

BOOK REVIEW

台灣文學的世界之路

[The Global Path of Taiwanese Literature]

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When Swedish indigenous writer Fredrik Prost was nominated for the Nordic Council Literature Prize 2024, he refused to have his book, written in Sámi, translated into any major language. He argued that he wanted to preserve its cultural integrity for the Sámi people and prevent its commercialisation and misappropriation by the metropolitan centre. Although Prost agreed to translate the book solely for the prize jury, he plans to burn these numbered copies after the jury's assessment to ensure it remains inaccessible to non-Sámi speakers. He hopes that winning the prize would demonstrate that minority literature can stand on an equal footing with the major literatures (Samer.se, 2024).

In her recent book, *The Global Path of Taiwanese Literature* (2023), Taiwanese scholar Chiu Kuei-fen addresses the urgency of framing and exploring Taiwanese literature in the world literary space. The book aims to identify conditions that obstruct and mechanisms and strategies that enhance the circulation and reception of Taiwanese literature within the world literary system, as well as to foster its wider appeal and boost its worlding in today's globalised world. The central question of her endeavour is how to overcome the obstacles faced by a "small literature" and amplify recognition for peripheral Taiwanese writers on the world stage.

It is not an exaggeration to claim that without this literary scholar's thirty-plus years of academic commitment and intellectual dedication, Taiwanese literature would hardly be a firmly established field in the national and international academic community. Before her recent retirement Chiu was a Chair Professor of Taiwan Literature and Transnational Cultural Studies at National Chung Hsing University, currently hosting the digital Taiwan Literature Archive. In *The Global Path of Taiwan Literature* Chiu treats us to the gist of her research and exploration of Taiwan literature, its development over time, its current state and its future aspirations. The overall framework is shaped by the impossible situation of Taiwan as a nation on the world stage in general, and of the island's literary production in particular. As such the book's driving force is to showcase the country's local uniqueness and cultural achievements, along with its international adaptability and democratic alignment both at home and in the world. Given this inevitable complicity, her research is anchored in the concerns and achievements of the domestic community while continuously engaging in dialogue with the international counterpart. Employing the globalised theory toolbox of world literature in conceptualising and exploring Taiwanese literature and its "journey to the world", Chiu opts for dialogic negotiation over confrontational resistance in her reasoning about a world of asymmetric power relations.

Comprising six chapters, the book first establishes the disadvantaged position of Taiwanese writers in the world literary space by aligning with Pascale Casanova's world literature system and its notion of "small literature". Given the "poverty", "smallness", "backwardness", and "remoteness" of the literary world they inhabit, Taiwanese authors have only restricted possibilities of gravitating towards the centre. As indicators of their invisibility and lack of recognition, Chiu accurately measures their under-representation in various forms of cultural and symbolic capital such as literary prizes, translations, academic attention, readership, writer-in-residencies, adaptations. Concluding that Taiwan literature still has a long way to go, she points to translation as key, referring to Johan Heilbron, who has shown how the success of Dutch writers, despite occupying a peripheral position, follows a pattern structured by three succes-

sive circuits: selection, diffusion, valorisation and recognition. First, supported by Dutch cultural diplomacy, Dutch literature travels among Dutch-speaking groups abroad. Second, it expands towards the respective national literary field of the receiving country. Third, it occupies a visible space in the transnational universe tied to international fairs, publishing houses, and prizes, ultimately gaining international fame.

The second chapter engages with the research paradigms of Taiwanese Literature, such as “World Chinese Literature” (世界華文文學), “Sinophone Literature” (華語語系文學), and “World Literature” (世界文學), examining their development and transformation over time and their roles within various national academic cultures. This chapter maps out a differentiated and critical review of a field marked by globalisation and transnationalism, assessing the pros and cons of these paradigms for exploring and positioning Taiwanese literature. Instead of pitting these approaches against each other, Chiu deliberately evaluates their respective usefulness.

While the paradigm of World Chinese Literature, a concept developed in the 1980s by mainland literary scholars, might be considered outdated by some, Chiu argues for its continuous relevance. She insists that, despite its arguable narrowness, this paradigm notwithstanding challenges the traditional concept of “Chinese literature” as it includes literature written in Chinese produced outside China, and it also fosters a transcultural perspective. Since it acknowledges the locality of literature and demands a nuanced historical exploration, it naturally moves beyond merely recognising commonalities among transnational literatures. Also, as a methodological approach it requires looking beyond aesthetic discussions to examine the complex power dynamics within the literary field (p. 67–68).

Both the Sinophone and the world literature approaches serve different purposes when applied to Taiwanese literature. Chiu positions the Sinophone approach as an epistemological concept and research method that challenges sinocentrism and Chineseness within the hierarchy of Chinese literary studies. However, her approach prefers a definition of literature written in the Sinitic script that is independent of the writer’s identity and ideological position. Sinophone Taiwanese literature thus implies two major paradigms: a transnational one regarding Taiwan’s Mahua literature (馬華文學, Literature written by Malaysian Chinese) and an indigenous one concerning indigenous literature. At the same time, this term has been instrumental in pushing forward “de-Sinicisation” in Western academia and questioning its tendency to consider Taiwan literature as a sub-category of Chinese literature (p. 72).

Chiu concludes this chapter by applying all three different approaches to the work of Taiwanese poet Yang Mu, demonstrating how each approach highlights different aspects of his work. She emphasises that the appropriate framework and research method depend on the specific study to be conducted, while all of them are useful in exploring Taiwan’s literature and connecting with different scholarly communities. The crucial goal is to “put Taiwan back on the world map” (把台灣放回世界) (p. 85).

The third chapter delves into the cosmopolitanism (世界感) inherent in Taiwanese literature, focusing largely on two groups: millennial writers and indigenous writers. Chiu examines three key collections by writers born in the 1980s, demonstrating how in a joint effort they consciously build literary capital

by acknowledging the Taiwanese literary tradition beyond the continuous appropriation of Chinese, Japanese, and Western literature practised by their predecessors.

Using three works as reference points – Yang Shuangzi’s novel *Seasons of Bloom* (花開時節), which blends time travel with historical fiction; the joint publication *Anecdotes of a Magnificent Island: the Key* (華麗島軼文: 鍵), which recreates well-known Taiwanese authors as fictional characters; and the collection *100 Years of Taiwan Literature: 1900–2000* (百年降生: 台灣文學故事 1900–2000), which maps the development of Taiwanese literature in the 20th century by arranging 101 stories chronologically, each devoted to a lesser-known but significant writer, literary work, genre, or literary community – Chiu shows that intergenerational intertextuality, largely absent in the writings of previous generations, is central to millennial writing. A dialogue with the “legacy of Taiwanese literature” (傳承台灣文學) is apparently at the core of millennial writing (p. 107). These writers employ localisation and Taiwan subjectivity while effortlessly drawing from world literary resources, making cosmopolitanism a main feature of their writing. Their self-conscious memorialising creation of afterlives for Taiwanese writers and their works grants Taiwan literature the authority needed to consecrate its writers.

Indigenous writing at first gained prominence in Taiwan’s literary scene as an expansion of the Indigenous movement in the early 1980s. Initially it focused on themes such as the search for roots, the revival of repressed and forgotten cultural practices, the reclamation of cultural heritage, and criticism of the dominant culture. In a world literary context, as Chiu points out, their writing was less concerned with de-Sinicisation but more with the reinvention of indigenous cultural tradition. From the 2000s onwards, however, their work increasingly started to go beyond the paradigm of indigenism, gradually extending to topics such as modernity, planetary awareness, ecocriticism on the one hand and experimenting with literary forms and borrowing from Western textual and visual art on the other.

Thus, what both groups share in common is the cosmopolitan disposition of their writing, which is deeply anchored in localised culture. Consequently, both need to be analysed in relation to the complexity of cosmopolitanism and with regard to their position in the local literary system. In a literary landscape so multilayered and steeped in serial colonialism, the question of dominant cultures becomes a question of positionality, depending on whom and when you ask, as well as who is asking. In conclusion, Chiu rhetorically asks whether choosing compromise over confrontation does signify co-optation or rather broadening the space for Taiwanese literature (p. 117).

Chapter Four showcases nature writer Wu Ming-Yi, as a successful example of “small literature” gaining international recognition beyond its place of production. Using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, Chiu demonstrates how Wu’s literature overcame what Casanova defines as the four obstacles of small literature: “poverty” (文學資本匱乏), “backwardness” (落後), “remoteness” (遙遠), and “invisibility” (能見度低). Chiu illustrates how Wu successfully navigated the three circuits as defined by Heilbron: first, his journey into the literary centre was supported by a government-backed “publishing Taiwan” strategy and cultural diplomacy that promoted him as a representative of Taiwanese literature (p. 129); second, translation rights for his novel *The Man with the Compound Eyes* (複眼人) were purchased by a British publishing house, leading to a tour across the US that

bolstered Wu's reputation as a promising writer; third, his next novel, *The Stolen Bicycle* (單車失竊記), was consequently long-listed for the Man Booker International Prize, thus gravitating towards world literature.

Chiu argues that Wu's works were not simply translated for transnational literary traffic but were re-composed for the target literary context in order to be regarded as possessing literary merit, a transformative process Casanova calls "littérisation" (文學化). Besides, Wu's work holds profound potential by addressing not only local environmental issues but also global concerns, by aligning with the "cult of nature".

His integration of local history and environmental issues with cosmopolitan memory and global ecocosmopolitanism, together with his employment of modern scientific knowledge to dispel the impression of backwardness and his use of magical realism techniques and familiar environmental themes, makes his literature accessible to an international audience.

At the same time, he benefited from academics, translators, and distributors joining forces with promotion efforts by the Taiwanese government for an efficient marketing strategy, making his works fit for transnational literary traffic and increasing its visibility.

Chiu reminds us that despite Wu's success, the sustainability of his recognition in world literature remains uncertain. Unsuccessful attempts at "worlding", such as the case of Zhang Ailing, represent the existing divergences of Chinese language literature in the world literary system that make transnational travel a difficult endeavour (p. 143-144). And, one might add, cases of successful worlding hardly affect or sustainably change the asymmetrical world literary system.

The final two chapters extend their inquiry beyond conventional print literature, examining the feasibility and limitations of transmedial artefacts such as the documentary *Le Moulin* (日曜日式散步者) by Ya-li Huang (2016). Revisiting world literature as a mode of reading and circulation, Chapter Five offers an instructive analysis of the filmic reconstruction of the Taiwanese modernist *Le Moulin Poetry Society* (風車詩社), a group of experimental poets in 1930s colonial Taiwan.

Chiu critically engages with transmedia concepts and the significant role of new media in fostering circulation within a world literary system. The core issue, however, lies in the apparent paradox this documentary creates for post-colonial and world literature approaches: set in the colonial era, it seemingly portrays these poets as lacking a critical engagement with their subjugated position, while highlighting their keen interest in and longing for world literature from the West, mainly by forging connections with French symbolism and modernism translated through the colonial metropolis (p. 164). Their positive search for inspiration from world literature and art through Japanese and Western modernism, in other words their lack of any critical awareness of their colonised mentality, disqualifies post-colonial and world literary approaches.

Predictably, the film received much criticism for harbouring an uncritical romantic nostalgia for the colonial period and fostering "Japanophilia" in line with other films and art products. Chiu however, argues that reducing the world literary space to a world political space misses the point. These poets

strongly believed in literature as a world-opening force, and their alignment with world literary trends was a form of connecting with the world. Thus, the documentary recreates these poets' fascination with the world-making power of literature and art, resisting the conflation of the literary with the political space.

Overall this chapter highlights the importance of non-print media in transforming and sustaining old literary texts as a form of rejuvenation and dissemination of cultural heritage. *Le Moulin* serves as case study on how the visualising of these influential but relatively unknown poets not only boosted a public interest but also allowed for a more efficient mode of circulation, relying not purely on linguistic but enjoying cross-medial translation.

The final chapter investigates new agents and the role of digital platforms in shaping international recognition of writers from “the republic of small literature” (小文學共和國). Using Taiwanese writer Li Ang as an example, Chiu evaluates different digital platforms as new agents of literary consecration. Most relevant is the Li Ang Archive (李昂數位主題館), created by her own academic institution to build a social memory and literary afterlife of this author and her work. Similar to traditional museums or archives, it showcases the writer's achievements and documents historical material as a kind of technical media record (科技媒介紀錄) (p. 185). As a digital platform, the archive forms a dynamic space that integrates digitised documents with digital recreations, applying tools such as TimeMapper and Timeline JS to create various perceptions of space and time (p. 186). Chiu presents statistical figures and charts generated by algorithms based on e-footprints that open up new directions in reception research.

As a non-profit and crowdsourced platform, Wikipedia emerges as the most prominent global platform for producing, disseminating, and sharing knowledge. Focusing on the changing public image of Li Ang, Chiu resorts to the archiving mechanism of Wikipedia that keeps track of the editing and revising process, revealing how entries have been written and rewritten over time.

She also consults the highly commercialised database Goodreads.com that implements machine learning to provide reader comments, ratings, and categorisations as well as personalised recommendations and book-sharing services. Chiu utilises sales figures and reader responses from this platform to measure international literary recognition. Through tagging, commenting, and search protocols, these readers play a crucial role in shaping the literary reputations of writers and their texts.

The *Global Path of Taiwanese Literature* rigorously surveys the rich multicultural and multilingual landscape of Taiwanese literature as a “small literature”, examining how it has adapted to and aligned with changing global literary trends and academic paradigms. Chiu approaches this with a playful yet inclusive methodology, uncovering the various roles and positions Taiwanese literature occupies in the world literary system. Utilising Casanova's framework as a theoretical foundation, she identifies the challenges faced by Taiwanese authors and the key success factors for accumulating literary capital, gaining international recognition, and moving from the literary periphery to the centre.

However, reading Taiwanese literature through the lens of a geocultural framework may have complicated the neat periphery versus centre, small literature versus world literature binary system; it approaches understanding literary practices as ways of claiming space that constantly shift, expand, and contract the “world” undergirding world literature. Through the lens of cosmopolitan-vernacular dynamics these geocultural practices affect the construction of spaces in multifarious ways, making world literature emerge not as a static entity or “small literature’s” Other but as a shifting stage for symbolic claims on space (Bo Ekelund, 2021).

While Chiu maintains an admirably critical stance toward the colonising effects of theoretical frameworks imposed on Taiwanese literature but originating elsewhere, she is less critical of government-sponsored promotion of translation, research, and the institutionalisation of Taiwanese literature through education, museums, festivals, and prizes. What happens when Taiwanese authors respond by producing texts that cater to international tastes? When AI-generated texts start to dominate commercialised, algorithm-based platforms? World literature is a double-edged sword; like soft power, it comes with a price. Thus worlding “small literature” is one way of relating to the world, while its provincialisation signifies either a pendulum swing back or simply another mode of engaging in the world literary system.

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