CONSTRUCTING TAIWAN: TAIWANESE LITERATURE
AND NATIONAL IDENTITY

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In this work, I trace and reconstruct Taiwan’s nation-formation as it is reflected in literary texts produced primarily during the country’s two periods of colonial rule, Japanese (1895-1945) and Kuomintang or Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) (1945-1987). One of my central arguments is that the idea of a Taiwanese nation has historically emerged from the interstices of several official and formal nationalisms: Japanese, Chinese, and later Taiwanese. In the following chapters, I argue that the concepts of Taiwan and Taiwanese have been formed and enriched over time in response to the pressures exerted by the state’s, colonial or otherwise, pedagogical nation-building discourses. It is through an engagement with these various discourses that the idea of a Taiwanese nation has come to be gradually defined, negotiated, and reinvented by Taiwanese intellectuals of various ethnic backgrounds. I, therefore, focus on authors whose works actively respond to and engage with the state’s official nationalism. Following Homi Bhabha’s explication in his famous essay “DissemiNation,” the basic premise of this dissertation is that the nation, as a narrated space, is not simply shaped by the homogenizing and historicist discourse of nationalism but is realized through people’s diverse lived experience. Thus, in reading Taiwanese literature, it is my intention to locate the scraps, patches, and rags of daily life represented in a select number of texts that signal the repeating and reproductive energy of a national life and culture.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

In this work, I trace and reconstruct Taiwan’s nation-formation as it is reflected in literary texts produced primarily during the country’s two periods of colonial rule, Japanese (1895-1945) and Kuomintang or Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) (1945-1987). One of my central arguments is that the idea of a Taiwanese nation has historically emerged from the interstices of several official and formal nationalisms: Japanese, Chinese, and later Taiwanese. In the following chapters, I argue that the concepts of Taiwan and Taiwanese have been formed and enriched over time in response to the pressures exerted by the state’s, colonial or otherwise, pedagogical nation-building discourses. It is through an engagement with these various discourses that the idea of a Taiwanese nation has come to be gradually defined, negotiated, and reinvented by Taiwanese intellectuals of various ethnic backgrounds. I, therefore, focus on authors whose works actively respond to and engage with the state’s official nationalism.

Following Homi Bhabha’s explication in his famous essay “DissemiNation,” the basic premise of this dissertation is that the nation, as a narrated space, is not simply shaped by the homogenizing and historicist discourse of nationalism but is realized through people’s diverse lived experience. Thus, in reading Taiwanese literature, it is my intention to locate the “scraps,

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1 Some might disagree with the practice of categorizing Kuomintang’s authoritarian rule as colonial, as the current Taiwan state is a derivation of the same state structure laid out by that regime, and the official name Republic of China (R.O.C.), which used to denote territory under KMT’s effective control, is still in use on certain diplomatic occasions. However, Chen Fangming has put forth a cogent argument calling for a reassessment of the postwar period (after 1945). He argues that the period in question should be considered a “recolonized” period in Taiwanese literary studies (32). His reasoning is that KMT’s rule in Taiwan is similar in style to that of Japan. Both implemented cultural engineering to eradicate the indigenous population’s cultural memories and forcibly impose their respective nationalist ideologies on the society in general. Both forbade the use of local dialects, relied on military and police forces to terrorize the locals into submission, and practiced discrimination against native Taiwanese. More importantly, Chen’s argument allows one to see generations of Taiwanese writers who continue to critically engage with sociopolitical issues under different governments as forming a continuity, as opposed to placing arbitrary breaks among them simply by virtue of regime change. See Chen 28-34.
patches, and rags of daily life” represented in a select number of texts that signal the “repeating and reproductive” energy of a national life and culture (Bhabha, “DissemiNation” 297).

Research of Taiwanese literature has flourished in recent years in the English-speaking world. Important works published after the twentieth century include Leo Ching’s *Becoming Japanese*, Faye Yuan Kleeman’s *Under the Imperial Sun*, Sung-sheng Yvonne Chang’s *Literary Culture in Taiwan*, to name only a few. These path-breaking works have substantially broadened our knowledge about the themes, concerns, and scope of Taiwanese literature. Nevertheless, most of the analyses on Taiwanese literature produced in the past two decades have displayed a curious tendency: they deliberately avoided dealing with the difficult national question of Taiwan head-on. This is in part because the national question of Taiwan is in itself a highly controversial issue given the current political stand-off between Taiwan and China, and in part because most self-conscious studies of Taiwanese literature would avoid lending themselves to either the discourse of Chinese nationalism or that of Taiwanese nationalism as well as to the unproductive ideological debate regarding whether Taiwan should eventually reunify with China or declare independence.

In his study of Taiwanese colonial literature in the Japanese-ruled era, Leo Ching, for instance, argues against both Sinocentric and Taiwan-centric readings of Taiwan and proposes to situate Taiwanese literature and history in the triangular, regional dynamics of Taiwan, Japan, and China in order to complicate ethnocentric interpretation (8). Sung-sheng Yvonne Chang introduces in her study capitalism as an important shaping force of Taiwanese literature to counterbalance previous scholars’ uncritical tendency to simplify, politicize, and polarize Taiwanese texts along ethnocentric and nationalist lines (3-4). Pei-yin Lin and Bert Scruggs likewise point out and criticize the way in which nationalist thinking dominates the canonization
of certain Taiwanese texts which only exacerbates the essentialist China/Taiwan binary (Lin 3; Scruggs 25). Finally, in their excellent collection of essays, David Der-wei Wang and Carlos Rojas discard the possessive adjective “Taiwanese” in Taiwanese literature and opt, instead, for an ambiguous term, “Taiwan literature.” This move is made in order to rid the previous concept of its underlying nativist assumptions (Rojas 1).

While it is certainly a welcome development that scholars working in the field of Taiwanese literature are conscious and critical of the tendentious pull of different nationalisms, many questions are left unanswered or answered unsatisfactorily when the national question of Taiwan is only dealt with indirectly and ambiguously. For example, how have the Taiwanese people managed to form their subjectivity in relation to various top-down nationalist discourses? How have the people reflected on and negotiated their layered historical experiences resulting from numerous regime changes and subsequently formed a basic sense of local belonging? There is no denying that for the majority of people in Taiwan, Taiwan is a self-sufficient and unique community, if not a de jure nation-state, if only because it is a place that stores the collective experience and memory of many generations and different ethnicities. Therefore, I argue that it is an important undertaking to try to document and describe how a sense of community and identity has been gradually formed in Taiwan. It is also my conviction that a literary project that attempts to map out the formation of a nation does not necessarily pander to a totalizing nationalist discourse, provided that the diverse experiences and perspectives of a people can be well accounted for and represented in a reasonably inclusive manner.

In the following pages of this introduction, I will first explore why the nation has become such a controversial concept that most progressive-minded scholars are eager to avoid or even

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2 A more detailed explanation of the concept of “Taiwanese people” is given later in the introduction.
theorize into oblivion. In doing so, my hope is to make clear the thematic focus of the current project in its discussion of Taiwan as a nation. Next, drawing on Benedict Anderson, Timothy Brennan, and Homi Bhabha’s theories, I will explain how a literary reconstruction of the nation can possibly avoid ascribing to such narrow discourses as nationalism, ethnocentrism, and essentialism. This is to be followed by a brief account of the specific characteristics of Taiwanese history, culture, and literature and how the current project can contribute to a better understanding of Taiwan in contemporary humanities scholarship. Lastly, the introduction will provide an overview of the upcoming chapters.

The Nation and Its Paradox

Amorphous and reactive to changing conditions, the nation is notoriously hard to define. Aside from the obvious and immediate causes, such as linguistic, customary, religious, ethnic affinities, territorial cohabitation, and economic interdependency, researchers of the nation venture a number of different theories to explain the rise of modern nations: among the most famous, print capitalism (Anderson), industrialism (Gellner), communication technology (Deutsch). There is also a crucial difference in principle between statist and culturalist approaches to nationalism, with John Breuilly and Anthony D. Smith being the most noted advocates of either approach respectively.3

3 The following arguments in the opening pages Nationalism and the State sum up Breuilly’s method of investigation: “Nationalism should be understood as a form of politics that arises in close association with the development of the modern state”; and “[t]he term ‘nationalism’ is used to refer to political movements seeking or exercising state power and justifying such action with nationalist arguments” (xii, 2). In response to Breuilly’s rather narrow definition, Smith offers his broad understanding of nationalism by arguing, “[W]e cannot understand nations and nationalism simply as an ideology or form of politics but must treat them as cultural phenomenon as well. That is to say, nationalism, the ideology and movement, must be closely related to national identity, a multidimensional concept, and extended to include a specific language, sentiments, and symbolism” (vii, his emphasis).
Central to contemporary discussion of the nation is a recurrent conceptual antagonism that pits the nation against cosmopolitanism and internationalism, with the former gradually becoming associated with backwardness and the latter with progress. For many on the left, the nation is an anachronism that should have met its natural death some time ago, as this was, allegedly, the logical outcome of an unprecedented level of commercial integration of all nationalities and the rapid advancement of human intellect and technology reflecting such a world-historic change. This teleological belief in the inevitable end of the nation can be attributed to two foundational thinkers, Kant and Marx, who set the tone for contemporary progressive attitude towards the nation. In his seminal ethico-political work *Perpetual Peace* composed as a future constitution for all states, Kant envisages a future where human beings will finally transcend state boundaries and achieve perpetual peace by establishing a “federation of free states” governed by law, republicanism, and the public rights of humanity because, he believes, reason and moral duty would eventually prevail over human self-conceit and compel all states to form a cosmopolitan politico-economic union in which people of all nationalities can thrive in peaceful coexistence (120).

Kant’s rational-moral account of the purposive movement of world history finds a materialist revision in Marx’s writing where division of labor and intercourse serve as the driving force of history rather than universal reason. In the Marxian historiography, it is through division of labor and intercourse that the first European bourgeois states were able to first organize the

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4 The most representative manifestation of the theoretical incompatibility between nationalism and internationalism within the Marxist tradition is the Lenin-Luxemburg debate during the Second International. Within the tradition of Kantian liberalism, Jurgen Habermas, John Rawls, Richard Rorty are among some of the most well-known advocates of cosmopolitanism, while Jean-Francois Lyotard, coming from a poststructuralist view, theorizes the obsoleteness of nationalism as a grand narrative (37). Postnationalists like Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, combining Marxist and poststructuralist observations, pronounce the irrelevancy of the nation (xii).

5 For an excellent discussion of Kant’s conceptual contrast of self-conceit and reason as a fundamental contradiction that drives history, see Allen W. Wood’s “Kant’s Project for Perpetual Peace” included in *Cosmopolitics*. 68-71.
productive forces of various nationalities within their territories and then proceed to compete for monopolies in the colonial market through tariffs, prohibitions, and treaties (Marx, GI 79). It is further because of the competition among these bourgeois nation-states that national boundaries in the rest of the world became increasingly irrelevant, as they have “through exploitation of the world market given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country” and have “drawn from under the feet of industry the national ground” (Marx, CM 38). In the end, because the bourgeois exploitation of the market has encompassed the entire world, it follows that workers across the globe must act “world-historically” as an international force to counter this unprecedented scale of exploitation (Marx GI 57). Hence, the emergence of internationalism, an enshrined Marxist doctrine.

Clearly, whether on an idealist or a materialist ground of reasoning, the historical trend is for human community to progressively grow and to move towards the end state of a universal and holistic politico-economic union. As such, the current reign of the nation-state can only be a transitional stage and must eventually be overcome and substituted with cosmopolitan and internationalist principles, if humankind is to attain a higher state of happiness and a non-exploitative world-economy. Not surprisingly, against this theoretical background, a concept like the nation which implies immediate territorial commitment of a smaller scale is sometimes dismissed as nostalgic and anti-progressive.

Founding intellectuals of postcolonial studies speak of the nation in a language that echoes the teleology accompanying the very concept, and in a tone marked by a distaste for archaism. In an interview, for example, Gayatri Spivak argues categorically that anticolonial and national struggles are “a thing of the past” (OA 248, emphasis added). Although her insight that anticolonialism sanctions “the kind of national identity politics that can lead to fascism” and can
“work in the interest of terrible cultural conservatism, which is generally bad for women” is entirely correct and indisputable, she discredits anticolonial national struggles in part also by alluding to the stageist thinking of the nation in order to emphasize its outmodedness: “it is a thing of the past.” Staying true to her Marxist lineage defined in part by a futuristic penchant for larger units of solidarity, Spivaks proposes the idea of “critical regionalism” in place of the backward, anachronistic nationalism (OA 129).

In Edward Said’s commentary on anticolonial nationalism, a similar language of forward-looking, pragmatic dismissal of old paradigms is hard to miss. Building on Frantz Fanon’s critique of national consciousness in *The Wretched of the Earth*, Said argues that anticolonial nationalism was no more than a foil for Western imperialism, not only because it was born out of a dialectical relation with the latter but also because of early nationalist thinkers’ dependency on Western philosophy (his example is Afghani’s debt to Renan) (263). Said’s appellation of this early breed of third-world nationalism reveals his intent to compartmentalize anticolonial history and apply a closure to a period in which nationalist struggles belonged: “orthodox nationalism”—a term that accentuates its ancient and archaic quality (273). Although Said’s criticism of nationalism is driven by a suspicion of grand narratives typical of poststructuralism, he nevertheless rehearses the teleological belief in the necessary death of the nation and its inevitable replacement by a better formation, in his case, a spontaneous, non-doctrinal organization of resistance. As he writes, “Nationalist culture has been sometimes dramatically outpaced by a fertile culture of resistance whose core is energetic insurgency, a ‘technique of trouble,’ directed against the authority and the discourse of imperialism” (267, emphasis added).

It is clear that the anti-national attitude has become a recurrent theme in much of today’s postcolonial studies in particular and in different branches of cultural studies in general.
However, a closer examination of the ideals of cosmopolitanism and internationalism as they were first envisioned by Kant and Marx reveals that much of today’s progressive antipathy towards the nation might not be entirely justified, and that the difference between nationalism, cosmopolitanism, and internationalism in their original senses might not be as significant in spirit as it is in form.

First, it is crucial to know that Kant’s and Marx’s critiques are not directed at the nation as such, but the absolutist monarchical states (for Kant), and the bourgeois states (for Marx). As Pheng Cheah reminds us, Kant could not have made European nations his target of reform when he penned *Perpetual Peace*, because “the phenomenon and concept of ‘the nation’ [was] still at an embryonic stage” in his time (“Introduction II” 26). On the other hand, for Marx, the principal actors in exploiting the world market were the European capitalist states that had, through commerce and division of labor, integrated and homogenized the various nationalities within their borders and thereby firmly based the economic power of the state on a unified nation to be able to expand outward. Hence, despite the ascent of nationalism in the mid-nineteenth century, Marx was apparently “more concerned about abolishing the state-apparatus than its epiphenomenon, the nation-form” (Cheah, “Introduction II” 28). However, as Cheah also argues, in the history of ideas, nationalism assumes a conservative, even reactionary, connotation precisely after Marx and this is due to his conflation of the nation and the state:

Identifying the nation too hastily with the bourgeois state, Marx reduced the nation to an ideological instrument of the state and saw nationalism as a tendentious invocation of anachronistic quasi-feudal forms of belonging in modernity. The antagonistic relation between socialist cosmopolitanism and nationalism is premised on this collapsing of the nation into the state. (“Introduction II” 28)

In summary, what drives both Kant’s and Marx’s cosmopolitan projects is a profound humanist spirit that sees humans as ends in themselves and seeks to liberate them from the
irrational and unjust competition among belligerent and avaricious states (not nations). The significance of this underlying humanism and its relevance to my project will be explained shortly. But, for now, I would like to dwell a little on the Marxist legacy of “collapsing of the nation into the state” in the historical unfolding of anti-imperialist struggle and discuss the intervention made from a non-European standpoint by Frantz Fanon and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, two of the most perspicacious theoreticians of Third World nationalism.

From Marx onwards, the nation is more or less seen as organically linked to the state, especially from a European perspective. Accordingly, several attempts have been made to formulate larger networks of solidarity to bypass the nation, in both conceptual and institutional senses. The earlier supranational alliances based on common race (Pan-Africanism) and common religious culture (Pan-Arabism) and, more recently, the postmodern celebration of an uprooted, exilic borderline existence, and the poststructuralist insistence on a spontaneous, non-doctrinal coalition of interest groups all attest to this development. Amidst this broader intellectual current, there are still voices insisting on the priority and relevance of national liberation. Fanon, for instance, has shown us in his criticism of Pan-Africanism, specifically, its cultural manifestation, Negritude, that what matters most is not the size or scope of solidarity, but whether such solidarity has humanist content which draws directly from people’s struggles for freedom, democracy, and equality. Fanon argues that Negritude is a reactive construct invented to disprove Europe’s sweeping denial of the existence of a precolonial African culture: it is “a glorification of cultural phenomena that become continental instead of national, and singularly racialized” \((WE\ 154)\). As he further explains, since there is little experiential common ground other than a racialized and essentialized category of blackness or Africanness on which to base its claims, Negritude is “increasingly cut off from reality,” from people’s continual struggle for
self-determination and liberation (WE 154). As such, Negritude is but an ahistorical, high-flown ideol that has little bearing on people’s thoughts and endeavors to change their immediate situations. Fanon’s insistence on historicizing the liberation struggles of various African peoples leads him to proclaim that “every culture is first and foremost national” and that “to emphasize an African culture rather than a national culture leads the African intellectuals into a dead end” (WE 152, 154). For Fanon, the correct path to achieve African unity resembles an outwardly expanding circle with the priority being for individual African peoples to take control of their own nations and attain national consciousness through a continuous struggle against imperialism; only then is it possible for a progressive international union to exist, because “it is at the heart of national consciousness that international consciousness establishes itself and thrive” (Fanon, WE 180).

Echoing Fanon’s thought on African unity, Ngũgĩ elaborates on the idea of national consciousness by providing it with a psycho-linguistic underpinning and, in doing so, reasserts the primacy of national liberation over international unity. In Ngũgĩ’s anthropological account, a national language is an outgrowth of a people’s natural need to communicate in the common struggle to produce wealth within their immediate natural and social environment and, therefore, carries cultural values of the community handed down from one generation to the next. As such, the native tongue of a people is an “image-forming agent” that has everything to do with how a people perceive themselves in relation to other peoples in the universe, that is to say, with their self-understanding, self-positioning and self-esteem (DM 15-16). After centuries of “self-mutilation of the mind, the enslavement of our being to Western imperialism,” one of the most urgent tasks for Africans, Ngũgĩ argues, is to decolonize the mind by reclaiming and revitalizing the national language (“SOG” 29). It is only after the mind is decolonized and self-esteem
reestablished in this way that a colonized people can appreciate “the humanistic, democratic and revolutionary elements in other people’s literatures and cultures without any complexes about his own language, his own self, his own environment” (DM 28-29). Once again, as in Fanon, one sees in Ngũgĩ a process whereby liberation starts from the nation and gradually expands outward. Such is what he means by a “quest for relevance”: “A person must know where they stand in order to know in what directions they must proceed” (“SOG” 32).

For Fanon and Ngũgĩ, an internationalist concept like African unity would be an empty, banal slogan if individual African peoples did not first undergo a revolutionary process of material and psychological decolonization as well as a democratic process of reclaiming their nations from the hands of both the imperialist state and the comprador bourgeoisie it cultivates. Their intention is to set the priority right rather than opposing nationalism with internationalist and cosmopolitan ideals. In other words, theirs is “not a call for isolationism but a recognition that national liberation is the basis of an internationalism of all the democratic and social struggles for human equality, justice, peace and progress” (Ngũgĩ, DM 103). Nations, in both thinkers’ writings, are not obstacles to internationalism or cosmopolitanism but, quite the opposite; they are the precondition or building blocks of it. It is through common efforts to redress inequities between nations and states and the skewed social relations that this lopsided global structure engenders at home that one nation connects with another and, in this way, fills any internationalist concept that might arise afterwards with a humanist semantic.

The above discussion should make fairly clear that the common thread that runs through Kantian cosmopolitanism, Marxian internationalism and Fanon and Ngũgĩ’s conceptions of the nation is the same humanist intention to set humanity free from vicious militaristic and economic competition among states and their perennial collusion with multinational capital. The goal is the
same, but the means to achieve it are different. In this respect, it can be argued that beneath the
different shapes and sizes of the various imagined communities that have been proposed or
realized in the past, what truly makes a difference is the existence or non-existence of a humanist
kernel, a genuine intention to promote democracy, to redefine social relations, and to realize a
fairer redistribution of wealth. Be it nationalism, regionalism, pan-nationalism, or any
supranational alliance based on race, class, gender, religion, or culture, I would venture to assert,
none of them is inherently more progressive than the other. From European fascism, Nazism to
the recent resurgence of white nationalism in many parts of EuroAmerica, the devastating effects
of nationalism is too well known to require any full tally. But, on the other hand, supranational
blocs are not in themselves a guarantor of peace and progress. Sometimes they bring the exact
opposite consequences; witness Imperial Japan’s Greater Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere, the Soviet
example of class-warfare-turned-totalitarianism, the irrational nuclear arms race during the two-
bloc era, and finally the complete disregard for human life by ISIS in the present day. Without
democratic, humanist content, any larger union can be just as dangerous as some of the most
narrow-minded varieties of nationalism. Even in a quasi-cosmopolitan world, which not all but
some of us live in today thanks to increased physical mobility and improved information
technology, the marginalization of humanism by multinational business interest and egoistic state
policies predisposes such a fledging cosmopolitanism to amount to no more than a travesty of
Kant’s vision.

Timothy Brennen’s discriminate critique of the distortion of cosmopolitanism since the
late twentieth century onwards and his attempt to draw attention to the legacy of anti-imperialist
nationalism help illuminate this line of thinking. Seeing that the term “cosmopolitanism” has
been regularly coopted by some unsuspecting metropolitan commentators to cover up and
beautify an American-led cultural imperialism, Brennen proclaims in a Fanonian voice, “Nationalism is not dead. And it is good that it is not” (AHIW 317). Using Latin American ex-colonies as an example, he contends that nationalism remains the only viable means for these countries to assert autonomy against an overwhelming tidal wave of Americanization that will not stop until “a dead level of uniformity” is achieved (AHIW 30). Thus, terms such as “liberation,” “the people,” and “the indigenous,” Brennen argues, while much ridiculed by metropolitan theory due to their rootedness in nationalism, “remain vital today because there is simply nowhere else to go [than turning nationalist]” (AHIW 317). Brennen’s assessment, it bears repeating, should never be read in binary terms as a romantic celebration of nationalism and a repudiation of the post-Enlightenment cosmopolitan project. Rather, it is meant to underscore, more than anything, the fact that the humanist outlook which makes up the core of Kant’s and Marx’s cosmopolitanism is on the verge of being swept away in today’s capitalist cosmopolitanism, yet is still kept alive, however tenuously, in the tradition of anti-imperialist nationalism.

Like Brennen, while I agree with Kant and Marx that humanity must have cosmopolitanism in mind as an ultimate common goal, I also align myself with Fanon and Ngũgĩ’s contention that as long as there are peoples remaining culturally, economically, and politically subjugated by their own or other states and multinational bodies, it is premature to speak of true cosmopolitanism.

To return to the starting point of the current discussion, the crux of the problem remains that the constant practice of pitting the idea of nation against cosmopolitanism not only narrows the meaning of the nation but, more importantly, it obscures the common humanistic pursuit implied by both concepts. In other words, an excessive concentration on their formal difference
prevents the more important question in regard to their content and goal from being posed. It is in view of this somewhat cliché but entrenched dichotomy between the nation and cosmopolitanism that I hope to move my project beyond a formal conceptualization of community and identity—as important as this exercise may be in other studies and for other purposes—and redirect attention to the theme of humanism by focusing on literary expressions of people’s diverse experiences, desires, and aspirations.

Finally, I would like to offer a few words on the potential role a study of national literature like the present one can play in mediating the conceptual antagonism between the nation and cosmopolitanism, the reification of which has become especially acute in our postmodern condition and benefited, perhaps more than anyone else, multinationals and shortsighted nationalist leaders. Here, I am using and expanding on Brennen’s insights to emphasize the relevance of studies of national literature in an increasingly polarized neocolonial condition. As he points out, in our postmodern time characterized by an inundation of information, both the imperial center and the state are vying for control over the instant dissemination of images. Consequently, just as some pop-cultural icons and global brand names from the West become a stand-in for cosmopolitanism in the popular imagination, so too the nation is reduced to a host of images of national heroes, religious symbols, traditional costumes, and revolutionary monuments. The study of traditional cultures and national fictions under these circumstances, as Brennen argues, is a responsible practice to tie the images of today to the concrete acts of struggle that are stored and represented in the narrative form: to “place them,” to “give them perspective,” to “discuss the way they reflect a submerged history while turning it into a contemporary, instantaneous shadow” (“NLF” 67). Such is the task I envision the current project will fulfill by reading closely literary content that reflects a people’s progressive consciousness
and by tying such consciousness to a universal pursuit of self-determination and freedom—a
pursuit irreducible to simplistic binaries: us against them or us against the world.

Nation as a Narrated Space

After Benedict Anderson, the idea that the novel plays an instrumental role in the
realization of a nation has become widely accepted. It is certainly no coincidence that the same
material conditions—the emergence of print-capitalism and the elevated status of vernaculars—
contributed to the rise of both the novel and the nation in Europe. Though historically
contemporaneous with the nation, the novel was not simply the byproduct of a new, nation-
centered worldview; rather, it gave rise and actively consolidated such a worldview by instilling
and perpetuating a new form of national consciousness in the popular mind. Thematically, as
Anderson explains, the novel mediates between the national reality and people’s subjective
feelings of national belonging. It does this by presenting to a national readership recognizable
characters speaking recognizable languages and navigating through a recognizable but
meticulously depicted “sociological landscape of a fixity that fuses the world inside the novel
with the world outside” (Anderson, IC 30). The reading of the novel, in Anderson’s words, is a
“picaresque tour d’horizon” which “is nonetheless not a tour du monde” that allows a national
readership to cognitively map out its domain of cultural familiarity and, in this way, imagine a
bounded, shared cultural life beyond which there is no nation (IC 30).

Concurring with Anderson’s groundbreaking theory, Brennen explains the central role of
the novel in national imagination by stressing its syncretic and inclusive form. As he argues,
“[I]ts very form [objectifies] the nation’s composite nature: a hotch potch of the ostensibly
separate ‘levels of style’ corresponding to class; a jumble of poetry, drama, newspaper report,
memoir, and speech; a mixture of the jargons of race and ethnicity” (“NLF” 51, his emphasis). In other words, no other genre than that of the nearly all-encompassing novel can bring together a variety of cultural elements, languages, lifestyles of the low and high, far and near into the same purview. The inclusive and hybrid nature of the novel cuts across class, regional, and ethnic barriers, and accurately mirrors the entire spectrum of the kaleidoscopic national life down to its every detail.

Whether considering its form or its content, the novel is undeniably instrumental in bringing the imagined community of the nation into the daily lives of people and is, as such, an important—if not the most important—cultural medium through which to locate the stuff that makes up a people’s national consciousness. In the specific context of colonial Taiwan, moreover, the novel and its related forms, the novella and short story, are not only the preferred mediums to locate oppositional national consciousness, but are perhaps the only mediums for doing so, especially given the fact that the other popular literary pursuit, poetry, was at the time generally lyrical and apolitical and was, for that reason, deliberately encouraged by colonial authorities. In addition, unlike other types of cultural workers in, for instance, cinema, play, and journalism which required a certain degree of collaboration and funding, novelists in oppressive times could escape the iron fist of the colonial regime and its network of surveillance relatively easily, as the writing of novels and fictions is a solitary activity that requires no more than a reflective mind and some basic writing utensils, and publication need not happen in the writer’s country or immediately after composition. For instance, one of the Japanese-era writers that will be discussed later, Wu Zhuoliu, “wrote and completed his novel [Orphan of Asia] in secrecy, with no immediate prospect for publication” (Ching 177-78). Wu’s novel, as it turns out, was

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6 See Kuo-ch’ing Tu’s Foreword to Taiwan Literature English Translation Series, Issue 19, ix-xvii.
written between 1943 and 1945 and published in 1946 after Japan admitted defeat during World War II and forfeited Taiwan. In summary, considering the novel’s uniquely conducive role in the imagination of a nation, its elusiveness in the face of authoritarian censorship, and the situatedness of writers, I suggest that Taiwanese novelists and fiction writers in colonial times together paint a rather comprehensive and truthful picture of people’s daily lives. The burden, then, falls on the interpreter to determine the kind of nation she wishes to see and draw from the texts.

This brings up the critical role of the interpreter. If novels and fictions can be said to contain in themselves bits and pieces of a people’s national consciousness, important questions arise: How do we read them? What kind of national consciousness does an interpreter have in mind when she sets out to find it and for what purpose? Given all the uncertainties hanging over Taiwan’s legitimacy as a nation-state, cultural materials about the country’s and its people’s past are, regrettably, not always immune from tendentious nationalist treatments.\(^7\) The inherent paradox of the very term “national literature” leads to this inevitable question: Can the interpretation of a nation’s literature avoid playing into the hands of a narrow nationalism and lending itself to nationalist myth-making? As Ernest Gellner notes, “[N]ationalism […] sometimes takes pre-existing cultures and turns them into nations, sometimes invents them, and often obliterate pre-existing cultures: that is a reality, for better or worse, and in general an inescapable one” (49, his emphasis). “Inescapable” is a rather pessimistic estimation. Is it, then,

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\(^7\) Historian Paul R. Katz notes, “As Taiwan struggles to survive in the present and chart a stable course for the future, all attempts to impose interpretations on the past have come to be viewed as an ongoing endeavor to construct a sense of identity” (387). Elsewhere, literary critic Leo Ching also comments on how Taiwanese intellectuals during the famous Nativist Literature debate of 1970s attempted to impose the metatexts of Chineseness and Taiwaneseness on literary and historical materials. See Ching 67-76.
possible at all for an interpreter to produce analyses and commentaries on a national literature without engaging in the “invention of tradition,” to use Eric Hobsbawm’s telling term (76)?

Homi Bhabha’s textual deconstruction of the nation provides some clues towards resolving this inherent dilemma. Bhabha argues that the nation as narration exists in a contested, liminal space and a disjunctive time between two modes of narrating and reading the nation: pedagogical and performative. On the one hand, the people that make up a nation can be read as “historical ‘objects’ of a nationalist pedagogy” and, accordingly, be used to weave together a linear national story harking back to an originary moment, or in Bhabha’s words, “a naturalistic continuity of Community or Tradition” (“DissemiNation” 297, 302). On the other hand, the people depicted in literature are also “the ‘subjects’ of a process of signification that must erase any prior or originary presence of the nation-people” and embody a “continual process by which the national life is redeemed and signified as a repeating and reproductive process” (Bhabha, “DissemiNation” 297). In this contested space of nation as narration, Bhabha explains, it is the performative “shreds and patches of cultural signification” that constantly unsettle “the certainties of a nationalist pedagogy” (“DissemiNation” 294). In other words, it is the irreducibly rich and heterogeneous presence of the people represented in literature that continues to prevent a totalizing nationalist vision from completing itself. The task of a self-aware interpreter then, as can be inferred from Bhabha’s explication, is to never lose sight of the performative, self-renewing energy of the people, which is the same as to say, to refrain from adopting a normalizing, totalizing view that reduces the people to homogenous objects and events expressive of a timeless national essence.

Notably, Bhabha draws on Fanon’s analysis of national culture to elaborate on his own notion of the performativity of the nation, which makes his contrast of the pedagogical and the
performative all the more relevant to my argument. Bhabha cites Fanon’s observation that “the knowledge of a people depends on the discovery of a much more fundamental substance which itself is continually being renewed,” to emphasize, in agreement with the latter, that the nation does not exist “in the translucidity of the people’s customs or the obvious objectivities which seem to characterize the people” (“DissemiNation” 303). One recalls here Fanon’s discussion of the Western-educated colonized intellectuals who, out of touch with the people, look in vain at a litany of cultural particulars in an attempt to know the people all while being oblivious to the people’s creative agency that daily renew and updates their culture. Such a regenerative agency of the people that invigorates and redefines national culture has a more overtly political, down-to-earth explanation in Fanon than perhaps Bhabha’s high-theoretical deconstruction, incisive as it is, can make room for. Fanon believes the dynamism that constantly causes changes in the meaning of national culture and tradition consists in the praxis of the people—their liberation struggle:

The development and internal progression of the actual struggle expand the number of directions in which culture can go and hint at new possibilities. The liberation struggle does not restore to national culture its former values and configurations. *This struggle, which aims at a fundamental redistribution of relations between men, cannot leave intact either the form or substance of the people’s culture.* After the struggle is over, there is not only the demise of colonialism, but also the demise of the colonized. (*WE* 178, my emphasis)

As Fanon makes very clear, what drives a culture towards new directions and new possibilities is a fundamental human desire to resist repression and to create more just social relations—“a fundamental redistribution of relations between men”—which then translates into concrete actions that practically reform, redefine, and inject new meanings into a national culture.

Building on Bhabha’s and Fanon’s analyses, I shall conclude now that the reading of national literature means more than looking for some seemingly immortal signifiers—national
heroes and monuments, cultural symbols, customary practices, and traditional institutions—to piece together a narrative about a coherent, continuous people; rather, it requires the interpreter to focus on literary content that depicts what Bhabha calls a “repeating and reproductive process” which, in Fanon’s terms, derives from generations of people’s thoughts and deeds to define for themselves a better society.

It should be pointed out first that, in the colonial context, extreme political oppression and economic exploitation do not necessarily produce only self-aware colonized intellectuals who operate with a “situational and materialist” consciousness. Therefore, not all literary works written in the colonial period can be automatically read as political commentaries, or as “national allegories” (Jameson, “TWL” 69, 85). In the case of colonial Taiwan, for example, a clear-cut distinction often did not exist between collaborationist and oppositional intellectuals in the earlier periods of Japanese rule and, later, oppositional intellectuals were not allowed to express any national aspiration when Japan tightened its grip over Taiwan in preparation for the imminent Pacific War. Adding to that is the colonial government’s imposition of ideological control through its educational policy which saw a majority of Taiwanese pupils denied the wherewithal to systematically think and argue nationally. As John F. Copper notes, “Taiwanese students [receiving Japanese colonial education] were encouraged to study medicine, engineering, science, and technology-related subjects, but not law, politics, or any of the social sciences” (40).

However, insofar as colonialism is a system in which the correspondence between socioeconomic inequality and racial/cultural difference is an empirical reality, the existence of a considerable number of organic intellectuals of the colonized can be reasonably entertained.8

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8 Antonio Gramsci defines the term organic intellectual as such: “Every social group, coming into existence on the original terrain of an essential function in the world of economic production, creates together with itself, organically,
These are intellectuals who learn the mother country’s culture and language yet are given far fewer life chances than their metropolitan peers. In this situation, there are generally three different modalities, according to Fanon, by which colonized intellectuals express themselves vis-à-vis the mother country. The first is the assimilationist mode. This is adopted when intellectuals seek to be recognized as intellectually on a par with the colonizers by, for example, imitating and mastering metropolitan literary styles and philosophical thoughts. Then there is the traditionalist mode adopted by intellectuals when they, out of disillusionment, choose to retreat to the indigenous cultural tradition and seize on a number of timeless cultural symbols to assert an identitarian difference. This mode of writing conveys an intense, but purely reactionary, national consciousness. Finally, some intellectuals, following Fanon, can be called the “combat intellectuals” who, by representing the sociopolitical totality of the colonized society, seek to awaken the people’s awareness towards their shared predicament and thereby incite common action to change the national reality of the here and now.9 This mode of writing will be further explored in Chapter 2.

Defining the Taiwanese Nation

The convenience or difficulty involved in writing about one’s own country notwithstanding, a literary attempt at tracking Taiwan’s nation-formation and changing national narrative has a special value in itself. Oftentimes, the very term “nation” can bring to mind a series of appended descriptions: militancy, sentimentalism, cultural/ethnic pride, irrationality, personality cult, xenophobia and so on. Accordingly, much attention has been paid to varieties of

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9 See Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 158-63.
national discourse that best fit these descriptions: the aggressive and expansionist imperialism, the dangerous and reactionary fascism, the radical and sometimes romanticized anticolonial or anti-imperialist nationalism, as well as some of their offshoots that have been rightly or biasedly labeled “terrorism.” Studies of these, while yielding great insights, also reinforce certain entrenched notions about the nation. As such, it is difficult to persuasively say one version of the nation is really that much different from the other, and condemnation and defense of one or the other could easily end up being taken as a mere conflict of positions. For instance, most anti-imperialist movements have strong, charismatic leaders, and so does fascism, and both could be said to have xenophobic tendencies. Where do we draw the lines at which inspirational leadership ends and personality cult begins, assertion of cultural difference ends and xenophobia sets in?

Amidst all the back-and-forths revolving around some of the most dramatic manifestations of the nation, what often gets ignored are nations that displayed a more moderate and flexible trajectory of development in some peripheral or semi-peripheral regions. Nations of this sort are what Tom Narin calls the “third cross-category”: nations of small peoples typically not from a situation of “colonial under-development [sic]” but from one of “relative progress” (185). This, however, is not to make a value judgement asserting one form of nation is inherently better than the other, for different historical contexts give rise to different kinds of nation-formation. It can be credibly argued, to certain hard-line independence activists’ dismay,

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10 Nationalities belonging to this category are technically not independent countries and, for historical and geopolitical reasons, have enjoyed relatively stable and rapid economic growth, which can include places like, Scotland, Northern Ireland, Basque, Catalonia, Taiwan and Hong Kong. Narin gives four usual characteristics of nationalities of this category: “The peoples and territories concerned are small. They tend to be in ‘sensitive zones’ of a larger political economy, alongside or in between powerful neighbors. They usually develop so rapidly through the discovery and exploitation of sub-soil resources…And sometimes they occupy a particularly favourable ‘crossroads’ position in terms of trade patterns” (185). Except for natural resources, these characteristics can be quite accurately applied to Taiwan.
that Taiwan’s nation-formation has historically been a moderate one in that it has traditionally been reformist rather than revolutionary in any true sense. This reformist tendency, which contributed to Taiwan’s revolution-less transition from authoritarianism to democracy, has led some to call—somewhat reductively I think—the country a “political miracle” (Copper xii). Deserved praise or exaggeration notwithstanding, there is something, indeed, curiously miraculous about Taiwan as a multiethnic new democracy.

In his essay “Primordial and Civic Ties,” Clifford Geertz points out that inherent in every modern state is a tension between people’s primordial bonds which can include assumed blood relation, race, language, locality, religion, and tradition on the one hand, and their pragmatic demands for an efficient and modern civil state on the other. This tension, he continues, takes “a peculiarly severe and chronic form in the new states” because populations in these often multiethnic, multilingual, and sometimes multiracial new states “tend to regard the immediate, concrete, and to them inherently meaningful sorting implicit in such ‘natural’ diversity as the substantial content of their individuality” (30). The primordial-civil tension that Geertz so usefully identifies, however, seems to have only limited explanatory power when it is applied to Taiwanese society. A multiethnic society whose two major political parties are both nationalist (Chinese and Taiwanese, respectively) in essence, and whose electorate, to this day, are still predominantly casting communal rather than class votes despite decades of a capitalist social formation, Taiwan has yet to see any serious confrontation among different ethnic and linguistic groups since the inception of democratization in the late 1980s. In other words, the Taiwanese people’s commitment to a shared society geared towards economic and political modernization seems, in the long run, stronger than their self-identification as Chinese or Taiwanese nationals or members of various ethnic origins. Such a restrained development of nation-formation calls
for more than a simplistic political explanation which more often than not amounts to an apology for the authoritarian regimes’ effective yet repressive efforts of nation-building and social engineering, but merits an in-depth and thorough study of Taiwanese cultural inheritance that has since colonial times formed the ethos of Taiwanese society.¹¹ A study of Taiwanese culture and literature, therefore, can hopefully reveal the cultural elements that contribute to a modern “political miracle,” a less repressive model of nation-formation.

Having explained the relevance of a study of Taiwan and Taiwanese literature, I would like to now share my ideas regarding the definition of nation and give a brief, objective account of Taiwan’s development as a nation over the past two centuries. My understanding of the nation is largely based on Anthony D. Smith’s classic definition (1991) and, adding to that, Montserrat Guibernau’s revision of Smith’s definition.

Compared to the modernists’ narrow definition which posits the nation exclusively as a product of the age of nationalism or that of perennialists which frees up the concept to such an extent that it loses much of its analytical usefulness, Smith’s is flexible and eclectic enough to accommodate most individual cases. Suffice it to say that, following Smith, the nation is both a cultural and political community rather than only one of the two; it is neither reducible to a cultural community nor is it parasitic on the state (Smith 9). For instance, Ernest Gellner’s instrumentalist and industrialist conception attributes the emergence of the nation to the state’s nation-building efforts such as “social infrastructure” and “educational system,” a view that essentially precludes the possibility for some stateless peoples who do not have a long history, a unique culture, and distinguishable ethnic traits—to use his term, “non-entropy-resistant

¹¹ In his account of Taiwan’s formal democratization since 1987, John F. Copper, for instance, implicitly credits the Chiang regime’s shrewd judgement in implementing democratization in a gradual manner, alluding to the idea of democratic tutelage built in Sun Yat-Sen’s teaching. 114-116.
peoples”—to compete with top-down state homogenization backed by modern technology, like the Taiwanese but unlike the Koreans (63). On the other hand, Walker Connor cites what could be the loosest definition of the nation in order to argue that “nation building” is actually “nation destroying”: “[A] social group which shares a common ideology, common institutions and customs, and a sense of homogeneity” (qtd in Connor 333). While it is certainly commendable on Connor’s part to respect all peoples’ right to self-determination and, in reality, some social and cultural groups are potential nations, such a definition reduces the distance between the nation and other organized groups to such an extent that it is almost non-existent and the nation as a concept becomes redundant.

However, I do agree with Connor’s assessment that the nation is more a matter of subjective identification than an observable fact; hence, the existence of national consciousness is a decisive factor of a nation: “A distinct group may be very apparent to the anthropologist or even to the untrained observer, but without a realization of this fact on the part of a sizable percentage of its members, a nation does not exist” (337). Finally, Smith’s definition of the nation: “[A] named 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” (14). Smith’s definition is rigorous enough, but his wording is deliberately flexible. While the organization of economy and the assignment of rights and duties can be read as functions of the state, they can also mean general economic activities in a bounded community and customary law. To Smith’s definition that emphasizes a sense of cultural continuity and shared civil institutions, Guibernau adds yet another element that I think is indispensable. For a people to constitute a nation, not only must they have “a common past” but they must also have “a common project for the future and claiming the right to rule itself” (Guibernau 132).
Guibernau echoes Smith’s idea that the nation is both a cultural and political community, but she goes even further to emphasize “the political consequences of being a nation” (141). The key factor that distinguishes a nation from other communities for Guibernau, and I agree, is the people’s persistent pursuit of either complete political autonomy or at least some freedom from state interference. This is true for most nations without a state, including the ex-colonized peoples, peoples that remain so today, or even strongly integrated minorities like Black Americans.

With the nation thus defined, when and how did Taiwan become a nation? My research suggests that the idea of Taiwan as a nation has undergone several radical changes. Prior to Japanese colonization, Taiwan was hardly conceived of as a nation by its residents, and postcolonial Taiwan was constitutively a rather different nation than post-KMT Taiwan. Let me explain why that is.

Benedict Anderson argues that Taiwan should be placed in the category of settler societies and its national narrative a creole one (“East-West” 34). Such a categorization is apt. What is collectively known as Taiwanese today consists mainly of four different groups: the Aborigines, the Hakkas, the Hoklos, and the Mainlanders. With the exception of the Aborigines, the latter three groups emigrated to Taiwan in various waves from as early as the fourteenth century to 1949 and for various reasons: chronologically, seeking new arable lands, escaping the Manchu takeover of the Middle Kingdom, being recruited by the imperial states to open settlements, escaping persecution in the aftermath of Taiping Rebellion (1850-1864), and, after 1949, escaping Communist China. It should be noted that although the Mainlanders consist of residents from various parts of China, they are often considered a collectivity because they came to Taiwan in the modern era, that is, after China had become a modern nation. They were, in
effect, Chinese citizens who identified with an existent Chinese nation-state, spoke a unified national language and subscribed to a fully formed nationalism based on Sun Yat-Sen’s *Three People’s Principles*, while the Aborigines, Hakkas, and Hoklos of the same period were Japanese imperial subjects. All the different waves of emigres brought with them customs, religions, languages, and—in the case of the Mainlanders—ideologies popular in their locales and times to Taiwan. Through continuous interactions with local sociopolitical institutions, natural environments, and pre-existing populations, these early and late arrivals “over time developed distinct traditions, symbolisms, historical experiences” specific to their lives in Taiwan (Anderson, “East-West” 34). In brief, Anderson’s view allows one to perceive Taiwan’s nation-formation as a separate development outside of the imported Japanese and Chinese official nationalisms, while not excluding segments of Taiwanese population affected by these two systems of nationalist thought, as traces of Japanese and Chinese nationalisms are still vividly perceivable in contemporary Taiwanese society, politics, and culture.

As a settler society, populations of various Chinese origins in Taiwan grew ever more diversified over time, not to mention that nowadays there are many new Taiwanese from Vietnam, Thailand, the Philippines and other South East Asian countries. The term “Taiwanese” can be ambiguous when it is not contextualized. Here is how I will use it in this introduction and in the following chapters. Whenever feasible, I address the different groups by their ethnicities. But for purely rhetorical convenience to distinguish the ruling group from the ruled of different periods, when dealing with materials from the Japanese-ruled period, I use the term “Han-Taiwanese” or “Chinese-Taiwanese” to refer to the Hakkas and Hoklos, as Japanese colonizers frequently asserted their supremacy by alluding to the two ethnicities’ common Chinese roots. Similarly, discussion of the KMT-ruled period uses the term “native Taiwanese” to distinguish
the ruling Mainlanders from the ruled Hakkas and Hoklos, as the KMT state made it a practice to systematically stigmatize and suppress, in their view, a Japanese-contaminated native population. In the democratic period, “Taiwanese” applies to all ethnicities, but is sometimes qualified as, for example, “Mainlander Taiwanese” and “native Taiwanese” whenever such qualifications are called for. The denomination Aborigines remains valid across all periods.

Prior to Japanese colonization, “Taiwanese” was not yet a designation of national identity as Taiwan was hardly conceived of as a nation among most residents of Taiwan, even if we don’t take the concept as exclusively modern. Instead, Chinese immigrants in Taiwan loosely formed what Smith defines as an ethnie, the precursor of a nation (21). The numerous aboriginal tribes, on the other hand, were multiple mini-nations in their own right. While most Chinese descendants on the island originated from the same racial stock and could trace their roots to some kind of a mythical common ancestry, they did not develop any shared system of economic and legal institutions. Even after being annexed in the late seventeenth century as an outpost off the Qing Empire’s southeast coast, the Manchu leadership never really cared to govern Taiwan and even considered it a nuisance. One scholar describes Taiwan as “China’s Wild East” where there was “a minor revolt every three years and a major one every five years” (Gold 25). Qing’s lack of interest in Taiwan did not change until a couple decades prior to Japanese takeover (1895) when the presence of modernized powers made it realize the island’s strategic importance and eventually sent a capable governor to run it (Gold 29). So, precolonial Taiwan, long lacking an effective governing body, was for the most part dominated by landlords of feudal and semi-feudal systems (Copper 69). The island’s populations mostly lived in separate clusters of self-governing settlements led by influential clan names which all had their own codes of taxation and stipulations of resident rights and duties, while Western powers and Chinese warlords in
different times laid partial claim to the island. Furthermore, without effective administration, an identifiable mass culture among the Chinese populations never took shape either. While most Chinese descendants could vaguely identify with a Chinese cultural sphere, they did so in their own limited ways and with bits and pieces of lifestyles and customs brought from their respective homelands that were somehow preserved. If one wants to get even more meticulous, traditional cultures between the Hoklo majority and the Hakka minority, though similar in some ways, were dissimilar in still more ways, not to mention their complex subsystems. And both groups’ languages were, and still are, mutually incomprehensible which was further compounded by the fact that both were spoken languages unable to be rendered using Chinese script. Adding to that, plain tribes who kept a closer contact with Chinese settlements were Sinicized to varying degrees. In the end, the social strata “most deeply committed politically and culturally to China” were limited to Qing officials and the higher gentry who, upon Japanese arrival, were given a two-year period of grace to return to the mainland and most did (Tsurumi 172). In short, before entering the Japanese period, there did not exist in Taiwan “a mass, public culture”—one of Smith’s criteria of the nation (14).

Fast forward to 1945. When the KMT took over Taiwan, conflicts among the natives and the newcomers already took the form of nation-against-nation. This is not simply to state the obvious that, having undergone Japanese modernization and nation-building, all native Taiwanese were invariably abandoned Japanese subjects fighting against incoming modern Chinese nationals. Such a facile suggestion would not only elide the fact that there were many Taiwanese who regarded positively a reunion with China but also overlook the material-spiritual divide that, as Partha Chatterjee observes, existed in many colonized societies which demarcated a sovereign space for the natives to preserve their ways of life and form solidarities despite state
homogenization. In fact, by the end of Japanese colonization, only the educated middle and upper classes had “absorbed a whole spectrum of Japanese tastes and attitudes” and the same degree of assimilation cannot be presumed to be true for the rest of the populations (Tsurumi 172). Rather, what I mean by an already emergent Taiwanese nation at this point is as follows. True, in the material domain, Japanese infrastructure had laid the foundation for a uniform civil life and a territorially integrated common economy. Through island-wide land reforms, a unified legal system, public education, the building of railroads and modern communications, and state investments in industries and public hygiene, Japanese governance had greatly diminished regional differences in every way imaginable related to a Taiwanese resident’s public life. But in the cultural domain, after decades of common education, there already existed a mass and distinct culture among the Han Taiwanese, albeit a mixture of modern Japanese and creolized classical Chinese cultures. For some it was a localized Japanese culture and for others a Japanese-inflected local culture which, at any rate, was quite at odds with that of modern China. So, when the two groups first met, “[j]ust as the Mainland Chinese perceived the Taiwanese as traitors lacking Chinese culture, the Taiwanese perceived the Mainlanders as dirty, dishonest, and technologically backward” (Copper 44). But perhaps more important than anything is the fact that the native Taiwanese at this point already had a national consciousness. Through numerous struggles for freedom and democracy against an Imperial Japanese state, the Taiwanese had developed a national identity based on a sense of internal, cross-ethnic solidarity nourished by decades of activism. They had come to imagine themselves as an autonomous community with a common destiny and wanted “democracy and genuine self-rule” by the time of Chinese takeover (Copper 43, emphasis added). As Copper notes, “Exclusionist and racially discriminatory policies—notwithstanding economic and social gains—led to the creation of an
identity among the Chinese in Taiwan not unlike that fostered by colonial subjects in other parts of the world” (111).

In summary, except for the Aborigines who have managed to keep their ways of life mostly intact to this day (and so whose anticolonial history deserves dedicated studies of its own), most Han Taiwanese under Japanese rule, lacking the ability from the start to tie their existence to a definitive cultural origin and an unbroken history, developed most of their collective identity and, later, national consciousness dialectically in their interactions with and struggles against the colonial state. Much of the same pattern of identity- and nation-formations continued well into the KMT era and beyond. On the one hand, generations of Taiwanese made use of the social and educational infrastructures built by the colonial states—literacy, official written languages, channels of communication, etc.—to expand solidarity by networking with previously unfamiliar or hostile social and cultural groups in a common struggle for democracy, thereby turning the state’s nation-building program against itself. On the other hand, they used whatever space that was allowed outside of the state’s reach to develop a common counterculture by absorbing an increasing number of cultural elements, including those of the colonizer’s, to not only maintain a sense of identity in the face of systematic assimilation but also broaden their knowledge of social reform and ways to achieve it. Such is historically how the Taiwanese nation and Taiwanese identity were formed during colonization. They emerged from the interstices of official nationalisms and state oppression.

Summaries of Chapters

In this final section, I would like to give a brief preview of the following chapters. In the next chapter, I draw on Raymond Williams’ explication of hegemony and Jacques Derrida’s
deconstruction thinking to examine Li Qiao’s historical novel *Brotherhood of Xilai Temple*. It is my intention to show how a pre-articulation or pre-emergence of an oppositional and semi-autonomous Taiwanese consciousness manages to slip through a formidable Sinocentric cultural hegemony dominating the narrative. My central argument in this chapter is that Taiwanese consciousness begins to take shape and becomes recognizable in the text when the fundamental similarities between Japanese and Chinese nationalisms and Japanese colonial rule and KMT authoritarian rule become indistinguishable in the liminal space between text and reality. In this chapter I discuss Li’s text in two parts. First, I demonstrate how the text fits the category of conformist text by showing Sinocentric cultural hegemony as the dominant consciousness of the text. This can be observed in its ritualistic allusions to Chinese patriotic classics and its racist demonization of the Japanese. My discussion in this first part is to set the context for the following examination of how an alternative and oppositional reading of the text can emerge alongside the dominant consciousness of the text. Next, using Williams’ notion of practical consciousness and Derrida’s supplementarity, I show that the idea of Taiwanese as a distinct group becomes clear when textual representation of Japanese colonization converges with people’s lived experience under authoritarian KMT rule. In addition, I also argue that the so-called Taiwanese consciousness—people’s sense of local belonging in Taiwan—is shown in the form of practical consciousness, which is a consciousness that cannot be reduced to nationalist sentiments.

In the third chapter, I looked at the representative works of three colonial Taiwanese writers: Lai He, Yang Kui, and Lü Heruo. My interest in this chapter is to examine the interrelations between social movements and literature in the 1920s and 1930s, a time that scholars like Edward I-te Chen and Ye Shitao consider to be the starting point of Taiwanese
consciousness. Borrowing Frantz Fanon’s humanism of the colonized as the outer limits of anticolonial cultural productions, I suggest that the works written by these three writers should be thought of as a project that aims to reinvent a new people, which therefore is not limited to a mere assertion of cultural or racial difference from the Japanese colonizer. As I demonstrate in the chapter, the three writers’ works constantly seek to raise simultaneously people’s social, political, and cultural self-awareness. This can be seen in their critique of traditional Taiwanese culture and their incorporation of such moralistic ideas as equality and human rights in their works. In this chapter, I discuss chronologically the three authors’ works. I demonstrate that Lai He’s Manichean representation of colonial Taiwan which focuses on police brutality helped initiate the tradition of anticolonial writing. This tradition was largely carried on by Yang Kui whose writing is in many ways similar to that of Lai He’s but whose socialist background also adds a new dimension—that of class—to this narrative tradition. I conclude this chapter by arguing that if the three authors’ writing helped lay the foundation of Taiwanese consciousness, it is not simply because of their emphasis on Taiwanese cultural and class identity in relation to the colonizer, but because their works contribute to the formation of what Axel Honneth terms a semantic horizon which provides the language for the people to interpret their sociopolitical predicament not as individual but as typical of the entire cultural group as well as the moral ideals that inspire them to seek a more just society.

Chapter 4 takes a slightly different approach to study how the idea of Taiwan as a nation is narrated from a minority point of view. In this chapter, I examine Wu Zhuoliu’s *Orphan of Asia* and Zhu Tianxin’s “The Old Capital.” Wu’s novel was completed and published at the end of Japanese colonial rule while Zhu’s story was written in the post-martial law, democratic Taiwan. Both texts, I argue, form a strong counter-narrative to question the totalizing and
homogenizing nationalist discourses in their different time periods, Japanese imperialism, Chinese nationalism, and the newly arisen Taiwanese nationalism. In this chapter, I rely mainly on Homi Bhabha’s concept of hybridity to examine how both texts, by highlighting the hybrid experiences of the Taiwanese people, unsettle the pedagogical nationalist narrative that seeks to represent Taiwan as a linear, homogenous society. In the end of the chapter, I conclude that both author’s emphasis on Taiwanese hybridity opens up a productive space for the reader to think beyond essentialist categories of people, culture, and nation. In doing so, their works also help point towards a more cosmopolitan future Taiwan.
CHAPTER 2
THE PERFORMATIVITY OF THE SUBALTERN: INTERTEXTUALITY AND
REVISION OF MEMORY IN LI QIAO’S REPRESENTATION
OF THE XILAI TEMPLE (TAPANI) INCIDENT

Edward Said writes, “The realities of power and authority—as well as the resistance offered by men, women, and social movements to institutions, authorities, orthodoxies—are the realities that make texts possible, that deliver them to their readers, that solicit the attention of critics” (WTC 5). In Said’s understanding, texts are “worldly” not merely in a tautological sense that they are situated in the world but in a decidedly political sense that they are necessitated and shaped by events of power struggle and relations of domination (Said, WTC 4). With its peculiar sensibility towards unbalanced power relations constantly at work, the text brings into popular imagination past events not merely in the way they were, but in the way they could and should have been, and, in so doing, responds to a collective intention to visualize and realize a future unburdened by the paralyzing thought of necessity. In this sense, “[Text is] reality…it [is] an event necessitated by other events, and leading to still other events” (Said, WTC 60). The text-event discursively transforms the material past and, with its own discursive materiality, influences the future both discursively and materially. By the same token, events are, to a degree, textual; they are discursively caused by prior texts and open to further textualization. Just as Gayatri Spivak’s subaltern-widow “attempted to ‘speak’ by turning her body into a text of woman/writing” in resistance to discourses of patriarchal “subject-constitution” and imperialist “object-formation,” so countless colonized individuals were also writing their texts the moment they were involuntarily dragged into events shaped by power (CPR 304, 308). Some of these texts, unfortunately, never found a reader and a critic, while others that did soon became nodal
points in a matrix of event-texts and text-events that exerts actual impact on the way we read our past and make our future.

In several past colonial societies, some of the instances that most explicitly exemplify the close entanglement between event and text suggestive of power relations can be found in a very peculiar tradition of revisionist narrative wherein outlaws are turned into anticolonial heroes and bandits become revolutionaries: “The outlaw, for example, who holds the countryside for days against the police, hot on his trail, or who succumbs after killing four or five police officers in single handed combat or who commits suicide rather than ‘give up’…all constitute for the people role models, action schemas, and ‘heroes’” (Fanon, WE 30). Taiwan has one such iconic outlaw, Liao Tianding, known as Xiadao (literally, chivalric robber). Starting out as a mere nobody, Liao became a household name in the early years of Japanese colonial rule after committing a series of high-profile thefts against rich businessmen and killing a colonial informant sent to follow him. An average criminal on the surface, but because of his much publicized defiance and his shiftiness in his confrontations with the Japanese police, Liao was turned into a larger-than-life, Robin Hood-like legend by subsequent storytellers, and his story has since been adapted into countless comic books, TV programs, and radio dramas. Stories like this in the Japanese colonial days were popular because they were empowering; they fulfilled what millions of colonized Taiwanese could only imagine but dared not do: openly defy colonial authorities. Later, their popularity received a further boost not by sheer chance but because they made perfect materials for the newly arrived KMT regime to provoke anti-Japanese national

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12 In the dissertation, all Chinese personal names are romanticized in conformity with the Pinyin system. For names of places in Taiwan, I follow the official translation.

13 For a discussion of factual details about Liao’s criminal life and how it enters Taiwanese pop-culture, see Tsai Chin-Tang’s “Is it Chivalry, or Robber?” pp. 1-18.
sentiments in Taiwan. Clearly, power is written all over these texts; it makes them possible from the start and subjects them to multiple revisions later on. Through continuous writing and rewriting, the many textualized events of outlaws-turned-revolutionaries shape the way Taiwanese collectively imagine a harsh Japanese colonization as much as the way they understand themselves today in relation to that past. This chapter will look at one such text, albeit, unlike Liao’s life, one that has received less attention—the Xilai Temple Incident (alternatively known as Tapani Incident), an historical uprising against Japanese colonial rule in 1915, and Li Qiao’s textual treatment of the incident titled *Sworn Brothers of Xilai Temple* written under the auspices of the KMT state in 1977.14

Using Li’s revisionist historical novel as a representative text, my primary task in this chapter is to demonstrate that, even in the most repressive of times, power is never total and exhaustive; it cannot completely control the way in which the past is written, perceived and communicated. There will always be areas that power cannot fully cover or exclude. It is from these areas of cultural past where power falls short and stumbles that ideas of resistance to state oppression spring forth and contribute to the rise and continued survival of people’s national consciousness. To pursue this line of argument in my analysis of Li’s text, I draw on Raymond Williams’ reading of Gramscian hegemony and his explication of the dominant, residual and emergent to make a case that, however formidable, a dominant cultural discourse—in this case, Sinocentrism or Han chauvinism—cannot fully incorporate people’s shared past and rewrite this past in perfect accordance with its own image. The range of human intentions, practices, and experiences that the dominant discourse, by default, cannot admit or manage to erase eventually

14 All direct quotations from this text are my own translation. The novel title is hereafter rendered as *Xilai Temple* for brevity.
stand to destabilize its hegemony and thus stake out areas of potential resistance. To further expound the inherent inadequacy and limitation of power, I also make use of Jacques Derrida’s deconstruction theory. Insofar as the understanding and transmission of historical events must be mediated textually, the impossibility for a dominant discourse to assert its total presence in the text of cultural memory can be shown to be rooted in the very nature of language and demonstrated in terms of a never-completed movement of signification. As my analysis will show, in Li’s text the presence of a self-assured Sinocentric hegemony is continually undermined by instances of slippage, over-signification (or in Derrida’s words, “surplus”), and quite simply by the very form of narrative that infuses humanity and agency in the portrayal of historical subjects, thereby complicating their predetermined function as mere signifiers of a transcendental signified.

To conclude, it should be mentioned, my choice of Li’s *Xilai Temple* is deliberate. It is a prime example of how power sets writing in motion in a most literal and unambiguous sense. For the text was produced in direct response to a state-sponsored cultural campaign to narrativize Taiwan’s important historical figures and events. Therefore, it was situated squarely within the ideological parameters sanctioned by KMT’s authoritarian state, or one could even argue it was written in support of that very ideological state apparatus, at least to an ostensible degree. Because of this, the moments in this text that show signs of power losing its grip over the meaning of Taiwan’s cultural past are all the more remarkable and exemplary. To make my point clearer, I quote Raymond Williams’ perceptive words: “It would be wrong to overlook the importance of works and ideas which, while clearly affected by hegemonic limits and pressures, are at least in part significant breaks beyond them” (114). It is my main purpose in this chapter to locate these significant breaks notwithstanding the limits and pressures exerted by the state’s
But before I turn to Li’s text, I would like to first try to recreate its original text, namely, the historical event of Xilai Temple Incident. Such a short detour is necessary, as it will help illuminate the extent to which power limits Li’s creativity and attempts to write itself into the event and the text through Li’s hand. It also helps us better appreciate the fact that inspiring ideas of resistance can still emerge against such real limits and pressures.

The Incident

A common practice in the discussion of Taiwan’s colonial history is to divide the fifty-year Japanese rule into three periods. Though different scholars may disagree on the exact start and end dates of each period, the defining characteristics of all three which justify such a convention of periodization seem to have been discussed in a rather consistent manner. The first two decades of Japanese rule (1895-1915) are often called the consolidation period. The colonial state’s top priority at this time was to bring the whole of Taiwan under its effective control. It relied heavily on military and police forces to pacify uprisings on the one hand; on the other, it was occupied with devising and implementing a coherent plan to develop Taiwan’s long-term socioeconomic infrastructure. Culturally assimilating the native populations was not one of its immediate concerns (Gold 38, Peattie 95-96). Following this is a relatively moderate and liberal period (1915-1930s) due in large part to a successful political democratization in Japan proper (naichi) known as the Taishō Democracy. In this comparatively favorable climate, Taiwan saw its civil society grow steadily stronger while the colonial state in the meantime picked up the pace to Japanize the Han-Taiwanese and plain Aborigines (Gold 40-41). The final years (1930s-1945) are the well-known Kōminka (becoming imperial subjects) period characterized by forced
assimilation and coercive governance, as Japan at this point was given to militarism and keen on turning Taiwan into a military front for its expansion (Tsurumi 109, Gold 43, Peattie 121).

The Xilai Temple Incident of 1915, put in the above timeframe, is a watershed event that marks the end of the first period and ushers in the second. Historian Paul R. Katz describes it as an event that “dramatically underscores the successes and failures of Japanese rule” in the early years, yet, for various reasons, it has not attracted as much scholarly attention as have pre-1910 instances of armed resistance (WVTBR 1, 32). In any case, the Xilai Temple Incident is, by all credible accounts, one of the last and largest armed uprisings to ever occur in Japanese-ruled Taiwan. The uprising, whose participants included both Han-Taiwanese and plain Aborigines, lasted for over two months before being finally put down by the Japanese authorities. In between, numerous battles were fought in the foothills in today’s Tainan and Kaohsiung with over a thousand people on both sides killed in action. Moreover, in the months that followed the failed uprising, hundreds of rebels as well as individuals suspected of aiding the rebel cause were arrested; nearly a thousand of them were sentenced to death while others were given varying lengths of prison terms (Katz, “GCCT” 389).15

To understand the nature of the Xilai Temple Incident as a rebel movement, a closer look at its cultural and social settings would be helpful. As noted, in the first couple decades of its rule, the Japanese colonial state adopted a gradualist policy towards assimilating the native populations. Accordingly, its principle in dealing with local religious activities was almost one of non-interference. This left the door open for religious agitation. Many temples in this time became “centers of popular discontent and subversive ideas,” as people would gather there in

15 For accurate numbers of casualties and convicts on death row following the Xilai Temple Incident, see Katz’s “Governmentality and Its Consequences in Colonial Taiwan,” pp. 387-424.
great number to vent their frustration with colonial rule, and certain educated opportunists would supply these unhappy temple-goers with “a mixture of debased Taoist and Buddhist magical practices suffused with strong anti-Japanese sentiment” (Kerr 98-99). Xilai Temple was one of such places where hundreds of “mostly illiterate peasants” clustered around a man named Yu Qingfang who proclaimed himself to be a “godly master” and have the “mandate of heaven” to establish a new state in the Japanese’s stead (Fong 163-64). Yu and several other leaders attracted followers by spreading millenarian prophecies predicting an imminent apocalypse to occur and drive out the colonizers and by issuing amulets said to have the magical power to protect wearers from harm during battles with government forces. Meanwhile, to maintain coherence, they required members to perform such rituals as observing a vegetarian diet, drinking sacred water, making oaths, and worshipping banners (Katz, “GCCT” 404). It is fair to say that local religious beliefs formed the main base of the rebel group’s ideological foundation that served to both mobilize and create a group-identity among participants. As Fong Shiaw-Chian observes, the Xilai Temple Incident was “pre-political,” because the leadership did not have a clear plan about how to bring a state into being, much less about how to govern one (163). Instead, what it did mostly was stoke up racial and religious sentiments by, for instance, instilling in the followers horrifying images of a living hell let loose by “nonbelievers, especially by the Japanese” (Fong 166).

Equally, if not more, important are the socioeconomic factors that prompted hundreds of individuals to risk their lives and take up arms against the colonial state. Katz studies the uprising through the conceptual lens of governmentality. He demonstrates with definitive evidence that a number of colonial policies and the drastic changes they brought to bear on an already poverty-stricken population in the mountainous area of southern Taiwan are among the
main reasons that a major uprising erupted there. One of the changes that hit the locals hardest was a sharply increased sum of land taxes. This was due to the near impossibility to evade taxation after a series of measures related to territorial and demographical control, such as land surveys and mandatory household registration, were introduced by a modern scientific state (Katz, “GCCT” 399). On top of an increased financial burden, many locals also saw their livelihood severely damaged by the colonial state’s systematic effort to industrialize sugar production and privatize forestlands previously declared state properties.16 Lacking any plan (or intent) of redistribution to go along with such a swift and wide-scale introduction of capitalist economy, the colonial state created a polarized situation in this poor, rural area where wealth was concentrated in the hands of Japanese capitalists while small peasants and loggers could barely make ends meet (Katz, “GCCT” 399-400). Finally, frequent occurrence of police brutality is also believed to be a major cause that drove the locals to rebel (Katz, “GCCT” 398).17

Overall, as an historical event, the Xilai Temple Incident was a large-scale, violent rebellion that mobilized hundreds of disgruntled men and women by means of a locally grown millenarianism bordering on religious fanaticism. In terms of timing, scope, intensity and influence, it is widely deemed as rare in Taiwan’s colonial history by all objective standards. Perhaps for this reason, as a historical text, the incident is especially susceptible to interpretation, rewriting, and sometimes gross misreading. As Katz points out, in postwar Taiwan,

16 Much of this was done during Governor-General Sakuma Samata’s term (1906-1915). George H. Kerr describes Sakuma’s term as “the longest and most corrupt administration during the Japanese half-century” (105). For a detailed account of Sakuma’s policies and the socioeconomic changes they generated in Taiwan, see Kerr, 95-105.

17 For a complete discussion of the socioeconomic background of the Xilai Temple Incident, see also Chapter 1 of Katz’s When Valleys Turned Blood Red: The Ta-pa-ni Incident in Colonial Taiwan, which is, to my knowledge, one of the most comprehensive and unbiased research of the incident. Citing the confessions of people arrested after the Xilai Temple Incident, Katz argues that many joined Yu Qingfan’s uprising out of a deeply felt dissatisfaction with the colonial state’s economic policies and that “nationalism or concerns about the ethnicity of their overlords do not appear to have been decisive factors” (“GCCT” 400).
interpretations of the incident tend to adhere to two extremes. For KMT sympathizers, the incident is an integral chapter in the metatext of modern China’s anti-imperialist history, and accordingly it is a revolution and the men and women who died to liberate a part of China are read as martyrs. Li Qiao’s text apparently falls under this category. On the other hand, scholars eager to de-Sinicize Taiwanese history tend to go so far in the opposite direction as to echo Japanese colonial officials in labeling the incident as a series of bandit activities committed by credulous, superstitious peasants (WVTBR 3). Whatever the case may be, I have no interest in nor the qualifications to pass a verdict of this sort. Rather, I will now turn my attention to Li’s fictional version of the incident which, while dutifully obeying the ideological boundaries erected by the KMT state, nevertheless enables a reading of the many Taiwanese implicated in the incident not as martyrs or bandits but as identifiable human beings caught in a familiar history of recurrent oppression. Such a reading is possible in Li’s revision precisely because a literary text, by definition, makes no pretension to absolute truthfulness. It is to this text that I now turn.

Conformist Writing?

Li Qiao, a Hakka Taiwanese, was born a Japanese subject in 1934 but only remained so for a mere eleven years due to the 1945 regime change. His most celebrated work is the Wintry Night trilogy written between 1979 and 1981, a three-volume magnum opus based also on Taiwan’s colonial history that saw an English translation in 2001. Li’s Xilai Temple (1977), on the other hand, is one of his earliest novels following the publication of a number of short stories, but the novel never quite received the same amount of recognition as did most of his later works. The reason for its relative obscurity might be that this seemingly unexciting and otherwise
forgettable novel of his represents an odd deviation from his entire writing career which is characterized by his unwavering devotion to the native land and people, and, in light of his intellectual development, it stands as an apparent contradiction to his later open commitment to the cause of Taiwan independence. As Kuo-ch’ing Tu points out, after the lifting of martial law in Taiwan in 1987, Li actively used his writing to promote “Taiwan consciousness” and reflect on cultural issues such as “how to break away from the dominance of foreign colonial culture” and “the need to build a new Taiwanese culture based on native culture” (xix). 18

At first glance, Xilai Temple may strike one as a none-too-subtle piece of state propaganda fraught with the kind of loyalist, patriotic rhetoric peculiar to a bygone authoritarian era in Taiwan that now almost sounds ridiculous and laughable. With its ritualistic allusions to classical Chinese literature, frequent invocations of vocabulary reminiscent of Nationalist revolution on the Chinese mainland, and outright demonization of the Japanese race, Xilai Temple is in many ways representative of the official culture that the KMT ruling elite deliberately fashioned and promoted on Taiwan. But, to be clear, the novel is far from a mindless distortion of history in blind support of the state’s political agenda. Rather, it takes a hybrid form that interweaves fictional and historical writing. It is a combined effort of Li’s creative capacity and historical research. In a non-linear fashion, the novel recounts the personal stories of the three rebel leaders, Yu Qingfang, Luo Jun, and Jiang Ding, after their eventful meeting at Xilai Temple, and spends the rest of the book recreating the rebels’ action in a series of offensives against the colonizers that culminates in an all-out battle down the Hutoushan (Tiger Head Mountain). Yet, throughout the narrative, in commemorating the valor and sacrifice of the rebels,

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18 Li even once served in the decision-making committee of the Taiwan Independence Party, the most radical political party devoted to that cause, as its name clearly suggests. He was also a policy advisor to President Chen Shui-Bian, the first Taiwanese president to openly advocate Taiwan independence.
the novel never neglects to repeatedly remind the reader that their anticolonial uprising is
inspired by the pride of being part of the Han civilization and justified by a sense of duty to
defend it from foreign corruption. It is in this way that the novel fulfills its expected didactic
function of patriotic education and keeps the all-important idea of China in the back of the
reader’s mind.

Due to the conformist stance it obviously takes, it is not surprising that Xilai Temple often
slips under the academic radar and rarely earns the full attention of liberal-minded critics who
normally attach higher value to literary works that display a critical sensibility towards the status
quo. Thus, as can be perfectly expected, no essay-length criticism of the novel has ever been
published in the English language. Even in Taiwan, serious discussions of the novel’s
sociopolitical implications are few and far between. To be sure, the novel does appear in
several published journal articles and monographs, but it is often mentioned in passing and as a
preliminary that emphasizes how the writing of Xilai Temple deepens Li’s interest in Taiwan’s
colonial past, sharpens his skills of incorporating historical materials in his creative endeavor,
and thereby anticipates his two masterpieces, Wintry Night and Buried Grievance of 1947, that
assume a clearer form of social criticism. One rare exception is a 2011 master’s thesis that
dedicates a full chapter to the discussion of Li’s emergent Taiwan consciousness against the
imposition of Chinese nationalism in Xilai Temple. But, unfortunately, it does so in a
predominantly descriptive way and, as such, fails to confront head on the theoretical question of
state power and its inevitable malfunction, thus precluding the possibility to draw broader

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19 According to the Index to Taiwan Periodical Literature System, the official database of scholarly essays in
Taiwan, the last piece dedicated entirely to the novel is a mere four-page article published in 1979 that discusses the
aesthetic effects of Li Qiao’s use of traditional tunes.

20 See for example, Hung Ying-Hsueh, 42, Yang Chi-Chu, 29-31, and Pei-Yin Lin, 71.
political implications from the text.21 It is my contention that, in order to fully demonstrate the nascent national consciousness (or so-called Taiwan consciousness) emerging through the cracks of state power in Li’s text as having a symbolic meaning in Taiwanese people’s continued search for self-definition and self-determination, one needs to begin by properly theorizing the colonial hegemony that Li and many others had to operate in and negotiate with in order to chart new paths. A discussion of Gramsci and Williams will be a good point of departure for our purpose.

The major contribution of Gramsci’s writing resides in its unprecedented revelation concerning the central role played by hegemony in political domination. As he makes clear, for every dominant social group to ensure its continued dominance over the whole of society, it must simultaneously have the means to establish an unquestioned hegemony in civil society as well as the means to exercise the state power of direct domination. Hegemony, as defined by Gramsci, is the capacity to solicit “the ‘spontaneous’ consent given by the great masses of population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group,” whereas direct domination is carried out through “[the] apparatus of state coercive power which ‘legally’ enforces discipline on those groups who do not ‘consent’ either actively or passively” (12)22. As can be inferred from Gramsci’s definition, since the purpose of domination is invariably to generate popular “consent” to the dominant way of life, accordingly the top priority of every dominant group that has risen to power in succession is to fortify its hegemony while resorting to coercive force only as a secondary means “in anticipation of moments of crisis of command and direction when spontaneous consent has failed” (Gramsci 12). To achieve this, it has to “assimilate” or “conquer ideologically” intellectuals from across all social strata and turn them

21 See Chang Yi-Ning, chapter 3.
22 All internal quotation marks are Gramsci’s.
into a subaltern rank of cultural agents or “deputies” to carry out the essential functions of promoting and defending the dominant values (Gramsci 10, 12). Normally, intellectuals are recruited or ideologically conquered by the positive fact of the “prestige…which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production,” but, in a more totalitarian climate, they can well become so due to the state’s negative means of coercion, such as censorship and legal punishment (Gramsci 12).

Piggybacking on Gramsci, Raymond Williams argues that since hegemony exists for the purpose of engineering the maximum amount of spontaneous consent of the masses to the dominant way of life, it cannot simply be “the articulate upper level of ideology” and make itself felt only in such explicit forms of control as “manipulation” and “indoctrination” (110). Rather, it has to be something more subtle and ubiquitous: “it is culture, in the strongest sense” (Williams 110). As Williams argues, “[Hegemony] is a whole body of practices and expectations, over the whole of living: our senses and assignments of energy, our shaping perceptions of ourselves and our world” (110). In other words, hegemony permeates the whole of culture, or rather it is itself the dominant culture that all individuals experience to varying degrees and are invariably defined in relation to it. As a dominant culture, Williams continues, in order to remain as such, hegemony cannot be but a living process that involves continuous incorporation and exclusion of what is not originally part of itself, namely the myriad of cultural experience of the marginalized and the dominated. One particular kind of marginal cultural experience—and this is the most relevant kind to my discussion—that the dominant culture must assimilate or otherwise eliminate is what Williams calls the residual, that which “has been effectively formed in the past, but is still active in the cultural process” (122). The residual, while dependent on the validity of the dominated group’s cultural memory, is still a constitutive part of
their self-identity in the present. As such, it forms a potential blind spot in their ability to give spontaneous consent, thereby posing a direct threat to the dominant group who therefore “cannot allow too much residual experience and practice outside of itself, at least without risk” (Williams 123).

Taken together, Gramsci and Williams’ analysis furnishes an apt theoretical angle with which to view and analyze the cultural policies systematically pursued by the KMT state during its one-party rule that not only directly contributed to its hegemony and shaped the cultural horizon at the time but also had a lingering impact on the way contemporary Taiwanese understand their pre-war past. It is my intention to examine the creation of this memory-reshaping hegemony now.

When the KMT arrived as a new colonizer in Taiwan, it was met with a native population that predominantly spoke Taiwanese and Japanese and was far from familiar with modern Chinese culture due to fifty years of separation. Intending to obtain social consent to its minority rule in the long run especially after the February 28th Incident had made it realize the futility of ruling by sheer force, the KMT saw it necessary to “re-Sinicize” what it perceived as the “enslaved” Taiwanese by inculcating them with a Sinocentric worldview through media and public education (S. Chang 79). Moreover, unlike the Japanese who confidently claimed Taiwan as a war prize, the relocated Nationalist Central Government of 1949 came with a bitter realization of losing the mainland to the Communist Party “on the ideological front,” which gave it a still urgent cause to build a robust and prestigious mainstream culture from the ground up (S. Chang 78). In this background, rooting out Japanese cultural influence and clamping down left-leaning thoughts were of course the obvious things to do. But literary production was also

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23 The term “enslaved” has a very precise meaning in this context, connoting Japanized exclusively.
deemed an important component in this widespread effort of cultural engineering and was thus subject to direct and indirect political control. With the help of all the “politically trustworthy agents” that the state had placed “at all levels of cultural bureaucracy and educational system,” an officially promoted and highly recognizable mode of cultural expression known as Mainstream literature became dominant and remained so for much of the forty-year martial law period (1949-1987) (S. Chang 76). As a legitimate cultural mode, Mainstream cannot be reduced to one or two features, but it will serve our purpose to mention two of its constitutive principles. First, it is a conformist literature born directly out of the state’s policy to make literature serve “the purposes of political propaganda” and “carry the burden of nation-building” (S. Chang 8). Secondly, it is neotraditionist heavy with references to traditional Chinese culture which, again, dovetails with the state’s policy to promote Chinese cultural orthodoxy, in part to differentiate itself from Communist China and in part to educate a not-quite Chinese majority (S. Chang 79).

Characteristic of its time, Li Qiao’s Xilai Temple was also written in the Mainstream mode and intended as a pedagogical instrument of popular Chinese and national education, but it had another important function: appropriating Taiwanese colonial past and imposing a hegemonic meaning on it. As Williams tells us, for a culture to remain dominant, it must actively absorb and rewrite the residual memory of the dominated. To be sure, public discussion of the Japanese colonial period in Taiwan was not permitted until the onset of soft authoritarianism in the mid-70s thanks to pressures coming from civil society and the agitation of literary Nativists and Localists. But the KMT was all along well aware of the fact that the “residue” of Taiwanese (anti-)colonial memory was still “lived and practiced” in people’s private sphere.

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24 For a brief history of Nativist and Localist literary formations and their relationship with the Mainstream, see introduction of Sung-sheng Yvonne Chang’s *Literary Culture in Taiwan*. 49
through such “social and cultural institutions” as Japanese and Taiwanese languages, unofficial oral and written history, and thus remained an active layer of Taiwanese cultural identity (Williams 122). So when it finally allowed the writing and reading of this segment of pre-KMT history to take place in the public sphere, it did so on one vital condition: this history could only be written and read from the KMT perspective. It is against this backdrop that then Premier Chiang Ching-kuo instructed the Party History Committee (Dangshihui) to invite notable native Taiwanese writers to contribute novels adapted from historical figures and events of the Japanese era to a *Collected Biographies of Early Honorable Chinese* (*Zhongguo xianxian liezhuan*). Li Qiao was among the invited writers and his *Xilai Temple* was written as a contribution to the Collection. Perhaps typical for an authoritarian regime, the committee had no qualms about making the Collection’s propagandistic purpose clear to the writers, as its mission statement clearly stipulated that writers were to detail “early honorable Chinese’s background, life, academic thoughts, moral deeds as well as their contribution to the nation and people” in a way that is “at once scholarly, artistic, and educational” (qtd. in Y. Chang 55, my translation and emphasis). Interestingly, *Xilia Temple* was at first highly approved by party officials upon completion and even made it to the final round of a government-sponsored literary competition before being abruptly turned down on the grounds of its “implications of Taiwan independence” (*Taidu sixiang*).25 This upset Li a great deal at the time, but became a source of pride to him later.

All told, whether willingly or unwillingly, when Li Qiao wrote *Xilai Temple*, he was effectively serving as a subaltern “functionary” or “deputy” of the KMT state’s “social hegemony” and “political government” (Gramsci 12). In particular, he helped promote and

25 This is a well-known anecdote surrounding the novel, but see, for example, Lin Cho-Shui’s article.

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defend its dominant values by forcing a dominant reading onto Taiwanese people’s—and his own—cultural past, thus normalizing this unruly past of the dominated. Williams lists a number of revisionist strategies used by the dominant culture in its appropriative endeavor: “reinterpretation, dilution, projection, discriminating inclusion and exclusion” (123). Let us first examine in these terms how well Li fulfilled his subaltern function to strengthen the legitimacy of the ruler. This will provide the necessary context for a discussion of the alternative and oppositional readings that emerge alongside the dominant reading of the text later on.

Hegemonic Rewriting of Marginal History

A representative revisionist text of its time, Xilai Temple was produced on behalf and in defense of the Chinese ruling elite’s Sinocentric cultural hegemony. As such, a thorough critique of its conformism may well begin by laying bare the organizing logic of the very hegemony that made the text possible. Sinocentrism, like any logocentric discourse, revolves around the belief of a transcendental Idea whose existence, allegedly, can be traced linearly to a mythical origin, and the practice of seeing everything of significance in terms of its relation to that origin. The Idea here of course is a rarified China, and its latest incarnation, as far as Taiwan is concerned, is KMT’s Republic of China (R.O.C), the self-fashioned inheritor of Chinese civilization, whose originary moment in turn is the Xinhai Revolution of 1911. In Li’s reinterpretation, as we shall see, by referring continually to these two origins—one imaginary, the other actual—he turns the Xilai Temple Incident into a mediating event bridging a Chinese past with a Chinese reality on Taiwan. Specifically, through Li’s textualization, the incident is first projected into a Sinocentric history, or what Said calls “a static system of synchronic essentialism,” where a constellation of humans and events are represented as epiphenomena of a timeless Idea of China (240, O).
Stripped of its historical and local specificity, when the incident enters public consciousness in its Sinocentric textual form, it serves to naturalize the existing social hierarchies of KMT Taiwan where people, thoughts, and behaviors are continued to be ordered by their proximity and resemblance to that Idea. In what follows, I will analyze in detail the various methods Li employs to reduce the Xilai Temple Incident to an ahistorical signifier of a transcendental China, and, in this way, metonymically incorporates the whole of Taiwan’s past into an organically conceived Chinese history.

One of Li’s key strategies in his Sinocentric-driven reinterpretation is to consistently represent the Xilai Temple Incident as inspired by and derivative of the Xinhai Revolution, thereby symbolically placing a Taiwanese anticolonial uprising in the official history of the R.O.C. and, from there, the semi-mythical history of Han civilization. In particular, Li does this by rewriting historical figures and inventing plots to create direct and indirect links between the two events, while filling the text with random citations and footnotes to strive for a look of historical accuracy. The names, for instance, of Sun Yat-sen, the sole founding father of the R.O.C., and his Chinese Revolutionary Party are specifically mentioned many times (14, 15, 55, 61, 92, 202). At one point, it is suggested that the Xinhai Revolution is a direct inspiration to one of the Xilai Temple leaders, Luo Jun, who the author describes in the preface as “a true leader” among the three because he is the only one who “rises up against the Japanese with a noble [Chinese] nationalist consciousness” ((20)). During Luo’s exile in China as a wanted man by the Japanese colonial state, it is narrated that despite all his miseries and frustrations, “the one thing that cheers him the most is that on October 10th of 1911 the Revolutionary Army led by Mr. Sun Yat-sen rose up from Wuchang and overthrew the Manchu Qing Dynasty…the birth of the Republic of China gives him unlimited hope and inspiration” (61). While it may be true that Luo
had heard of the Xinhai Revolution when in China, the extent to which he was influenced by it is historically unverifiable. Nevertheless, in suggesting that the most important rebel leader (in the author’s eye) is inspired by Sun’s revolution, the author effectively creates the impression that the Xilai Temple Incident is an overseas outgrowth of modern Chinese nationalism.

As if inspiration was not specific enough, the author goes a step further to forge a direct Chinese presence in the Xilai Temple Incident by making full use of Luo Jun’s well documented Chinese connections. In particular, he reinvents several individuals that Luo had actually recruited from China and turns them into liaisons acting between Taiwanese rebel leaders and the Chinese Revolutionary Party, thus affirming the latter’s direct involvement in the uprising. One such individual is Li Jingcheng, who is portrayed as a mainlander and a practicing doctor sent by Sun Yat-sen himself to help the Taiwanese rebels. In a secret meeting under Yu Qingfang’s rice mill, Li gives an impassioned speech to drive up the rebel group’s morale by assuring them their cause will have Chinese “backing”:

“I implore all of you to believe this: the fatherland will never forget about our compatriots in Taiwan! You might not know, restoring (guangfu) Taiwan has been one of the reasons Mr. Sun Yat-sen started a revolution! Anyway, please be assured, the zhishi (persons given to a noble cause) in Taiwan are never fighting alone. Everything you do is an important part, a tributary of the great revolution in all of China; people on both sides of the strait are united in one body and soul!”

Upon hearing this, all are deeply moved. Old scholar Wang Lanshi starts to weep. Tears well up in the eyes of Xiao Dacheng, Jiang Ding and others. (15)

A typical scene one would expect to see in a patriotic novel. But Li Jingcheng is far from the only person with Chinese background thus reinvented by the author. Other Taiwanese and

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26 As Paul Katz notes, “Some accounts claim that the flames of Luo’s anti-Japanese sentiments were further stoked by Sun Yat-sen’s 1911 Revolution, but he does not seem to have begun to plan any acts of resistance until August 1914, when he received a visit from a friend named Ch’en Chin-fa” (WVTBR 68). Moreover, none of the arrested rebels mentioned specifically Xinhai Revolution in their confessions (Katz, WVTBR 88).

27 Li Jingcheng was most likely Luo’s fellow Taiwanese exile living in China (Katz, WVTBR 69).
Chinese recruited by Luo Jun from the mainland are all invariably given an explicit identity of Chinese revolutionaries: They are undercover “comrades” “directly borrowed from the Revolutionary Army” who “specialize in politics, intelligence, mobilization, and military affairs” (92). Factually speaking, it is unlikely that the Xilai Temple rebels had received any significant help from the R.O.C, especially not in such a direct form as Li Qiao wants the reader to believe.\(^\text{28}\) However, the considerable presence of Chinese revolutionaries in his fictional account confirms what Li Jingcheng says unequivocally, the Xilai Temple uprising is a “tributary” of a broader revolutionary current originated in China. Such a symbolic act of appropriation further reinforces what the KMT consistently preaches to the Taiwanese people: that the whole of Taiwanese history has never been free from direct Chinese control, not even during Japanese colonization, and thus has always remained an integral part of Chinese history since time immemorial.

But perhaps the most effective way to make Chinese presence felt throughout the event/text of Xilai Temple Incident is not by blatantly writing it in as we just saw, but by tricking the reader’s psychology into spontaneously misidentifying colonial Taiwan with modern China with plenty of visual cues and stylistic hints. I am referring to Li Qiao’s deliberate imitation, both in terms of style and theme, of an ideologically loaded but widely consumed subgenre of Mainstream literature in Taiwan at the time, Combat literature. Combat literature is a unique mode of writing that focuses on depicting the military action of Nationalist revolutions and

\(^{28}\) The key figure in Li Qiao’s novel who acts as a mediator to “borrow” revolutionaries from China is Lin Zumi, a Taiwanese patron of Sun Yat-sen and descendent of the influential Wufeng Lin clan of Taiwan. However, in the Japanese official record, Lin denies any involvement in the uprising and says he has never heard of Luo Jun. See Lin Hengdao 317-321. Moreover, in 1907, Liang Qichao, someone who was actually in the decision-making core among Chinese revolutionaries told Lin Xiantang, a Taiwanese leader of almost all social movements in the Japanese-ruled era, that Taiwan was on its own because China had its own problems and could not offer any help. See, for example, Kerr 108. Edward I-te Chen also points out that another Chinese revolutionary Dai Jitao, “a close associate” of Sun Yat-sen, advised Lin Xiantang against any hope of Chinese assistance. See Chen (1972), 179.
battles on the Chinese mainland with a proclaimed aim to carry on the same revolutionary tradition on Taiwan. It is heavy with anti-communist and patriotic messages and, thus, stands at the forefront in propagating KMT’s core moral and patriotic values at the time. The editorial preface to the inaugural issue of *Military Literature* sums up the guiding principles of this literature thus: “Revolutionary thought needs literature to propagate it; revolutionary sentiment needs literature to establish it…Our revolutionary nationalist literature must declare war on putrefaction and evil, eradicate the harm of obscenity and the poison of communism” (S. Chang et al. 165). This literature and its related art forms were influential for the better part of the martial law period. As Sung-sheng Chang indicates, before the 60s “literary publications were inundated with works that condemned the evil doings of the Communists while eulogizing the heroism of Nationalist soldiers” (79). By the 70s, when the R.O.C. was expelled from the United Nations, the government made a bevy of military films to glorify the sacrifice of Nationalist soldiers in an attempt to stabilize a restless Taiwanese society. What all this means is that the unique lexicon and recurrent themes of this literary subgenre are by no means unfamiliar to Taiwanese populace of various generations, not excluding readers of *Xilai Temple*. Thus, by imitating the style of Combat literature, Li Qiao is able to generate the effects of misidentification.

Throughout Li’s rendition of the Xilai Temple Incident, the rebels are never called what they were, but are always referred to as *zhishi* (see above), *yishi* (persons dedicated to a righteous cause) and *lieshi* (martyrs), and the rebel force collectively as *yijun* (righteous/voluntary army). Jiang Ding, for instance, who was really only a local strongman in history, is described as a “righteous *zhishi* who refuses to submit to the Japanese dwarfs” (87). These designations, while commonly seen in works of Combat literature, are perhaps not exactly anachronistic and might
have actually been used in early Japanese-ruled Taiwan. However, the same cannot be said about the way the rebels address each other in the novel. Without fail, they call each other and are also routinely referred to by the narrator as tongzhi (comrades), as if they were party members. At one point, they are plainly called “party members” (dangyuan), which almost looks like a slip of the tongue on the author’s part (148). These terms are by no means as innocuous as their English translations may suggest, especially when put in the political context when Xilai Temple was first published. Nor can Li’s constant use of them be explained away as a simple mistake of anachronism. Rather, they are strategically deployed throughout the text to elicit a definitive feeling of reading Combat literature, albeit one that is set in Taiwan and not on the mainland, and to superimpose the suggestive image of Nationalist revolutionaries on Taiwanese anti-colonial rebels. To give a sense of how the word tongzhi is actually used in the novel, here is the concluding remark of Yu Qingfang’s speech given prior to the rebels’ final showdown with the Japanese at the Hutoushan: “The State of Immense Brightness and Benevolence (the intended name for the rebels’ new state) belongs to everyone, everyone is king: We are a democratic state—just like mainland China! Comrades, I am done talking. Now is the time to act. Let’s shed our blood, kill our enemy, and revenge our injury of losing our home and country!” (140)

With these loaded terms literally strewn all over the text, readers are incessantly manipulated into perceiving the Xilai Temple rebels in the likeness of Nationalist revolutionaries. In other words, they are led to read the rebels and their anticolonial deeds in an ideologically structured manner, that is, by comparing the rebels against the typified image of a

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29 The appearance of these terms is too ubiquitous to require any citation.

30 Earlier in the chapter, I quote Fong Shiw-Chian to emphasize the “pre-political” nature of the Xilai Temple Incident. It is unlikely that the rebels had any self-understanding as a party, let alone any conception of a democratic republic. Katz indicates that “[arrested] suspects who apparently used the term ‘revolution’ did not talk of establishing a democratic government but of founding an imperial state with either Yu or [Luo] leading it as emperor” (WVTBR 88).
host of consecrated modern Chinese patriots whose tales have been purposefully and repeatedly inculcated in them through literature, textbooks, TV series, and the like for years. In case readers fail to see the full parallel between what the author describes as a “grand anti-Japanese revolution” (*kangri dageming*) (another loaded term) and some of the most iconic Nationalist battles on the mainland, he offers a further help to facilitate such an association by reenacting in his description of battle scenes some of the most recurrent and recognizable themes in Chinese revolutionary narratives (72). Consider this example:

At this moment, the *yijun* have completely forgotten about their own lives...Although many were shot dead, they still march forward in an unbroken succession and with great bravery! Liu Huang shouts at them and orders them to stop. But some *yijun* are deaf to his warning; they continue to rush towards the frontline, risking their lives. Seeing this, Liu Huang also hurls himself into the enemy like an arrow fired from a bow. (190)

The description above succinctly captures the single most important ethos of the Nationalist Army—perseverance—predicated upon the well-told story of Sun Yat-sen’s ten failed uprisings prior to his final success on the eleventh attempt, a moral lesson widely promulgated by the KMT state. It also recalls for the reader’s benefit the all-too-familiar image of an always outnumbered and underequipped but nevertheless intrepid Nationalist Army during China’s War of Resistance Against Japan, a good example of which would be the textbook version of the Sihang Warehouse Battle. Through these thematic hints scattered across the novel which tap into the reader’s prior exposure to Chinese revolutionary narratives, the author manages to obscure the historical difference between colonial Taiwan and Republican China and create the sensation that the Xilai Temple Incident is nothing less than a veritable Chinese revolution. In doing so, he drives home to the reader the all-important moral: that these otherwise unremarkable Taiwanese rebels are worthy of praise and immortalization precisely—and only—
because they display the exact same national spirit in times of foreign occupation and embody the very essence of Chineseness just as much as their Chinese counterparts do.

In order to further maintain a consistent image of the Xilai Temple Incident as a legitimate Chinese-style revolution, the author has also to dilute some of its aspects deemed incongruous with dominant social values by selectively including and excluding bits and pieces of historical evidence about the incident. A good example would be how he rationalizes the well-documented religious nature of the uprising which I discussed earlier. Early in the novel, the author creates on behalf of the rebel leaders a charter consisting of ten items and uses it to rationalize religious mobilization in the Xilai Temple uprising. In it, it is stated, because the leaders hope to reach out to a population that are mostly peasants, workers and shop owners, it is deemed necessary to use “monarchy” and “religion” as their main appeals under the name of “State of Immense Brightness and Benevolence” for recruitment purposes (16). The next item continues, using religion as a camouflage will also help the rebel group “escape police attention” and “create a deceptive impression that they are merely a superstitious crowd” (16). As can be seen, with a sleight of hand, religious mobilization is rationalized as a conscious decision, a well-played political tactic even. Such a modification of historical details skillfully rids the uprising of its superstitious and feudal characteristics deemed antithetical to modern Chinese nationalism, and, more importantly, it also rids the uprising of its local color specific to a particular time period in Taiwan.

Another detail of the Xilai Temple Incident that has attracted the author’s revisionist attention is the fact that the uprising was led by a group and not by a person. But this time, rather than being downplayed, this detail is deliberately augmented. As the narrator states in approval, “In other words, they adopt a collegial system and a collective leadership in conformity with the
spirit of democracy” (17). These modern political jargons used to describe the Xilai Temple leadership create an almost outlandish effect, considering that the more educated Yu Qingfang and Luo Jun were both traditional elites who received a classical Chinese education geared towards the Imperial Examination System and whose political knowledge was therefore most likely limited to the Qing-style imperial government. However, such an explicit instance of anachronistic overwriting shows precisely how far the author is willing to go to smuggle in whenever possible the official ideology of the KMT state which, if one recalls, consistently portrayed itself as the world’s free, democratic China, leaving aside how sincere it was in practice. Overall, as the above examples show, by using his license as a fiction writer to manipulate the lines between fiction and history, past and present, the author is able to perform, in a relative persuasive manner, a major facelift on the Xilai Temple Incident and turn it into something akin to a modern Chinese nationalist movement.

One last move made by the author to complete his Sinicization of the incident is by projecting it via contemporary Chinese history into a mythological universe—constructed by a number of time-honored tales—surrounding the “Han people,” an anthropological construct used to legitimize the supremacy of “pure” Chinese. In doing so, Li Qiao provides the Xilai Temple Incident with an ultimate legitimation in the form of a quasi-religious notion of the nation and elevates it into something of a holy war waged in defense of Chinese racial and cultural orthodoxy against foreign races. One can clearly see this in his pointed allusion to Ming novelist Luo Guanzhong’s Romance of the Three Kingdoms, of which Li’s novel title is already an early indication: sworn brothers of the Xilai Temple vis-à-vis sworn brothers of the Peach Garden. Early on, the parallel between the three rebel leaders and the three legendary brothers in the final years of the Han dynasty, Liu Bei, Guan Yu, and Zhang Fei, is clearly suggested through both
characterization details and direct acknowledgement. For example, Jian Ding (second in order of seniority) upon his first appearance is described as a strongly built “red-faced” man—taking after Guan Yu (also second in order) known for his red face in popular imagination (4). When the rebels gather in the temple to take an oath of brotherhood, Jiang Ding proclaims to everyone, “Let us follow the example of the sworn brothers of the Peach Garden and swear our brotherhood here at Xilai Temple!” (17)

That Li Qiao chooses to allude to Luo’s classical novel is not because there is a numerical coincidence between the main actors of the two stories. Rather, it is a meaningful decision made with a clear intention to project the symbolic meaning Liu, Guan, and Zhang stand for in folk culture onto the Xilai Temple rebels. For people unfamiliar with Chinese culture, the legendary brothers of the Peach Garden exist in popular imagination as some of the most iconic defenders of Han orthodoxy who epitomize the Confucian ideals of zhong and yi, loyalty and obligation to the state. For this reason, Liu’s Shu Han regime is also widely regarded as the rightful successor of the Han Dynasty (the golden age of the Han people), much like how the KMT state sees itself. By contrast, Liu’s rivals, Cao Cao and Sun Quan, are remembered as usurpers of Han and, accordingly, their typified image as thieves of the state is also indirectly invoked by Li to reflect first and foremost the Japanese and to a lesser degree the Communists. By embedding this entire moral universe of good and evil revolving around the essentialist idea of Han as a subtext in his novel, Li Qiao implicitly suggests that all Xilai Temple rebels rose up against colonialism due to a deep-seated loyalty they felt as Chinese descendants and elevates a Taiwanese anticolonial uprising to a genealogy of consecrated events defined by their lofty mission to preserve the purity of Chinese race and culture. In this way, he firmly cements the incident in a Sinocentrically
conceived linear and organic history of China, much to the liking of contemporary Chinese ruling class.

Overall, as we have seen, in his capacity as a deputy of the KMT’s hegemony, Li Qiao does a thorough job in transforming the Xilai Temple Incident into an event of Chinese nationalism. In a fairly seamless fashion, he incorporates the incident into the ruling elite’s dominant culture and history through a series of revisionist techniques: rewriting historical figures and scenes to emphasize Taiwan’s eternal dependency on China, imitating a contemporary writing style designed to promote state propaganda and official nationalism, and selectively including and excluding historical facts to rid the incident of its local and temporal specificity. Finally, by alluding to a patriotic classic and thus invoking the core of modern China’s legitimation narrative, Han orthodoxy, he completes his task as an official storyteller of recounting a Taiwanese historical event to the public through the dominant lens of Sinocentric historiography. In a sense, after Li’s reinterpretation, the Taiwanese men and women involved in the Xilai Temple Incident, who were denigrated by the old colonizer as bandits and outlaws, do become heroes and role models for the people, as Fanon says. But they become so, ironically and sadly, according to the moral standards of the new colonizer who happens to hold its own grudge against the old one. It is fair to say, then, that much of Li’s reinterpretation does little to enrich people’s understanding of their past; instead, it replaces genuine understanding with ideological mystification and political didacticism. It would be futile to speculate whether Li actually believed everything he wrote at the time or he was simply paying lip service to political correctness. At any rate, like many writers in the martial law period, it is likely that, as Sung-sheng Chang points out, Li either “tacitly acknowledged” or “unwittingly internalized” the
ideological limits laid down by the state in order to “[gain] access to the market and greater opportunity for recognition and prestige” and to avoid incurring “severe punishment” (6, 77-78).

However, as I argue in the beginning, the value of Xilai Temple to the people in Taiwan lies not in its articulation of an independent Taiwanese consciousness, which is a practical impossibility in any case, but in its unsure attempt at expressing such a consciousness almost in spite of itself, which effectively and in a highly representative fashion exposes the inherent limitation of power and hegemony. As Williams indicates, the formation of an emergent culture distinct from the dominant and the residual is “never only a matter of immediate practice” but “depends crucially on finding new forms or adaptations of forms” (126). In other words, to trace the formation of an emergent Taiwanese consciousness, what we have to observe and describe first and foremost are the sketchy and tentative forms of its “pre-emergence”—that which is “active and pressing but not yet fully articulated” (Williams 126). It is my interest to turn my attention finally to these new forms of expression in Xilai Temple which signal at once the possibility of an emergent Taiwanese consciousness and the vulnerability of an existing Sinocentric hegemony.

Where Power Fails

Raymond Williams writes that the reality of any hegemony is that it is “never total or exhaustive” and, by the same token, “no dominant culture ever in reality includes or excludes all human practice, human energy, and human intention” (113, 115). During its incorporation of the residual memory of the dominated, although some aspects of this memory may have been “wholly or largely incorporated,” others may still retain “an alternative or even oppositional relation to the dominant culture” (Williams 122). This is so because what the dominant culture
can effectively seize is “the ruling definition of the social,” and the range of human intentions and practices it inevitably leaves out are ones it perceives “as the personal or the private, or as the natural or even the metaphysical” (Williams 125). In other words, while the dominant culture may be able to redefine according to its will the social meaning of events and figures belonging in the dominated group’s past, it is relatively powerless to account for and reshape wholly what Williams calls people’s “practical consciousness”—both in the past and present—which is “actually being lived, and not just what it is thought is being lived” (131).

Alternatively, one can also approach the inevitable moments of failure of hegemony by applying a more radical deconstructive thinking. The fact that any dominant cultural discourse which is organized around the belief of an absolute center or origin, such as Sinocentrism or any ethnocentrism for that matter, fails to assert its total presence in society is not just because it is unable to incorporate and transform every aspect of human experience, but also because it has to leave intact certain aspects deemed unworthy, impure, or unorthodox. Such is the case because the very meaning of an originary and transcendental Idea hinges on what Derrida calls “originary trace,” an a priori conceptual system of difference (OG 62). As he argues, “[Without] the trace retaining the other as other in the same, no difference would do its work and no meaning would appear…The (pure) trace is differance” and, accordingly, “the central signified, the original or transcendental signified, is never absolutely present outside a system of difference” (OG 62, WD 280, his italics). What Derrida means, in short, is that the presence of a transcendental Idea is never total and automatic because, as an idea, it is subject from the outset to the rule and finitude of language; it is always constructed belatedly and indirectly, that is, through a finite linguistic system of difference and as a result of the unstable movements of signification. In this sense, one
may also argue that the transcendental Idea never really exists because when it appears it is already supplemented by an imperfect sign.

In what follows, I intend to examine the various moments in Xilai Temple that hint at the potential failure of a Sinocentric cultural hegemony which, as we have seen, functions as the governing consciousness of the text. Specifically, I will do so from the theoretical standpoint of Williams’ practical consciousness and Derrida’s supplementarity. My intention is to show how the alternative and oppositional meaning of the text appearing in these rare, but nevertheless remarkable, moments likely corresponds and contributes to an emergent Taiwanese consciousness in a broader sociocultural sense.

If, as we have seen in the previous section, the Xilai Temple Incident is turned into an event of Chinese nationalism by the author’s repeated attempts to link it to the assumed origin of a timeless China, the way in which that origin is constructed throughout the text, however, reveals as much its artificiality as its insubstantiality. Indeed, in Li’s text the originary Idea of China or Chineseness cannot be grasped without the mediation of a prior system of difference and reference, that is, without it being reflected by the impure, the unorthodox, and the alien—by what is “un-Chinese” so to speak. To use Derrida’s words, “the origin was never constituted except reciprocally by a non-origin, the trace” (OG 61). One need only pay attention to how the Japanese, the evident adversary of the Chinese in the novel, is represented to see adequately the constructedness of Chineseness and the extent to which its meaning is dependent on the trace of what it is not. In order to represent the Chinese as a biologically superior race, for instance, one sees that the Japanese is occasionally relegated to a bestial, subhuman status and likened to animals most despised in traditional Chinese culture, dogs and mice: The Japanese are “four-legged,” and they have “a pointy face” and “bulging small eyes that resemble those of a mouse”
Furthermore, the idea of Chinese cultural supremacy in the text becomes comprehensible only when Japanese intellectual prowess is put into question. In an effort to stress the illegitimacy and incompetence of Japanese colonial rule in Taiwan, the narrator claims, “Even though Japan seized Taiwan by force, it lacks the experience of governing a colony. Facing the Han people who have a five-thousand-year cultural tradition, their governance appears helpless and clueless” (33). As the above instances attest, Chineseness in its pure sense only takes shape and registers momentarily when its difference from the non-Chinese remains in the reader’s vision. In other words, it only assumes meaning and becomes present in the reader’s mind when the trace—“the retention of difference within a structure of reference where difference appears as such”—is kept visible (Derrida, OG 46, his emphasis).

This visible trace, thus, stands as a proof of the very volatility and dependency of the transcendental Idea and, as such, it further indicates the inherent instability of the Idea, or, in Derrida’s words, it “permits a certain liberty of variations among the full terms” (OG 47). Rather than being an eternally valid and omnipresent idea whose meaning is self-evident in all times and places, the Idea of Chineseness is actually transient and partial, in that its presence can only be momentarily evoked through localized acts of signification. Conversely, precisely because no such transcendental Idea ever exists in reality, any signifying attempt that gestures towards its presence can only be a reactive attempt which seeks futilely to fill an infinite semantic void with a limited sign. The upshot then, as Derrida points out, is that any signifier used to signify such a transcendental signified is bound to be overabundant; i.e. it is bound to mean more than what is intended by the invoker because it has to actively and continually make up for “a lack” (Derrida, WD 290). As he writes, “The movement of signification adds something, which results in the fact that there is always more, but this addition is a floating one because it comes to perform a
vicarious function, to supplement a lack on the part of the signified” (*WD* 289). The floating and overabundant character of the signifiers deployed in *Xilai Temple* to signify a transcendental Chineseness can be made readily observable when one factors in the role of the Taiwanese reader, not in their given public identity as Han descendants or Chinese nationals but as private individuals who have both the lived memory of Japanese colonization and subjective perception of KMT rule. The moments of signifying overabundance in the text, which I will examine below, that become especially explicit in the presence of a remembering and perceiving reader are where alternative reading begins.

The effect of signifying overabundance can be felt for the first time in one of the author’s early attempts to characterize the Japanese colonizer as both cruel and illegitimate to show, by contrast, the benevolence and righteousness of the current Chinese ruler. In a follow-up effort to prove his claim that the Japanese is an undeserving ruler governing a people supposedly higher than itself, the author seemingly goes out of his way to single out and launch a vehement attack on an infamous colonial law, Law 63, which gave the Government-General of Taiwan the legislative power to issue and enforce its own ordinances outside of the Japanese Diet.31 The intention here is to emphasize how incapable and unfit the Japanese colonizer is to govern Taiwan as evidenced by its need for dictatorial power and to highlight the undemocratic and inhumane nature of Japanese colonial rule. As the narrator states in a matter-of-fact tone, the existence of Law 63 means that “the Japanese Government allows the Government-General of Taiwan to be autocratic, giving it the legislative power to fully control the give-and-take of people’s lives and properties” (34). Immediately following this, the narrator goes on to criticize

31 For an excellent discussion of the historical background of Law 63 and its impact on Taiwan, see Edward I-te Chen (1982), 240-274.
the harshness of the first ordinance instituted by the government-general under the authorization of Law 63, “Bandit Punishment Ordinance,” which empowered the colonial state to legally arrest and imprison anyone suspected of providing any form of assistance to the “bandits” (34). The section ends in a passionate indictment of the unfairness and extremity of the ordinance:

The ‘bandits’ mentioned in the ordinance were of course the righteous people who refused to submit to the [Japanese] dwarfs. Under this cruel ordinance, the Taiwanese people had been living in gory wind and bloody rain (xingfengxueyu)…hundreds were sentenced to more than nine years of imprisonment simply because they “donated one yen to express their agreement” [with the bandits]. (35)

What makes the author’s abrupt and somewhat cliché tirade of the Japanese colonizer’s abuse of power in the novel remarkable is the striking degree to which it can be directed equally pertinently at the KMT state with mere changes of proper names and legal terms. Just as the Japanese colonial state turned itself into a de facto autocratic regime under the aegis of Law 63, so the KMT state also declared the Order of Martial Law not long after it gained control of Taiwan to centralize its power in the name of national security. Moreover, whereas the Japanese colonizer issued the Bandit Punishment Ordinance to legally repress and incriminate, often without due process, the so-called subversive and recalcitrant elements of society, the KMT’s Temporary Provisions Effective During the Period of National Mobilization served essentially the same function which resulted in countless cases of unjust arrest and imprisonment. In short, the pair of Japanese colonial law and ordinance, initially intended as a contrast, now become a mirror reflecting the fundamental sameness between the old and new rulers in their deeds. The two rulers even used the exact same official term to label those they perceived as subversive and dangerous: bandits (hi; fei). Such parallels which demonstrate, to an astounding degree, how history repeats itself will most likely not be lost on readers who have the lived knowledge, if not experience, of life under both autocratic regimes, not least because there are plenty of
descriptions in the novel showing the same injustices people in Taiwan have received time and again to help them remember and compare.

As mentioned by the author in the above quoted passage, in the Japanese colonial days, many people were convicted and given long prison terms simply because of a small amount of donation they made to the wrong groups. In the KMT authoritarian era, comparable cases of disproportionate punishment meted out to often innocent people were no less outrageous. To give a sense of how similarly outrageous the abuse of judicial power was during the postwar years, for instance, in 1963 hundreds of illiterate miners in Luku, Taiwan were arrested by soldiers from the Garrison Command “merely because they happened to know their village head, a suspected Communist,” and they were “tortured and forced to sign confessions that then sent them to Green Island, Taiwan’s equivalent of Alcatraz for political prisoners” (S. Lin 5).

The similarities between both repressive states, however, do not stop there. In an effort to recreate how suffocating it was to live as a colonized under the panoptical watch of the colonial state, the author describes in detail Yu Qingfang’s experience of being constantly followed and harassed by the secret police prior to his decision to rebel. In a sequence of events, it is narrated, Yu is sent to a vagary camp by the authorities due to his jobless status and membership in a secret society which “was discovered by the ‘secret police’” (78)32. After his release, Yu has had a difficult time getting employed or starting his own business because of the constant “harassment and extortion by the secret police” (79). At no point, the narrator stresses, do “the Japanese spies ever relax their watch over him; any slightest hint of his behavior is soon picked up by the colonial lackeys” (80). What these ominous descriptions effectively create is an

32 This is a historical fact about Yu Qingfang that Li Qiao incorporates in his novel. For more details about Yu’s life, see Katz, WVTBR 63-66.
overwhelming sensation of oppression intended for the reader to vicariously experience the hardship of living under the colonial state’s all-seeing eye. Ironically, however, such descriptions can also potentially project back to and reinforce their more recent experience of living under yet another police state and its similar, if not stricter, surveillance system. I am referring to what is commonly called the period of White Terror in KMT Taiwan in which “fear [is] instilled in the citizenry” and people learned to practice self-censorship “in response to the omnipresence of the Garrison Command’s surveillance apparatus” (S. Lin 5, emphasis added).

A few pages down, another condemning dramatization of the Japanese colonial state’s excessive use of repressive force against the people can be found, and it too creates an uncanny effect of déjà vu for contemporary readers. But this time the victim is another rebel leader, Jian Ding. In the wake of the mysterious death of a colonial informant, Zhang Pengsi, a known rival to Jian Ding, the latter is soon targeted by the authorities as the murderer who barely escapes his arrest. The narrator recounts Jian’s narrow escape in a dramatic and vivid fashion:

On the third day [of Zhang’s death], after having breakfast, Jian Ding is preparing to leave for work. Suddenly, he notices that two vehicles, one following the other, are coming in his direction from the other end of the slope; the passengers in them are all black-head soldiers—military police…The two vehicles park along the fences. Nearly twenty military policemen quickly jump off the vehicles. There is no time for him to guess: “Ah-Lian [Jian’s only son]! Come with dad, quick! (85)

This, incidentally, is the backstory of how Jian Ding becomes an outlaw leading what the author calls an “underground armed force” (87). Yet, importantly, such a vivid depiction of the state’s forceful intrusion into people’s everyday life would likely fill the gaps in the reader’s imagination of how their fellow people were treated not only in Japanese colonial days but also under KMT’s authoritarian rule: A moment, in other words, of what Benedict Anderson calls “national imagination” in which “the movement of a solitary hero through a sociological landscape of a fixity […] fuses the world inside the novel with the world outside” (30). While
many people in Taiwan had friends or relatives who had been forcibly taken away by military police from the Garrison Command or had indirectly heard about such tragic incidents, they were strictly forbidden to discuss these matters in public. As Sylvia Lin indicates, “Only after martial law was lifted in 1987 were they finally able to freely and openly reflect on the injustices of the past four decades” (6). As such, depictions like the above in the novel of people being unjustly incriminated, followed, and arrested would potentially serve as points of reference that confirmed what many believed to be their common fate: the shared experience of oppression suffered under two different regimes for nearly a century which they had no way to communicate under normal circumstances other than passing it down to their children as cautionary tales.

In short, as we have seen, on several occasions the author’s depictions of the Japanese colonial state’s extreme measures of social control and the inhumane and untrusting ways in which it treated the locals eventually become textual mirrors of a Taiwanese reality under KMT rule. The narrated experiences of innocent people being unfairly indicted, the unbearable life under constant state watch, and the endless fear for one’s own and one’s family’s lives all seem to sharpen and prolong the sense of unfreedom embedded in people’s collective memory for many generations. Put differently, the threatening presence of Japanese repressive state apparatus in the novel, initially intended as a signifier of the superiority of Chinese rule, ends up ironically reinforcing the bleak reality of the continued subjection of the local population despite regime change. Consequently, an historical understanding of the people of Taiwan as a victimized collective distinct from its Japanese and Chinese rulers begins to take shape gradually in the text, especially given that there is another crucial reminder in the novel pointing towards yet another important similarity between the Japanese and Chinese rulers—treating the majority of native Taiwanese as second-class citizens.
In an effort to demonstrate the degree of unequal treatment most colonized Taiwanese endured under Japanese rule, the author makes a meaningful allusion to an exploitative colonial policy, “Storing Up Grain for the Country (Chuliangbaoguo),” enacted in 1915 (137). The policy, it is said, “required all Taiwanese villages and sub-villages to contribute a stipulated amount of rice to the state based on the size of their populations” and “encouraged Taiwanese to make sweet potatoes their staple while exporting rice to ‘naichi’ (Japanese mainland)” (137). The idea that the Taiwanese, as a colonized collective, only gets the leftovers of the colonizing people is here clearly communicated to the reader, but perhaps only in an impersonal way. However, through the author’s microscopic representation, such systematic inequality between the colonizer and the colonized is also shown on one occasion to be much more personal and thus relatable.

In the aftermath of a huge earthquake, Yu Qingfang’s mother is badly injured in the legs and waist. Yu, then an assistant sergeant, carries his mother on his back to seek medical help everywhere in town only to find out that most hospitals and clinics are packed with other victims. The only place that can take in injured victims at the time is a makeshift emergency room in the police headquarters. Yu, despite being a police serviceman, is given the cold shoulder because of his non-Japanese identity:

“Oh…um! Yu-kun, take your mother to a private clinic!”

“They are all full.”

“Not here!” Tanaka puts on a grave face, “This is not an emergency room for you people. Take a look. We only accept our own people!”

Yu finally notices, all the patients in the room, lying or sitting, dead or alive, are uniformly Japanese.

“This is for our people only,” Tanaka grins, “you are not allowed to come in…” (75-76)
In the end, Yu’s mother passes away in want of timely treatment. Yet, it is in this rare moment that we are given a glimpse of how systematic inequality under colonial rule is felt on a personal level. As a direct victim of colonial unequal treatment, the Yu Qingfang seen here has a human depth. He is no longer merely an historical figure—bandit or hero—but a relatable human being who resents injustice and grieves for personal losses. As the narrator recounts his experience in a touching tone: after Yu’s mother’s death “the words ‘our people…your people…your people…our people…our people…’ from now to forever, often ring in his ears” (76).

Yu’s story of personal losses suffered as a result of systematic racism and unequal treatment is relatable perhaps not only because it is rendered in a highly personal light, but also because of how aptly it reflects the reader’s personal experience under KMT rule. Whether in school or at work, the majority of native Taiwanese living in the postwar era had experienced first-hand varying degrees of unfair competition by the Mainlanders who were often the beneficiaries of state sanctioned cronyism and accordingly had the most of resources reserved for and allocated to them. John F. Copper usefully indicates, “When they came to Taiwan, many Mainlanders brought wealth with them or had good jobs in the government or elsewhere through family connections. They filled most of the official positions formerly occupied by the Japanese, and a few took over Japanese business” (75). The presence of the Japanese overlords in the novel and that of a privileged Mainlander class in reality, ultimately, are two sides of the same coin which bring into sharp relief the continuation of the same social hierarchy of which the native Taiwanese are permanently at the bottom.

As I have tried to show in the above discussion, time and again, in depictions of colonial unequal treatment as much as in those of state repression seen earlier, the narrated reality of Japanese colonization ultimately meshes with and reflects the lived reality of KMT
authoritarianism on both social and personal levels, and the common people in Taiwan as a
distinct group, as an oppressed group distinct from its oppressors, consequently becomes
graspable amidst the mutual mirroring between the pair of old and new rulers. The interplay
between the full terms in the text, Japanese and Chinese, rather than producing difference,
accidentally renders them synonymous because of the floating nature of signification.
Accordingly, a nascent third term that is deliberately marginalized and suppressed but is the only
term that remains considerably different from the other two throughout the novel is unwittingly
brought forth and starts to assume meaning: Taiwanese. In other words, it is in the liminal space
where text and reality intersect and overlap and where, as a result, the difference between old and
new rulers of Taiwan becomes blurry and eventually indistinguishable that an alternative,
distinct local consciousness starts to assume shape. Not surprisingly, then, it is also in the several
moments discussed above where the difference of the common people from its two rulers
appears the greatest that what can be called a precocious Taiwanese consciousness—that which
is “active and pressing but not yet fully articulated”—becomes noticeable (Williams 126). Let us
now examine how the pre-articulation of a local Taiwanese consciousness slips through the
author’s overarching Sinicizing intention.

Following his condemnation of the Japanese colonial state’s installment of Law 63 and
Bandit Punishment Ordinance as well as the ensuing brutalities sanctioned by them, the author
describes people’s undaunted resolve to resist colonial oppression thus:

—The Government-General of Taiwan has been brutally murdering righteous people,
especially now that it has legal grounds to do so. But will the Taiwanese people
capitulate? There are anti-oppressive activities everywhere on Taiwan Island and
everyone is against Japan…People who rose up against Japan on a [Chinese] nationalist
sentiment of course will continue to do so. But there are also thousands of Taiwanese
who were forced to stand up and resist in countless cases. (35, emphasis added)
Half a century later, thousands of people in Taiwan would again be “forced to stand up and resist” KMT’s Martial Law and Temporary Provisions for the exact same reason described above. This passage, crucially, is the first instance in the novel where anti-colonialism is partially detached from Chinese nationalism. The same occurs again in the author’s criticism of the colonizer’s unfair policy to extract Taiwanese rice to Japan while encouraging the locals themselves to eat sweet potatoes. As the narrator states, “[Exporting Taiwanese rice to Japan] is a deliberate move to starve the Taiwanese. As a result, farmers, workers, and the general public who only want to have food on their table and clothes on their back all rise up because of the need to survive” (137, emphasis added). Here, popular resistance to unequal treatment for survival renders Chinese nationalism completely irrelevant, partly because unequal treatment is a common feature in both Japanese and Chinese minority rules, but, more importantly, because resistance under these circumstances is simply a human thing to do. Lastly, Yu Qingfang’s speech given before a battle with the Japanese best exemplifies how Chinese nationalism, the supposed foundation of Taiwanese anticolonial movement in the text, is complicated by survival impulses: “We resist not because the rulers are Japanese dogs; it is because Japanese dogs are not Han people and they don’t want us Han people to live. That is why we resist Japanese dogs” (139).

All of the above instances effectively signpost the cracks of an otherwise formidable Sinocentric cultural hegemony in the text and its failure to incorporate Taiwan’s past completely into Chinese nationalist history. What “the short, tight, skin” of the Chinese nation fails to stretch itself to fully cover is what we have seen earlier people’s practical consciousness which is spontaneous, contingent, and untamable (Anderson 86). When people are systematically oppressed by state power and see themselves and their families starved and threatened, they
resist, whoever that state may be. Sometimes their motives are “natural and metaphysical,” and not always nationalist (Williams 125). Moreover, like Yu Qingfang and Jian Ding in their respective human moments, for people who suffer personal losses due to social inequality and state violence, they eventually rise up to fight. Their intentions are tinged with “the personal and the private” (Williams 125). These practical intentions and motives may coexist with nationalist or racial sentiments, but they are irreducible to any narrow and definitive discourse, nationalism, ethnocentrism, or culturalism. As the above instances show, people’s practical consciousness to resist somehow manages to slip through the cracks of a hegemonic Sinocentric consciousness governing the narrative. The totality of this practical consciousness that continues to burst through the confinement of official nationalism in the text gradually brings the image of the oppressed subalterns of Taiwan into sharper and sharper relief.

Perhaps because the author himself has become increasingly aware of the fact that people’s consciousness to resist state oppression cannot be fully explained by the existing ideological framework of Chinese nationalism which, if anything, oppresses them no less severely than Japanese colonialism, in moments that seem like slippages, he hints at the independence and continuity of this consciousness, thus making it a truly oppositional, collective consciousness of all people who simply see Taiwan as home. In a famous scene, the Xilai Temple rebels climb to a mountaintop and plant their combat flag there. On the flag, it is written, “Go Back to Your Den, Japanese Robbers; Return Taiwan to Us” and “Occupant of Our Home; I Vow to Forever Be Against You” (214). These words are unmistakably written from a localist perspective, as it expresses the inextricable ties people, “us,” have with their land, “Taiwan” and “home.” Furthermore, seen in this light, the unnamed occupant of Taiwan in the second sentence that people are forever against can then refer interchangeably to whoever occupies Taiwan then
and now. This scene which suggests such an intense and unmistakable localist sentiment is, not coincidentally, what earned Li Qiao the accusations of expressing thoughts of Taiwan independence and costed him a literary award.33

The motif of continuity that implies the people as a constant on the island as opposed to changeable rulers is further strengthened by Li Qiao’s invocation of the Buddhist notion of karma in the text, which is a hallmark of his writing style (Tu xii). When speaking to inspire the rebels’ morale, Jian Ding says, “I am saying: if after twenty years—in our next life we still couldn’t accomplish our anti-Japanese goals and I again got slayed by the dogs, then, after another twenty years, am I not an able body again?” (141). Similarly, after being completely defeated by the Japanese, Yu Qingfang wistfully says, “I fail! This is the end. The next fight will be other Taiwanese people’s responsibility” (240). Note his exclusive call to “other Taiwanese people” here. Jian and Yu’s karmic messages effectively embody a continual, oppositional consciousness of the people: Rulers may come and go and may oppress the people in much the same way, but there will always be a next fight and other Taiwanese will rise up again and again in the next life and one after that, ad infinitum. Such messages, I believe, would also induce a “structure of feelings” among the isolated readers under KMT’s authoritarian rule. The experience of oppression which was temporarily felt in a “private, idiosyncratic, and even isolating” fashion is hopefully confirmed here as “social” by these messages, as they openly appeal to future Taiwanese, demanding them to act and speak (Williams 132). Years later, Li Qiao, in a short story, would allude to this text of his own and speak in the voice of a political

33 See again Lin Cho-Shui’s article cited in the bibliography.
fugitive chased by the KMT state to respond to Yu’s call, thus completing the reincarnating cycle of Taiwanese popular resistance against recurrent state oppression he himself sets up.34

In this section, I have tried to chart the formation of a nascent Taiwanese consciousness in the text and describe the way in which its agitating pre-emergence defies and competes against a Sinocentric hegemony. In descriptions intended to contrast the Japanese and Chinese that incidentally reveal their similarities, an alternative consciousness of the people begins to assume a vague shape. Once the people’s consciousness appears, in moments where the common subalterns can be seen and where the rebel leaders are stripped of their social meaning as bandits and rebels, it exhibits a stubborn resilience and lasting endurance in its refusal to be subdued and incorporated entirely by any hegemonic rewriting and recoding.

Conclusion

In the narrated space that is the nation, Homi Bhabha writes, while the people may be represented and read as “historical ‘objects’ of a nationalist pedagogy, giving the discourse an authority that is based on the pre-given or constituted historical origin or event,” they are “also the ‘subjects’ of a process of signification that must erase any prior or originary presence of the nation-people to demonstrate…the people as that continual process by which the national life is redeemed and signified as a repeating and reproductive process” (“DissemiNation” 297). Bhabha’s observation is accurate, especially when one considers it in conjunction with Said’s insight of the worldly text. Texts are worldly because they represent fictional figures who are

34 This allusion appears in Li Qiao’s short story “Journal of the Taimu Mountain” (“Taimushanji”). When being chased by KMT agents, the hero Yu Shiji is mistakenly called Lin Shuangwen (a rebel in Qing-ruled Taiwan) by his chasers. Upon being caught up by the chasers, Yu Shiji, to conceal his true identity, claims his name is Yu Qingfang. By way of this double allusion, the tradition of Taiwanese anti-government resistance across three different time periods is embodied by this one fictional character. See “Journal of Taimu Mountain,” 271-276.
constantly under the influence of power and driven by their desire to resist. On the other hand, texts reach readers who are no less susceptible to the same power/resistance dynamic in the actual world. Even in a conformist text like Xilai Temple, the moments that reflect common people’s worldly experience, their situatedness in power and impulse to resist, or what Homi Bhabha calls “the scraps, patches, and rags of [people’s] daily life” can still come through and resonate with the reader, despite the text’s announced didactic mission (“DissemiNation” 297). These are moments that signal the spontaneous performativity of the people which continually complicates and undercuts the normalizing intentionality of the state and its nation-building pedagogy. The people as a “continual process” whose performative agency “repeats and reproduces” itself can be adequately observed in the narrated space where the nation appears as both textual and real; where narrated and lived experiences of power and resistance comment on, enrich, and sustain each other. It sometimes happens that, in this liminal space, events of resistance inspire writing/reading; writing/reading about resistance opens up further possibility for actual resistance. Seen in this light, the following sequence of causality initiated by the event-text of Xilai Temple Incident is perhaps not entirely coincidental. When still a child, after learning about the Xilai Temple Incident in the newspaper and seeing how the colonizers disparagingly labeled Taiwanese as bandits, Yang Kui, one of the most progressive-minded writers in the Japanese-ruled era, decided to become a writer to “right the wrongs of a distorted history” (qtd. in Y. Chang 50).35 Over half a century later, two years after Li Qiao’s Xilai Temple was published, the Kaohsiung Incident took place in southern Taiwan in 1979, firing the first shot of Taiwan’s democratic movement in the following decades. While the relationships

35 Note 6.
between these actual and textual events may not be absolute, they nevertheless hint at something continual and undying.

In this chapter, I choose a text that straddles the periods of Japanese colonization and KMT’s authoritarian rule in Taiwan. In my analysis, I hope I have sufficiently demonstrated my assertion in the Introduction that Taiwanese national consciousness has historically emerged from the interstices of imported official nationalisms. By way of discussing this trans-epochal text, I have also given a brief overview of the near-century history of Taiwan under colonization. In the next chapter, I will hone in on the Japanese colonial era and discuss the different writing styles in response to differing colonial contexts which contributed to the multifaceted idea of a Taiwanese nation.
On March 18, 2014, an unprecedented event taking place in downtown Taipei shook the whole of Taiwan and in the ensuing days drew considerable international attention to this East Asian island known geopolitically for its complex and uneasy relationship with Mainland China, a rising superpower in the new global order. At night, scores of students, professors, and activists managed to overwhelm the police force stationed in the Legislative Yuan, Taiwan’s highest legislative body, and occupy the legislative floor in protest of the controversial Cross-Strait Service Trade Agreement which had just been passed a day before by lawmakers of the KMT majority. The protesters’ occupying action marked the onset of the now well-known Sunflower Student Movement which lasted for nearly a month and successfully generated an enormous pressure on former President Ma Ying-jeou’s policy to rapidly retighten the links between Taiwan and China. Amid all the tension, excitement, and uncertainty surrounding the month-long protest, one moment especially stuck out to me. In a public rally in front of Taiwan’s Presidential Office Building—the same building which housed the Government-General of Taiwan (Taiwan Sōtokufu) in colonial days—one of the protest leaders Chen Weiting could be heard quoting famous anti-Japanese activist Jiang Weishui’s words on the podium: “Compatriots must unite, unity is powerful!”

The significance of Chen’s quotation is obvious. By paying homage in his speech to an iconic anticolonial figure in the Japanese colonial era, Chen was attempting to ideologically

ground a modern-day counter-movement against China’s attempted economic integration of Taiwan in the tradition of Taiwanese non-violent struggle for local autonomy, a tradition that was started in the early 1920s by native Taiwanese elites like Jiang Weishui.

Why is this part of Taiwan’s colonial history so important that it was evoked almost a century later to legitimate a twenty-first century movement? The short answer is that the entire period from the early 1920s to the mid 1930s is easily the most critical juncture in Taiwan’s historical formation as a nation (that is, for people who see it as a nation). This was a time in which a Taiwanese native consciousness and discourse, or what many today simply call Taiwan consciousness, was first conceived and articulated, and later widely spread throughout the island. The various publications, lectures, and public events organized by such influential elites as Jiang Weishui, Lin Xiantang, Cai Peihuo, and Lin Chenglu, to name only a few, not only helped foster and maintain a unique local identity in the face of Japanese colonial assimilation but also introduced to the general public, many of whom were students, peasants, and workers, such modern (Western) ideas as home rule, democracy, social justice, and human rights.37 Through their unremitting efforts, these local elites together sowed the seeds of Taiwanese will to self-determination that has been repeatedly expressed through the long twentieth century and continued to this day. Noted historian of Taiwanese colonial history Edward I-te Chen once remarked categorically that “Formosan desire for self-determination today has its roots in the days of Japanese rule” (496).38 What he refers to is precisely the period of non-violent protest

37 The policy to assimilate or Japanize the colonized peoples is perhaps the most salient hallmark of Japanese colonialism which separates it from most Western colonial powers. Japanese efforts to assimilate its colonized subjects derived from the country’s time-honored precept isshi-dōjin, meaning “impartiality and equal favor.” Moreover, imperial Japan’s policy to assimilate the Han-Taiwanese was entertained from the very beginning when they took over the island due to the fact that Chinese and Japanese are the same race and their cultures share many similarities. For a more detailed discussion regarding Japanese attitude towards assimilation, see Harry J. Lamely 496-499 and Mark R. Peattie 96-104.

38 Formosa is the older name of Taiwan but is still in use today.
between the 1920s and 1930s. It would, therefore, not be an overstatement to suggest that this period marked the starting point of Taiwanese national imagination.

What then exactly were the ideas promoted and circulated at this time that so profoundly shaped people’s national imagination and constituted a discourse of Taiwanese self-determination that continued to inspire later generations? How were some of these ideas expressed and enacted by contemporaneous texts later consumed by the general public? More generally, what role did literary texts of this time period play in articulating, elaborating, and spreading these ideas in support of an emergent national consciousness? My present chapter seeks to answer these questions in hopes of contributing to a fuller understanding of this foundational moment of Taiwanese national imagination.

The 1920s and 1930s is a special and important transitional time in Taiwan’s modern history, not only for reasons discussed above. By the early 1920s, that is, by the time Japan had already governed Taiwan for over a quarter century, there appeared in Taiwan a considerable number of young men and women who were sufficiently hybrid and modernized in their cultural, social, and political outlook (Kleeman 146). These Japanese trained Taiwanese men and women were “fluent in the Japanese language, familiar with Japanese culture, at home in Japanese social settings, and well versed in the laws and institutions that governed the ruling country as well as those under which Taiwan was ruled” (Tsurumi 177). In other words, these new generations of Taiwanese were sufficiently familiar with the workings of Japanese colonialism orchestrated by a modern state which was hitherto unknown to Taiwan, and they were thus well-positioned and adept in their dealings and negotiations with the colonizers. Together they formed a new class of native intelligentsia consisting of “physicians, clerks, journalists, and urban school teachers” (Tsurumi 177). Perhaps with the only exception of Lin Xiantang who was a businessman and
inherited a huge sum of wealth, most social activists as well as all three writers I discuss in this chapter hailed from this class and earned a living in one or more of the abovementioned middle-class professions.

To a general degree, the formation of this class of native intelligentsia and the common traits that defined its members can be best understood in terms of Anthony D. Smith’s “crisis of dual legitimation,” which he believes to be responsible for the birth and shaping of the first modernized intelligentsia, the potential leaders of nationalist movement, during the early phases of modernization in many parts of the world. Exemplary figures of the modernized native intelligentsia in the twentieth century can be found in several former colonies and semi-colonies which include Sun Yat-sen in China, Mahatma Gandhi in India, Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana, Leopold Senghor in Senegal, and Jomo Kenyatta in Kenya, all Western-educated nationalist leaders mentioned by Elie Kedourie. Taiwan was no exception from this global trend observed by Smith. Precisely, what shaped the common outlook of these, at the time, highly educated natives in colonial Taiwan was a condition in which many had to negotiate their ideologies between two sources of authority: a scientific modern state and a traditional cosmic worldview derived from inherited religion and customs. According to Smith, normally there were three possible ways in which this transitional intelligentsia would choose to respond to this dilemma: traditionalist, assimilationist, and reformist (Smith, TN 116-120). It seems that, in the case of colonial Taiwan, most outspoken and active members of this intelligentsia chose the third route. On the one hand, they shared a yearning for the modern, the rational, and the scientific, and thus

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39 See Anthony D. Smith’s *Theories of Nationalism*, Chapter 10.
40 See Elie Kedourie’s Introduction to *Nationalism in Asia and Africa*. 83
were deeply impressed by progressive ideas and committed to sociopolitical reform. On the other, they were adamant in preserving local way of life in the face of systematic assimilation while being extremely critical of Taiwanese feudalistic customs. To use Smith’s words, despite their “commitment to critical rationalism and science,” they do “not completely reject all religious authority or cosmic theodicies” or, I might add, traditional social order (“CDL” 119). These, then, were the defining traits of intellectual activities of this period in Taiwan and can be readily observed in much of contemporaneous literature. Celebrated Taiwanese literary historian Ye Shitao observes that protest literature in colonial Taiwan served a twofold function: “to protest Japanese colonial rule and the inhumane feudal production system of the island’s villages” (152). Similarly, Tu Kuo-ching points out that Taiwanese new literature in the Japanese colonial period operates on two axes: resistance-submission and tradition-modernization (TLETS No. 20 viii). Together this literature gives us a glimpse of the kind of new Taiwanese identity that intellectuals of the time strived to fashion for their contemporaries and later generations.

In this chapter, I take a close look at the representative works of three organic intellectuals belonging to this class of hybrid colonized intelligentsia: Lai He’s “Steelyard” and “A Dissatisfying New Year”; Yang Kui’s “Newspaper Carrier” and “A Model Village”; and Lü Heruo’s “Oxcart.” In these works, all three writers expressed a profound reformist attitude characteristic of their time. Again, Smith’s characterization, minus his questionable equation of tradition with religion, is perhaps accurate to capture the mindset of these transitional writers: “Unable to accept traditional theodicies, and impressed by the evidence of human suffering and

41 In his essay, Chen Chien-chung indicates that “after the very best of Taiwanese intellectuals received the new style education, they fundamentally approved the superiority of the new morality and new rationality, both of which were imbued with the sense of modernity (with elements such as liberty, democracy, human rights, and science)” (11).

42 The journal Taiwan Literature English Translation Series is hereafter abbreviated as TLETS.
injustice, many secular intellectuals embraced radical ideologies which looked to man’s collective efforts and political institutions to redress the world’s wrongs” (“CDL” 115). Confronted with the colonizer’s socioeconomic oppression and forced cultural assimilation of the native population, the three writers neither endorsed wholesale the values that the colonizer stood for and thus accepted the colonial status quo unquestioningly; nor did they blindly call for a complete return to traditional Chinese and Taiwanese culture. With the purpose of promoting unity among the native population in mind, instead, by exposing the harsh realities most people felt at a deeply personal level under Japanese rule, their works persistently sought to raise popular awareness towards issues such as social equality and human dignity. At the same time, they expressed an urgent need to reform the archaic and feudalistic aspects of Taiwanese traditional culture while celebrating the positive qualities of the people in hopes of restoring self-esteem among the people.

In many ways, the three writers and many others in their time embody the ideal type of colonial writer that Fanon envisions who appears in the “combat stage” of colonial literature, the last stage in his scheme of things: “Instead of letting the people’s lethargy prevail, [they turn] into a galvanizer of the people” (WE 159). It is in this combat stage that, according to Fanon, a genuine national literature emerges. Echoing Fanon, I would also argue that Taiwanese literature in the 1920s and 1930s helped lay the initial discursive foundation for a Taiwanese national consciousness. For ideas of social equality and cultural reform first expressed in these works not only supported the various popular movements in demand of reform at the time but also lived on and influenced later generations’ quest for Taiwanese political autonomy and cultural identity.
The Shaping Forces of Taiwanese Literature in the 1920s and 1930s

Before looking at the works of the three writers, it would be useful to briefly consider the broader domestic and international contexts that made possible an outspoken, self-conscious native intelligentsia in colonial Taiwan. Doing so will allow us to have a more clear idea of the common influences that shaped their thinking.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, from 1915 to 1937 the colony of Taiwan experienced a relatively liberal time. This was due to a democratic reform known as Taishō Democracy in Japan (1912-1926) and, especially relevant to Taiwan, Hara Takashi’s premiership (1918-1921). As the first commoner prime minister of Japan, Hara Takashi not only consolidated parliamentary politics in the metropole, but also appointed his colleague and friend in the Diet Den Kenjirō, a civilian, to serve as the governor-general of Taiwan, thus ending more than two decades of military rule in the colony. In general, during the tenures of civilian governors-general (1919-1936), the colonial government was more open and tolerant to the demands of the natives, provided these demands did not encourage Taiwan’s de facto separation from Japan. In addition, it was also in this period that the colonial government, having completed the economic infrastructure necessary for Taiwan’s modernization, amped up its efforts to assimilate the Han-Taiwanese and plain Aborigines. However, it should be noted that Japanese assimilation policy (dōka) never translated into genuine equality between the native and Japanese populations in Taiwan. As Mark R. Peattie points out, the colonial government’s assimilation efforts in practice emphasized more on equal obligations than on equal rights (97). As a result, throughout the entire fifty years of colonial rule, the native population of Taiwan were treated in effect as second-class citizens, because the government-general never ceased to prioritize the interest and well-being of Japanese colonialists in the island (Tsurumi 131).
Another important influence came from the international stage. Following his declaration of US participation in WWI, President Woodrow Wilson made a series of speeches promoting his ideas of self-determination of all peoples in the world. His words “soon [leaped] across all national and territorial boundaries, kindling hopes in every restless Asian colony” (Kerr 116). In East Asia particularly, the Wilsonian doctrine of self-determination helped spark the March First Movement of Korea (then also a Japanese colony) and May Fourth Movement of China in 1919, and “made a deep imprint in the minds of many Formosan students in Tokyo, then numbering about 2000” who subsequently began to entertain the notion of “Formosa for Formosans” (E. Chen 481). Many Taiwanese who could afford to study in Japanese universities around this time, including Yang Kui and Lü Heruo, befriended Korean and Chinese student-activists and together they shared their colonial experiences and anti-imperialist aspirations (E. Chen 481; Tsurumi 179). Moreover, benefited from a more inclusive and freer political climate in Taishō Japan, these expatriate students were also exposed to thoughts of socialism, democracy, liberalism and Marxism to which they would otherwise have had little access in Taiwan (Tsurumi 178). It was these students who brought home the ideas they learned from Japan, China, and elsewhere that provided important stimuli to the various social movements in this period.

In summary, under the dual influence of a democratizing Japan and the tidal wave of global anti-imperialism, Taiwanese intellectuals at home and abroad began to take a broader and more informed look at their and their compatriots’ situations as colonized subjects. Equipped with the powerful notion of self-determination, they began to agitate for more social equality, political autonomy and more official recognition of local culture by launching a series of protest organizations. The most notable organizations formed by roughly the self-same group of local elites in this period included in succession: Assimilation Society (Dōkakai, 1914-1915); New
People’s Society (Shinminkai, 1918-1923); League for the Establishment of Formosan Parliament (Taiwan Gikai Kisei Dōmei, 1920-1934); Taiwan Cultural Association (Taiwan Bunka Kyōkai, 1921-1930); Popular Party (Minshūtō, 1927-1931); and League for the Attainment of Local Autonomy (Taiwan Chihōjichi Kisei Dōmei, 1930-1937). 43

As a literary scholar, I am inclined to believe that Taiwan Cultural Association, founded by Jiang Weishui, was the more influential among all six. For unlike most of the above organizations whose configurations were elitist in nature and whose goals were narrowly political, the Association made the greatest effort to reach out to the wider public and thus most effectively brought the leading elite’s social, political, and cultural agenda into the minds of the people. In its nine years of existence, the Association launched numerous petition campaigns in pursuit of local autonomy, sponsored academic courses taught in the Chinese language, organized circuit plays and Chinese operas in the Taiwanese dialect, and gave circuit lectures “about political events in China as well as about anticolonial movements around the globe” (E. Chen 490; Tsurumi 197-198). Together these events of public education reached the minds of tens of thousands of islanders. 44 Incidentally, both writers Lai He and Yang Kui were at different times actively involved in the activities of the Association (Tu, TLETS No. 15 xx; Kleeman 163).

The significance of the Association can be further explained with the help of Partha Chatterjee’s theory of cultural nationalism in colonial India. According to Chatterjee the domain of culture represents the inner, spiritual domain (as opposed to the material, technological domain controlled by the colonial state) which bears “the ‘essential’ marks of cultural identity”

43 I follow Edward I-te Chen’s English translation of the names of these organizations from the Japanese original. For a detailed history of the background, development, and ideological splitting of these organization, see Chen’s excellent essay “Formosan Political Movements Under Japanese Colonial Rule, 1914-1937.”

44 According to E. Patricia Tsurumi, more than 117,000 islanders attended 315 public lectures in 1925 and more than 112,000 attended another 315 lectures in 1926 (198). The total native population of Taiwan at the time numbered about three million.
of the colonized and is thus the incubator of anticolonial nationalism. It is within this inner
domain that “nationalism launches its most powerful, creative, and historically significant
project: to fashion a ‘modern’ national culture that is nevertheless not Western [or Japanese, in
Taiwan’s case]” (6, quotation marks in the original). It can be argued that in promoting Chinese
and Taiwanese cultures and languages, the Association functioned to safeguard the cultural
difference of the colonized Taiwanese from the Japanese colonialists and thus fashioned an
alternative local culture in competition with the hegemonic Japanese culture. It is worth noting,
however, that the cultural difference or sovereignty asserted by Taiwanese elites at this time was
highly ambiguous due to Taiwan’s historical and cultural dependency on China. As Patricia
Tsurumi enquires, “The association’s championship of the Taiwanese as culturally distinct from
the Japanese was unequivocal from the beginning. But was this culture Chinese or Taiwanese?”
(197). The ambiguity of Taiwanese cultural identity at this time was further exemplified by the
intellectuals’ inability in deciding whether to use vernacular Mandarin or Romanized Taiwanese
as the preferred medium of written communication.45 A more articulate Taiwanese cultural
nationalism—that is, a politics of Taiwanese cultural uniqueness—only emerged in the 1980s in
the postwar era and as a result of native confrontation with the KMT regime (Hsiau 21).

Due to the ambiguity in Taiwanese elite’s claim of cultural identity, anticolonial
movement in this time period should perhaps not be understood too hastily in the conceptual
framework of cultural nationalism. Rather, its emergence can be more reasonably explained in
terms of the so-called downward filtration theory proposed by the Cambridge school in their
study of British India. For leaders of Taiwanese anticolonial movement in the 1920s and 1930s

45 See Kleeman Chapter 6 for a fuller discussion of the linguistic reforms conducted by Taiwanese intellectuals in
the period.
were all invariably Japanese-educated intellectuals. It was this educated stratum of the native society who were first awakened to political consciousness thanks to the modern education they received in Taiwan and Japan and who subsequently took it upon themselves to galvanize the masses into anticolonial action. As Tsurumi indicates, “Conservative or radical, Taiwanese anticolonialism was a product of Japanese education” and “although some internationalist content and Chinese experience went into the making of Taiwanese anticolonial intellectuals, leaders and followers alike were overwhelmingly products of Japanese education” (211). As such, just as these intellectuals were ambiguous about their Chinese cultural heritage, their attitude towards Japanese rule was equally ambivalent. What they demanded, therefore, was more equal rights within the existing framework of the Japanese Empire rather than an outright separation of Taiwan from the empire; or in Tsurumi’s words, they “demanded a larger slice of the unevenly divided colonial pie, rather than destruction of the pie itself” (175).

What’s also worth mentioning is the establishment of publication organs promoting this multi-decade long struggle in Taiwan. The first half-Japanese and half-Chinese journal, Taiwan Youth (Taiwan Seinen), was launched at around the same time when the New People’s Society was founded in Tokyo. It then evolved into a weekly press Taiwan People’s Press (Taiwan Minpō) and eventually into a daily newspaper Taiwan New People’s News (Taiwan Shinminpō) (Kerr 144). This press, along with Zhang Wenhuan’s literary journal Taiwan Literature (Taiwan Bunkaku), would become two of the most important venues in the next few decades for native writers in Taiwan, including the three discussed in this chapter, to express their thoughts.

With the possibility of expressing the native voice, naturally, literature played a potential complementary role in propagating anticolonial thoughts and sentiments and, to varying degrees, worked in tandem with sociopolitical activism of the period. Ye Shitao went as far as to say that
“the New Literature Movement (Xin Wenxue Yundong),” which was a vernacular movement spearheaded by writers like Lai He and Zhang Wojun, was from the start “closely linked with the anti-Japanese protest movement for political, economic, and social liberation” and that “[w]hether a Taiwan writer wrote in Chinese or Japanese…all displayed some form of protest in their depiction of the reality…of the common people and the political environment” (147-148). Although Ye’s assessment may smack of overgeneralization and unwarranted optimism, it does give us some sense of how frequently literature worked to popularize and sustain the widespread spirit of resistance at this time as well as the extent to which ideas of anti-imperialism and Taiwanese people’s hope for local autonomy were widely circulated among readers both in the metropole and the colony. In what follows, by looking closely at a handful of representative works of this time period, I will locate some of the common ideas expressed in these texts and attempt an explanation of how these ideas nourished a budding Taiwanese consciousness in the past and present.

The Invention of New Humanism

The works of Lai He, Yang Kui, and Lü Heruo discussed in this chapter, though undeniably different in style, can be reasonably grouped together and seen as a common project which aimed to invent a new humanism for the colonized, when one considers coloniality as the paramount shaping reality of these works and that they were written with the same anticolonial exigency. My grouping and characterization of the works in this way is based on Fanon who, in his own unique way, sees colonization as an act of total dehumanization, and accordingly he

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46 New Literature Movement promoted the use of vernacular Chinese and Taiwanese in literary composition and urged the abandonment of classic Chinese which was up to this time the predominant medium of literary expression. The goal was to make literature accessible to the general public. For a more in-depth discussion of the movement, see Kleeman 145-47.
believes that the only logical response to it is a complete re-humanization of the colonized. As his call-to-action to the colonized clearly reveals his ideal of a new humanism of the colonized: “Let us endeavor to invent a man [sic] in full, something which Europe has been incapable of achieving”; and “The Third World must start over a new history of man [sic]” (WE 236, 238). Fanon’s recommendation to the colonized is derived from his lifelong observation and reflection of European colonialism, particularly the French variant.47 In Black Skin, White Masks, he theorizes the inferiority complex derived from the relation between the colonizer and colonized.48 And later in The Wretched of the Earth he famously argues, “In the colonies the economic infrastructure is also a superstructure. The cause is effect: You are rich because you are white, you are white because you are rich” (WE 5). Clearly, for Fanon, colonization constitutes a total assault on human as such; it destroys the colonized subjects and the world they know. It entails simultaneously psychological subjugation of the colonized individuals, systematic deprivation of the colonized population’s social, economic, and political rights, and constant denigration of local way of life and culture. As such, for him, any meaningful anticolonial and decolonizing endeavor aiming to restore humanity to the colonized must be an all-out and simultaneous battle on all these different fronts.

Taking Fanon’s humanism of the colonized as the outer limits of anticolonial cultural productions, I argue that the works produced by Lai He, Yang Kui, and Lü Heruo examined in this chapter fulfill several purposes simultaneously. First, by representing the common hardships that the colonized masses undergo and are able to recognize, they seek to raise people’s awareness towards their innate dignity as human beings so as to enable their self-understanding

47 Some scholars have suggested the similarities between the French and Japanese brands of colonialism, particularly in their assimilation policy. See for example Lewis H. Gann and Mark R. Peattie.

48 See especially chapter 5 and 6.
as an oppressed people who are unjustly exploited and trampled by the colonizer in similar ways. Second, the three writers’ works all consciously engage in, to borrow Eric Hobsbawm oft-quoted phrase, the reinvention of tradition.49 This can be seen in their selective attitude in eulogizing certain aspects of Taiwanese cultural tradition while denouncing others such as gambling, the practice of arranged marriage, and people’s shortsightedness. Such a persistent sense of cultural reformism expressed in these works, I suggest, is indicative of the authors’ desire to reconstruct a viable local culture that is able to nourish a new people and prepare them to rise to the challenge of modern times.50 Lastly, with the exception of Lü Heruo, both Lai He and Yang Kui represent in a positive light certain admirable qualities of the common people, such as perseverance and fraternity, with the probable intention of promoting solidarity and reestablishing self-respect among the people. In short, the three writers’ humanist project of total rehabilitation of the colonized implicitly aims to suggest that the colonized population in Taiwan share a common destiny and that they are socially, economically, culturally, and mentally bound together due to the reality of colonization. For this reason, it is only logical to see their works as containing some proto-nationalist thoughts. Indeed, as Fanon argues, “[D]ignity and sovereignty were exact equivalents. In fact a free people living in dignity is a sovereign people. A people living in dignity is a responsible people” (WE 139). If dignity and sovereignty are, as Fanon suggests, really two sides of the same coin, it is not too much to say that the three writers envisioned an autonomous Taiwanese people when they repeatedly urge the people to seek dignity and end oppression with their writings.

49 The concept is first proposed in his essay “Nation as Invented Tradition.”

50 Pei-yin Lin points out that most reformers at this time adopted an “evolutionary” outlook and thought Taiwan must culturally “catch up.” See her introduction to Colonial Taiwan: Negotiating Identities and Modernity through Literature 18.
Lai He: Representing Colonial Violence and Subaltern Unity

Lai He was born in 1894 and died in 1943. Because his lifespan almost corresponded to the entirety of Japanese colonial rule in Taiwan, some consider him “the most representative figure in the early period of Taiwan’s new literature” (Tu, TLETS No. 15 xx). In addition, his pioneering experiment with writing in vernacular Chinese and spoken Taiwanese was one of the reasons that he has been immortalized as the father of Taiwanese new literature, much like Lu Xun to Chinese modern literature.51 Apart from being a prolific and accomplished poet, Lai also produced a number of short stories during his lifetime. His fiction-writing can be considered predominantly social realism, as his writing style is marked by his accurate depiction of the miserable conditions of the poor, his uncompromising exposure and scathing criticism of all forms of social injustice derivative of colonial rule, particularly police brutality, and native feudalistic social order. Lastly, his profound sympathy for those who struggled at the bottom of society like peasants, workers, and street vendors is also a hallmark of his storytelling. Ye Shitao has this to say about Lai’s career as a writer: He is “a profound humanist who embraced the poor, suffering masses” (150). Because of his truthful and sympathetic portrayal of the hardships facing the colonized poor and his critical attitude towards colonial reality as a whole, Lai He was often credited with “initiat[ing] the literary tradition of ‘anti-colonialism’” in Taiwan (Chien-chung Chen 7, quotation marks in the original). As such, any discussion of Taiwan’s oppositional literature during the Japanese colonial period cannot fail to take into consideration Lai He’s writing and his influence.

In addition to his vernacular experiment and trend-setting realist composition style, perhaps what also makes Lai He representative of writers of his time is the fact that he

51 Indeed, scholars often compare Lai He to Lu Xun. See for example Chien-chung Chen 3 and Pei-yin Lin 51-53.
consistently approached his writing with a strong sense of mission; a self-imposed sense of mission characteristic of traditional Chinese scholars (*shidaifu*) who took it upon themselves to guide the people and deliver them from their current misfortune. Lai clearly saw himself as a deliverer and educator, or in Pei-yin Lin’s words a “cultural enlightener,” of the people (48). This sentiment can be sensed in the opening words of an op-ed article he published in *Taiwan People’s Press* of which he was a frequent contributor: “Newspapers are the vanguard of the people and the bugler of the movement to reform society. If they don’t faithfully cry out on behalf of the oppressed and fervently play a march to inspire the people, they certainly don’t deserve that title” (“May Our Bugler Play a March to Inspire the People” 9). Lai’s words quoted above clearly reveal the expectations he set for himself as well as his fellow intellectuals, and they also explain his insistence on producing short stories depicting the dark side of society. A vanguard, bugler, and cultural enlightener, Lai He never took his writing lightly, seeing it merely as a pastime of the privileged literati; rather he saw literature as a way to fulfil his obligation to his colonized compatriots. Lai’s messianic ambition can be sensed in almost all of his short stories, not least in two of his relatively early ones, “Steelyard” and “A Dissatisfying New Year.”

Because of Lai He’s overall importance in Taiwanese literature and his celebrated status as an archetypical anticolonial writer in Taiwan, there has never been a shortage of studies on his life, work, and thoughts in Taiwan, even though he remains largely unknown to non-specialists in the West. Many scholars have also analyzed his writing from a postcolonial and sometimes even a nationalist standpoint due in large part to a rapid shift of paradigm in Taiwanese historiography—from a Sinocentric to a Taiwan-centric one—occurring on both official and

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52 The most comprehensive study of Lai He remains to be Lin Ruiming’s *Taiwanese Literature and Zeitgeist: A Collection of Research Essays on Lai He.*
unofficial levels since the 1990s. In what follows, I will consider a few of such analyses written by influential scholars of Taiwanese colonial literature as well as ones that are most up to date to give my reader a sense of how Lai’s writing has been discussed in recent scholarship. My discussion of previous scholarship is far from comprehensive; rather, it is more a summary of some of the most recurring comments made about Lai He.

Scholarly discussion of Lai He mainly revolves around three salient aspects of his work: his experiment with hybrid writing—using Japanese vocabulary, vernacular Chinese and spoken Taiwanese simultaneously—which has been sometimes taken as a manifestation of his negotiation of identity as a colonized subject; his candid and detailed representation of the suffering of the poor and underprivileged; and his sharp criticism of aspects of traditional Taiwanese cultural practices. Since my present chapter is a thematic-oriented analysis, I will focus on the latter two—the themes of social criticism and cultural reformism—which almost no Lai He scholar has failed to notice. In her latest monograph published in 2017, Pei-yin Lin notes, “Lai He’s early works are often critical of the backward social practices and satirical of the character of the Taiwanese people” (48). When commenting specifically on “Steelyard,” Lin goes on to suggest that the steelyard is a symbol of Japanese colonial government; it symbolizes the “absurdity of [colonial law] and the exploitative nature of colonial economy” (50). In the same spirit of symbolism, Fong Shiaw-chian too extends the meaning of the steelyard and argues that its image symbolizes “the situation of poverty” and is thus one of the more fitting objects to be consistently featured in what he calls the literary “genre of the masses” (as opposed to that of the intellectuals) at the time (175). Finally, noted Taiwan-based literary critic Xu Junya also

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53 For readers interested in Lai He’s linguistic experiment, Faye Yuan Kleeman offers a detailed account of its historical background and Pei-yin Lin discusses the experiment with specific pieces of Lai’s writing. See Kleeman 145-157 and Lin 64-72
points out how Lai He critiques some of the longstanding ills inherent in Taiwanese culture, such as gambling, in her discussion of his “A Dissatisfying New Year” (170). While all of the above observations about Lai’s social criticism and cultural reformism are important and also reasonable, it seems to me that not much has been made about his emphasis on forging solidarity among the colonized through his selective valorization of certain native cultural elements and qualified praise of the masses. I maintain that the concept of solidarity is key to understanding and connecting the dots in Lai’s writing. For his exposure of social injustice and criticism of local cultural tradition all point to the same goal: to forge a new local identity around which to unite the people in the immediate fight against colonial oppression. It is for this reason that I suggest we pay closer attention to the ways in which Lai He stresses the importance of solidarity among the colonized. Let me now turn to the two stories to demonstrate these moments.

Both “Steelyard” (1925) and “A Dissatisfying New Year” (1927), like several of Lai He’s short stories, unfold around events of police brutality, with the former being narrated from the perspective of the Taiwanese people and the latter from that of the Japanese police. The protagonist in “Steelyard” is a middle-aged man named Qin Decan which, when pronounced in Taiwanese, means, allegorically, “the terribly unfortunate one.” Qin was born into a poor peasant family. After his father’s death, he and his mother live hand to mouth. They work on a small piece of rented farmland and do odd jobs for others. The mother and son eventually manage to save enough money for Qin to marry a farmer’s daughter who soon gives birth to two children. The family enjoys a short period of peaceful and content life until Qin’s mother passes away and he contracts malaria which makes him physically incapable of farming anymore. Worrying about the family’s lack of income especially when Chinese New Year is around the corner, Qin by chance learns that selling vegetables in town is a good way to make a living. He decides to
follow that route but soon runs into new problems: he lacks start-up capital to buy vegetables and a government-approved steelyard which all vegetable vendors are required to use by law. Luckily, a neighbor lends them a steelyard and his wife’s sister-in-law gives them her only valuable belonging, a hairpin, and lets them pawn it to get just enough money to start business. One day when Qin is selling vegetables, a police officer comes up to his booth with the intent to find any fault possible to persecute Qin. Enraged over the fact that Qin has the audacity to charge him for the cauliflower he intends to buy, the police officer accuses Qin of using a counterfeit steelyard. Qin ends up receiving a jail time of three days. But his wife quickly uses the money they set aside to buy back the hairpin to bail him out. The story ends with the police officer being mysteriously murdered on his usual patrol route.

The narrative of “A Dissatisfying New Year,” on the other hand, is filled with a Japanese officer’s internal monologue which, obviously, is intended to caricature the arrogant and reactionary mindset of the colonial police. The story opens with a disgruntled officer cursing the locals over the little amount of new-year gifts he has received this year. He is convinced that the scarcity of gifts he has received from the people this year is a sign that they have stopped respecting and fearing him and thus a sign that his authority has waned. The officer puts especial blame on social activists, the spoilers of peace and order in his eye. Feeling offended, he sets out to re-instill fear and respect in the people by doubling up his efforts to threaten street vendors and small business owners with fines and punishments. Near the end of the story, following a failure to catch illegal gamblers in the street, he takes out his anger on an innocent child, scolding him and slapping him in the face. Even though all bystanders feel sympathy for the child, none but one man dares to intercede on his behalf. The intercession, however, only makes
matters worse, because the officer takes it as a challenge to his authority and prestige as an official.

It is instructive to first dwell on the question as to why Lai He’s makes the colonial police a perennial target of criticism in his writing. The colonial police, I suggest, functions as a synecdoche in Lai’s depiction of colonial reality and is a key element in his deliberate attempt to paint for his readers a Manichean world comprising of two distinct identities, the colonizer and the colonized, the perpetrator and the victim. To understand why this is, we must first consider the special role of police in the Japanese brand of colonialism. It is a well-established fact that, whether in Taiwan, Korea, or Manchuria, the functioning of the entire Japanese colonial machine relied heavily on an efficient, widely deployed, and highly centralized police network. The Japanese police were literally the empire builders in all these colonies. In addition to maintaining law and order, they were charged with a great number of duties which required them to make frequent contact with the colonized populations, such as promoting and enforcing new government policies of public health and sanitation, regularly collecting census information of every household, taking part in land surveys, and coordinating local able-bodied corps in projects of public construction and neighborhood watch” (Ching-chih Chen 227-228). For the colonized populace, thus, the Japanese police were a big part of their daily reality. To put it more bluntly, the colonial police were for them colonialism in concreto and colonizer par excellence.54

Given that the colonial police played such a big role in almost all aspects of the colonized’s public life and was the colonizer in most common people’s minds, it is not difficult to see why Lai He focuses so much energy on detailing the brutal and oppressive behavior of the

54 In his study of the centrality of a modern police force in the running of Imperial Japan and her colonies since the Meiji period onwards, Ching-chih Chen indicates, “For the average Japanese ‘political power’ was not personified by the remote and seldom seen elite of the Diet, Cabinet, and higher civil service, but by the ubiquitous civil police” (213).
police towards the people in his fictions, turning it into a figure of colonial injustice as a whole. The recurring image of the police as unscrupulous bullies in Lai’s work, furthermore, is central to his construction of the mutually opposing, but mutually constitutive, identities of the colonizer and the colonized. In his effort to accentuate the sharp contrast between the two opposing identities, thus, we often see Lai He employ vivid and, inevitably, stereotypical images in his portrayal of the colonial police. In “Steelyard,” a police officer is someone who abuses his power all the time, giving hard working people like Qin Decan difficult times for no obvious reason and habitually anticipating free gifts from street vendors. An old man says to Qin after the policeman has left his booth, “Damned fool. How can you expect to do business here if you don’t even know the rules of the market place? When you told him the weight, were you really thinking of taking his money?” (“Steelyard” 20) In “A Dissatisfying New Year,” the police officer genuinely believes that the proper way to rule what he perceives as a lower people, the “filthy pigs,” is by coercion (42). As he thinks to himself, “It was already a serious matter for someone to be an official and not elicit fear from the people, but how much worse if they did not respect him?” (“A Dissatisfying New Year” 41). The story includes a highly visual account of the police officer’s fear-eliciting behavior to help the reader grasp the brutal nature of the colonial police and, by extension, the inhumane nature of colonial rule as a whole. In the story, we are told, the colonial police routinely carry out these actions: “the rigid reinforcement of regulations controlling peddlers, harshly punishing businessmen, sending people and their loads sprawling with a single blow, levying fines if someone was late sweeping in front of their house, or destroying the ‘steelyards’ in several stores to safeguards weights and measures” (“A Dissatisfying New Year” 41, quotation marks in the original).
Whereas Lai He gives a stereotypical image to the colonial police and uses this image to suggest a fundamental identity among the colonizers, he also seeks to construct a mirror-identity among the colonized masses based on their shared experience of colonial violence and exploitation. In contrast to the contemptuous and abusive manner of the colonial police, the colonized in the two stories appear a victimized yet virtuous people defined by their generosity towards each other and their sense of justice. This contrast is nowhere more obvious than in “Steelyard.” Facing the police’s constant harassment and brutal treatment, the oppressed people appear united and helping each other out. When Qin Decan cannot afford to buy an expensive steelyard, it is his neighbor, “a kind person who lent them one that looked relatively new” (“Steelyard” 18). When he lacks money to buy vegetables to start his business, his wife’s sister-in-law, not well-off herself, “was nice enough to take out her only ornament—a gold hairpin—and tell her to pawn it for a little capital to launch Decan’s business” (“Steelyard” 18). After Qin starts making some profit out of his vegetable business, the first thing that crosses his wife’s mind is redeem the hairpin and return it to her sister-in-law. As she counsels Qin, “Save the rest of the money so we can redeem that hairpin. Isn’t it more important?” (“Steelyard” 19) In short, in his representation of colonial reality, Lai He thoughtfully complements his depiction of the unfortunate situations of the colonized poor with a hopeful message of solidarity that, he hopes, exists among them: they lift each other up and are grateful to each other’s help.

A further way that Lai He seeks to strengthen solidarity among the people is by embedding certain didactic moments in his narratives where the colonized can be seen rise up to assert their human dignity and question injustice. In “Steelyard,” Qin Decan is not afraid to confront the police when he is dehumanized by the latter. When the policeman calls him swine before taking him to the police station, Qin retorts, “What? You have no cause to talk to me like
that…I’ll go if you want me to. But why call people ‘swine’?” (“Steelyard” 21). In “A Dissatisfying New Year,” Lai He speaks to the reader directly in the voice of social activists, the cause of the police-colonizer’s angst: “Society is composed of officials, farmers, artisans, and businessmen. One is not inferior to the other”; and “Everyone who lives in society must respect the law, including the officials. But the police beat people for no reason and this behavior should also be punished by law” (42). Through these words of dignity and equality, Lai He conveys to his readers the notion that the Taiwanese are not lesser human beings simply because they are colonized and that they should abandon their passivity and stand up to earn their respect and rights, like Qin Decan and the man who attempts to rescue the boy in “A Dissatisfying New Year.” It is as Fanon says that the only means for the colonized to end the vicious cycle of dehumanization is to force their humanity upon the colonizer’s consciousness: “Unable ever to be sure whether the white man considers him consciousness in-itself-for-itself, he must forever absorb himself in uncovering resistance, opposition, challenge” (222 BSWM). To a more extreme degree, as the dénouement of “Steelyard” implies, they should even kill the perpetrator of violence to regain their human status if need be.

In keeping with Lai He’s project to construct a dignified identity among the Taiwanese under colonization is his attempt to reinvent a respectable native culture through partial valorization and denouncement of traditional cultural practices. In the context of the two stories, the main occasion for Lai He to apply his ideas of cultural reform is the Chinese New Year, the essential marker of Taiwanese people’s Chinese heritage which, accordingly, is something that makes them fundamentally different from their Japanese rulers. Lai expresses his general approval of this heritage by showing in his stories people’s insistence on celebrating the new year according to the old calendar rather than the Gregorian calendar introduced by the colonial
government. In “Steelyard,” no matter how difficult Qin’s economic situation is, when he earns money he thinks of buying new clothes for his children for the new year: “As a father, he would feel regret over not meeting his responsibilities if he couldn’t give them some new clothes for the coming new year. A comfortable life was out of the question, but he could at least give them a bit of happiness” (19). This passage not only reveals Qin’s fatherly tenderness towards his children but also brings into relief how serious people in Taiwan were in observing and continuing new year customs passed down by their ancestors. For centuries in Taiwan, parents would prepare brand new clothes for their children to wear on the New Year’s Day so that they could be rid of whatever was old and bad and look forward to a bright new year. The people’s insistence on celebrating the Chinese New Year is also shown in “A Dissatisfying New Year.” At one point, it is narrated, “Although it was New Year’s [by the Western Japanese-imposed calendar], the businessmen continued working, maintaining their old custom of only celebrating the lunar New Year” (43). In both stories, the new year becomes a site of symbolic resistance to the colonizer where Lai expresses an urgent need to preserve a unique local identity in defiance of official assimilation.

However, not all customs related to the new year are equally valuable and worth preserving to Lai He. In “A Dissatisfying New Year,” he offers a sarcastic account of Taiwanese people’s habit of gambling during the New Year holidays:

The mere mention of New Year’s was associated with gambling, at least in the minds of the Chinese. You could say fondness for gambling was an important facet of character building among the lower classes. The first choice for killing time was gambling, so when it came to the free time at New Year’s most people felt it was a time for gambling. (44)

Notably, critic Xu Junya sees an inherent contradiction “between the lines” of Lai He’s critique of gambling quoted above (170). As she argues, “[H]e impatiently criticized the Taiwanese
people for their ignorant backwardness and crude nature; but in another sense, as a descendant of the Han people, he also endured the silent pain that came from his identification with his people” (170). It may be true that Lai He wrote those words in “silent pain” (of which only he himself knew), but what I find rather questionable is Xu’s nativist assumption of identity formation which presumes that a people is made up predominantly of their inherited customs. In Xu’s own words: “Without folk customs, the identity of an ethnicity would always remain indistinct, just as would a person without a face” (168).

Countering Xu’s sentimental views, what I propose, instead, is a reading of Lai’s stories from a broader anticolonial perspective. Whatever identity constructed or implied in Lai’s writing, it is a product of his observation of and antithetical position against the totality of colonization and is thus not limited to an assertion of cultural difference, or in Fanon’s words, to an underscoring of “an inventory of particularisms” (WE 160). Rather, it seems clear to me that Lai’s literary project of identity-construction, if we may call it that, entails an overall awakening of people’s social, political, and cultural self-awareness. Seen in this light, Lai’s critique of certain backward aspects of Taiwanese tradition is actually in keeping with his overall progressive intent to define a new local society that is robust and healthy enough to compete against that which has been forcibly put in place by the colonial state. This tendency to reform and modernize the people was common among transitional intellectuals like Lai He. To illustrate, in “Steelyard,” Lai plainly criticizes people’s “unenlightened” habit of turning to traditional herbal remedies when they get sick and their widespread distrust of Western medicine which causes them to believe Qin Decan’s “swelling of the spleen” is “a side effect from having taken Western medicine” (18). Being himself a medical doctor, Lai must have seen patients who endangered their own lives by taking herbs to try to cure themselves. For a new intellectual like
him, thus, he must have learned first-hand that “[a]ny inclination to glorify the unanalytical cast of mind is not just retrograde; it is tragic” (qtd in Appiah 104). Or as Fanon puts it more directly, “Seeking to stick to tradition or reviving neglected tradition is not only going against history, but against one’s people” (WE 160). For this reason, I think, Lai He’s attempt to enlighten the people’s minds is not in contradiction to his insistence on preserving local cultural heritage.

In conclusion, Lai He’s stories often vividly portray for the reader a reality that is sharply divided into the groups of the colonizers and the colonized. While his portrayal may strike one as simplistic and lacking nuances, it is, ipso facto, easy to consume and grasp, and thus extremely powerful. Without question, Lai was one of the very first writers in Taiwan to have systematically articulated the fundamental incongruity and inequality between the colonizers and the colonized by repeatedly highlighting their differences in social and political status, cultural heritage, and psychological make-up. His characteristic amplification of police brutality had also become a model for others to continue to criticize and satirize the violence and corruption of colonial rule. What should not be forgotten, above all, is that underlying Lai’s persistent effort to draw attention to people’s shared experience of exploitation and discrimination is his deeper interest in fostering a sanguine sense of identity among the colonized Taiwanese which is revealed through his often unveiled attempt to incorporate such ideas as equality, dignity, and solidarity in his stories as well as his progressive critique of traditional folkways. Indeed, in many ways, as many have affirmed, Lai He’s writing helped establish a tradition of anticolonial writing in Taiwan. This narrative tradition was, to a noticeable extent, carried on by his friend and mentee Yang Kui.
Yang Kui: The Meshing of Anti-Imperialism and Anti-Capitalism

Compared to the binary worldview often found in Lai He’s fictions, Yang Kui’s representation of the colonizer-colonized relations appears noticeably more complex and multilayered (but no less intense in its accusation of colonial injustice). On a personal level, this might have to do with the fact that one of Yang’s best friends was a Japanese policeman and an aspiring writer, Nyūta Haruhiko, who was also his intellectual comrade and benefactor.55 But, more crucially, it is clear to many that Yang’s perception of colonial reality was rooted in his staunch socialist position which compelled him to view Taiwanese people’s predicament partly in class terms rather than simply as a result of one homogenous racial group oppressing another. As the “foremost of the proletarian writers” in colonial Taiwan, Yang Kui was deeply influenced by Russian literature, French literature of the Revolutionary period, and Japan’s workers’ and proletarian literatures of the 1920s and 1930s (Peng 211). Themes such as class struggle and proletarian solidarity introduced by Yang in his writing, especially in his award-winning novella “Newspaper Carrier,” added a new dimension to Taiwanese anticolonial literature. Stylistically, like Lai He, Yang Kui also chose realism as his preferred medium of literary expression. He was a steadfast practitioner of reportage literature and so-called “kuso realism” (feces realism), a term coined by leading Japanese proletarian writers promoting an unadulterated depiction of the ugliness and darkness of society.56

Also like Lai He, Yang Kui saw it as his mission as a writer to lift the people out of their present misery and confusion. Paraphrasing one of Yang’s proses, Peng Hsiao-yen indicates that

55 For a more detailed description of Yang and Nyūta’s friendship, see Kleeman 172-73.
56 The term kuso realism was derived from a debate between Japanese realist and romanticist writers. A few decades later the same debate was carried on in Taiwan between the Japanese-dominated romanticist literary circle and that of native realists. Yang wrote an article in defense of kuso realism. See Peng Hsiao-yen 231-32 for a brief discussion.
Yang Kui believed a writer should “live, think, and labor like the masses” and fully understand “the sources of the people’s joy, anger, sorrow, and happiness,” but at the same time he also believed that “a writer’s wisdom and vision [must] be above those of the masses” so that he or she is able to “see the tendency of the times and have a keen eye for the corruption of customs that thwart progress” (229). It was, thus, not a flattery nor an overstatement when Ye Shitao characterized Yang’s life work as “a literature of engagement” (qtd in Tu, TLETS No. 38 xxii).

What makes Yang Kui additionally special among his peers is the fact that he unflinchingly practiced what he preached even in the harshest of political times: he was as much a voice as he was an agent of change. Throughout his career, Yang was both an outspoken writer and a lifelong devotee to social activism. Upon his return from Japan as a young man, Yang was actively involved in the affairs of then increasingly left-leaning Taiwan Cultural Association and occupied a leadership position in Taiwan’s Farmer Union (Nōmin Kumiai). Even after the 1945 regime change, Yang’s pursuit of social justice did not stop. The price he paid as a result, however, was a dozen times of imprisonment under both the Japanese colonial and the Chinese Nationalist regimes. The last prison term he served was twelve years, from 1949 to 1961, in Green Island.

Perhaps because of Yang Kui’s radical image as a writer-activist and his well-documented socialist position, (for Yang famously proclaimed himself a “humanitarian socialist”), critical discussion of him has often focused (sometimes disproportionately, I think) on his best-known “Newspaper Carrier” as well as his socialist thinking most explicitly expressed in this rather youthful work of his. Leo Ching, for instance, considers in his book only Yang Kui’s “Newspaper Carrier” and writes that Yang “accentuat[es] the structure of oppression and exploitation not as an opposition between clearly defined racial groups but between capitalist
and proletariat” (128). Taking his cue from the ending scene of the novella where the Japanese proletariat and the Taiwanese colonized join forces to fight back against capitalist exploitation, Ching then concludes, “Yang’s classism is perhaps too reductive and his call for proletarian solidarity too idealistic” (128). Almost echoing Ching, Faye Yuan Kleeman also asserts, “Yang’s ‘Newspaper [Carrier]’ falls into the easy trap of universalism, naively portraying an unproblematic union between the [colonizers and colonized subjects]” (173). In fact, Yang’s image as a “socialist” writer in “Newspaper Carrier” was so entrenched in literary scholarship that some felt obliged to take the novella as an inevitable frame of reference to examine all of his later works. For example, when commenting on “A Model Village,” a story set entirely in Taiwan, Pei-yin Lin claims with a rather negligible bit of textual detail, namely Yang’s one-time mentioning of the Chiba farmer protest in Japan, that “‘Model Village’ transgresses national boundaries, reconfirming that Yang was more concerned with class inequality than political affinity” (82).

Though much of what previous scholarship has said about the socialist implications of Yang Kui’s writing was accurate to some extent, the tendency, as seen above, towards portraying him as the rootless or colorblind type of socialist who prefers class identification to ethnic affiliation, it seems to me, warrants some correction. In other words, what needs to be re-examined are the doctrines of classical Marxism implicit in past critics’ arguments which presume class and ethnic identities to be mutually incongruous; doctrines that, if we believe Fanon, are inadequate to apply to the colonial situation. As he argues that “Marxist analysis should always be slightly stretched when it comes to addressing the colonial issue” because “[t]he ruling species is first and foremost the outsider from elsewhere, different from the indigenous population, ‘the others’” (WE 5, quotation marks in the original). Given the entwined
structure of class exploitation and racial discrimination inherent in colonialism, few colonized intellectuals, not even a socialist Yang Kui, could completely and not self-deceivingly detach class identity from racial or ethnic, not to say national, identity—the so-called “false consciousness.” Even Lenin had to concede nationalism was necessary when he voiced “unconditional” support for Third World anticolonial nationalist movements.\(^{57}\) Granted, in Yang’s time there was hardly a clearly defined discourse of Taiwanese nationalism, as most intellectuals were still navigating their path forward between their two major sources of cultural influence, Japanese and Chinese.\(^{58}\) This, however, does not mean that Yang’s commitment to proletarian solidarity precluded his self-understanding as a Taiwanese and blunted his awareness of the various cultural and racial inequities between the colonizer and the colonized. In fact, the opposite is true. Though it is an irrefutable fact that capitalist exploitation is a dominant theme in “Newspaper Carrier,” in most of Yang’s later works, such as “Water Buffalo,” “A Model Village,” or “Clay Dolls,” it is only one, and not even the most prominent, thread among many with which Yang weaves together a representation of Taiwanese people’s suffering under colonial rule. Peng Hsiao-yen’s emphasis that Yang was a localist writer who insisted on “describe[ing] the reality of Taiwan through a Taiwanese point of view,” paradoxically, seems to be closer to the mark (238). In summary, it is limiting and misleading to take a part for the whole and continuously reinforce the idea that Yang Kui was a writer who adhered to a certain set of doctrines and that because he was drawn to socialism he must have also embraced

\(^{57}\) In his *The Right of Nations to Self-Determination*, Lenin writes, “The bourgeois nationalism of every oppressed nation has a general democratic content, which is directed against oppression, and it is this content that we support unconditionally while strictly distinguishing it from the tendency towards national exceptionalism” (24-25).

\(^{58}\) In her study of Taiwanese anticolonial movement at the time, Patricia Tsurumi remarks on the elite’s persistent failure to articulate a clear Taiwanese cultural/national identity: “Not only is the depth of the conservatives’ cultural nationalism unclear, but the content of this cultural movement is unclear too. The [Taiwan Cultural] association’s championship of the Taiwanese as culturally distinct from the Japanese was unequivocal from the beginning. But was this culture Chinese or Taiwanese?” (197).
internationalism. It seems to me that in Yang’s work socialism, rather than being an end in itself, is a means with which he attempts to achieve the more urgent end of decolonizing Taiwan, which had always been his central concern and can already be observed in his early “Newspaper Carrier.”

The novella “Newspaper Carrier” was first published in 1932 in Taiwan New People’s News, but initially only the first part of it saw the light of day because the second part was deemed inappropriate by colonial censors. In 1934 it was selected for a second-place award by the Japanese proletarian journal Literary Review (Bunkaku hyōron). The award quickly established Yang’s fame as a writer, making him the first Taiwanese writer to be recognized by the literary establishment of the metropole. With a protagonist that shares the author’s family name, “Newspaper Carrier” is based on Yang Kui’s experience in Tokyo when he attended classes at night at Nihon University and worked as a newspaper carrier during the day.

Set mostly in Japan, the story opens with a desperate young Taiwanese, Yang, falling for an employment scam and beginning to work as a carrier for an exploitative newspaper distributor. During his short gig there, Yang is subjected to many inhumane conditions, such as having to stay in an unsanitary, flea-ridden dormitory and share a quilt with two others and sleep “packed in like sushi” (“Newspaper Carrier” 15). Fortunately, despite all his misery, he befriends a coworker, a kind-hearted Japanese student named Tanaka, who lends him money and offers him much needed emotional support. Yang, however, is shortly fired by the proprietor for failing to find enough new subscribers, and the deposit, the only money he has, is taken by the latter on the pretext that he has not worked a full month. Distressed, Yang starts to see the similarities between Japanese capitalists and the colonizers back home, as he recalls how the sugar companies, police, and local compradors colluded to coerce farmers in his home village to sell
their land, leading to his father’s death and eventually his mother’s suicide. The story, nevertheless, ends in an upbeat note when Yang, Tanaka, and a worker-activist, Itō, organize a strike that successfully makes the newspaper distributor improve its employees’ working conditions. In the end, feeling fulfilled and educated, Yang departs for Taiwan and is determined to use what he learns from this experience to help his home village.

There are several moments in the story where Yang Kui explicitly expresses his hope for a future alliance between Taiwanese and Japanese workers in the common resistance against capitalist exploitation. Tanaka’s act of kindness and generosity towards the impoverished protagonist enacts the author’s ideal of an anti-racist world, a precondition for cross-cultural, cross-racial cooperation, and sends a clear message to his readers: Not every individual belonging to the colonizing race is an oppressor and, likewise, not everyone belonging to the subject race is equally oppressed. The protagonist says plainly at one point that comparing Tanaka to the Taiwanese who help the colonizers to oppress the people, like the head of his home village and his brother, a policeman, is “doing Tanaka an injustice” (“Newspaper Carrier” 46). Toward the end, the friendship developing between Yang and Tanaka and later Itō culminates in their concerted action against the exploitative newspaper distributor. Their collaboration brings out the possibility that, regardless of nationality or place of origin, the downtrodden in the pecking order of capitalism can work together on account of a common cause. This hopeful possibility is most succinctly voiced by Itō’s encouraging words to Yang: “Come! Let’s take each other by the hand! It’s the same kind of people that make you Taiwanese and us Japanese both suffer” (“Newspaper Carrier” 48). Clearly, as Ching and Kleeman rightly observe, Yang’s narrative is shot through with youthful optimism and his rather crude attempt to bring about a union between the colonizer and colonized bespeaks his unexamined confidence in
the notion of international proletarian solidarity. But I think there is more to the story than
Yang’s simplistic and overly idealistic rendition of socialism.

In the mid-section of the story, the protagonist’s painful but vivid recollection of the
tragic land seizing event occurring in his home village complicates the reading that Yang Kui is
unaware of the racial hierarchy existing between the Japanese and Taiwanese and that he naively
displaces the complexity of colonialism with a simpler scheme of class confrontation. As the
protagonist recalls, when the villagers refuse to sell their land, officials of the sugar companies,
police, and the village head deliberately use such words as “conspiracy,” “unpatriotic people,”
and “be shown no mercy” in their speeches to terrorize them into submission (“Newspaper
Carrier” 31). This strategy works because the words tap into Taiwanese people’s collective
memory, reminding them of “the bloody suppression of the conspiracies of Yu Qingfang and
Lin Shaomao [that] remained all too fresh in their minds” (“Newspaper Carrier” 31). Yang’s
representation of this event clearly shows that the causes of Taiwanese people’s suffering under
colonial rule are not purely economic and thus cannot be entirely comparable to capitalist
exploitation. Inherent in colonial rule are blatant ethnocentrism and Japanese jingoism which
discriminatorily presume uncooperative Taiwanese to be criminals and label them as such. That
Yang specifically invokes the names of Yu Qingfang and Lin Shaomao—symbols of what Ernest
Renan terms people’s “common suffering”—further indicates that the people of Taiwan occupy a
significant space in this seemingly cosmopolitan text (17).

Yang’s concern for the colonized people in Taiwan is most clearly revealed by the
protagonist’s mother’s letter to his son sent before she commits suicide. In it, the mother exhorts
the son, “Therefore, when you come home, come home with the intention of rescuing the village.
Don’t come home at all until you have confidence in yourself. I don’t know what you should do
except do your best to help the villagers” (“Newspaper Carrier” 41). Like the filial protagonist
who shares his name, it is possible that Yang’s purpose of writing this story has always been
“rescuing” the Taiwanese people from colonial rule, and one of the ways of doing so is by
borrowing the method of class struggle to mobilize the people of Taiwan. When the protagonist
meets Itō, he thinks to himself, “I thought that if he knew how to show a miserable newspaper
carrier and the unemployed the means to fight back against a diabolical brute of a proprietor, he
might have some advice for the people in my home village” (“Newspaper Carrier” 46). In
repeatedly comparing capitalist exploitation to colonization in the story, therefore, Yang does not
merely and superficially equate the two. Rather, he recognizes that capitalism and industry are
the internal driving forces of colonialism and, to that extent, socialism can be a useful tool to
achieve the broader end of decolonizing Taiwan. Thus, when Pei-yin Lin argues that in
“Newspaper Carrier,” “the theme of anti-imperialism remains enveloped by that of anti-capitalist
movement,” I think the opposite can also be true (79). It seems clear that in the story Yang’s
localist concern is never subsumed into his socialist ideology; instead, the latter enhances the
former. In the end, rather than staying to continue to fight with his Japanese comrades, the
protagonist decides to go home with the “education” he has acquired alongside Tanaka and Itō in
the past few months to rescue his village, just as his mother had wished (“Newspaper Carrier”
48).

If Yang’s localist stance is ambiguous and partially balanced out by his ostensible
socialist agenda in “Newspaper Carrier,” the same cannot be said about his “A Model Village,” a
story representing the absurdity of colonial rule in Taiwan and the local farmers’ undaunted will
to resist. Compared to the former, the latter appears more multi-dimensional and richer in
themes. Like “Newspaper Carrier,” “A Model Village” also deals with the immense economic
disparity between the rich and poor, between the coalition of Japanese capitalists controlling the sugar refineries and the local landowning gentry on the one hand, and the great farming and laboring masses on the other. But, aside from highlighting class difference, the story also shows Taiwanese people’s conscious cultural resistance in the private sphere and contains an uplifting message that seeks to inspire the people to unite to change the status quo.

Written in 1937, “A Model Village” details the daily transactions in a fictional village, Taiping village, leading up to its climatic moment of being awarded the status of model village. The title is in fact a caricature that aims to underscore the superficiality and injustice of colonial modernization in Taiwan. For the prosperous and orderly façade of Taiping village, far from being the fruit of official investment, is really built on the locals’ sweat and blood and at the expense of their inconvenience. The wide, neat-looking public roads in the village touted as “the benevolent acts of modern civilization” are actually paved and maintained by local young men recruited through the baojia system, and the new iron doors and windows installed for official inspection are paid for by the villagers themselves (“A Model Village” 53, 91).

Taking a panoramic view over the happenings in the village, the story does not follow a single storyline. But all of the important events seem to center around the only two intellectuals in the story, Ruan Xinmin and Chen Wenzhi. Ruan Xinmin, an idealist and university graduate who just returns from Japan, is the son of Ruan Gu, the biggest landlord in the village. Frustrated over his father’s self-serving attempt to arrange a marriage for him with the daughter of another

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59 Baojia, hokō in Japanese, was a community self-policing system inherited from ancient China. In principle, ten households form a bao and ten bao is a chia. The baojia system was responsible for reporting all suspicious acts in the community to the authorities. Failure to do so would incur punishment for the entire community. The system also had to provide labor force for public construction but the laborers were often not remunerated. Ching-chih Chen writes, “Just as in Imperial [Qing] times the pao-jia members covered their own costs, so too did their officers under the Japanese work without pay, and households performed duties demanded of them without any compensation” (216).
rich landlord, a tradition that doesn’t sit well with a new intellectual like Ruan Xinmin, he leaves the village for good. The breakup between the father and son seems to suggest the author’s own critical attitude towards the custom of arranged marriage, a custom he also criticizes in his “An Arranged Marriage for Mother Goose.” Chen Wenzhi, on the other hand, is a penniless private instructor who provides free Chinese education for the young men in the village. Much as Chen is widely respected by the villagers due to his selfless dedication to educating the young, he is constantly scorned and harassed by the wife of a local grocer for failing to pay off his grocery bill. The contrast between a poor but virtuous educator of the people and a miserly shop owner clearly indicates the author’s aversion to the shortsightedness and selfish mindset of the local petty bourgeoisie.

But the author’s sharpest criticism is undoubtedly directed at the landowning class, the local compradors, represented by the character Ruan Gu. In the story, Ruan Gu is portrayed as a profiteering, idle, and corrupt businessman. In the past few years, it is said, Ruan Gu deliberately raised land rent and “took land back from the tenant farmers and rented it to the sugar company” because “[h]aving close connections with the sugar company, which had a great deal of capital, made things convenient” (“A Model Village” 68). As a result, many farmers suffer from poverty. To further strengthen the villainous image of Ruan Gu and his like, the author provides vivid contrast in his depiction of the diametrically opposite lifestyles and worldviews of the landlords and farmers. When Ruan Gu smokes opium in his “hidden paradise,” a marbled mansion furnished with such modern niceties as electric fans and a refrigerator holding cold beers, the farmers are toiling under scorching sun, risking heatstroke (“A Model Village 52, 71). During a banquet held in honor of the village’s newfound status as model village, when Ruan Gu and other Japanese officials give pompous speeches, congratulating themselves on the “successful
development” of the village, and later flirt with geishas at their tables, the tenant farmers are “worrying that the land they rented might be taken back, and sighing that they had no ideas where they were going to get money for the iron windows and concrete” (“A Model Village” 93). In highlighting the huge social gap between the rich and poor, Yang Kui draws the reader’s attention to the lopsided economy tacitly encouraged by colonial policy which benefits landowners and Japanese corporations at the expense of the common people.60 And in doing so, true to his self-positioning as a writer of the masses, he also seeks to strengthen people’s self-awareness in the colonial production system or, more specifically, their class consciousness.

In addition to his attempt at promoting a unified class consciousness among the people by showing their shared economic hardships, Yang Kui also pointedly demonstrates in the story how farmers resolutely adhere to their traditional beliefs and thus preserve their cultural identity in defiance of the colonial state’s assimilation efforts. In reading the story, one senses that just as the colonial state’s modernizing effort is facile and has amounted to little more than mere window dressing, so too is the effect of its assimilation policy which remains only on the surface level. In compliance with the government’s policy to build a modern model village, farmers are required to throw away their posters of the goddess Matsu and the bodhisattva Guanyin, the deities they have worshiped for centuries, and install in their place Japanese shrines and scrolls. This policy, however, doesn’t change the heart of the farmers, because “not being able to worship the Buddhist images was like not being able to eat, and for this reason they frequently took the images secretly out from amid the junk, then lit incense and worshipped them, tears flowing from their eyes” (“A Model Village” 90). Much like how Yang Kui builds two different

60 Samuel Pao-San Ho points out that “[i]n Taiwan government land policy helped Japanese and large Japanese corporations to gain control of much land” and among these corporations sugar companies soon “became the most important landowners in Taiwan” (371).
layers of reality into his narrative in economic terms, that of the capitalists and that of the peasants, on cultural matters he also draws a sharp distinction between what Partha Chatterjee terms the material and spiritual domains. In other words, he creates a “sovereign territory” within his representation of colonial reality, an “inner domain bearing the ‘essential’ of cultural identity,” and shows how the colonized continue to practice their traditional way of life, that which brings the community together, and how they keep out the meddling hands of the colonial state (Chatterjee 6, quotation marks in the original). It is in this instance that one may argue Yang Kui expresses something akin to a nationalist sentiment, whatever that nation may be. For the creation of these two separate domains, as Chatterjee observes, is the hallmark of anticolonial nationalism.

Yang’s strong commitment to anticolonial resistance is best embodied by the character Chen Wenzhi and, like Lai He, when the story ends he leaves the reader with an optimistic outlook of Taiwanese solidarity through the character. When all villagers are caught up in the banquet celebrating the facile progress of the village, the village’s young men and students of Chen Wenzhi work together to rebuild their poor teacher’s ramshackle house. This image of rebuilding is filled with hope and allegorical meaning, as the narrator says, “A spark of happiness glowed in this corner of the village that had been downcast for many years” (“A Model Village” 88). Furthermore, in contrast to the colonizers’ and landowners’ superficial efforts at modernizing the village, Yang Kui shows us that in the end it is people like Chen Wenzhi who really engage in the work community building, that is, through the transmission of knowledge. The story ends with Chen Wenzhi receiving a crate of books and old newspapers from the self-exiled Ruan Xinmin and using the materials that include subjects like politics, economics, and social science to teach the young men. In their humble classroom, the teacher
and students “urgently hoped that the old paper would help them understand everything about the world,” and “[e]veryone was tremendously excited, as if they had seen hope. Their hearts wouldn’t stop pounding” (“A Model Village” 95).

Thus far we’ve looked at two of Yang Kui’s representative works. To sum up, Yang’s stories exemplify a slightly different mode of anticolonial writing in Taiwan which, nonetheless, still bears some considerable similarities with that of Lai He’s. Both writers emphasize the maintenance of local cultural identity in opposition to colonial assimilation; both are not shy in criticizing the negativities of Taiwanese society in hopes of effecting some level of reform; and both write with a clear purpose to bring about solidarity among the colonized masses. But, unlike Lai He, Yang Kui is able to articulate Taiwanese people’s economic difficulties in explicitly class terms. In a sense, Yang’s meshing of anti-imperialism and anti-capitalism, rather than being a self-contradictory move, makes his writing all the more politically effective. His blending of class and ethnic identities, excluding a tiny minority of local beneficiaries of colonial economy, suggests an implicit and nascent formation of class-nation or nation-class which, if Ernest Gellner was right, is the necessary recipe for revolutionary movement. As he writes, “Only when a class happened to be (more or less) a ‘nation’ did it turn from being a class-in-itself into a class-for-itself, or a nation-for-itself” (121, quotation marks in the original). At the same time, as exemplified by “A Model Village,” Yang’s representation of colonial Taiwan from the perspective of the masses offers a powerful counter to the official narrative of modernity which seeks to re-brand colonialism as beneficial to premodern cultures. The critique of colonial modernity through literature can be most strongly felt in Lü Heruo’s “Oxcart.”
Lü Heruo: The Gaze into the Abyss

Lü Heruo (1914-1951), the youngest among the three authors discussed in this chapter, was a writer, journalist, musician, and later a political activist upon the Nationalist takeover of Taiwan. During his short and tumultuous life, Lü produced dozens of short stories along with several plays and essays. Because of his superb mastery over the Japanese language as well as his sharp perception and meticulous portrayal of human emotions and worldly objects, Lü was praised by his contemporaries as “Taiwan’s number one literary talent” (Taiwan diyi caizi). After Japan surrendered to the Allies following its defeat in WWII and Taiwan was returned to Nationalist China, Lü wrote a handful of short stories in Chinese before giving up writing entirely to participate in political activities. In the last years of his life, he served as editor-in-chief of the radical leftist paper, *Illumination Bulletin* (Guangming bao) and was a leading member of an underground communist group. In 1951, Lü was found dead in the mountains near Luku, Taipei. Official report stated that he was bitten by poisonous snakes near his hideout in the mountains, but some believed he was shot dead by KMT agents. To this day, the cause of Lü’s death remains unresolved. Notably, Li Qiao’s “Journal of Taimu Mountain” mentioned in the previous chapter was based on the mystery surrounding Lü’s premature and lamentable death.

In this final section, I choose to look at Lü’s first short story “Oxcart,” because the story offers an interesting contrast to Lai He and Yang Kui’s narrative styles. Like the stories written by his two predecessors, Lü’s “Oxcart” can be without controversy considered social realism. Early in his career, Lü believed that the ingenuity of literature lies in its reflection of social reality and class structure, “since only this art [form] can bring spiritual inspiration to the people” (Pei-yin Lin 133). But unlike Lai and Yang who, in spite of their faithful depiction of people’s suffering, tend to leave the reader with something to hope for, Lü’s early stories often convey an
acute sense of complete hopelessness, taking the idea of human suffering to the extreme. This narrative strategy, by forcing people to confront head-on the darkest of realities, also serves, if not more effectively, the anticolonial purpose of raising people’s awareness towards their shared situation and inspiring collective action. To be sure, as Kleeman points out, “Oxcart” is “rather atypical of Lü’s writing” (175). Most of his later works published after his return from Japan in 1942 appear less critical of colonial rule, which is attributable to the stringent mechanisms of ideological policing and censorship during the war years. In the last few years of colonial rule, Lü increasingly shifted his focus towards the representation of traditional family life and local customs with the intention of preserving Taiwanese cultural identity in response to rapid modernization and the extreme Japanization policy pursued by the colonial authorities.61 Nonetheless, even though “Oxcart” cannot be considered representative of Lü’s work, it is still one of the prime examples of Taiwanese anticolonial writing.

Published in 1935 by Bunkaku hyōron, the same journal that gave Yang Kui’s “Newspaper Carrier” a top award, “Oxcart” tells the story of how an oxcart driver, Yang Tianding, and his family fall into extreme poverty due to rapid modernization in Taiwan. Before the arrival of modernity, Yang had been able to support his family by transporting goods with his oxcart. However, after the opening of public roads and emergence of motorized vehicles, no one wants to hire Yang’s oxcart because by then oxcarts are simply “no match for those fast trucks and bike-trailers” (“Oxcart” 25). Yang’s business is so adversely impacted by modern machinery that often he “runs around all day and can’t even make thirty sen,” barely enough to put rice on

61 Tarumi Chie writes, “The fear of cultural extinction and his self-imposed mission to record Taiwanese culture for posterity led Lu to depict with camera-like realism in his literary works various human relationships, architectural structures, and clothing, as well as traditions and customs” (267).
the table (“Oxcart” 21). As a result, even with his wife working in a pineapple cannery, Yang’s two children always suffer from malnutrition and the couple bicker all the time over their difficult financial situation. After an especially serious fight, Yang and his wife come to see the district advisor, a rich landlord, who suggests that Yang give up his carting business and become a tenant farmer. But, in order to do so, Yang needs to pay a considerable sum of deposit. Out of desperation, Yang’s wife begins to work as a prostitute to help her husband save money. Yet, their tragedy doesn’t end there. One day Yang is fined by an officer for illegally riding his oxcart on the public road. Seeing no possibility of ever paying the fine, Yang is driven into crime; he steals geese from the neighboring village and eventually gets arrested by the police.

Understandably, critics have often compared Lü’s “Oxcart” to Yang Kui’s writing and noted how both writers sought to represent the economic inequality created by colonial policy and give voice to the working class. Expanding on their insight, I want to further highlight how Lü’s narrative ascribes to the notion of “class-nation” mentioned above—that the economic predicament he depicts is uniquely Taiwanese—and how he makes class and ethnic identification almost unavoidable for the reader.

The biggest strength of “Oxcart” as an anticolonial narrative lies in its author’s ability to consistently create for the reader a sensation that the colonial power which subjects people to immense suffering is structural and impersonal and thus irresistible. The creation of this overall ambiance of oppression, which invites—or rather forces—the reader to see the protagonist’s predicament not as an individual case but as generally Taiwanese, is something both Lai He and

62 A hundred sen makes one Japanese yen.

63 For instance, Kleeman writes, “[Oxcart], similar to Yang Kui’s “Newspaper [Carrier],” is a seething indictment of the disastrous effect of colonial economic policy on the working class” (175). Pei-yin Lin also mentions Yang Kui in her discussion of “Oxcart” and notes that Lü “exposed the cruel social reality and class inequality in colonial Taiwan” (133).
Yang Kui’s never really persuasively achieve. In both Lai and Yang’s works, there are specific agents of colonial violence—capitalists, police, sugar companies, local landlords—on whom the reader can easily blame. However, in “Oxcart,” except near the end of the story where the Japanese police briefly appears, the presence of the colonizers is kept to a minimum. What drives this tragically sad story of poverty, instead, are formless powers—the irresistible trend of modernization coupled with metropolitan economic policy operating from afar—in the face of which individuals are rendered completely powerless. And the most powerless are of course the majority of locals who still engage in older modes of production, and who are either painstakingly trying to adapt to new times or mercilessly left without a means to survive like Yang Tianding. As the owner of a rice mill half-pityingly tells Yang, “It’s not just oxcarts. Everything from the old [Qing] dynasty—none of it’s any good in this Japanese era” (“Oxcart” 25). Later when Yang meets his friend Old Lin, a former oxcart driver turned thieve who has just been released from prison, the latter reveals how meaningless it is to work under current conditions: “That’s right. It’s stupid to work. Look at this Japanese era. All the work where you can make a lot of money, they’ve taken it all away. Right? I say it’s stupid for us to work” (“Oxcart” 33). By highlighting the sense of utter hopelessness shared among the working masses in a time of radical change in Taiwan, “Oxcart” offers a thorough critique of colonial modernity, in that it shows its consequences to be social rather than individual, structural rather than local.

What further contributes to the pessimistic overtone of the story is the fact that it almost does not have any uplifting moments suggesting symbolically some unity among the colonized people that one often finds in Lai He and Yang Kui. Quite the opposite. It constantly shows the ugly and selfish side of human nature. When Yang Tianding cannot find any customers to hire his oxcart, no one lends him a helping hand except a farmer Wang Sheng who does so not
necessarily out of kindness but because he hasn’t been able to book a truck ("Oxcart" 29). Even when oxcart drivers attempt to resist, their resistance is pathetic and meaningless. For all they can do is secretly vandalizing a road sign prohibiting oxcarts from using the public roads ("Oxcart" 30). To add insult to injury, upon knowing Yang’s wife works at the town brothel, rather than offering sympathy, the villagers gloat over their misfortune. Even the husband and wife, far from appearing united in times of poverty, constantly heave insults at each other.

The ideas of powerlessness and hopelessness dominate the entire narrative of “Oxcart.” Unlike Lai He and Yang Kui who often offer a glimmer of hope in their stories, Lü Heruo highlights the extreme consequences of Japan’s self-interested development and modernization of Taiwan, a process indifferent to the native population’s basic survival. Through his bleak representation, he shows, rather coldly, that what lies ahead of the colonized poor is nothing but a reality of endless downward spiral; a reality that forces men into thieving and women into prostitution, just as the old Chinese saying depicting the extreme chaos of society where people abandon all moral principles to simply survive “nandao nuuchang” has it. In a negative sense, Lü’s “Oxcart” is perhaps more provocative than most anticolonial writing of his time. When commenting on Lü’s “cold realism” in “Oxcart” that leaves the colonized little to hope for, Ye Shitao says, “Isn’t this a more effective form of resistance and denouncement?” (156).

Conclusion

In discussing Lai He, Yang Kui, and Lü Heruo’s stories, I avoided resorting exclusively to the narrow and anachronistic perspective of cultural/ethno nationalism (Chinese or Taiwanese) influential in much of contemporary scholarship of Taiwanese literature in the Japanese colonial period. On the other hand, I did not fully subscribe to the equally narrow and, in the authors’
time, unrealistic scheme of classism, which to a large extent still dominates discussion of Yang Kui’s oeuvre and Lü Heruo’s early writing. Instead, I opted for a broader conceptual framework of humanism—the intellectual impulse to free humans from irrational state oppression and the tyranny of feudalistic order—which, as Pheng Cheah so usefully identifies, is the core driving force of popular nationalism and Kantian and Marxian cosmopolitanism upon their initial conception.64

In the above discussion, as we have seen, the broader political and intellectual currents in the 1920s and 1930s made possible the emergence of writers like Lai He, Yang Kui, and Lü Heruo. Lai He was one of the first Taiwanese writers to represent the antithetical positions between the colonizer and colonized while infusing in his writing such moral ideals as human dignity and social equality. Yang Kui, in his own socialist way, expanded on these ideals in class terms and foregrounded the issue of internal colonialism. Lü Heruo, with his uniquely dark narrative style, attempted to prompt the colonized into action in a negative manner, that is, by highlighting the extreme consequences of colonial modernity. In the meantime, all three cast a critical eye on the feudalistic character and shortsightedness of the native society. Taken together, their work can be considered forming what Axel Honneth terms a “subcultural horizon of interpretation” that provides the language for the colonized Taiwanese to interpret their situations not as individual but as “typical for an entire group” as well as “the moral doctrines and ideas” for them to aspire to a more just and progressive society (163-64). To an important degree, the Taiwanese nation as it is known today is a byproduct of this humanist semantic horizon forged in opposition to Japanese colonial discourse and continued to be enriched later in

64 See Pheng Cheah’s Introduction to Cosmopolitics 22-30.
the democratic movements against KMT authoritarianism and today’s KMT-CCP Sinocentric chauvinism.

It bears noting, finally, that the anticolonial mode of writing exemplified by the three authors discussed in this chapter by no means represents the whole of Taiwanese cultural productions in the Japanese colonial period. At best, it only constitutes a dimension of this body of literature and sometimes even of individual authors. Both Yang Kui and Lü Heruo, for example, wrote fictions in support of the colonial state’s war mobilization towards the end of Japanese rule, not to mention also the considerable amount of *kōmin* (loyal imperial subjects) literature. In other words, the literary scene in Japanese-ruled Taiwan is more diverse than my single chapter can hope to represent. Nor was there ever a clear-cut distinction between the stances of opposition and collaboration. In the next chapter, I shall examine a rather different mode of writing which I will tentatively term the resolution of confused identity.
CHAPTER 4

WRITING TAIWAN FROM THE MARGINS: HYBRIDITY AND ANTI-NATIONALISM IN WU ZHUOLIU’S ORPHAN OF ASIA AND ZHU TIANXIN’S “THE OLD CAPITAL”

In the previous chapter, I discussed fictions by Taiwanese anticolonial writers from the Japanese-ruled era such as Lai He, Yang Kui, and Lü Heruo whose writings voice Taiwanese people’s hopes for solidarity and identity in the face of colonial domination. I have also argued that their works helped lay the initial discursive foundation of an emerging Taiwanese nation. If their works can be thus regarded as proto-nationalist and as contributing to a literary tradition of community-building, there is another no less prominent tradition in Taiwanese literature which calls into question the former’s optimism and merits our attention. This other, rich tradition of narratives articulates Taiwanese people’s deep-seated perplexity resulting from their complicated past and multilayered cultural heritage, and accordingly highlights the difficulty, if not impossibility, of ever defining a stable, coherent self-identity for the present. The confusion, anxiety, and helplessness derived from the lack of a viable collective identity expressed in this narrative tradition, I would suggest, better characterizes the reality of Taiwan since the colonial and postwar eras to the present day than any literary attempt at portraying a harmonious imagined community.

The two traditions of narrative, one constructive and the other deconstructive, can be construed with the help of Homi Bhabha’s useful distinction between the pedagogical and the performative which, according to him, are the mirror images of one another and constitute a disjunctive time that characterizes the ambivalence of the modern nation as a narrated space. As he writes:

It is indeed only in the disjunctive time of the nation’s modernity—as a knowledge disjunct between political rationality and its impasse, between the shreds and patches of
cultural signification and the certainties of a nationalist pedagogy—that questions of
nation as narration come to be posed…To write the story of the nation demands that we
articulate the ambivalence that informs modernity. (‘DissemiNation’ 294)

The pedagogical mode of writing and reading seeks to inform and educate the people that
they form a self-sufficient, historical community by laying bare “the process of identity
constituted by historical sedimentation”; whereas the performative mode enacts “the loss of
identity in the signifying process of cultural identification,” a process that is always fortuitous,
arbitrary, and unpredictable (Bhabha, “DissemiNation” 304). Borrowing Bhabha’s insight, it
may be argued that to tell the story of Taiwan and to comprehend the complexity of its people’s
experience, it is never enough to consider simply texts that attempt to narrate a nation into being,
that attempt to represent the “many as one.” Instead, one needs to pay special attention to texts
that question precisely the possibility and legitimacy of any unitary and totalizing representation
of Taiwan, texts that foreground the “minus in the origin, the-less-than-one” (Bhabha,
“DissemiNation” 300). After all, what makes up a people’s collective experience and memory is
as much about what has been included as about what has been excluded over time.

In this chapter, I choose to discuss two literary texts from Taiwan: Wu Zhuoliu’s
celebrated novel Orphan of Asia (1946) and Zhu Tianxin’s story “The Old Capital” (1996). Wu’s
novel, often heralded by critics as the perfect staging of Taiwanese people’s historical
predicament, was written in the closing years of Japanese colonization and published after the
colonizers had left the island.65 Zhu’s story, on the other hand, was written and published in
contemporary, post-martial law Taiwan which enacts the disorientation and disillusionment felt
by Mainlander Taiwanese during a time of drastic political change in which the old KMT social

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65 Kuo-ching Tu, for instance, has made the following comment about Wu’s Orphan of Asia: “[T]his 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” (xxviii).
order began to crumble and the nativist rhetoric of Taiwan-centrism was well on its way to becoming the dominant nationalist discourse. Despite being set apart by exactly half a century, the two texts display several thematic similarities. Both texts actively explore and highlight the hybrid configuration of Taiwanese historical and cultural experience. In doing so, they pose indirectly the radical question regarding the legitimacy and applicability of any totalizing nationalist representation of Taiwan, from Japanese imperialism, KMT’s Sinocentric chauvinism, to the Taiwan-centric nationalist discourse in a putatively inclusive postmodern age. Moreover, both texts, by crisscrossing the different cultural locales of Taiwan, Japan, and China, allow for what Edward Said calls a “contrapuntal reading” of Taiwan which situates it in the regional dynamics of “overlapping territories” and “intertwined histories” of East Asia, thereby undercutting any ethnocentric understanding of Taiwan (Culture 51, 61). In short, both texts eloquently show that the hybridity of Taiwan results from its historical marginality in relation to Japan and China, the two cultural hegemons in the region.

In my discussion, I rely mainly on Bhabha’s theory of hybridity to argue that both Wu and Zhu’s texts, in accentuating the hybridity of Taiwan, form a counter-narrative that destabilizes any ethnocentric account which seeks to either discursively homogenize Taiwan as a unified culture, people, and history or absorb it into a larger cultural and political framework, be it Japanese imperialism, Chinese nationalism, or later Taiwanese nationalism. It is because of texts like these written by different generations of Taiwanese authors of various ethnic backgrounds that represent Taiwan in a disjunctive time and a liminal space that “no political ideologies could claim transcendence or metaphysical authority for themselves” in Taiwan, in spite of the mystifying propaganda of demagogic politicians of all stripes (Bhabha, “DissemiNation” 299). I further conclude that, in representing Taiwan’s radical hybridity—not
entirely Chinese, nor Japanese, nor even Taiwanese, “less than one nation and double”—both authors open up a productive new space, a third space in Bhabha’s words, or an outernational space in those of Paul Gilroy’s, that allows us to think beyond essentialist categories of nation, people, and culture and envision new forms of transcultural connection (Bhabha, “DissemiNation” 318).66

The Question of Taiwanese Identity and Hybridity Theory

The question of identity has always occupied the central space of cultural discourse in Taiwan since the onset of colonial times to the present day. Fifty years of Japanese colonial rule along with its forced Japanization and the subsequent four decades of drastic, top-down re-Sinicization enforced by the KMT regime have not only led many in Taiwan to perceive themselves as fundamentally different from contemporary Chinese on their ancient fatherland but left behind them an immense and irreconcilable sense of confusion. The people of Taiwan are compelled to pose repeatedly the ontological question which, as Fanon diagnoses, is symptomatic of a common neurosis suffered by many of the formerly colonized peoples: “Who am I in reality?” (Wretched 182). As literary critic Angelina C. Yee indicates, “To many, the people of Taiwan have long been subjected to a succession of colonizers’ myths that deny their existence and obliterate their local histories in subservience to the grand national narratives” (83). And as a result of this series of relentless suppression and obliteration of local experiences following multiple regime changes, Yee continues, “[t]he task of self-definition, of reconstructing a history and a cultural identity distinct from an increasingly overpowering

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66 The term “third space” appears in Bhabha’s introduction to The Location of Culture and will be further explored later. Paul Gilroy proposes the concept of “outernational connections” in his influential work The Black Atlantic to describe the hybrid cultural transactions occurring by way of the Atlantic Ocean.
mainland China has become for many an urgent moral imperative” (83). Similarly, Taiwanese anthropologist Hsin-yi Lu observes that “[v]ery few places in the world have experienced the same level of anxiety and complexity of identity formation as Taiwan” and characterizes contemporary Taiwanese as suffering from a collective “schizophrenic condition” due to “frequent, drastic, and often-imposed identity shifts, resulting from rapid changes of political power, during the past two centuries” (2). She further notes that, “caught between the desire to participate in the international community and the pressure from The People’s Republic of China to censure that desire,” the people of Taiwan have enthusiastically engaged in a “structural nostalgia” since the 1990s, eagerly attempting to rediscover the “authentic” Taiwanese experience through such endeavors as fieldwork and cultural tourism” (5, 10). In short, through the two scholars’ observations, it is not difficult to understand the cause and extent of confusion experienced collectively by the Taiwanese people and how it has become a common effort for them to continuously define who they are and find their place in the world.

Even though Japanese colonization has become a relatively distant memory and its legacy has gradually waned in Taiwan as years pass by, for the people of Taiwan the persistent question remains to be, Are we Taiwanese, or Chinese, or both? This question has also attracted the attention of scholars from both within and without the island and across various disciplines. It is perhaps not too much to suggest that the national question of Taiwan remains, to borrow Fredrick Jameson’s terms, the political unconscious and the “absolute horizon” of studies of Taiwan (PU, 17). Here, to illustrate the extent to which the national question dominates scholarly discussion, I would like to briefly consider how this question determines even the most fundamental understanding and positioning of Taiwanese literature by looking at a never-ending
debate regarding the status and definition of Taiwanese literature, specifically, a debate about whether it should be read as a national or a regional literature.

In his highly informative essay, Xiaobing Tang traces the Literary Indigenization Movement in Taiwan since the 1970s, giving a comprehensive account of how Taiwanese writers and cultural critics at the time were already very concerned about the status and future of Taiwanese literature and debated about its definition and mission. Participants of this debate, as Tang shows, can be divided mainly along two ethnocentric lines: Sinocentrism and Taiwan-centrism. While there were such important writers like Chen Yingzhen who steadfastly maintained that Taiwanese literature was an integral component or a tributary of Chinese literature, there were also influential scholars like Chen Fangming who insisted on the integrity and sovereignty of Taiwanese literature, seeing it as forming an autonomous tradition. Tang, however, is not an impartial observer. He is particularly wary of arguments advanced by the likes of Chen Fangming and their nativist implications, worrying that such arguments would eventually turn Taiwanese literature into an exclusionary concept, which privileges certain arbitrarily defined “authentic” writers and texts over others that are deemed less so. As he writes, “Literature becomes a sacred enterprise [in the minds of the nativists] because it is called on to buttress an overdetermined myth of origin and destiny” and “to invent a distinct and usable cultural tradition to serve the cause of Taiwan’s independence” (61, 64). In his effort to intervene in the debate and to prevent the full nativist turn of discussion about Taiwanese literature, Tang finally concludes that the flexibility of the term Taiwanese literature blurs the boundary between the local and the national and attests to the diversity of literary cultures in the Chinese-speaking

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67 Scholars most often use the term Nativist Literary Movement. However, the concept of nativism has a strong negative connotation. Hence, my adaptation of the term.
world: “The real potential of Taiwan literature may ultimately lie in the enrichment and revelation that it can introduce into such notions as Hong Kong literature, Shanghai literature, or Hunan literature, all of which are accepted categories in the broad field of modern literature in Chinese” (80).

While Tang’s intention to rid contemporary conception of Taiwanese literature of its nativist assumptions is certainly commendable, in subsuming Taiwanese culture and literature under the overarching concept of cultural and linguistic China, his conclusion can still appear essentialist. What he does, in other words, is merely substituting the conceptual unit of civilization for that of nation-state. In suggesting that Taiwanese literature, despite its specific history of formation, is nonetheless a contributing part of Chinese-speaking literature, Tang presupposes that there is something particular and essential about the Chinese race and language. His invocation of diversity thus speaks not to the internal and inherent hybridity of cultures but is more in line with popular rhetoric of multiculturalism which presumes that the many can coexist harmoniously as one.

In my chapter, I show that the hybrid experience of Taiwan and its people described by Wu Zhuoliu and Zhu Tianxin problematizes precisely the validity of the totalizing and harmonious image of people and culture, or even race and civilization. In Bhabha’s deconstructivist explanation, the “plentitudinous presence” of the image of a pure and homogenous people “can never be ‘original’ nor ‘identical,’” because it is always constructed through “the act of repetition” and “by virtue of the difference that defines it”; it is both deferred and differed in Derrida’s words (“Signs Taken for Wonders” 153). In this respect, the idea of

68 The following are Tang’s precise words in his invocation of the idea of cultural China: “By Chinese literature we understand not narrowly a nation-state institution…not just one standardized literary production, but rather a vast literature written in Chinese and interacting with long and uneven literary and cultural traditions” (80).
hybrid Taiwan—its marked impurity and marginality—foregrounded by Wu and Zhu’s writings highlights the belatedness and non-existence (in short, the constructedness) of the image of a unitary people, and thus serves to undermine all totalizing claim of “natural” unity, be it national, cultural, linguistic, racial, or civilizational. I would further argue that compared to a Sinocentric or Taiwan-centric worldview, hybridity is an overall more suitable concept for understanding the experience of Taiwan and the Taiwanese people.

As a concept, however, hybridity is not without its problems and limitations. Several important scholars have raised their concerns particularly over its political efficacy and its usefulness to shed light on the colonial experience. It would be appropriate to first address these concerns before I proceed to use the concept in my following discussion. Here, I will consider specifically the writings of Pheng Cheah and Robert Young, two of the most notable critics of Bhabha’s hybridity theory. By addressing both scholars’ criticism, I hope to make clear my use of hybridity in the specific context of Taiwan and my purpose of invoking it.

In his essay “Given Culture,” Pheng Cheah offers a materialist critique of what seems to him a purely culturalist and idealist theorization of cosmopolitanism, specifically Homi Bhabha and James Clifford’s hybridity theory. His main charge against Bhabha and Clifford is that both place an uncritical faith in the transformative power of cultural signification and representation; that they repeat the “commonplace assertion, [like the idealist tradition of Kant and Hegel before them], that discourse produces the real” and thereby “obscure the material dynamics of nationalism” (292). In particular, he argues that Bhabha’s hybridity theory has only limited political efficacy because it is premised upon “a reductive understanding of colonial rule as the establishment of cultural authority through the deployment of symbols (the Bible, the Law, and so on)” while overlooking a whole spectrum of material forms of domination such as politics and
economics (294, italics in the original). Extending his criticism of culturalist reductionism inherent in Bhabha’s hybridity theory to the neocolonial present, Cheah further contends that hybridity ultimately amounts to little more than an elite phenomenon because, as he points out persuasively, for the majority of populations living in the global South, to become hybrid through physical migration is simply not a viable option in the current political and economic reality of uneven globalization. As he writes, “The suggestion that hybrid practices constitute the birth of cosmopolitan consciousness and indicate the impending obsolescence of national identity and nation-state make sense only if we reduce the complexity of contemporary neocolonial globalization to one of its strands: cultural hybridization” (298). In summary, Cheah claims that hybridity, as it is currently being theorized, is politically irresponsible and ineffective, as it offers little for us to consider “our responsibility to the given” and mainly tries to theorize “our freedom from the given” by replacing actual reality with a discursive one (292).69

Robert Young, on the other hand, offers a critique of Bhabha’s hybridity theory from a different angle. He questions Bhabha’s reliance on psychoanalysis and deconstruction theories, both of which obviously have their roots in Western European intellectual tradition and thus cannot pretend to be universally applicable. As such, Young takes issue with Bhabha’s claim that hybridity forms a site of political agency and resistance for the colonized, arguing that such a claim might be ahistorical, voluntarist, and lacking “historical substantiation” (150). In reading the examples used by Bhabha to illustrate his conception of hybridity, Young questions, “Is Bhabha describing a forgotten moment of historical resistance, or does that resistance remain

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69 A more problematic argument made by Pheng Cheah is that in the absence of a world-state which is able to ensure equitable political and economic order, the postcolonial nation-state remains the only effective entity to protect the interest of the people. What we need, as he suggests, is a “popular rearticulations of postcolonial national identity” (313). I find this a risky suggestion because, as we have seen in recent global development, popular nationalism has become a powerful tool for far-right, populist politicians to seize power in many parts of the world.
inarticulate until the interpreter comes a hundred and seventy years later to ‘read between the lines’ and rewrite history?’ (149, quotation marks in the original). As a historian, apparently, Young is disturbed by Bhabha’s revisionist approach, seeing it as a voluntarist attempt on Bhabha’s part to rewrite history according to his own will. Bhabha’s lack of “historical substantiation” once again leads Young to question the usefulness of Bhabha’s theoretical model to the colonial situation: “[I]f colonial texts only demonstrate the same properties that can be found in any deconstructive reading of European text,” one cannot justifiably claim that there is anything specific about the kind of ambivalence felt by the colonized subject because ambivalence then would be a universal human experience (153). A further problem Young points out in Bhabha’s reliance on deconstruction and psychoanalysis is that, in disallowing the possibility of intentionalist agency and in claiming that colonial discourse is in itself ambivalent and always already deconstruct-able, Bhabha’s analyses leave little room for conscious resistance on the part of the colonized (152).

Perhaps not coincidentally, both Cheah and Young point out that the limitations of hybridity theory lie in its ahistorical and idealistic reasoning, which is out of pace with the material reality. And they are certainly correct to remind us that text and discourse do not by themselves affect reality or change the course of history. It is not my intention here to intervene in the debate on the respective merits and shortcomings of idealism and materialism or culturalism and historicism; nor do I wish to argue in Bhabha’s defense. What I want to suggest is merely that hybridity, far from being a purely idealistic category that exists in the discursive space, is actually an historically rooted experience for the people of Taiwan. It is neither an elite mentality nor a product of a posteriori theorization; rather, it is a prominent aspect of average Taiwanese people’s daily experience. As both Yee and Lu have both indicated above, Taiwanese
people’s deep uncertainty regarding their self-identity results from numerous changes of political power in their history and such a history has and continue to shape the lives of many Taiwanese in concrete and palpable ways. On the other hand, ambivalence, rather than being the unconscious indeterminacy of text waiting to be uncovered and articulated by the literary critic, is very much embedded in Taiwanese popular consciousness. One need not “read between the lines” to locate this sentiment, for it has been a recurrent theme of Taiwanese literature and has been actively and consciously explored and documented by many Taiwanese writers such as Wu and Zhu.70

Lastly, in emphasizing the hybridity of Taiwan, I do not mean to make any claim that such an emphasis will eventually give rise to any actual resistance or have any immediate and perceptible effect on local, regional, or global politics. But I do acknowledge that hybridity is a powerful concept; a first conceptual step that is worth taking, if we were to think beyond the narrow-mindedness of ethnocentrism and cultural particularism and to one day transcend the current world order of nation-states. James Clifford’s own defense of his hybridity theory against Pheng Cheah’s criticism is worth considering here: “Whatever ‘freedom’ is asserted [through the concept of hybridity] is not inherent in discourse…but is, rather, a pragmatic response, making the best of given (often bad) situations. The cultural inventiveness at stake is a matter of specific juxtapositions, selections, and overlays offered and imposed in limited historical junctures” (366). With this said, let me now turn to the two texts to illustrate what I (and Clifford) mean by a concept of hybridity that is both experiential and pragmatic.

70 Another rich source where the theme of ambivalence can be further explored is the so-called kōmin literature or imperial subject literature which has too often been read as a collaborationist literature.
The Non-Belongingness of the Orphan

Wu Zhuoliu’s *Orphan of Asia* was written in secret between 1943 and 1945 during the closing years of the Pacific War and the height of the so-called *kōminka* (imperial subjectivization) movement, which saw Japan tightened its ideological control all over Taiwan to an unprecedented degree. As such, one can only imagine the amount of pressure Wu had to endure when he penned the novel. When the novel was published in 1946 after Japan surrendered unconditionally to the Allied forces and retreated from the island, it was first titled *Kō Taimei*, the name of the main character (or Hu Taiming in Chinese pronunciation). This initial title then underwent several changes made by the author himself in response to changing political conditions, but *Orphan of Asia* remains the best known among contemporary readers.

Written in a chronological order, the novel narrates Hu Taiming’s tragic life as well as the many fruitless journeys he makes in search of a stable cultural identity. Throughout the novel, Hu embarks on several trips between Taiwan, Japan, and China, hoping to find a place where he can call home and emotionally belong. Yet, wherever he goes, his confused sense of identity only exacerbates, as he continues to find himself being spurned and rejected due to his “impurity” as a Taiwanese—not truly Japanese nor purely Chinese anymore—in all three societies. Eventually, unable to reconcile this immense sense of loss and inconsolable feeling of non-belongingness, Hu loses his sanity.

It is very likely that Wu Zhuoliu wrote this novel with an allegorical intention to

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71 The *kōminka* movement was a thoroughgoing linguistic and cultural campaign aiming to turn all Taiwanese into loyal Japanese subjects. During this time, the Chinese language was entirely prohibited in the public space. To promote Japanese, the government also implemented a policy called “National Language Family” to identify families that used only Japanese and award such families with material benefits. On the religious front, the traditional Chinese and Taiwanese deities were completely replaced by Shinto shrines. For a more detailed description about the *kōminka* campaign, see Xu Junya 200-201.

72 For a brief account of the publication history of *Orphan of Asia*, see Leo Ching 177-79.
document the widespread sense of loss felt by most Taiwanese during the Japanese colonial decades. On the one hand, they were never genuinely integrated as equal citizens of the mother country, the Japanese Empire, despite the fact that they were constantly encouraged to act and think like a true Japanese. On the other hand, they could not go back and be accepted again by their fatherland, China, because their “Chineseness” was believed to have been already corrupted by foreign rule. Hence, the apt imagery, orphan. Wu’s truthful depiction of the historical predicament of the Taiwanese is well known and needs no further acknowledgment. However, what I wish to emphasize in my discussion is the way in which he powerfully demystifies ideas of nation and nationalism through his storytelling. In showing the difficult in-betweenness of the Taiwanese and the discrimination and rejection they often received from both Japan and China, the novel effectively puts the very notion of nation into question and exposes the fundamental inconsistency of nationalism as a political doctrine—its promise of inclusion and the effects of exclusion it inevitably creates without fail.

Not all critics, however, have been interested in the anti-nationalist implications in *Orphan of Asia* as well as in Wu’s other works. In fact, the opposite may be true: there was no shortage of nationalist (both Chinese and Taiwanese) interpretations of Wu’s fictions and non-fictions. Oftentimes, precisely because of the ambiguity surrounding issues of Taiwanese identity that Wu so faithfully tries to capture and explore, much of his writing has become a fertile ground for critical speculations about where the author’s national loyalty ultimately lies. As Sung-sheng Yvonne Chang indicates, “The fact that today Wu’s writings lend themselves to use by both Chinese and Taiwanese nationalists testifies to the indeterminacy of his position on the thorny identity issue” (131). Similarly, Leo Ching notes, “The ambivalent and equivocal relationship to mainland China depicted in the novel has made *The Orphan of Asia* quite useful
for advocating either identification with China or with Taiwan by those who favor the eventual reunification with China and those who advocate Taiwan independence” (180). Ching, in particular, mentions two famous writers’, Chen Yingzhen’s and Sung Zelai’s, influential readings of *Orphan of Asia*, as representative examples of nationalist interpretation of the text, Chinese and Taiwanese respectively.

Recent scholars such as Leo Ching and Chien-hsin Tsai have done much to correct the previously predominant nationalist readings of *Orphan of Asia* governed by the notion of identity politics. They argue that such readings often simplistically and misleadingly categorize the text in terms of “the binarism of struggle and complicity” or of resistance and collaboration (Ching 178). As a result, they point out that many past critics problematically read either Chinese or Taiwanese nationalism into the text. In response to this problem, Ching proposes a contextualized and historicized reading of *Orphan of Asia* revolving around the idea of conscious formation which, as he defines it, is based on experience rather than identity formation which is rooted in ontology (195). Tsai, on his part, uses David Der-wei Wang’s concept of postloyalism to study *Orphan of Asia* and focuses on the historical movements in the region made by the Taiwanese people. As he suggests that the meaning of Taiwanese as implied by the novel can be approached with the historical migratory movements in and out of Taiwan and people’s attendant shifting sense of home and belonging: “The meaning of Taiwanese is always in motion and defined by movement” (36). It is clear that both Ching and Tsai prefer to approach the novel with a more historicist and empirical method. They discuss the meaning of Taiwanese not as an ontological category but as a formative process of hybrid historical experiences. Both, as such, effectively avoid the unilateral, nationalist interpretation of the text, which more often than not leads only to ideological disagreement rather than inspiring critical discussion.
Though both Ching and Tsai propose a useful non-nationalist counter-model to engage with the meaning of Taiwanese represented in *Orphan of Asia*, their strictly historicist approach leaves much to be desired. In Ching’s analysis of the text, for example, his discussion rarely moves beyond the obvious. Though his discussion is without question illuminating and highly informative, it does little more than offering historical details about the lives of the Taiwanese people during the fifty-year Japanese colonial rule and the changing policy of the colonial government. And it does not seem to be interested in exploring how Taiwanese people’s hybrid experience actively challenges and destabilizes the discourses of nation and nationalism on a more theoretical level. My reading of *Orphan of Asia* in this chapter aims to fill this gap by bringing in Bhabha’s theory. I shall now turn to the text itself.

From the beginning, the novel makes clear that during the Japanese colonial era Taiwanese people are experiencing an unprecedented cultural shift, which fosters a new generation of hybrid native young men and women such as Hu Taiming. When the novel opens, Hu Taiming’s grandfather Old Hu takes his grandson to visit his old classmate, Master Peng, a Confucian scholar and a private tutor who opens a school in the mountains. A traditional scholar himself, Old Hu’s plan is to let his grandson learn Chinese classics from Master Peng and live with the latter as a boarding student. Upon entering Master Peng’s house, however, the grandfather and grandson soon discover how run-down the place is: “In the corner was a bed and, above it, a square ashtray on which a shaded light, an alcohol lamp, flickered tiny, pale flame. The same dim flames were reflected gloomily on leaves, a pipe, a tray, and other carelessly strewn implements for smoking opium” (*Orphan* 4). Later when Master Peng appears, he is described as having an “almost fleshless face” with “a pale blue that betrayed no trace of blood even in the sunshine” (*Orphan* 7). Master Peng’s ramshackle dwelling and his lifeless,
almost ghastly appearance signal that Chinese classic culture, just like the master himself, is quickly fading and dying in Taiwan.

Forming a sharp contrast with Master Peng whose lifelessness bespeaks the demise of Chinese culture is Hu Taiming’s cousin Zhida, a native colonial police who appears full of vigor and whose prestige as an official embodies the promise of an industrial mother country and all its modern trappings: “People called Zhida ‘Sir,’ and he certainly cut a fine figure, carrying expensive Japanese cigarettes, flashing a brilliant white handkerchief, and leaving whiffs of perfume everywhere he went” (Orphan 11). Hu Taiming thinks that the scent Zhida so brilliantly exudes is the “cultural smell of soap,” the “scent of Japan,” and “sense[s] in Zhida’s frivolous airs the harbinger of a new era” (Orphan 11). By setting up a stark contrast between the old and the new, the author reveals that many young Taiwanese, like Hu Taiming, during colonial times aspire to become part of a modern Japanese culture and gradually come to find classical Chinese learning less useful, if not downright obsolete. As Hu Taiming’s father Hu Wenqing often says pragmatically, “Those who can’t speak Japanese are as good as fools in the civil service today” (Orphan 15). In short, in this transitional time, for any aspiring Taiwanese, being integrated into Japanese society and culture is the only avenue to success. Such is the reason why many Taiwanese at this time willingly embrace hybridity. Becoming Japanese is also the goal Hu Taiming sets for himself during his younger days and he soon obtains an official position, a schoolteacher at a common school.

However, no sooner has Hu Taiming started his job at the common school than he confronts the harsh reality of inequality between the Japanese and the Taiwanese and realizes the inconsistency inherent in the Japanese nation-building discourse which is embodied by the oft-repeated slogan “nai-Tai ichijo,” meaning there is no difference between Japan and Taiwan or
“Japanese-Taiwanese unity” (*Orphan* 23). Upon his first day at the common school, the principal throws a Japanese-only party to welcome Miss Naito Hisako, another new instructor who arrives at the same time as Hu, while excluding all native faculty members. This incident compels Instructor Li, a native, to complain to his fellow Taiwanese thus: “[The principal] was calling for staff harmony just yesterday, after the entrance ceremony! ‘Japanese-Taiwanese unity!’ it’s depressing” (*Orphan* 23). Li’s complaint effectively exposes the fundamental inconsistency of colonial discourse by foregrounding that *nai-Tai ichijo* is nothing more than a mere slogan. In practice, the colonizers constantly have to both disavow and reaffirm the colonized Taiwanese’s difference.

Another instance that especially highlights the unbridgeable gap between the Japanese and the Taiwanese is Hu Taiming’s ill-fated love affair with Naito Hisako. Not long after Hu starts his position at the common school, he falls in love with Hisako. Upon learning that she is about to be transferred to another school, Hu musters up his courage to confess his feelings for her. Under a dimly lit tree, however, Hisako “who had not forgotten that they belonged to different ethnicities” rejects Hu categorically, saying, “Because you and I are different” (*Orphan* 50). Hu Taiming’s failed courtship with Hisako demonstrates that no matter how hard a Taiwanese tries to assimilate into Japanese culture, he is still a native, a hybrid “partial presence” (Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man” 123). Hu Taiming, just like many young Taiwanese, is a product of a colonial discourse that wants the natives to remain “a reformed [but] recognizable Other, as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite” (Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man” 122; italics in the original). Such a characteristic principle of mimicry of colonial discourse is derived from the colonizers’ contradictory needs to justify their grandiose civilizing
mission while at the same time safeguarding the hierarchy existing between themselves and the colonized masses through the repetition of the phrase: “you and I are different.”

Nevertheless, as Bhabha also suggests, the hybrid, partial presence of the colonized has the potential to subvert the colonial discourse, causing it to momentarily malfunction. This subversive moment can be observed at one point in the novel where the inquisitive gaze of the hybrid colonized is returned upon the colonizer. In a faculty meeting meant to chastise the native instructors for not being able to speak Japanese properly and for teaching the students to speak the language with a terrible accent, the principal delivers a speech on language and patriotism, yelling at everyone present, “Those who have not learned the national language (Japanese) lack national spirit” (Orphan 39, parentheses in the original). Not long after the principal’s tirade, an unintimidated native instructor, Instructor Zeng, comes forward and challenges the principal. As he speaks undauntedly, “Japanese-Taiwanese harmony. You repeat that phrase every time you open your mouth but don’t seem to understand the principle behind it. Permit me to teach you by example” (Orphan 41). Instructor Zeng goes on to rearrange the plates that bear all instructors’ names on the board, pointing out that Japanese names always come before native ones and such a practice is against the rule because the arrangement of name plates should reflect seniority and rank rather than ethnicity. After he is finished with his demonstration, Instructor Zeng makes his final remarks before promptly leaving the scene: “If there is to be true harmony, Mr. Principal, there must not be any prejudice—no preferences” (Orphan 41). The principal as well as all Japanese faculty members, upon learning what Instructor Zeng has to say, are rendered completely speechless.

In this instance, the hybridity of the colonized subject—almost the same but forever different—exposes the inconsistency and hypocrisy of the colonizer’s civilizing intent and in this
way short-circuit the authority of the colonial discourse by disrupting its rules of recognition. The fact that all Japanese faculty are unable to respond to Instructor Zeng’s questioning is because, for a moment, the normative civilizing ideal of colonialism that legitimizes their presence in Taiwan cannot be defended due to the jarring inequality existing between themselves and the natives. As Bhabha argues, “It is not that the voice of authority is at a loss for words. It is, rather, that the colonial discourse has reached that point when, face with the hybridity of its objects, the presence of power is revealed as something other than what its rules of recognition assert” (“Signs Taken for Wonder” 160). The partial, hybrid presence of the Taiwanese attests to the fact that Japanese colonialism, far from being a discourse that produces equal citizens and promotes civilization as it wants to be seen, is actually sustained by the unenlightened practices of racial discrimination and unequal treatment. Later, the hybridity of the colonized Taiwanese not only disrupts Japanese colonialism but also destabilizes the notion of a “pure” Chinese race that Chinese nationalism seeks to construct and justify.

Despaired by the prevalent inequality in colonial Taiwan, Hu Taiming finds refuge in the pursuit of knowledge and embarks on his journey to Japan in search of a place where he can belong. During his stay in Japan, he is initially surprised by how polite and considerate the people there are: “Every stranger whom Taiming asked for directions—and he did this more than once—responded knowledgably and politely, never using the contemptuous tone that he would have heard in Taiwan” (Orphan 55). However, just when Hu thinks he is free from the depressing contempt of the colonizers back home, another form of discrimination soon finds him. In Japan, Hu Taiming befriends a fellow Taiwanese and student activist, Lan. One day, Lan takes Hu to a gathering of patriotic Chinese students where everybody is chanting with great enthusiasm such slogan as “down with imperialism!” and “For a new China!” (Orphan 61).
Initially, the Chinese students think Hu Taiming is one of them and from one of the Chinese provinces. However, upon learning that Hu is actually from Taiwan, the Chinese student who is having a conversation with Hu “sneered in disgust and, with obvious contempt, quickly strode away” (Orphan 62). The words quickly spread among the Chinese students and people begin to accuse Hu Taiming: “He’s Taiwanese” and “He might be a spy” (Orphan 62).

Hu’s marginality and hybridity—neither Chinese nor Japanese—exposes ironically the true exclusionary nature of Chinese nationalism, a discourse meant to include and create solidarity. It also exposes the constructedness and non-existence of the very notion of Chinese; that the meaning of Chinese only becomes clear when someone with a difference, like Hu Taiming, is present. Hu, a Taiwanese, embodies a Chinese history “that happened elsewhere” (Bhabha, “DissemiNation” 318). To slightly change Bhabha’s comments on Gibreel Farishta of The Satanic Verses, his marginal and impure presence “does not evoke a harmonious patchwork of cultures, but articulates the narrative of cultural difference which can never let the national history look at itself narcissistically in the eye” (“DissemiNation” 318). Hu’s radical and indelible difference as a Taiwanese, an impure and corrupted Chinese so to speak, highlights the very limits and impossibility of the nationalist dream to bring many into one.

Much the same thing happens to Hu Taiming when he relocates to China and starts his new job as a teacher at a women’s high school in Nanjing. Hu gets the new teaching job thanks to his old friend, Instructor Zeng’s, recommendation. But shortly after his arrival, Instructor Zeng warns him not to reveal their Taiwanese background:

People will look askance at us wherever we go, it’s our fate. It’s not about what we have done or haven’t done. We’re deformed—fate’s monstrous children. Of course it’s unfair, but we can’t do much about it, and we mustn’t behave like sulky foster children. We’ve got to prove ourselves through deeds, not words. (Orphan 98)
The presence of the hybrid, or in Zeng’s words, deformed and monstrous children of China once again brings into focus the contradictions inherent in the idea of nation. Both Hu and Zeng’s ancestors came from China and they can speak various Chinese dialects, yet because of their status as Japanese colonial subjects, they are regarded with suspicion and repeatedly rejected by the Chinese. Later, when Japan starts its aggressive invasion into China and the conflict between the two countries escalates accordingly, Hu Taiming is soon suspected for being a Japanese spy and taken into custody by Chinese officials. Luckily, he is rescued by two of his former students. After his escape and return to Taiwan, Hu Taiming, who is now completely disillusioned, gives up his search for national and cultural belonging and eventually realizes that “the nation’s fundamental ideology was nothing more than a mess of contradictions” (Orphan 239).

In this story of endless exclusion of the Taiwanese which is dominated by an immense sense of loss and a gloomy mood, there are nevertheless some gleams of hope. In Nanjing, it is two of Hu Taiming’s former students at the women’s high school who risk their own safety to orchestrate his rescue and send him safely back to Taiwan, even though China is at the height of war with Japan and chauvinism accordingly is on the rise. After he is back in Taiwan for some time, Hu collaborates with a Japanese intellectual named Sato, “whose sensibilities were so far removed from those of the other Japanese he had met,” to start a journal dedicated to the cause of anti-war (Orphan 223). Both examples demonstrate that people can empathize and connect with one another based on personal feelings and sometimes for a common cause without regard to exclusionary national barriers. In this way, the author carves out and anticipates an outernational space of human connection and uses the main character’s movements between Taiwan, Japan and China to express what Said’s aptly calls “a particular sort of nomadic, migratory, and anti-
narrative energy” (*CI* 278). Such a nomadic and migratory energy crisscrossing national boundaries, as Hu Taiming’s friendship with his former students and Sato testifies, cannot be confined by any ethnocentric and nationalist narrative.

The Hybridization of the National Space

If there is any Taiwanese text that offers the reader a contrapuntal understanding of Taiwan just as skillfully and truthfully as *Orphan of Asia*, it has to be Zhu Tianxin’s novella “The Old Capital.” Zhu Tianxin, a second-generation Mainlander Taiwanese, published this novella in 1996. This was a time of great political and cultural turmoil. In 1987, the eventual lifting of martial law announced formally the end of KMT authoritarian rule in Taiwan. Immediately following this, throughout much of the 1990s, the KMT itself underwent a radical process of indigenization and democratization under the leadership of its former chairman and former Taiwanese president Lee Teng-hui. In addition, after the institution of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) in 1986, which offered a common platform for several hitherto disparate oppositional forces collectively known as *dangwai* (outsiders of the one-party system), a Taiwanese nationalist discourse quickly took shape and, as a result, the native political elite’s call for Taiwanese independence increasingly gained popular support.

Meanwhile, Taiwanese literature at this time also benefitted from the general liberalization and democratization of politics. As Chen Fangming indicates, Taiwanese literature after martial law rapidly moves from monism to diversity and from privileging a grand Chinese national narrative to expressing multiple voices from various subject positions. As he writes, “The proliferation of feminist literature resists patriarchy; the rise of military compound literature questions KMT’s party-centrism; the awakening of Aboriginal literature challenges
Han chauvinism; and the appearance of gay literature critiques heterosexual norms” (134, my translation). Zhu’s “The Old Capital” was written and published against this backdrop of great literary heteroglossia.

What is also worth noting is that, near the end of the twentieth century, the Mainlander Taiwanese, following the dramatic decline of the once all-powerful KMT, increasingly became a new minority who were often subjected to retaliatory attack and sometimes even irrational insult in a Hoklo-dominated society. Zhu Tianxin’s “The Old Capital” is, arguably, a response to this new predicament shared by the Mainlander Taiwanese during the early years of democratization in Taiwan. It also expresses the confusion and uncertainty they felt as a social group in the midst of rapidly shifting political power. Chang Fangming rightly observes that Zhu’s military compound trilogy, of which “The Old Capital” is a part, voices a collective sense of loss experienced by the Mainlander Taiwanese after they were “mercilessly abandoned by the KMT, rejected by the DPP and its political correctness, and coldly alienated by the Chinese Communist Party (CPP)” (137, my translation). The Mainlander Taiwanese, in other words, appeared increasingly like a forgotten people and their collective memory in Taiwan was at a risk of being completely wiped out by the now dominant Taiwan-centric nationalist discourse. Perhaps this is why Zhu asks with a strong sense of urgency in the beginning of her novella, “Is it possible that none of your memories count?” (“Old Capital” 111).

“The Old Capital” does not follow a simple, linear storyline. Even though it unfolds around the life of a second-person protagonist-narrator “You,” a second-generation Mainlander Taiwanese woman in her forties, the narrative is often interrupted by You’s reminiscences of old Taipei which exists only in her youthful memory. When the story opens, You is on her way to Kyoto, Japan to meet with her best friend from high school, “A.” But in the end A fails to show
up, leaving You to wander the streets and alleys of Kyoto in several cold winter nights alone. Not feeling particularly disappointed, You promptly cuts short her trip and makes her way back to Taipei. Upon her return, You is mistaken by a cabdriver for a Japanese tourist. Not intending to correct the misunderstanding, You decides to assume the identity of a cultural outsider and follow a Japanese colonial map of Taipei to travel the city with the intention to see the city where she grew up anew. When the novella closes, however, You loses all her sense of direction and begins to wail in the middle of downtown Taipei.

Even though, as one can clearly sense from the above summary, “The Old Capital” is shot through with such negative emotions as loss, nostalgia, anxiety, and disorientation, it nonetheless offers the Taiwanese reader an ingenious and non-linear perspective to view their history and cultural heritage. As one follows You’s travels through different spaces and times, one sees that the images of landmarks and streets of contemporary Taipei are always juxtaposed with their colonial shadows as well as their foreign projections. For instance, when the protagonist intends to get off a train at Miyanoshita (a station in colonial times), a conversation holds her up and she ends up alighting at Shilin (a contemporary station) (“The Old Capital” 120). On another occasion, the protagonist compares Qingshuiyan Temple to San Francisco due to their similarly rugged terrains (“The Old Capital” 115). By constantly mixing the old and the new, the colonial and the postcolonial, and the local and the foreign, the narrative foregrounds the multilayered history and hybrid cultural heritage of Taiwan and, in this way, effectively disrupts the pedagogical, nationalist historiography which seeks to represent Taiwanese history as a smooth, linear and cumulative story revolving around a unitary people.

Previous scholars have noted that the notion of identity crisis is one of the organizing themes of “The Old Capital.” They have argued that the work, by deliberately and somewhat
forcibly juxtaposing a litany of incongruous cultural elements, reflects the disconcerting identity
crisis that the Taiwanese people go through in the postmodern, postcolonial present. Shao Yuh-
chuan, for instance, approaches the novella with Zygmunt Bauman and Arjun Appadurai’s
globalization theories. She argues that the novella highlights the rupture of a nation-state caught
between forces of globalization and localization (156). Countering critics who often sense an
intense nostalgia in “The Old Capital,” Shao asserts that Zhu’s mixture of historical and present-
day Taipei indicates her intention to rebel against the homogenizing forces of both global
capitalism and Taiwanese nativism, or in her own words, “ethnic primordialism” (160). Like
Shao, Chang Shu-li also reads “The Old Capital” as a fin-de-siècle expression of a “postmodern
identity crisis” (53). Utilizing theories of modernist aesthetics, Chang reads the protagonist in
“The Old Capital” as a “modernist flaneur” who wanders from place to place in the cities of
Taipei and Kyoto (52). She suggests that the protagonist is caught helplessly in an ideological
limbo, in that she is never satisfied with the grand narratives of the modern, nor is she
completely at ease with the seemingly unbridled freedom of the postmodern. The hybrid space
created by the novella, she concludes, reflects how the protagonist “remains forever unsatisfied
with any ‘literal’ reading or mapping of the city space” (52).

While it is certainly true that in “The Old Capital” identity crisis is triggered in part by
Taiwan’s rapid modernization and its quickly changing landscape in the 1990s, I am more
interested in exploring the direct relationship between the author’s textual hybridization of
Taiwan and the anti-nationalist implications such a strategy entails. Lingchei Letty Chen remains
the only critic who has spoken to this relationship at some length. Chen suggests that by
combining “postcolonial sensitivity” and “postmodern practice,” such as pastiche and collage,
“‘The Old Capital’ directs the discourse of Taiwanese cultural identity toward a more intricate
discussion” (303). Chen, however, questionably reads “The Old Capital” as Zhu’s attempt to reconstruct a coherent identity out of heterogeneous historical remnants. She argues that the hybrid historical and cultural setting Zhu strives to represent in the novella is indicative of her intention to negotiate a unity out of multiplicity, “a negotiation specific to Taiwan’s unique postcolonial condition” (305). Finding Bhabha’s concept of mimicry inadequate, Chen contends that “the real struggle lies not in how to achieve ambivalence, but in what to do afterwards,” namely, to attain some kind of certainty (305). She thus insists that Zhu’s is “a personal project of ‘decolonizing Taiwan’” and that she “turns to history to find ways of resolving the problem of constructing cultural identity in an essentially hybrid milieu” (305, 311).

Contrary to Chen’s reading, I want to argue that “The Old Capital” is a determinedly anti-nationalist text that engages mostly in identity deconstruction, rather than construction as Chen suggests. Considering Zhu’s antipathy towards the pernicious antagonism between Chinese and Taiwanese nationalisms in Taiwan which reached its peak in the late 1990s, I suggest that, rather than concerning herself with constructing a coherent, decolonized Taiwanese cultural identity, she was more interested in using patches and fragments of subjective memories to complicate and disrupt the totalizing representation of Taiwan by formal nationalisms. As Zhu repeatedly expresses in public, “If we really want Taiwan to progress and move forward, we should allow space for even those who do not identify themselves with it” (qtd in Chuang 187).73 Zhu’s remark amply shows her impatience with the exclusiveness of nationalist discourses. In my view, her amplification of Taiwan’s hybrid cultural and political heritage, rather than gesturing towards a future reconciliation between ethnicities and exploring a possible unity among them, is an

73 In an interview, Zhu Tianxin expresses her disappointment with the exacerbation of ethnic politics in Taiwan since 1996. As she says, “The second-generation Mainlanders are facing an unprecedented predicament. They have been given all kinds of labels: they are the same as KMT; they are a class of the rich and powerful. In fact, most of them have nothing to do with power but the values they uphold now become a laughing stock” (Chuang fn. 57).
attempt to emphasize precisely the very impossibility for the people of Taiwan to ever achieve a coherent cultural identity. Indeed, not all conflicts necessarily lead to reconciliation and the cost of unity is often most heavily and unfairly placed upon non-dominant groups. I shall now turn to the text to tease out its anti-nationalist implications.

Unlike *Orphan of Asia* where anti-nationalism seems to be a derivative afterthought which is attained after the protagonist has completely given up all hopes of cultural belonging, in “The Old Capital” it is from the start the dominant consciousness of the narrator “You” and is directly tied to her deliberate hybridization of Taiwan’s landscape. In several instances, the narrator expresses her deep suspicion towards the state’s and the opposition’s nation-building propaganda. One of such instances is her early memory of KMT’s brainwashing education which causes her much regret and shame later in life. As she recalls, when she was a child, she was told one day to dress up and line up in front of the Presidential Office (here rendered deliberately as the Governor-General’s Office) to receive a steamed bun. The occasion for the community giveaway, as it turns out, was Chang Kai-shek’s birthday, October 31. It is not until years later that the narrator realizes how credulous she was and how her behavior was exactly like the North Korean people she had seen on an international report “wishing Kim Il Song a happy birthday, the smiles on their faces so obviously genuine” (“Old Capital” 191). At the same time, she envies those native Taiwanese girls in her class “who were neither moved, motivated, nor brainwashed by the patriotic education from those in power” and marvels at their early “enlightenment and growth” (“Old Capital” 191). By comparing Chang Kai-shek to Kim Il Song and by deliberately misnaming the Presidential Office the colonial Governor-General’s Office, the narrator here highlights the fundamental similarities of all state leaders and their often absurd nation-building policy as well as their obsession with personality cult. And by calling her younger self
“innocent” and “naïve,” the narrator implies that, as an adult, she is now too “enlightened” to be easily influenced by any nationalist rhetoric (“Old Capital” 191).

The narrator’s critical attitude towards nationalism, however, is not limited to KMT’s patriotic education and mystifying propaganda but is also shown in her distaste for the once idealistic political dissidents who now turn into fanatic nationalists, even though the nation they have in mind is a completely different one. In an oppositional candidate’s election campaign, the narrator experiences first-hand the pernicious and exclusionary effects of the newly arisen Taiwanese nationalism when a campaign aide on stage agitates the crowd and angrily calls for “people with a provincial background like yours (Mainlanders)…to get out and go back to China” (“Old Capital” 132, parentheses added). At this moment, the narrator thinks to herself:

You never tried to deal with this feeling, nor did you dare mention it to anyone, especially there were always people who wanted to know whether or not you loved this place, even wanted you to hurry up and leave if you didn’t.

“If you want to leave, leave. Go back to where you came from”—as if you all had a place just waiting for you to return to, a ready-made place to live, but you kept hanging around, to your shame.

Was there such a place? (“The Old Capital” 134)

In this event, the narrator’s experience shows that nationalism, even if it is a bottom-up and oppositional one, can be just as toxic and divisive in its creation and exclusion of minorities. In selfishly demanding the Mainlander Taiwanese to “go back to where you came from,” this mass-based, seemingly democratic nationalism presumes that certain people’s existence on the island and their collective memory can be easily erased.

After showing that different kinds of nationalism are fundamentally the same in their exclusiveness, the narrator further reveals that politicians of different national identifications act in a similarly selfish way and nationalism is but a political tool for them to obtain power and a
justification to pursue their personal interest. As she observes, most politicians in Taiwan, whether they adhere to Chinese nationalism or Taiwanese nationalism, all share the same profiteering “eat and run” mindset (“Old Capital” 148). She then tells the story of a former political dissident “who had been exiled for thirty years because of his resistance against the totalitarian government” (“Old Capital 148). However, once he was elected the county head, the narrator continues, “reminiscent of others before him, he converted the island’s last piece of wetland into a polluting industrial site that consumed tremendous amounts of energy” (“Old Capital” 148-49). People in power, even those who most frequently proclaim their love for the land, the narrator seems to suggest, share the same tendency to abuse the land according to their own interest and thus ruthlessly ruin people’s lived space and memories of the land.

As can be seen, the narrator’s antipathy towards nationalism goes beyond merely the ideological; rather, she is deeply troubled by that fact that the land where people’s most intimate memories reside is constantly being transformed beyond recognition in a very concrete sense by officials of all stripes in the name of nation and development. This is why, throughout the narrative, the narrator constantly introduces her subjective memories of old Taipei to complicate the “official” version of the city space which is a product of such governmental schemes as gentrification and urban planning. Her anxious desire to reclaim a space of her own in an increasingly alienating city is amply revealed in this following passage:

When you were seventeen the sky wasn’t all that different from the one seen by ancestors who had followed the Tamsui River to fish, hunt, and farm 4,000 years ago, and the same as that seen by the Spaniards who followed the river upstream one night and discovered the Ketagalan tribe 330 years ago. The station and newly completed MRT tracks destroyed every sliver of imagination. (“The Old Capital” 133)

In the narrator’s mind, the land has always been a space where people go about their daily lives, invest all sorts of emotions, and nourish their hopes. It is only after Taiwan is turned into a
national space by competing nationalisms that the land no longer signals something tender, familiar, and homely to the people. As the narrator proclaims, “[W]ouldn’t a city, no matter what it’s called…be in essence a city of stranger if it had no intention of retaining the traces of people who had lived there? Why would anyone want to cherish, treasure, maintain, and identify with an unfamiliar city” (“The Old Capital” 157). In this sense, contrary to previous critics’ opinion, the sentiment that the narrator expresses here is not so much a passive and romantic nostalgia as an active and anti-nationalist resistance to reclaim and protect the people’s lived space from the formal, developmentalist discourse of the nation. Her subjective memories of the land in the past, in this instance, are the “scraps, patches, and rags of daily life” that function to disrupt the official narrative of the nation (Bhabha, “DissemiNation” 297).

To further complicate nationalist representation of Taiwan, the narrator also repeatedly foregrounds Taiwan’s physical hybridity in architectures and landmarks, a hybridity that has been repressed by official narrative of the nation which abides by a linear, historicist logic. Consider this instance when the narrator uses the colonial map to travel Taipei:

By reading the kanji in the guidebook, you discovered that the Wanguo Theater…had been the Shōnichiza…The Taiwanese theater was located at the site of current China Cinema; Yoshino kan became Meilidu Cinema after retrocession, then Guobin Cinema, where you saw Godfather…New World Cinema used to be Shinseki kan. (“The Old Capital” 197)

By juxtaposing the Japanese old cinemas with their contemporary Chinese and Taiwanese reincarnations, the narrator resurrects the repressed past of Taipei and uses it to complicate nationalism’s attempt to homogenize and modernize the city space according to its own will. In Bhabha’s words, in reviving the hybrid history of Taipei, she reintroduces “an anteriority that continually introduces an otherness or alterity within the present” (“DissemiNation” 308). Much like Gibreel in The Satanic Verse who turns London into a tropical city, the narrator here also
reintroduces the forgotten and estranged parts of Taiwan’s history to defamiliarize the banal national space. She “turns the nostalgic past into the disruptive ‘anterior’ and displaces the historical present,” thereby opening up the other histories of Taiwan and showing that there has never been one history in Taiwan but always less than one (Bhabha, “DissemiNation” 318).

Throughout the narrative, as we have seen, the narrator continues to use her subjective memories and the colonial traces of old Taipei to disrupt and complicate the increasingly homogenous landscape envisioned by contemporary architects of the postcolonial new nation. Her stubborn hybridization of Taipei attests to her refusal to subordinate her personal memories of the city to the hegemonic redrawing and rewriting of people’s lived space by both Chinese and Taiwanese nationalisms. This is why the narrator in “The Old Capital,” just like Hu Taiming in Orphan of Asia, continuously tries to define an ultimate outernational space, a space that is yet to be arrogated by nationalist discourses. But unlike in Orphan of Asia where such a space is realized outwardly through the form of nomadic and migratory movements, the narrator in “The Old Capital” finds her nation-less utopia by retreating inwardly into her subjective imagination which is nourished by a Chinese classical tale, Tao Yuanming’s “Peach Blossom Stream.” Towards the end of the novella, we see that the narrator frequently makes allusions to Tao Yuanming’s tale in which a forgotten people is said to have lived self-sufficiently in a valley for hundreds of years and have been completely oblivious to the political turmoil in the outside world:

Their ancestors had fled the disorders of Qin times and, having taken refuge here with wives and children and neighbors, had never ventured out again; consequently they had lost all contact with the outside world. They asked what the present dynasty was, for they had never heard of the Han, let alone the Wei and the Jin. (“The Old Capital” 199)

A minority dissatisfied with either dominant nationalist discourses that arrogantly and inexorably transforms everything about the city she has come to identify herself with, the narrator
eventually finds her solace in a liminal space, a Peach Blossom Stream, which exists
metaphysically between the actual and the imaginary.

Conclusion

Wu Zhuoliu’s *Orphan of Asia* and Zhu Tianxin’s “The Old Capital” are two of the
representative works in Taiwanese literature that highlight the hybrid experience of the
Taiwanese people. Wu tells the tragic story of a Taiwanese who is constantly being
discriminated and excluded due to his hybridity. However, he also shows us that it is precisely
because of this hybridity that ethnocentric discourses such as Japanese imperialism and Chinese
nationalism are exposed of their inconsistency and contradictions. By combining Chinese,
Japanese, and Western cultural elements, Zhu paints a hybrid Taipei from the viewpoint of a
minority. Her intention is to use a disarray of cultural elements to protest the linear
historiography of hegemonic nationalist discourses, both Chinese and Taiwanese. Both texts
effectively situate Taiwan in a disjunctive time and a liminal space and open up the other,
repressed histories of Taiwan which powerfully problematize the official history.

Furthermore, in their questioning of formal nationalisms, both texts gesture towards a
future, utopic third space which lies both within and outside of national boundaries. In moving
between Taiwan, Japan, and China, *Orphan of Asia* maps out a network of outernational human
connections. “The Old Capital,” by alluding to a Chinese classic, creates an inner, spiritual
space, a Peach Blossom Stream, within the concrete jungle of modern Taipei. Their intervention
“quite properly challenges our sense of the historical identity of culture as a homogenizing
unifying force, authenticated by the originary Past, kept alive in the national tradition of the
People” (Bhabha, “The Commitment to Theory” 54). In a time when most Taiwanese are still
anxiously trying to define their collective identity, texts like these make us pause and contemplate the things that have been ignored, excluded, and overlooked in the process of identity construction.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The nation, as Homi Bhabha has pointed out, is a “contested cultural territory” caught between the “nationalist pedagogy” and the “performative,” renewing energy derived from people’s diverse lived experiences, desires, and perspectives (“DissemiNation” 297). Since 1895, Taiwan has been twice colonized. In the first half of the twentieth century, the Taiwanese people, most of whom were of Han descent, were forcibly taught to become loyal Japanese subjects. Almost as abruptly, after World War II, however, they were forced to adopt a new, modern Chinese identity and learn to appreciate and accept orthodox Chinese cultural tradition. The national culture of Taiwan, therefore, has been deeply shaped by the rigid nationalist discourses of two different colonial states, Japanese and Chinese. Nevertheless, despite the homogenizing and normalizing pressures exerted by these two powerful nationalisms, there still developed a unique sense of identity among the Taiwanese people of various ethnic backgrounds. This sense of identity, though it undeniably bears the imprint of Japanese and Chinese cultural influence, is nevertheless not reducible to either national culture. Rather, the idea of Taiwanese identity has continuously been defined, modified, and reinvented by generations of Taiwanese writers, intellectuals, and cultural workers who sought to give voice to people’s heterogeneous experiences and memories on the island. The fact that a unique sense of identity among the Taiwanese people has managed to emerge from the interstices of two strong nationalisms seems to have been foreseen by the Taiwanese leftist writer Yang Kui whose post-war allegorical work, “The Spring Sunlight Cannot be Shuttered,” aptly captures the people’s regenerative and undying desire to break free from the ideological confines of official nationalisms.
In this dissertation, I have tried to locate the “scraps, patches, and rags” lying outside of the orbit of formal nationalism that make up an alternative, non-exclusionary idea of Taiwan from three different angles (Bhabha, “DissemiNation” 297). In the first chapter, I drew on Raymond Williams’ ideas to examine Li Qiao’s much neglected early novel, *Sworn Brothers of the Xilai Temple*. Williams’ elaboration on Gramsci’s hegemony helps open up the possibility that alternative and oppositional consciousness exists at all times even in an extremely totalitarian and repressive society. As I have demonstrated in the first chapter, Li Qiao’s text corroborates Williams’ conviction that hegemony (in this context, a Sinocentric nationalism), however powerful and well supported by economic and political institutions, is never total and exhaustive; it cannot completely cover and reshape people’s diverse experiences and memories. Even in a text like *Xilai Temple* which was produced in support of the authoritarian KMT regime’s ideological state apparatus, an alternative and oppositional reading is still possible. Despite its ostensible adherence to the rhetoric of official nationalism and Han orthodoxy, there are still in the text various moments that signal the Taiwanese people’s “repetitious, recursive” and performative agency: their continuous desire and act to define for themselves a freer and more autonomous society under two different colonial states (Bhabha, “DissemiNation” 297). Indeed, as deconstruction theory has it, the nation is never a self-evident, plentitudinous idea evolving along an ahistorical and linear path preordained by nationalist discourse; rather it is being constructed and reconstructed through historical repetition and constant discursive differentiation.

Having established an external space where the nation is imagined and narrated by writers and artists outside of the state’s pedagogical discourse, I travelled back in time to locate the inception moment of Taiwanese national imagination by looking at the fictional works of Lai
He, Yang Kui, and Lü Heruo. My goal was to study the effects of Japanese colonialism on the articulation and elaboration of a native Taiwanese consciousness in a period known as Taishō Democracy. It was my findings that the first generation of writers who laid the discursive and imaginative foundation of a Taiwanese nation were the so-called native intelligentsia, the beneficiaries of Western-style colonial education. Yet, it was also my understanding that this intelligentsia displayed a much more complex and heterogeneous attitude towards the colonial government’s social and cultural reform than either the Cambridge thesis or Partha Chatterjee’s model of cultural nationalism would make allowance for. On the one hand, despite their strong commitment to science, rationalism, and political liberalism—and thus, to a reform of local society—this intelligentsia also expressed an intense desire to uphold and maintain their cultural difference from the mother country. On the other hand, however, their assertion of cultural difference was always ambiguous and inconsistent because this difference was rooted in a vaguely conceptualized Chinese cultural influence rather than a fully articulated Taiwanese culture. As such, the “autonomous territory” of cultural domain which nourished a unique cultural nationalism that Chatterjee has observed in India, I suggest, seems to be non-existent in colonial Taiwan, as there was not yet a clearly defined Taiwanese culture on which to build a national discourse (6). It would be more appropriate, instead, to argue that an alternative discourse of Taiwan has often been constructed through its ambivalent, complex, and shifting interactions with official nationalisms: it was not entirely parasitic on the latter, nor was it a completely autonomous realm.

74 An example of the Cambridge thesis can be found in Bruce McCully’s English Education and the Origins of Indian Nationalism. McCully’s main argument is that Indian nationalism is a result of British liberal education (225). For a different argument, see Viswanathan’s critique of McCully, 14-16.
In my last chapter, I take a step further to engage with two texts, Wu Zhuliu’s *Orphan of Asia* and Zhu Tianxin’s “The Old Capital,” which actively and explicitly question and critique the totalizing discourse of official nationalism. Wu and Zhu’s texts highlight Taiwan’s historical marginality in relation to the cultural powerhouses of Japan and China in East Asia. They also strategically evoke and enact the hybrid experience of the Taiwanese people after many times of regime change to expose the inconsistency and hypocrisy of different nationalist discourses. By highlighting the historical predicament of the Taiwanese who were discriminated against by the Japanese and generally treated with suspicion by the Chinese, Wu puts forth a powerful critique of the essentialist conception of culture and race that sustains both Japanese and Chinese nationalisms of his days. Zhu, on her part, foregrounds the physical hybridity of Taiwan’s landscape and uses bits and pieces of subjective memories to complicate both Chinese and Taiwanese nationalists’ attempt to represent Taiwan as a homogenous society which has a linear and ethnocentric history. Her story further reveals that nationalism in Taiwan is but a political instrument that allows power-hungry politicians self-identifying as Chinese or Taiwanese to obtain power by excluding and scapegoating minorities. Overall, Wu and Zhu’s narratives paint a rather different picture of Taiwan as a national space: it is always diverse, hybrid, and subject to constant reinvention. Such a representation of Taiwan, as I have argued, is more faithful to Taiwanese people’s perceived reality and effectively deconstructs and demystifies the nationalist myth of a single people, history, and culture. Furthermore, the anti-nationalist implications in both texts pave the way for the Taiwanese readers to think beyond essentialist categories of nation, culture, and people and envision eventually a more cosmopolitan Taiwan.

All of the texts I examined in this dissertation represent several different modalities to narrate and construct Taiwan. Through my discussion, I hope I have demonstrated that, from the
Japanese colonial era to the present day, the idea of Taiwan as a nation has been gradually broadened and diversified by many writers through their continuous questioning, interrogation, and critique of imposed official nationalisms. It was also my intention to avoid discussing these texts in a strictly chronological order. For instance, my first chapter deals with a text that spans both Japanese colonial and KMT authoritarian eras and my third chapter discusses a pair of texts from two starkly different times: *kōminka* Taiwan and democratic Taiwan. In addition, all of the authors I discussed in the dissertation represent different ethnic backgrounds: Hakka, Hoklo, and Mainlander. If my dissertation can be seen as in itself a kind of metanarrative of Taiwan, I hope I have succeeded in giving my readers a multi-faceted and diverse picture of Taiwan rather than simply another cumulative and linear national narrative. However, I must also acknowledge that the historical experience of the Taiwanese people is more complex and diverse than my short project can hope to account for and adequately represent. Much work remains to be done. There are at least two new directions in which the present project can be further expanded and complicated.

A future expansion of the current project can focus on the questions of how to represent Taiwan as a cosmopolitan space and how Taiwanese literature can contribute to world literature. It is my belief that a responsible study of a national culture and literature not only should trace how a nation is imagined and constructed in literary representation but should also eventually point to a way of thinking beyond the conceptual confines of nation and nationalism. In other words, more attempts should be made by scholars of Taiwanese literature to try to gradually detach the concept of literature from that of the nation. In critiquing the rise of nativism in contemporary studies of African literatures, Ghanaian philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah persuasively points out that the proliferation of cultural nationalism in the African continent is a
legacy of European imperialism and colonialism which profoundly shapes the way in which African cultures and literatures are imagined and discussed by critics in national terms nowadays. As he writes, “Nativism organizes its vaunted particularities into a ‘culture’ that is, in fact, an artifact of Western modernity. While Western criteria of evaluation are challenged, the way in which the contest is framed is not” (60). While, on the surface, a nationalist reading of literature can suggest the agency of the ex-colonized people to reclaim control of their cultural production and interpretation and reassert the autonomy of their culture, such a reading in effect risks falling into the trap of imperialist modernity which had divided the world into various imagined nations through the often arbitrary invention of traditions. Postcolonial cultural nationalism, in all practical terms, repeats the process of inventing traditions only in an inverted fashion. As Appiah further argues, “Time and time again, cultural nationalism has followed the route of alternate genealogizing. We end up always in the same place; the achievement is to have invented a different past for it” (68). Apparently, one of the keys to truly destabilizing and reversing the enduring domination of imperialism lies in how humanities scholars can gradually move beyond the narrow national framework in their discussion of culture and literature and focus not simply on the identification of cultural uniqueness but also on the expression of experiences that are commonly human.

In my view, Taiwanese colonial literature offers rich materials for a cosmopolitan reading of culture and identity. Specifically, works of the so-called kōmin (imperial subject) literature, which has long been dismissed as collaborationist literature, are especially promising. Under the pressures of colonial cultural assimilation, works such as Wang Changxiong’s “The Torrent,” Zhou Jinpo’s “Voluntary Solider,” and Chen Huoquan’s “The Way,” actively explore the possibility of how identity can be plastic and plural: how one can be culturally both Japanese and
Chinese while remaining emotionally a Taiwanese. Though one should not lose sight of the fact that unequal power relation between cultures and the coercive policy of colonial assimilation gave rise to these narratives, they nevertheless offer us ways to transcend the nativist assumption of identity as rooted, single, and exclusionary. In other words, the hybridity of cultural legacy in Taiwan and Taiwan’s checkered colonial history need not be conceived of as a liability which only poses difficulties to construct a cohesive nation but can be treated as a potential asset that allows for a certain degree of flexibility in our conception of identity and culture. In an increasingly globalized world, Taiwanese colonial literature offers us much needed mental skills to tie the local to the regional and global and imagine a broader and more inclusive paradigm of identity formation.

Another rich site for further investigation consists of works of what can be loosely called minority literature that, as Chen Fangming indicates, emerged in great number after martial law was finally lifted in Taiwan in 1987. As he writes:

From veterans’ homecoming movement, Aboriginal movement, farmers’ march in the capital, labor movement, feminist movement, to student movement [in the early 1980s], what was generally reflected at this time was Taiwanese people’s desire to fight for political, economic, and social change across the island. Writers’ formerly repressed creative energy also exploded at the same time, participating in a timely fashion in this historical symphony. (131, my translation)

Following political liberalization and democratization in the 1980s, the content of post-martial law Taiwanese literature appeared diverse and heterogeneous. Numerous writers wrote about and critiqued Taiwanese society from various marginal positions. Feminist authors such as Li An and Shi Shuqing challenged the toxic masculinity inherent in Taiwanese political establishment; writers of military compound literature such as Zhu Tainxin and Zhu Tianwen called into question the newly arisen Hoklo chauvinism; writers of gay literature like Bai Xianyon drew attention to heterosexual norms in Taiwanese public discourse; and Aboriginal
writers like Tian Yage offered the reader a refreshingly different perspective to view Taiwanese society which was tinged with profound environmentalist concerns. All these minority voices powerfully destabilize the grand national narratives which had been dominant in the previous decades. As Bhabha writes, minority literature “will not…celebrate the monumentality of historical memory, the sociological solidity or totality of society, or the homogeneity of cultural experience. The discourse of minority reveals the insurmountable ambivalence that structures the equivocal movement in historical time” (“DissemiNation” 308; italics in the original). In short, Taiwanese minority literature paints a national space that is democratic, diverse, and heterogenous and, in doing so, reveals the nation as an always ambivalent sign subject to endless modification and embellishment.

In summary, kōmin literature and minority literature in Taiwan remain two areas that are relatively understudied. The former, more often than not, is dismissed because it does not conform to the conventional definition of anticolonial protest literature, and the latter is perhaps simply too diverse to be systematically treated under a single rubric. However, in my opinion, texts belonging to these two categories furnish valuable, alternative insights into Taiwanese culture both in the past and present. More importantly, they offer much needed correction to an ethnocentric reading of Taiwan.

Finally, building on the overall arguments of my dissertation, I would like to share a few words about my hope regarding the future of studies of Taiwanese literature and culture. As a nation without an internationally recognized state, today’s Taiwan is still struggling to find its place in the world, or to use a contemporary political jargon, to increase its “global visibility.” The formal isolation of the Taiwanese people in the international society is especially compounded by the constant pressures coming from the People’s Republic of China. This,
however, should not be a cause of frustration. It is my belief that, as a postcolonial nation caught
in the competing influences of global powers, especially between the United States and the
newly arisen superpower China, Taiwan’s experience has much to offer to the global culture of
anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism. As my previous chapters show, the people of Taiwan
share the same drives as people in many parts of the previously colonized world to achieve
freedom, equality, self-determination, and an overall more democratic society. As such, the
important task for researchers of Taiwanese literature and culture, it seems to me, is not to
uncover and assert the cultural uniqueness of Taiwan through the reading of literary texts, or in
Fanon’s words, to create “an inventory of particularisms” (WE 160). Rather, what we need to do
is to try to tie the language expressing the aspirations of the Taiwanese people to what Ngugi
calls “the real language of humankind: the language of struggle” (DM 108). In doing so, “a study
of...literature, culture, and history, starting from a national base, would therefore be linked with
progressive and democratic trends in world literature, culture, and history” (Ngugi, DM 103). It
is in this cosmopolitan spirit that I end my project.


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