic masterpieces with a universal value unlimited by time and place. Thus Taiwan literature will not only achieve prominence in the world of literatures written in Chinese but even prove itself competitive with world literatures written in other major languages.

This journal will be published two issues a year hereafter. The continuing support of the Council of Cultural Affairs in Taiwan as well as all the translators’ cooperation in spite of their busy schedules have made the publication of this issue smooth and successful as planned. We would like to express our appreciation, and at the same time we hope that more scholars and experts will join us in the future to improve the journal in content and in quality to better introduce Taiwan literature to more English readers.