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UN-NARRATING THE NATION

Literary History in Post-Authoritarian Taiwan

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Introduction

In 1999, as the millennium approached, a Conference on the Taiwanese Literary Canon was held in Taipei, organized by the United Daily Literary Supplement and the Council of Cultural Affairs. The event sought to establish a literary canon reflecting Taiwan's literary subjectivity – its social, cultural, and linguistic uniqueness – emphasizing the island's geographic and cultural distinctness from mainland China and amplifying the voices and profiles of the people of Taiwan. The conference produced a list of 30 works, spanning genres such as poetry, fiction, prose, drama, and theoretical writings. These works were later integrated into college textbooks and widely promoted. However, the limited scope of the list invited further contributions and complementary lists in subsequent years. Notably, the works selected were exclusively published post-1950, encompassing Taiwan's White Terror era under the Nationalist Kuomindang (KMT) and its subsequent transition to post-authoritarian rule. While the canon-selection process involved 67 literary scholars over three stages to ensure impartiality, the event sparked extensive media coverage and ignited political controversy, which often overshadowed purely literary concerns.

In 2013, after three years of preparation, the National Museum of Taiwan Literature announced the publication of the first "authoritative anthology on Taiwan's literary history". The 33-volume collection spans aboriginal oral literature, works from the Koxinga-era (17th century), literature from the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911), the Japanese colonial period (1898–1945), the post-World War II era, and recent literature in Taiwan's native languages. Compiled by 35 scholars and over 20 reviewers, the anthology was the first to document Taiwan's aboriginal oral literature while providing a chronological account of

literary development, categorizing literary works by genre from the 1970s onward.

Composing a literary history is never merely a matter of categorizing texts and events from the past; it emerges from the need to establish a coherent historical tradition in the present. Literary histories are conventionally national in focus and presupposing a unified literary language and culture. They aim to document the literary and intellectual development of nations over time, reflecting the rise of the modern nation-state and competition among nations. This process involves balancing homogeneity and heterogeneity – constructing internal consistency while emphasizing literature's distinctiveness compared to other national literatures. These histories typically seek to highlight a literature's "uniqueness" as a means of defining and producing the broader category of "national culture". National literary historiographies rest on the foundational assumption that the nation preexists the writing of its literary history. This perspective suggests that changes or developments in literature align with and reflect the unique characteristics of the nation itself. However, Taiwan complicates this picture. Taiwanese literary history is not merely a field where national consciousness and belonging is negotiated but also a productive space where cultural nation writing occurs, a process of actively creating national consciousness and subjectivity.

In this paper, I explore Taiwanese literary history as a spatio-temporal field where national identity is actively created and negotiated. While the concept of the "nation" has often been dismissed as obsolete in academic discourse, I argue that, given Taiwan's unique historical and geopolitical context, it remains a vital yet contested framework. The discussion begins with accounting for why the nation has persisting relevance as a critical construct, followed by a brief overview of Taiwan's historical trajectory of nation formation and the creation of cultural national consciousness by means of literary history. Drawing on Homi Bhabha's concept of "the nation as a contested space", I examine how pedagogical nationalism is challenged by the performative mode, which emerges in what Bhabha describes as the "scraps, patches, and rags of daily life". As a key example, I analyze the anthology *Hundred Years of Taiwanese Literature*, published in 2018 and co-authored by a group of twelve millennial authors.

The Nation: A Contested Concept

In Taiwan, the "national question" has long been a polarizing issue. The island's complex political relationship with China means that engaging with the concept of the nation often risks drawing participants into divisive debates about Taiwanese independence versus reunification with China. These discussions frequently deepen ideological rifts rather than foster constructive dialogue. Furthermore, Taiwan's Cold War history profoundly shaped Taiwan's intellectual discourse, which has been heavily influenced by U.S. metropolitan theory and postcolonial thought. Postcolonialism and globalist discourse essentially rendered the concept of the "nation" obsolete, often dismissing it as "a thing of the past". Nationalism in postcolonial contexts was criticized as a lingering residue of Western imperialism.

The celebration of cosmopolitanism and internationalism further contributed to framing the "death of the nation", privileging supposedly more "progressive" concepts. Yet, these global formations, aiming to transcend nationalism, were themselves built on exclusionary and teleological frameworks. For example, supra-national alliances like Pan-Asianism often mirror the same hierarchical structures they sought to dismantle. Additionally, as a matter of fact, the history of culture with its broader political and social transformations is no longer confined within national boundaries but extends beyond. As Alexander Beecroft aptly observes:

> There is reason to suppose that the national-literature system may be reaching the limits of its capacity to effectively reduce information [i.e., narrate literary history] at precisely the moment when globalization and the gradual weakening of Euro-American economic hegemony are beginning to suggest the need to incorporate non-European literature more fully into the system.[1]

Nevertheless, this paper argues that the concept of the "nation" remains critical for Taiwan. The insights of Frantz Fanon and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o support this claim. Drawing from the (post-)colonial histories and experiences of their respective countries – Martinique and Kenya – both scholars maintain that national liberation is

essential, not as an endpoint, but as a necessary first step toward broader global unity. Fanon's critique of Negritude, which he dismissed as an overly idealistic and ahistorical construct disconnected from lived realities, highlights his insistence on situating liberation struggles within their historical contexts. His assertion that "every culture is first and foremost national" emphasizes the foundational role of national consciousness in resistance movements.[2] Similarly, Ngũgĩ underscores the importance of reclaiming native languages, describing language as an image-forming agent crucial for decolonizing the mind and cultivating a sense of national consciousness.[3] Both scholars argue that the national remains significant as long as systems of oppression endure. For them, national liberation must precede international liberation. Building on these perspectives, Taiwanese sociologist Chen Kuan-hsing advocates for psychological and cultural decolonization. In *Asia as Method,* Chen argues that political decolonization in Taiwan has failed to address the cultural and psychological residues of colonial rule. Taiwan's entanglement in cold war geopolitics disrupted the process of decolonialization and de-imperialization, as the nation became enmeshed in globalization and neo-imperialist capitalism. For Chen, nation-building in Taiwan is not about rejecting the world, the West, or metropolitan theory. Rather, it is about reclaiming Taiwan's history, culture, language, and autonomy as critical tools of resistance against both past and ongoing forms of imperialism and domination. Chen's vision of nation-building is therefore not a strategy of isolation but of grounded resistance – a means of asserting autonomy and identity while maintaining the ability to critically engage with global discourses. Articulated through his concept of "internationalist localism", Chen's framework moves beyond unconditional identification with the nation-state. While acknowledging the nation-state as a historical product, he maintains a critical distance from it. This approach emphasizes the creative possibilities that arise from the interplay of local and colonial histories, fostering a respect for tradition without essentializing it. Unlike binary oppositions that pit the local against the global or tradition against modernity, internationalist localism reinvestigates value systems and practices without reifying them. Through "inter-referencing", Chen positions Asia and the

Global South as comparative horizons, enabling Taiwan to reclaim its history and cultural identity while engaging meaningfully with the world.[4]

Becoming Taiwanese

Historically, before Japanese colonization in 1895, Taiwan lacked the characteristics of a unified nation in governance and cultural identity. The island's population consisted of fragmented groups, each with its own distinct languages, customs, and traditions. These spoken languages were mutually incomprehensible and lacked a standardized written form. The population included Austronesian indigenous peoples (approximately 2,5 % of the total population) and successive waves of Chinese immigrants, primarily Hoklo and Hakka, who began arriving in the 14th century. These settlers sought arable land, fled persecution, or, after 1949, escaped Mao Zedong's communist forces (so-called "mainlanders" comprising about 12 % of the population). For Taiwan, a settler society with a creole national narrative, reclaiming a common cultural identity means walking a tightrope.[5]

Stuart Hall defines cultural identities not as fixed essences but as dynamic and fluid "positionings" that change continuously over time. According to Hall, identity is not a timeless, universal concept; instead, it is shaped by the interplay of history, culture, and power. Constructed through a blend of memory, fantasy, narrative, and myth, cultural identity involves a process of both "being" and "becoming".[6] And indeed, by the mid-20th century, Taiwan's population had developed a distinct identity blending elements of Japanese influence with creolized Chinese traditions. This hybrid cultural identity, shaped by decades of Japanese governance, diverged significantly from the culture of Mainland China, which had followed a vastly different historical trajectory. The arrival of the Kuomintang (KMT) and the "mainlanders" after 1945 further complicated this identity, creating a cultural clash between what was now recognized as native Taiwanese and the newcomers. This division, deeply entrenched along ethnocentric lines, persisted through four decades and Taiwan's gradual progression toward liberalization and democratization, marked by competing Sinocentric and Taiwan-centric cultural discourses.

While the idea of a "Taiwanese nation" is primarily a post-colonial construct that emerged following political de-colonialization, the processes of psychological and cultural decolonialization are still ongoing. Taiwan's rapid shifts in political power over the past two centuries have forced its people into frequent and often imposed identity transitions, resulting in what has been described as a "schizophrenic condition". Consequently, the feelings of non-belonging and in-betweenness are not merely theoretical constructs but are deeply rooted in the lived historical experiences of the Taiwanese people.

The concept of the nation in Taiwan aligns with and yet transcends Anthony D. Smith's classical definition of a nation as "a human population sharing a historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass, public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members".[7] Taiwanese settlers' national consciousness was less rooted in a shared cultural origin or a homogenous language. Rather, it coalesced around their collective experiences of colonization and struggle, shaped in response to imported Japanese and Chinese nationalist frameworks.[8]

While the formal nationalisms of Japan and China left indelible marks on Taiwanese society, politics, and culture, Taiwanese identity emerged dialectically, through both engagement with and resistance to this serial colonialism. In essence, nation formation in Taiwan took place both within and beyond the formal frameworks of colonial nationalism. Generations of Taiwanese simultaneously aligned with and concurrently opposed the colonial state's nationalisms; they also struggled and at the same time utilized modern colonial infrastructures. In doing so, counter-cultures and common-sense solidarity across ethnic, class, and cultural divides came into being.[9]

National Literary History

The idea that literature, particularly the novel, plays a crucial role in the realization of a nation is widely acknowledged. Novels are instrumental in bringing the imagined community of the nation into the realm of everyday life. They "not only not conceal the nation's inner differences but manages to turn them into a story".[10] Literary histories, often regarded as "a sort of meta-literary history", are con-

ventionally organized chronologically around a suprapersonal entity such as genre, nation, language or historical ethos.[11] This structure assumes shared characteristics that evolve over time. Most literary histories are tied to nations, emphasizing a unified literary language and culture, reflecting the rise of the modern nation-state and its competition with others. In 19th-century Europe, modern literary history rested on the premise that understanding national literatures required comparison with other literary traditions – a perspective that aligned with the political drives of the time for national unification and identity, as well as with international competition and difference. National literary history sought to construct internal unity and external distinctiveness, creating a narrative of the nation's literary development to reinforce its national identity and culture.

In Taiwan, the 1980s marked the beginning of a political tug-of-war, with the cultural elite largely aligning with either Sinocentrism (promoted by the KMT) or Taiwan-centrism (championed by the Democratic Progressive Party, DPP). Following the lifting of martial law in 1987, Taiwan experienced a surge of "China fever", initiated by an avalanche of cultural exchanges and non-governmental activities across the Taiwan Strait. In just the first year, approximately 600,000 Taiwanese traveled to China, engaging with the much-touted "cultural homeland" that the KMT long had promoted. However, when sentiment met reality, stark cultural and political differences became evident. The initial enthusiasm soon gave way to widespread disappointment and even aversion, fueling a burgeoning Taiwanese consciousness that was further strengthened by escalating aggression from the People's Republic of China (PRC). By the mid-1990s, cultural policies and artistic endeavors had coalesced into an ambitious project to construct a unique Taiwanese subjectivity. This effort involved shedding historically imposed Sinocentric frameworks through a process of "othering" and in the course of the missile threats in the mid-1990s the once longed-for "homeland" turned into a brutal "enemy".[12]

The mid-1990s marked the zenith of fostering a "Taiwanese consciousness". Under the working title "Writing Taiwan", the conceptualization and canonization of Taiwanese literature were both a means to and a result of this cultural awakening. Key milestones included the institutionalization of Taiwanese Literature and Culture depart-

ments at universities,[13] the founding of the Association of Taiwanese Literature in 2016,[14] and the opening of the National Museum for Taiwanese Literature.[15] Literature was elevated to a "sacred enterprise", tasked with underpinning a mythologized national origin and destiny. As such, literature was imbued with "the mytho-poetic task of creating and naming a new national culture and polity".[16]

However, by the late 1990s, this Taiwan-centric cultural narrative, designed to forge "internal unity and external distinctiveness" began to falter. The project of constructing "Taiwaneseness" was deemed nationalist, imperialist, and colonial in nature. It not only excluded and racialized "mainlanders" (Chinese immigrants who had arrived at Taiwan after 1945 and their Taiwan-born descendants) but also marginalized indigenous peoples, who existed outside the alleged ethnic split. Indigenous communities, unwilling to celebrate the monumentality of national Taiwanese memory, criticized this post-colonial narrative as complicit in their ongoing colonization. Taiwan's most esteemed literary voices, such as Chu T'ien-hsin, herself a mainlander descendant, questioned the national project, challenging its exclusionary nationalism and its hermetic self-righteousness. These critiques revealed the limitations of the nativist project, evidencing the "nation as a contested space", to borrow a concept from Homi Bhabha.[17]

Canonizing Literary Taiwan

In Taiwan, the writing of literary history has been intrinsically tied to nation-building efforts. During the period of Japanese colonialization, Taiwan became integrated into the modern nation-state system, and literature emerged as a crucial medium for shaping national identity. Japanese scholars were among the first to construct Taiwan's literary history. In the 1940s, literary figures such as Shimada Kinji, a pioneer of comparative literature in Japan, and Mitsuru Nishikawa, editor of magazines such as *Formosa* and *Literary Taiwan,* framed Taiwan's literature as an extension of Japan's metropolitan culture. Their focus remained primarily on Japanese writers working in Taiwan, situating Taiwanese literary output within the context of "colonial" or "overseas" literature.[18] In contrast, Han scholar Huang De-Shi presented a different perspective in his 1943 series, *Taiwan's Literary History.*

Huang argued that Taiwan could serve as an independent subject of literary history, on par with England and Japan. He characterized Taiwanese nation formation as a process of indigenization and racial amalgamation – from settlers to natives – which enabled him to include multi-racial and multi-linguistic works in his narrative.[19]

From the late 1970s, amidst the rising democracy movements and the emergence of "Taiwanese consciousness", the concept of "Taiwan Literature" re-emerged. Writers and critics emphasized Taiwan's distinct identity, presenting it as a unified entity separate from China. The publication of the quarterly *Wenxue Jie* (lit. *Literary World* with the English subtitle *Literary Taiwan)* and *Taiwan Literature* marked the beginning of a deliberate effort to define and promote Taiwan literature as an independent tradition. Ye Shih-Tao's *An Introduction to the History of Nativist Literature in Taiwan* published in 1987, was the first post-war literary history written from a Taiwan-centered perspective.[20] Ye defined "Taiwanese consciousness" as rooted in the shared experience of colonization and oppression, making it the core spirit of Taiwanese literature. Still, Ye regarded Taiwan literature as fundamentally a transplant of Chinese literature, connected by the "umbilical cord of the motherland".[21] Taiwanese local identity and Chinese national identity were not viewed as mutually exclusive.

While Taiwan had published only two literary histories by 1987, three extensive histories of modern Taiwanese literature, covering both pre- and post-war periods, were published in China during the same time. Following the CCP's "reform and opening" policy in the late 1970s, Taiwan studies flourished in China. Research on Taiwanese literature became a key element of the CCP's "China reunification" agenda. Chinese scholars emphasized a "Chinese consciousness" in Taiwanese literature, highlighting the influence of China's May Fourth Movement and framing Taiwanese literature as an integral part of "Chinese national literature".

Building on Ye's work, Chen Fang-ming's *A History of Modern Taiwanese Literature* from 2001 offers the most comprehensive historiographic analysis to date, employing colonial and postcolonial frameworks.[22] Echoing China's May Fourth Movement, Chen identifies the founding of the Taiwan Cultural Association in 1921 as the starting point of modern Taiwanese literature. Nevertheless,

he also incorporates pre-colonial literature and works by indigenous groups, reflecting Taiwan's multifaceted cultural heritage. By the turn of the millennium, an "obsession with Taiwan" – to parallel historian C.T. Hsia's concept of modern Chinese writers' pre-1949 "obsession with China" as a moral and cultural burden – dominated cultural discourse in Taiwan. For nearly two decades, literary discourse in Taiwan functioned as a para-political discourse, with literary history largely serving a moral-political agenda.

In recent years, a new wave of literary works has emerged in Taiwan, authored by the "millennial generation" – writers born in the 1980s who share a common interest in revisiting and reinterpreting Taiwan's literary and historical past. Among these efforts, three works stand out: *The Contents of the Times* (2017),[23] *Anecdotes of a Magnificent Island: The Key* (2017),[24] and *Hundred Years of Taiwan Literature: 1900–2000*.[25] Each engages with Taiwan's literary history in distinct yet interconnected ways. *The Contents of the Times* blends historical and fictionalized portrayals of renowned Taiwanese writers, while *Anecdotes of a Magnificent Island: The Key* focuses on literary and artistic figures from the colonial period, transforming their lives into compelling fictional narratives. The collaborative *Hundred Years of Taiwan Literature: 1900–2000* (henceforth *Hundred Years*) stretches across the 20th century. Comprising 101 chronologically arranged stories, this collection, a blend of fact and fiction, showcases writers, literary movements, genres, places, and communities, paying homage mainly to lesser-known aspects of literary figures, events, groups, places, and texts that either have been overlooked or simply erased from historical records or displaced by the forces of neoliberal capitalist "progress".

The remaining part of this paper examines how questions of national literature and Taiwanese consciousness are explored in *Hundred Years* through the lens of the millennial generation. As will be shown, these authors' "stories about one hundred years of becoming Taiwanese literature" – the literal translation of the volume's title 百年降生：台灣文學故事 1900–2000 – is not merely a comprehensive record of Taiwan's literary legacy but a dynamic site for reimagining Taiwan's self-understanding and its place in the world as a contested and ever-evolving cultural nation. At the same time, it is a cultural and political positioning of the post-authoritarian generation.

Scraps, Patches and Rags

In *DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation* (1994), Homi K. Bhabha argues that nationalist discourses aim to forge a unified community out of diverse and fragmented groups. To achieve this, such discourses rely on two contradictory modes. On one hand, nationalism operates as a *pedagogical* discourse, presenting the nation as rooted in a shared origin and continuous, cumulative history. Simultaneously however, nationalism is also *performative*, constantly reinterpreting and reconstructing its cultural narrative. Bhabha highlights that the tension between these modes generates an "unstable nation as narration", where the diverse and layered representations constantly challenge nationalist efforts to impose a singular, homogenous vision of the nation. As he asserts, "the scraps, patches and rags of daily life must be repeatedly turned into the signs of a coherent national culture".[26] For Bhabha, the role of the self-aware interpreter is to embrace the performative mode, which fragments and constantly unsettles "the certainties of a nationalist pedagogy". By attending to these "scraps, patches and rags of cultural signification", interpreters can resist the seduction of the cohesive national myth and instead celebrate the multiplicity and hybridity that define the modern nation.[27]

Hundred Years is a playful celebration of multiplicity, multiglossia, and hybridity. Although the volume is co-authored, it is not collaboratively designed. Discontinuity intended, each chapter is written independently, with individual authors largely unaware of others' contribution. This deliberate "lack" of coordination disrupts the conventions of traditionally organized national literary histories.[28] Rather than attempting to construct a cohesive national myth, the volume engages with the scraps, patches, and fragments of past literary lives.

Its performative mode, however, does not primarily aim to disrupt or subvert the pedagogical nation. Instead, it focuses on what Bhabha terms the "unspoken traditions" of "colonials, postcolonials, migrants, minorities […] who will not be contained" within a "unisonant discourse".[29] By amplifying these overlooked traditions, voices, and pasts, the volume on the one hand equals an archeological undertaking, unearthing literary voices that had been forgotten,

overlooked, or repressed during shifts of serial colonializations. On the other hand, it gestures toward a solidarity that transcends ethnic, cultural, and generational boundaries, by lifting the little things and everyday lives unnoticed in fissures and interstices of history.

In his foreword, editor Lee Su-yon references three points of departure that frame this project and suggest an interpretative lens. The first is Nobel laureate Günter Grass' (1925–2015) novel *My Century*, a collection of 100 vignettes on 20th-century German history that was published in 1999. Grass had been introduced to the Taiwanese public as Germany's national moral authority on *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (coping with the past) through an exhibition at the National Museum of Taiwan Literature in 2012.[30] Through 101 "annual episodes" centered on political, cultural, social, ecological, and economic themes, *My Century* portrays German history "from below", disrupting linear chronological structures, using the present as a starting point from which the past and future are woven into the narrative.[31] In a different work, Grass coined the term "Vergegenkunft" (pastpresenture) to describe the interplay of past, present, and future, which also reflects an ethical principle: it resists forgetting by keeping the past alive in the present and connecting it to the future, ensuring that no historical moment ever truly concludes.[32]

The second point of reference is nativist writer Huang Chun-Ming's (1939–) essay "Reading Geography with Your Feet", which engages with Swiss psychoanalyst C. G. Jung's (1875–1961) ideas on identity formation and Huang's childhood experiences of geographic rootedness and being at home.[33] Huang has never wavered in his conviction that Taiwan does not belong to China, whether politically or literarily, on the contrary, he has consistently advocated for a distinct Taiwanese identity and independent political entity. For him, the creation of identity is not an abstract, external process that can be politically imposed, but rather an ongoing, fragile process of differentiation that requires a sensory, lived experience of being-in-the-world. "Localization" can only succeed when individuals and communities have a reliable and secure place to "walk on" for developing a mental and emotional sense of belonging. In Huang's view, Taiwan must be recognized as a territorial nation.

The third reference is the dramatic reappearance of Suniuo, also

known as Nakamura Teruo or Lee Kuang-hui, a Taiwanese aborigine presumed dead, who was discovered in the Indonesian jungle in 1975 – thirty years after Japan's surrender.[34] Suniuo's return epitomized collective amnesia, historical voids, and the layered victimization of indigenous peoples, but also highlighted the complex issue of intra-Asian entanglements stemming from a history of war and colonialization. As one of the last "holdouts" of the Imperial Japanese Army in Indonesian Borneo, Suniuo's identity was complicated by his origin as an indigenous person from Taiwan, then a Japanese colony, and by his involvement in the war. Was he Japanese? Taiwanese? Chinese? A collaborator? A victim of colonial power?

Reclaiming Japanese Colonial Legacy

In *Hundred Years*, the Japanese colonial period emerges as an inexhaustible source of literary figures, texts, and events that resist reduction to a simplistic dualistic framework of colonized versus colonizers or resistance versus collaboration. The work highlights a significant body of Japanese-language works by both Taiwanese writers and Japanese writers who either emigrated to Taiwan or were born there. As Chiu Kuei-fen remarks, "*100 Years of Taiwanese literature* also takes pains to reclaim the Japanese colonial legacy".[35] For instance, in chapter 1904, we encounter the Japanese sinologist and poet Momiyama Ishuu (1855–1919), who regards Taiwan as his "spiritual homeland" amid Japan's ongoing Westernization and modernization. In Taiwan, his traditional Chinese education and self-identity still holds cultural capital. Alongside the tradition-oriented Taiwanese scholarly elite, he engages in traditional Chinese poetry and classical literature and participates in the intellectual salon culture within the refined setting of the Japanese Governor-General's office. The fact that he also became an instrument of a colonial government relying on the tacit collaboration of the Taiwanese elite is only implied.

This "inverted colonial perspective" however, challenges the pedagogical nation, as it focuses on Japanese individuals who, fleeing Westernization and modernization of Edo (Tokyo), took spiritual refuge in the traditional environment in Taiwan. These were often individuals who had failed in the metropole and were able to promote

and elevate their own cultural capital in the colony. At the same time, in Taiwan, they mitigated the colonial government's policies and played a key role in trans-cultural literary events. "In fact, Ishuu did not create anything innovative, nor was he a great leader. However, had he not come to Taiwan, this stage, for literature and politics, would not have existed".[36] These complex interactions raise important questions for contemporary literary historians: the literature and culture of Taiwan during this period can neither be understood merely as independent artistic expressions nor as mere tools of colonial governance. In the narrative, the period is framed as "a great time", when various forces – colonizers, the colonized, and traditional literati and modern intellectuals – interacted and shaped the cultural landscape in ways that resist simple categorization.

Another story that unsettles the pedagogical understanding of Japanese colonialism, told in chapter 1905, attends to the work of Tetsuomi Tateishi (1905–1980), a Taiwanese-born artist whose paintings reflect his painful journey between Japanese colonial rule and re-sinicization through the KMT. His later works express themes of homelessness and uprootedness, as Tateishi is forced to return to Japan in 1945, losing not only his "homeland" but also his ability to recreate and represent the "world". His displacement makes him "not only loose a memory but also a life".[37] When his works resurface in post-authoritarian Taiwan, they deeply resonate with the Taiwanese people. It is through the lens of the "Japanese Other" that the Taiwanese are able to rediscover and reconnect with their own heritage – an identity they have been alienated from for decades.

The entry for 1941 highlights Taiwanese-Japanese research and publication activities. The rediscovery of the collaborative magazine *Folklore Taiwan* provides a perspective of a transcultural collaborative space. A pioneering magazine on Taiwanese folklore by prominent Japanese and Taiwanese cultural figures, it featured contributions from academics, literary scholars, teachers, and local gentry, offering diverse articles on Taiwanese folk taboos, rituals, festivals, divination, legends, folk art, and more. Notably, it combined folklore studies with dialect writing, emphasizing local identity. *Folklore Taiwan* preserved a wealth of unique cultural information and explored topics previously overlooked in folklore studies. As such this

entry gives room for a colonial period portrayed as a melting pot of languages, cultures, and nations: "On Taiwan's stage, colonizers, the colonized, traditional writers, and emerging modern intellectuals all took the spotlight".[38]

Reclaiming Chinese Cultural Legacy

Hundred Years presents a narrative that challenges the trauma-based memory model, omnipresent in the memory boom and obsession with "authentic Taiwanese identity" in post-martial law Taiwan. It abstains from reading literature as a para-political discourse and presents individuals, events, memories, and texts that disrupt this model. Another aspect is that the volume embraces memories of "positive" experiences and depicts individuals and groups primarily as active subjects of their time, rather than passive "victims of history". Colonial and imperialist nationalisms were never absolute. A universal pursuit of self-determination and freedom developed in the interstices and places in-between, sparking bits and pieces of resistance into the nationalist machinery.

The entry for the year 1959 recreates poet and writer Chou Meng-tieh's historical book stall at the Café Astoria, located "across from the Chenghuang Temple on Wuchang Street" as a cosmopolitan literary and cultural hub in Taipei. The café, founded by Russian émigrés fleeing the Bolshevik army and later the Maoist forces, becomes a meeting place for the city's intellectual and literary life. Writers like Huang Chun-ming, San Mao (Taiwan's most well-known travel writer), Pai Hsien-yung (who authored first queer novel) and Lin Huai-Min (founder of Cloud Gate Dance Theater) frequent the café and hang out at the legendary book stall. Chou Meng-tieh, unaffected by the intellectual buzz, immerses himself in Ingmar Bergman's *Jungfrukällan*, savoring his coffee and transforming Buddhist texts into poetry in which he predicts "a century in which even stones will bloom".[39] The protagonist of the entry tacitly contrasts the Taiwan-centric image of the "mainlander": Chou, forced to drop out of school to join the army, was sent to Taiwan, following the defeat of Chiang Kai-shek's Chinese Civil War, never seeing his wife and three children again.

Chapter 1991 situates Taiwanese literature within both local and

global contexts, highlighting that local and global values are not mutually exclusive but instead mutually constitutive. For instance, the entry for 1991 begins by marking the political and cultural end of the cold war, referencing the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the death of Paul Engle (1908–1991).[40] Engle, who was married to Taiwanese writer Nieh Hua-ling (1925–2024) played a significant role in the global literary scene. Nieh, a mainlander who relocated to Taiwan after her father was executed by the Red Army during the Civil War, worked alongside Engle as the long-time director of the Iowa Writers' Workshop and co-founder of the International Writing Program (IWP). The IWP profoundly influenced both Taiwanese and global literary landscapes.

The end of the Cold War finally allowed for minor countries and minor literatures to have a meaningful dialogue and mutual understanding with one another – a perspective that had been obstructed during the decades-long rivalry between the two superpowers. Entry 1991 highlights Sino-Malay (Mahua) authors who migrated to Taiwan in the 1950s on an American scholarship for overseas Chinese during the cold war, a strategy that actually fostered Mahua literature in Taiwan. However, it needed the end of the cold war for these writers to come to the fore and gain significance within Taiwan literature.

Even before the cold war era, Taiwan literature is presented as an open process of transcultural flows and individual encounters, particularly between Japan, China, Korea, and Europe. A key example of this is the *Le Moulin Poetry Society*, appearing in various chapters as fulcrum between Japanese and Western modernism to develop a distinctive Taiwanese modernism. Without the multilingual abilities of the writers at the time, the cross-national encounters, and especially the mediating role of Japanese authors – Nishiwaki Junzaburo (1894–1982) who introduced French Dadaism and Surrealism into the Japanese literary field of the 1920s – this would never have happened. The 1914 narrative discusses Taiwanese surrealism in light of "the world", where "ideas flow and people are on the move. Taiwan is small, but the world is large".[41]

This shift underscores how Taiwan literature has continually evolved within the broader context of global and geopolitical transformations and how its cultural and literary identity has been shaped

by transnational movements and the merging of cultural and intellectual traditions. In concrete terms: Taiwan is part of the "world" and engages with the "world", naturally, Taiwan literature needs to be positioned in relation to world literature.

Chapter 1970, dedicated to Taiwanese writer Huang Ling-chih (1928–2016), attends to Chinese linguistic nationalism, which reigned at the time. In 1945, when Japan's colonial rule over Taiwan ends, 17-year-old Huang Ling-chih seizes the chance to buy over a thousand Japanese literary works, sold by departing Japanese, fueling his literary dreams. However, in 1946, the Kuomintang's De-Japanization abolishes the Japanese language, leaving Huang and his generation, educated in Japanese, linguistically stranded. While some adapted easily due to their Chinese proficiency, many writers, including Huang, struggled for decades to transition to writing in Chinese, their creative aspirations stifled by the loss of their native literary medium. Until the end of his life Huang insisted on writing in Japanese at the cost of not making his works available to Taiwanese readers until Taiwanese literati started to look back to works "before restoration".[42]

Un-narrating Taiwan-centric Literary History

In addition to inter-Asian entanglements, *Hundred Years* attends to the island's very first nations, their ethnic and cultural diversity, and to the rise of re-indigenization and localization movements. Emerging from the shadow of Japanese and Chinese literatures, Taiwan literature has struggled to gain recognition. However, the conceptualization of Taiwanese literature has been complicit in the ongoing colonialization of Taiwanese indigenous peoples. The emergence of Indigenous written literatures in Taiwan began in the 1980s, driven by democratic activism and global indigenous cultural revivals. The establishment of the Taiwan Association for the Promotion of Indigenous Rights in 1984 played a key role, mobilizing pan-Indigenous populations, advocating for minority rights, and fostering self-awareness among Indigenous communities.[43] Chapter 1971 focuses on Kowan Talall (Chen Yingxiong) a member of the Paiwan indigenous group, who presents the first Chinese-language work by an indigenous author. In *Traces of Dreams from a Foreign Land* (1971)

he shares "the tribal memories and the rich and beautiful myths he received from his Shaman mother". The most interesting part, however, is the chance encounter with Taiwanese mainland writer Lu Ke-Chang, and the lifelong literary friendship and the re-writing of each other's "native and tribal memories" that connected the two men. This not only sets Lu Ke-Chang into the history of Taiwanese indigenous literature but Kowan Talall into the history of Taiwanese literature.[44] With entry 1989 the narrative follows Syaman Rapongan, an indigenous Tao author, who returns to Lantau Island in 1989 after studying and working on the Taiwanese mainland. Determined to reconnect with his roots, he immerses himself in the traditions of the island, particularly the culture of flying fish. The journey of reconciliation is slow, but it shapes his writing. His first book, *The Myth of Yatsushiro Bay* (1992), captures the oral stories passed down by his elders, alongside the hard-earned lessons of his return: cutting wood with his father, diving alone at night, and mastering the art of building boats and fishing. Rapongan reconnects with the "tradition of flying fish" while actively engaging in environmental and land rights activism. Through his writing, he highlights the fragility of indigenous cultures and the delicate balance of ecosystems, emphasizing the Tao people's profound spiritual connection to fishing and ocean culture. His work bridges the past and present, illustrating the power of healing and cultural resilience. In this chapter, indigenous literature is treated as a distinct and stand-alone category. However, it is also recognized as an integral part of Taiwanese literature – a concept that began to take shape in the late 1990s.[45]

Un-narrating Nationalisms

How can postcolonial societies avoid falling into the trap of fostering neonationalisms when narrating the nation? More specifically, how can Taiwanese literary history reclaim its own history, culture, and language while constructing a shared past that also serves as a collective project for the future?

Hundred Years offers potential counter-narratives to various forms of nationalist self-assertion – whether rooted Japanese imperial colonialism, KMT Chinese nationalism, or Taiwan-centric nationalism.

This ambitious generational project weaves multifaceted, open-ended narratives that span across time, space, cultures, nations, presenting unfinished stories and improvised texts, ambiguous figures, unequivocal texts, and inextricable historical contexts. These narratives disrupt totalizing representations of Taiwan by nationalist ideologies and instead embrace patches and fragments of subjective memories, complicating and resisting linear, monolithic histories. By interweaving the past and the present, the colonial and the postcolonial, and the local and the foreign, the collection highlights the island's multilayered history and hybrid cultural heritage. In doing so, it challenges the pedagogical nation centered on a singular, unified identity, a coherent national narrative, a homogenized historical account, a totalizing image of people and culture, and even race and civilization.

Yet, *Hundred Years'* performative mode is less occupied with deconstruction than with reconstruction, recovery, reclaiming and rediscovering what had been lost, repressed, forgotten, and considered unimportant. This act of reclamation lays a foundation for the millennial generation's own writing and literary creation. The underlying assumption is that Taiwanese literature is a dynamic and evolving concept, one that rejects the notion of local and global identity spheres as mutually exclusive. Instead, it embraces their interdependence. This perspective is rooted in a broadly shared commitment to inclusion and diversity, rather than exclusion or primordialism. Identity, in this context, is depicted as an ongoing historical process – one that remains inherently unfinished. Moreover, identity is shaped not only by culture and ethnicity but also by the geographical and social spaces we inhabit, as well as by the distinct, lived experiences inscribed within those spaces.

Hundred Years is, above all, a symbolic generational self-positioning. Unlike earlier generations, who could justifiably claim, "We are never taught what freedom is, we are only taught how to sacrifice for it" (a quote from Svetlana Alexievich that introduces chapter 1947), this generation grew up in a post-authoritarian era. This period was defined by a shift toward academia as a privileged space for exploring Taiwanese subjectivity, identity, and homeland, while engaging with global discourses on postcolonialism, world literature, and other international issues.

Millennials' activism, notably their resistance to President Ma Ying-jeou's (KMT) "One China Policy", reached a climax during the 2014 Sunflower Movement, which protested secretive government negotiations for closer economic ties with the People's Republic of China. These struggles unfolded in a politically tumultuous transitional period, rife with ethnic, cultural, and social tensions, as Taiwan's rapid economic transformation into a post-industrial, neo-capitalist, and globally oriented society brought new complexities.[46] Amidst overwhelming choices and competing ideologies, reclaiming one's own history, culture, and literature becomes a way to counter Taiwan's hybrid paradox of balancing non-belonging. Following Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's insight – "A person must know where they stand in order to know in what direction they must proceed" – this act of reclamation might also be a means of grounding identity in a rapidly shifting world.[47]

Noter

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