

of weak quality. We have only to recognize the determined spirit of "not to write means to die"; then we cannot bear to let limited days leave a blank.

Fortunately we can see that literature still makes the best mix of remedies among the people and within the people. We can see that there are very many poets and authors in Taiwan, some of whom are evergreen trees, while others are fiery phoenixes, and still others are winter insects. For the sake of Taiwan's literature, like silkworms they will spit forth all their thread in full measure without resentment or regret.

Our stricken loved ones have already been buried beneath the soil of Taiwan. We hope to gain support for the creation and publication of literature, and thus cause our stricken loved ones to live again in historical memory. This will form the essential element in our "collective unconscious," and also constitute our nurture so that our consciousness of Taiwan will act as the primary strength of literary creativity.

[Preface to 1994 *Taiwan wen-hsüeh hsiün* (Selections from Taiwan Literature, 1994). Taipei, Ch'ien-wei ch'u-p'an-she, 1995.]

Bickering About Literature: The Meaning of "Taiwan Literature"

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Translated by Robert Smitheram

Following the remarkable growth of social power in Taiwan society, it has been reported that there is a new controversy over the meaning of Taiwanese literature. It has been further reported that this controversy erupted when certain critics from a certain institution began discussing an older writer with regard to the definition of Taiwanese literature. As I myself have not yet perused these articles, I would not dare to pass any critical judgment on their arguments; however, looking back ten years before the removal of martial law, I can see that in comparison to the indirect but clear pronouncements that all those literary writers made in the midst of the White Terror, today's sound and fury in the "bright light of the day" appears all the more vain and pretentious.

In the July 1981 issue of *Taiwanese Literature* I published an article in two parts entitled "My View of Taiwanese Literature"; and in July 1983 in the same journal, I advanced my ideas further in "A Correct Interpretation of Taiwanese Literature." As it turns out, that was exactly ten years ago; and taking stock of it all now-and-then, I can see that my views are still the same: "Taiwanese literature is that literature which takes the viewpoint of the people of Taiwan and which writes about Taiwanese experience."

land's subjectivity.

"Taiwanese subjectivity" is a name and a reality fixed in the realm of human culture. Objectively speaking, the realm of human culture for "Taiwan" is an "independent unity"; in a fundamental sense, Taiwan certainly possesses its own unique belief and value systems, and therefore on the international scene exists as an independent unity with its own national character. It possesses a complete existence, self-sufficient, independent, and autonomous, not part of some other entity of the same kind, including all the possibilities for continuous future growth.

However, the important point is this: "Taiwanese subjectivity" in the realm of human culture is not to be taken as an existence in essence; nor does Taiwan have a "Taiwanese subjectivity" that is here or there, rather it is the result of the people on this land having gone through a process of consciousness-raising and creative practice. This kind of understanding and grasp will provide some important ideas. Here I will only raise two of them:

1) Given that [this subjectivity] is the result of consciousness-raising and creativity, it must be true that one does not need to be born Taiwanese in order to possess it. And in addition, as it is a name and reality within the creative process, its existence is the same across the "gap" separating the various language families on Taiwan. It is not the sole possession of one language group; indeed, it is a cultural meaning jointly created and held in common by the entire people of Taiwan.

2) The social sciences are theoretical study in the objective sense. In order to fix the scholarly integrity and significance of each area of inquiry, it is necessary first to define each area of research in "Taiwanese subjectivity." Literature and the other arts are the revelation of subjective impressions, and therefore there clearly is no need to flaunt some manifesto on "Taiwanese subjectivity" in order to think out how one is to write. For literature, the author needs only to (a) be truly sincere with respect to his own impressions of love and hate, and (b) return to his own land and people. Yet one must "render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's, and render unto God that which is God's"—what is Taiwanese literature? What is it like? "The nature of the work itself" will prove everything; there is no need to start raising a ruckus and fight about it.

As for the notion of "writing about the Taiwanese experience," the reason for this is quite simple: literature is the observation and experience of life; it is a portrayal of how one lives. Life and daily living cannot be separated from the land in which life is set; otherwise, there is no way to speak of "style" or "meaning." Moreover, through the historical experience of Taiwan one can see that besides writers native to

In regard to the explanation quoted above, I would like to make a further clarification:

In literary creation, it is necessary to indicate a viewpoint? If one is just speaking of "literature," then a viewpoint need not be specified succinctly, because the matter is then just the actions of common individuals, one aspect of human phenomena. However, once the concept is set off as "Taiwanese literature," then it is prudent to clarify the viewpoint. The reason is twofold: First it has to do with Taiwan. Throughout their history the Taiwanese people have constantly suffered cruel oppression from outside political power. The people of Taiwan have their own special historical circumstances, with their own ideals and aspirations. The "phenomenon of literature" is thus an aspect of Taiwanese culture and humanistic activity. This being so, there is no such thing as a Taiwanese literature that is removed from the viewpoint of the Taiwanese people. Second, once given freedom of expression, literature, like political ideas and methods of politics and economics, cannot avoid divisions among political parties or conflicts in theoretical inquiry; and included within all of this are such factors as the composition of individual character and the formation of one's personal experience. Since "human activity" dwells in such confusing turmoil, how can one avoid losing sight of reality and truth? There is a simple and direct solution: that is, to return to the land and the people first. And for literature, this means that the viewpoint of the Taiwanese people is the viewpoint of the land and the people of Taiwan; and the viewpoint of the land and the people of Taiwan is simply the viewpoint of the Taiwanese people. The two are clearly one and the same.

Having considered matters to this point, we must now deal with the question of the "subjectivity of Taiwanese literature," which entails that we clarify the question of the "Taiwanese subjectivity." It is to these problems that we now turn.

"Taiwan" is an object of nature, and as such, ontologically speaking, does not possess a "subjectivity"; it only exists in the realm of human culture. However, when we consider the advanced development of ecology, we can see that human beings began to understand a "subjectivity" with respect to the land, this object of nature—a subjectivity, moreover, formed by such conditions characteristic of the land as degrees of longitude and latitude, temperature and humidity, amount of sunshine, wind direction and strength, geology and hydrology, as well as other external relations. And of necessity, "humanity," this "ecological population," could only develop by adapting to nature in terms of the

southern dialects, Chinese and other foreign languages. If you made a distinction based solely on nationality or the use of the indigenous dialect, it would unavoidably lead to the exclusion of many pearls of the "Taiwanese experience." And I may further add that the language of a future Taiwanese literature still has a rough and difficult road to go; therefore in making more open definitions with regard to language there are prospective and strategic considerations. Now as to whether or not the works of writers of the first and second generations of "mainlanders" can be considered Taiwanese literature, I would suggest that one test them with the litmus paper of "taking the viewpoint of the people of Taiwan and writing about Taiwanese experience"; then their true nature will be revealed, and any argument or countercharge will be superfluous.

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