

The State of Taiwan Literature in English Translation

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In response to the theme of the 2nd World Congress of Taiwan Studies, the focus of this paper aims to review the achievement of English translation of Taiwan literature in the past decade and discuss the direction of its development. The trajectory of the historical development of Taiwan literature can be observed from the annual survey of the study of Taiwan literature in America and Canada included in *The Almanac of Taiwan Literature* published by the National Museum of Taiwan Literature since 1996, in which there are three most important publishers dedicated to the publication of Taiwan literature in English translation:

- A) *The Taipei Chinese Pen*, published by the Chinese P.E.N. Center since 1972;
- B) *Taiwan Literature: English Translation Series*, published by the Center for Taiwan Studies, UCSB, since 1996;
- C) *Modern Chinese Literature from Taiwan*, published by Columbia University Press since 1999.

Each of these three publishers of Taiwan literature in English translation has its particular background, purpose, and guiding principle of publication, and has accumulated a considerable amount of achievements, making its distinctive contribution to introducing Taiwan literature to the international arena. Taiwan literature is a product of the development in the society, political situation, and history of Taiwan. In the modern history of Taiwan, the two major events that have had a decisive influence on the society, culture, and people's daily life can be seen as the termination of Japanese colonial rule in 1945 and the repeal of martial law in 1987. Literary works produced during the fifty years (1895-1945) under Japanese rule are the prized literary heritage that cannot be overlooked in the history of Taiwan literature, and the end of martial law was a historical moment that became a turning point in the fundamental direction of the historical and sociopolitical development in Taiwan. The rise of Taiwanese consciousness, along with the recent advancement of the political and cultural indigenization movement, gradually diverges from the China-oriented position, in an effort to build up the subjectivity of Taiwan. This appears to be a new tendency that progresses in the society of Taiwan as well as in the current development of Taiwan literature.

Panel 10 Literature and Arts

Thus, the definition and orientation of Taiwan literature have become a focus of concern for many writers and scholars since the 1990s, and a basic question that the translation of Taiwan literature inevitably will have to face is: Does a work selected for translation reflect the reality of the sociopolitical changes and historical development of Taiwan? In other words, what is Taiwan literature? What is the originality or distinctive character of Taiwan literature? What is the subjectivity of Taiwan literature? Those are the questions one cannot escape in dealing with translation of Taiwan literature into a foreign language, as they are the touchstone for the justification of translating a particular work as a piece of representative work of Taiwan literature.

With those questions in mind, this paper will examine and comment on the two major publications of Taiwan literature, *The Taipei Chinese Pen* and *Taiwan Literature: English Translation Series*. Since *Chinese literature from Taiwan* published by Columbia University Press drew some of its source materials from the translations previously published in the *The Taipei Chinese Pen* with the same editor, it has less relevance to this paper, and therefore the paper will deal only with the first two complementary publications as the main object of study from a comparative perspective.