

Women Writers' Historical Fiction in the 21st Century: Gender as National Allegory Revisited

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Abstract

Both male and female writers in Taiwan have written many novels related to the history of Taiwan. However, since the 21st century, female writers have gained prominence by taking a new approach to historical writing. They explore the intersection of great historical events and the private life of the subaltern people, particularly female figures who live under the double oppressions of colonial rule and local patriarchal tradition. In this paper, I attempt to analyze historical fiction written by two female authors: Shih Shu-ching's *Taiwan Trilogy* and Ping Lu's *Beautiful Formosa*. In addition to analyze these novels, I will also review research papers about these works. In Taiwan, woman as victim has long been regarded by literary critics as a national allegory, and therefore her suffering is the collective suffering of Taiwan as a colonized island. In such a case, Taiwan is feminized and the cultural imagination of Taiwanese nationalism hinges upon suffering and grievances. Jameson's article, "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," has been one of the most frequently cited works in the studies of Taiwanese literature. I would like to present a detailed discussion of Jameson's famous article in order to rethink the relationship between gender and national allegory. I will argue that in these novels, women's roles are more than victims, and the meaning of gender does not depend on the binary opposition of male and female, the oppressor and the oppressed. The diversities of gender performances and the fragmentation of gender as a signifier present new insights into national allegory seen through the angle of gender. I will conclude with the (in)significance of Taiwanese identity and its possible reconfiguration as manifested in these novels.

Key words: gender, national allegory, historical fiction, Taiwanese identity