

## **Wartime Taiwan: Epitome of an East Asian Modality of the Modern Literary Institution?**

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### **Abstract**

Over the past two decades, post-colonial and multiculturalist discourses have effectively discredited claims for the universal validity of Eurocentric literary views and evaluative criteria. Progress toward expanding the scope of literary inquiries to include the non-West, however, has been fairly uneven. Compared to literature from the former Western colonies, such as the Anglophone and Francophone regions, literature from modern East Asian has received significantly less attention. This is caused, in my view, not only by a knowledge deficit, in terms of empirical facts, but also by a lack of systematic examination of the distinctive dynamics, internal cross-currents, and shared patterns of modern literary development within the region, and a sociologically oriented structural approach promises to fruitfully address this issue.

Drawing from theories of Pierre Bourdieu and Peter Bürger and enlarging the scope of a world-literary phenomenon described by Franco Moretti as “a compromise between a western formal influence (usually French or English) and local materials,” I try to explore some special modalities found in East Asian societies as they built their own modern literary institutions, following established Western models, which had arrived around the second half of the nineteenth century. As a result of its relatively late start, the East Asian modernization process is compressed, and the course by which various modern institutions—including the institution of literature—are entrenched in local settings are frequently disrupted by external forces, reoriented into drastically different paradigms, and typically fraught with supposedly aberrant structural elements. Using a special literary phenomenon in wartime Taiwan as material for a case study, and in dialogue with some recent scholarship on the Japanese colonization of the island, I argue that these seemingly deviant traits are in fact quite common in the cultural history of modern East Asia. It is hoped that this hypothesis may be validated by future applications of the sociologically oriented analytical schemes employed here to other periods of East Asian literary history that appear to exhibit some structural affinities, such as Korea’s colonial period, martial-law Taiwan, China’s socialist era, Shanghai under Japanese occupation, colonial Hong Kong, Japan under Allied occupation, and so forth.