

What is the Mainstream in Taiwanese Literature? An Introduction

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The title of this special issue involves a certain dilemma: How can one explore areas out of the mainstream if the mainstream itself is ill-defined? It therefore has to be stated from the outset that the articles published in this issue have not been assembled under the assumption that there is an a priori definition or a common understanding of what constitutes the ‘mainstream’ with regard to Taiwanese literature. Yet on the other hand, as Yuan Kleeman points out in the introduction to her paper, there is a general understanding that the ‘mainstream’ alludes to that which is ‘common’, ‘popular’, ‘easily accessible’ and ‘commercially viable’. These criteria inevitably lead us to better-known works, writers, and topics that usually come to mind whenever Taiwanese literature is mentioned inside and outside academia. These range from Lai He 賴和 (1894–1943) as the ‘father of Taiwanese literature’, to the well-researched and thoroughly edited Taiwanese/Japanese writer Yang Kui 楊逵 (1906–1985), the post-war modernists and nativists and contemporary award-winning authors such as Li Ang 李昂 (b.1952), the Zhu sisters Tianwen 朱天文 (b1956) and Tianxin 朱天心 (b1958) and many others. Their books can readily be found on the shelves of the Taiwanese Literature (*Taiwan wenxue* 台灣文學) sections in bookshops. Their names are indispensable entries in Taiwanese literature histories; their texts enjoy exposure to a wide readership inside and even outside of Taiwan, and their works are subject to academic research and the scrutiny of literary criticism. As regards the latter, the past three decades have witnessed far-reaching institutional and academic initiatives to ‘nationalize’ Taiwanese literature.¹

1 Cf. Hsiao A-chin, *Contemporary Taiwanese Cultural Nationalism* (London; New York: Routledge 2000), 79–124.

Even a brief review of the relevant literature would be beyond the scope of this introduction. One need only point to the establishment of several Taiwanese literature institutes across the country, the foundation of the National Museum of Taiwanese Literature (Guoli Taiwan wenxueguan 國立台灣文學館) in 2003, the impressive oeuvre of the late scholar and critic Yeh Shih-tao 葉石濤 (1925–2008)² and most recently the publication of Chen Fang-Ming's 陳芳明 two-volume History of Taiwanese Literature.³

By placing the focus on lesser-known protagonists and works and highlighting the margins of Taiwan's literary scene, this issue explores the selective mechanisms within the vast field of Taiwanese literature and the criteria that determine who and what is in the limelight and who and what stays out of the mainstream. These criteria take effect before the shelves of the above-mentioned Taiwanese Literature sections are filled with books. They also shape a general understanding of what constitutes Taiwanese literature and what does not.

A literary mainstream is never static and is subject to ideological influences. In the case of Taiwan, the issue of belonging *vis-à-vis* China has been the major ideological force inside and outside literary debates in the last decades. The preface to a collection of short stories from Taiwan in German translation published 30 years ago starts with the sentence: »China has produced yet another very successful literature.«⁴ Whereas nothing seemed wrong with equating China and Taiwan when the collection was published, the same opening sentence would now face severe criticism. The very fact that 'Taiwan' and no longer China is now the self-evident label of a certain kind of literature is indicative of the thorough ideological changes the country has witnessed since the 1980s. In other words, wherever one locates the current mainstream, it very likely covers an area that used to be far off of the mainstream after the so-called retrocession of Taiwan to the Republic of China some 60 years ago.

This historical juncture is the topic of the first paper of this volume. Táňa Dluhošová examines how a literary mainstream was politically constructed in the

2 Ye Shitao 葉石濤, *Ye Shitao quan ji* [Complete Works], 20 vols. (Gaoxiong: Kaohsiung City Government, Bureau of Cultural Affairs; Tainan: National Museum of Taiwan Literature, 2006–08).

3 Chen Fangming 陳芳明, *Taiwan xin wenxueshi* 臺灣新文學史 [A History of Modern Taiwanese Literature] (Taipei: Linking, 2011).

4 Helmut Martin, »Vorwort«, in *Blick übers Meer: Chinesische Erzählungen aus Taiwan*, ed. by H. M., Charlotte Dunsing and Wolf Baus (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1982), 7.

years 1945 to 1947. As her analysis of Yuan Shengshi's 袁聖時 (1916–2001) *Dragon Gate: A Collection of Fairy Tales* shows, institutional support and convergence with the dominant ideology are by no means sufficient criteria that help an author gain admittance to the literary mainstream. Dluhošová's investigation of cultural Sinification in the postwar years also sets the historical background that is crucial for placing the later ideological paradigm shift towards Taiwanization in context.

Another criterion that defines the mainstream is language. During the entire 20th century up until the present, the recognition of Taiwanese literature has to a large degree depended on the language of literary composition. Whereas literature in Mandarin is now—albeit not uncontroversially—the quasi-norm in linguistic terms, the situation was fundamentally different during the period of Japanese colonial rule and before. Thus, the question as to what qualifies as Taiwanese literature is closely connected to the sociolinguistic issue of language choice. Three papers in this issue take off from or bring up this question. Julia Schulz explores what exactly constitutes the label 'Taiwan' in Taiwanese poetry. Is it poetry written in the local language known as Hoklo? Is it poetry written by Taiwanese authors? Is it poetry dealing with things Taiwanese? Her analysis thus expands to other related fields of inquiry, such as authorship and subject matter. Faye Yuan Kleeman examines a body of literature that has been, in her words, »way off from the mainstream« in the context of Taiwanese literature: travelogues about Taiwan written in Japanese by Japanese authors, colonial settlers, travelers and ex-soldiers. As Yuan Kleeman's article shows, marginalization in discourse is by no means the same as insignificance, since, as she concludes, »there is a Taiwan to be found« in these sources. Henning Klöter's article reexamines the thinking of Huang Shihui 黃石輝 (1900–1945), who triggered the first debate on literary composition in the Taiwanese Hoklo language. Examining largely neglected textual evidence from literary journals of the 1930s, Klöter concludes that Huang Shihui did not pursue an ideal of cultural demarcation from China, as claimed in previous research. Instead he was driven by the socialist ideals of spreading mass literacy.

Another dividing line between mainstream literature and writing out of the mainstream is ethnicity. Historical research has pointed out that as early as in the seventeenth century, Taiwan's Malayo-Polynesian ethnicities achieved a basic literacy in the Roman alphabet. This was due to contact with Dutch priests who had reached Taiwan in the company of the Dutch colonial authorities. In the subsequent centuries, 'writing' (in a very general sense) by Taiwan's native ethnicities developed towards diversity with regard to the scripts, languages, and content of the written texts. In contemporary Taiwan, we can observe an

increasing disclosure and popularity of so-called ‘aboriginal literature’ (*yuan-zhumin wenxue* 原住民文學). However, due to various reasons associated with the ethnic background of their authors, the works continue to stay out of the mainstream—especially in international scholarship. Foregrounding the nexus of literature and ethnicity, Darryl Sterk analyzes aboriginal gift culture in the works of the Taiwanese writers Husluma Vava, Auvini Kadresengan, Badai and Topas Tamapima.

This special issue concludes with an article that addresses literature in its material and textual dimensions. During the twentieth century, recognized literary works were by definition printed works, in other words, books that have gone through a process of careful editing in order to make them accessible to a larger public. Printing and binding are prerequisites for public exposure. As a consequence, the preliminary pre-printing stages of a text typically stay out of the mainstream of public attention and scholarly interest. However, as Raoul David Findeisen’s inquiry into two manuscript versions of Wang Wenxing’s 王文興 (b1939) novel *A Family Catastrophe* (*Jiabian* 家變) shows, a close look at preliminary manuscript stages tells us more about the dynamics of textual genesis than a static understanding of a text as something that is printed, bound and exposed to readers.

Preliminary versions of the articles included in this volume were presented at an international symposium held at Ruhr University of Bochum (Germany) in 2010 which was jointly organized with the International Taiwan Studies Center (Guoji Taiwan yanjiu zhongxin 國際台灣研究中心) of National Taiwan Normal University (Guoli Taiwan shifan daxue 國立台灣師範大學). The organizers gratefully acknowledge support from the Taiwanese Ministry of Education (The Talent Cultivation Project of Taiwanese Literature, History and Art in Globalization) and the Cultural Division of the Taipei Representative Office in Berlin. While the symposium provided a vibrant platform for discussion and exchange of perspectives, a vast area out of the mainstream of Taiwanese literature remains to be explored.

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