

Concentric: Literary and Cultural Studies 49.1
March 2023: 127-151
DOI: 10.6240/concentric.lit.202303_49(1).0009

Reconstructing Taiwanese Indigenous Literary History

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Abstract

Although Taiwanese Indigenous literature has a long history, the first monograph to consider it, Pasuya Poiconu's (浦忠成) *Literary History of Taiwanese Indigenous Peoples*, was not published until 2009. This book represents a significant attempt at deconstructing Chinese/Taiwanese literary history while simultaneously constructing a pan-Indigenous literary history. How might we understand the dual implications of construction and deconstruction at play in Indigenous literature as formulated by Poiconu? What specific historical conditions shaped its emergence? What is its relationship to Taiwan literature? How is Indigenous literature presented as an organic whole? How does chronology become a transformative element in the writing of Indigenous literary history? To answer these questions, this study begins with a basic overview of "literary history" as a concept, followed by an analysis of the innovations and limitations of the theories and methodologies at play in Poiconu's *Literary History of Taiwanese Indigenous Peoples*.

Keywords

Taiwanese Indigenous literature, Taiwanese Indigenous peoples, Taiwanese Indigenous literary history, Taiwan literature, literary history

Taiwanese Indigenous literature is both ancient and emergent. Over thousands of years, Taiwanese Indigenous peoples have created rich oral traditions of songs, myths, and legends, the origins and performance of which are intimately linked with various labor, ritual, and natural life cycles. The written form of Indigenous literature, however, is a phenomenon of the last century. What's more, writings from an Indigenous standpoint about Indigenous life and the experiences of colonization (present and historical) only emerged in the last half-century. Given these circumstances, the first Taiwanese Indigenous literary history, *Literary History of Taiwanese Indigenous Peoples* (hereafter *Peoples*), written by Cou scholar Pasuya Poiconu (浦忠成), was not published until 2009. To better understand this book's significance, I will begin with an exploration of the meanings of "Indigenous" and "literary history."

First, "Taiwanese Indigenous peoples" as a term of collective identification only gained official recognition in the 1990s after years of social advocacy by Indigenous rights groups. Thus, "Taiwanese Indigenous peoples" is a contingently constructed ethnicity and identity. Second, "literary history" in the early 2000s was a concept deeply shaped by the 1990s movement to rewrite Taiwan's literary histories. This entailed a shift away from national grand narratives toward a focus on minorities and marginalized subjects—for example, literary histories constructed around particular gender, sexual, place-based, ethnic, or subcultural affiliations.¹ In other words, the publication of *Peoples* is significant precisely because it represented an attempt at both constructing a pan-Indigenous literary history and deconstructing Chinese/Taiwanese literary history. It marks the moment when Taiwanese Indigenous literature refused to be seen simply as a "subsidiary" of "Taiwanese literary history" and instead established its own autonomous one.

How might we understand the dual implications of construction and deconstruction at play in Taiwanese Indigenous literature? What specific historical conditions shaped the construction of this literature? How did Indigenous literature come to be viewed as an organic whole? What types of chronologies are at play in the process of writing its literary history? What is its relationship to Taiwan literature? To answer these questions, we must consider the strengths and limitations of current theorizations of the writing of Indigenous literary history.

¹ See, for example, the literary histories constructed around "women," "queerness," "place," and "language," such as Lin; Chi; Liao; and Png.

Establishing Literary History: Premises

Although literary histories can be conceptualized through diverse frameworks, they are built on some common premises. A given literary history is typically organized around the presupposition of a “suprapersonal entity” of the literature, such as genre, nation, language, religion, social class, or historical ethos (e.g., classicism or Romanticism). To speak of a particular literary history is to assume a set of shared characteristics among member works, the development of which can (retrospectively) be mapped chronologically (Perkins 2-3). Most literary histories coalesce around the name of a nation, such as British, French, or Chinese literary history. Such nomenclature implies the assumption of a unified literary language and culture as well as a developmental concept of literature written from the viewpoint of a distinct ethnic group, nation, or region. Such literary histories aim to capture the literary and intellectual life of nations or ethnic groups over time.

Hence, the emergence of literary history must be understood in relation to the rise of the modern nation-state and competition among nations. In early nineteenth-century Europe, Friedrich Schlegel created literary history in the modern sense with the publication of *Geschichte der europäischen Literatur* (1803-04) and *Geschichte der alten und neueren Literatur* (1815), which consider European and ancient/modern literatures, respectively. Later, Schlegel attempted to account for Hebrew, Persian, and Hindi literature, arguing that national literatures could only be comprehended through comparison with larger totalities (Neubauer 7-8). In other words, the establishment of a national literary history is the result of dialectical relations with the literatures of other nations. Regarding the development of literary history, Hans Robert Jauss comments:

The cohesion of literary phenomena was to be mediated by the concept of national individuality. Only from the nation's individuality, immediate to God, could the series of works derive its direction and destination. Politically, this expectation responded in the nineteenth century to the striving for national unification and international competition. It is in this context that literary history achieved its greatest significance. (qtd. in Webster 29)

The establishment of a national literature entails complex negotiations between homogeneity and heterogeneity, wherein the literature is unified by constructing internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity, that is, its specificity vis-à-vis other

national literatures. National literary histories aim to narrate, in an uninterrupted timeline, the trajectory of the national literature's growth and development as a means of establishing its "uniqueness," thus producing real content to fill the category of "national culture." Nationalist literary historiographies share the primary assumption that a nation existed prior to the writing of national literary history, a notion used to support a secondary assumption that changes or developments in the literature are consistent with the nation's unique characteristics.

Although literary history seems to concern only specific nations, it exists in the dialogue between and among nations or ethnic groups. For example, the author of *Histoire de la Littérature Anglaise* (trans. *History of English Literature*, 1872), Hippolyte Taine, is French. The earliest Chinese literary history, *Outlines of Chinese Literary History*, was published by a Russian scholar, V. P. Vasiliev, in 1880 (Li 92-95), while *Literary History of China* was written by Japanese scholar Sasakawa Taneo in 1898 (Dai 1). Thus, "Chinese literature" was established as a national literature prior to the writing of nationalist literary histories in Chinese.

As Hans Robert Jauss and Elizabeth Benzinger remind us, the writing of literary history differs from political, social, or economic history. Causal relationships and measures of continuity between literary works are often ambiguous, broken, or even irrelevant (11). Therefore, questions of how to select canonical works and how to demonstrate their significance and intertextual relationships are left to literary historians' subjective judgments, which are inevitably shaped by their ideological, historical, and aesthetic biases. Thus, the writing of literary history isn't simply a matter of conveying an accurate understanding of history, it also involves, and can only be accomplished through, the institutions of literary criticism—through the selection, appreciation, analysis, understanding, and interpretation of literary works (Wellek 20). Taking these two factors into account, the literary historian searches for and provisionally establishes the causal relationships between literary works and their contexts, thus determining their historical positionality. Therefore, literary historiography must account for the viewpoints of literary historians within the historical context of literary composition and publishing, criticism, and reader reception.

In reflecting on the writing of literary history, postmodern and deconstructionist theories from the 1970s forward critically interrogated the grand narratives that had previously been used to construct literary histories, and their claims to "truth" and "objectivity" were forever shaken. Jean-François Lyotard, for instance, argued against ideas of "unity" and "universality" in the Western tradition. He especially questioned the grand narratives' assumption of the transhistorical continuity of

literary themes. In the globalized, multiethnic, multicultural present of the late twentieth century, these notions had lost credibility.

Lyotard values heterogeneity and diversity, arguing that more attention should be paid to localized, minor narratives (*petits récits*) to complicate and replace the grand ones. Postmodernism, with its penchant for deconstructing master narratives, thus had a massive impact on the writing of literary histories. The notion of literary histories as coalescing around a monoethnic, monolingual nation-state lost its luster, to be replaced by a concern for the literary histories of sub-national communities and marginalized subjects. However, the question remained as to how these previously marginalized or emergent communities would approach the problem of writing their own literary histories. Linda Hutcheon argues that national literary histories premised on a unique, monolithic historical and philosophical tradition are out-of-step with the complex and interrelated social contexts of the present. Despite this, minority and emergent groups often cannot avoid going through the process of constructing a national literary history as a means of self-advocacy. Therefore, Hutcheon advocates an interventionist approach to the writing of literary histories: challenging mainstream literary histories and writing the literary history of one's own group in dialogue with other literary histories (401-17).

To summarize, the establishment of a literary history assumes the a priori existence of the literature in question as a discrete entity. Second, disparate works, writers, and literary events are connected only through the scholar's application of a historical, ideological, or critical perspective. Third, the writing of postcolonial and minority groups' literary histories often mix deconstructive approaches with strategic essentialism to counter colonial narratives and assert previously marginalized subjectivities. The following sections examine how these processes are evident in the writing of Taiwanese Indigenous literary history.

The Role of Indigenous Peoples in the Establishment of Taiwanese Literary History

Before the island of Taiwan came under Japanese colonial rule in 1895, it had already been partially occupied by many other maritime powers and settled by large members of ethnically Han people from Mainland China. As a result, a diversity of languages and peoples have been present on the island throughout recorded history. However, with the advent of Japanese colonization, as Taiwan became more systematically integrated into the modern nation-state system, literature gained increasing political significance as a medium for constructing national identity.

Although literary activities in this period were carried out in both Chinese and Japanese scripts, Japanese literary historians were among the first scholars to construct the literary history of Taiwan.

For instance, Shimada Kinji (島田謹二), who served as an English lecturer at Taihoku Imperial University from 1929 to 1945 before becoming one of the founders of comparative literature in Japan, believed that literary history should be an academic subject and viewed literary criticism as a crucial part of literary history. In “Southern Island Literary History” (南島文学志 *Nantō bungakushi*), Shimada reflects on the definition and scope of Taiwan literature (臺灣文学 *Taiwan bungaku*):

How should we define so-called “Taiwan Literature”? The literature of a nation is defined in the academy as the literature established under the premise of the existence of a continuous and unified language and nation; such as the well-known Japanese, Greek, Roman, French, and British literature. Each reflects the uniqueness and specificity of the nation’s literature. However, Taiwan Literature does not meet the criteria to be in the same category as these great nations. (58)

Although “Taiwan Literature” (臺灣文学) as a term was generally accepted, it was inadmissible within a nationalist literary framework of world literature in that it did not refer to the literature of a specific nation or ethnic group. Shimada defines “Taiwan Literature” as literature created in Taiwan and literature about Taiwan (58). Under these two conditions, “Taiwan” (臺灣) refers to a geographical region, irrespective of ethnic and cultural identity. However, if the geographic definition of “Taiwan Literature” were further analyzed through the frameworks of national literature mentioned above, it would include segments of several national literatures (58). Shimada viewed Taiwan as a land where many different ethnic groups and nations convened throughout history. As Taiwan had been occupied by several nations in the past, Shimada believed that Taiwan literature should include the literature of those nations and ethnic groups. Shimada’s view on Taiwan literature has been criticized by contemporary scholars for devaluing Taiwan’s unique cultural subjectivity and for suggesting that Taiwan literature is simply a “composite of foreign colonial cultures” (Liu 53). However, it is worth remembering that Shimada’s definition of “Taiwan Literature” was limited by the way “literary history” carried with it the assumptions of a monolingual, monoethnic national literature, and therefore it could not be easily applied to multilingual, multiethnic, colonial situations.

Following the framework of “Taiwan Literature” described above, Shimada

chronologically examines the literature of “Indigenous” peoples across Taiwan: the Spanish in northern Taiwan, the Dutch in southern Taiwan, Koxinga’s administration (Koxinga was of mixed Chinese-Japanese descent), the Han settler society under the Qing Dynasty, the French and British travelers to Taiwan during the second half of the nineteenth century, and the Japanese after 1895. In his place-based framework, these ethnic groups—both colonizers and colonized—are all afforded constitutive roles in the making of Taiwanese literary history. He thus evaluates the literary works produced by members of these various ethnic groups based on their relation to Taiwan. As for the origins of Taiwanese literary history, while Shimada admits that Indigenous peoples (*Takasago*) have been the longest residents of Taiwan, he believes that their myths, legends, and songs, though complex and profound, do not meet the criteria of literature. Therefore, he excludes Indigenous peoples from his literary history, viewing their oral literature as a “prototype of literature” and relegating their study to the domains of “archaeology or folklore” (59). Shimada believes that literary works must be expressed in written form and reach a certain level of “civilization” to be considered “serious literature.” This narrow definition of literature justified the exclusion of Taiwanese Indigenous people’s oral traditions from the category of literature.

Although Shimada adopts a narrow definition of literature, he defines the ethnic groups that compose Taiwan literature loosely. He consistently characterizes Taiwan as a place where many different types of nations aggregated, creating a microcosm of world literature and a superb field site for experimental and comparative literary research. Shimada’s version of literary history has several notable features. First, its historical perspective is generally consistent with that of the Japanese mainstream, in which the violence of colonial encounters is obscured by an image of Taiwan as a place where diverse ethnic groups simply aggregate. Shimada uses such logic to argue that because Western European countries became connected to Taiwan through their colonial and mercantile pursuits, and their literature introduced to Taiwan through globalization, European frameworks could serve as a model for constructing Taiwanese literary history. Such conclusions indicate that he had no intention of pursuing an in-depth, critical analysis of the very colonial and mercantile pursuits and hegemonic competition that underlie the (inter)nationalization of literature. However, his definition interestingly allows for the expansion of Taiwan’s geographic and ethnic borders to the global level through the inclusion of “world literature” within Taiwan’s literary canon. Additionally, although Shimada includes the literature of the Han people, the most populous ethnic group in Taiwan, he depreciates their works through his literary criticism and excludes Indigenous works

altogether by suggesting they don't count as literature.

Ironically, the literary activities of Indigenous peoples were also overlooked in subsequent literary histories written by Han scholars. In 1943, Te-shih Huang (黃得時 *Ng Tit-si*) published a series of articles entitled “*Taiwan bungakushi*” (台灣文學史 “Taiwan’s Literary History”). They are regarded as the first works of their kind to take the literature of “Taiwanese people” as their subject. However, Huang’s portrayals of Indigenous peoples rely solely on accounts by Han writers.² Therefore, the literatures of Indigenous peoples are scarcely mentioned in Taiwanese literary histories written by Japanese and Han authors before World War II. This neglect persisted after the war, when Taiwan was “restored” to China and the “Taiwan Literature” widely acknowledged by Taiwanese and Japanese intellectuals under Japanese rule was reconfigured as a branch of Chinese Literature. In the immediate post-war period, as “Taiwan Literature” ceased to be a viable category, the existence of Taiwanese Indigenous literature was out of the question.

However, beginning in the late 1970s, with the rise of movements for democracy and “Taiwanese Consciousness,” the phrase “Taiwan Literature” reappeared. The pursuit of a literary history with “Taiwanese people” as subjects was also revisited. Critics and writers seeking to distinguish Taiwan from China deemed it necessary to emphasize the uniqueness of Taiwan and interpret it as an internally unified entity. The first Taiwanese literary history in the post-war era written from a Taiwan-centered perspective, Shih-tao Ye’s (葉石濤) “An Introduction to the History of Nativist Literature in Taiwan” (臺灣鄉土文學史導論 “*Taiwan xiangtu wenxue shi daolun*”) introduces “Taiwanese Consciousness” as “the common experience of the Chinese living in Taiwan, and such experiences are nothing more than being colonized and oppressed” and views it as the core spirit of Taiwanese literature (69). Ye’s definition of “Taiwanese Consciousness” was taken up by later scholars, becoming a key concept in Taiwanese literary history. At present, Fang-ming Chen’s (陳芳明) *A History of Modern Taiwanese Literature* (臺灣新文學史 *Taiwan xinwenxue shi*) is the most extensive of such works. Chen uses colonial and postcolonial periodizations to analyze and interpret Taiwan’s literary history. To a large extent, he also follows Ye’s approach, adopting “Taiwanese Consciousness” as his central historical lens.

² Huang only mentions Indigenous peoples briefly and sporadically. For example, he mentions that if one wants to study Indigenous cultural practices, Yonghe Yu’s (郝永河) *Account of the Fan Barbarians* is a must-read (104). He also directs his readers to Dingyuan Lan’s (藍鼎元) “Two Poems from Taiwan” and Shujing Huang’s (黃叔璥) collection of twenty-four *Odes to the Fan* as exemplary poetic works featuring Taiwanese Indigenous peoples.

The term “Taiwanese Consciousness” as employed by Ye clearly refers only to Han Taiwanese. Although he also traces Taiwanese Indigenous peoples’ literary histories, he still emphasizes Taiwan literature’s connection with Mainland China. He writes, “From Changbin Man and Zuozhen Man of the Paleolithic Era to those peoples of the Neolithic Era who dwelled in the mountains and plains, this race of people originated from the Chinese mainland” (“An Introduction” 68). The Chinese literary historians opposed to “Taiwanese Consciousness” also emphasize the relationship between Taiwan and Mainland China. For instance, in his *Concise Taiwanese Literary History* (簡明臺灣文學史 *Jianming Taiwan wenxue shi*), Ji-tang Gu (古繼堂) claims: “All the residents living on Taiwan Island are immigrants from Mainland China at different historical periods. The mountain Indigenous Peoples on Taiwan Island are the first immigrants from Mainland China. . . . The rise of Taiwan literature is thus fundamentally a transplant of Chinese Mainland literature” (11-12).

Admittedly, there is no consensus on the origin and migration history of Indigenous peoples in Taiwan. However, a tendency to view Mainland China as the origin of the ancestors of Indigenous peoples was common in the historical interpretations of Han scholars during the 1970s. As described by Shu-mei Shih (史書美), “The Indigenous peoples are viewed as the ancestors of immigrants (the Han people) regardless of their history. In this way, the Han people justifiably became their successors, as well as the legal heir of the Island” (77). Ye later states that Taiwan literature became more variegated with the addition of Indigenous literature before blossoming in the democratic era into a literary culture characterized by diversity (qtd. in Peng, *Listen* 94). However, Taiwanese Indigenous literatures were undeniably neglected in literary histories written by Han authors.

Formation of Indigenous Literature and its Relationship to Taiwan Literature

In the shadow of Japanese and Chinese literatures, Taiwan literature has struggled to gain recognition. However, Indigenous literature has often been doubly marginalized in this struggle. In other words, the writing of literary history in the name of “Taiwan” has been largely Han-centric. Although the writing of Taiwanese literary history is defensible as an anti-colonial action, it is simultaneously complicit in the ongoing colonization of Taiwanese Indigenous peoples. The causes of such negligence are many and complex. While a lack of reflection on the part of Han scholars may be one of the reasons, another fundamental issue is that at the time when the literature of Han-Taiwanese was being discursively formulated as Taiwan

literature, parallel arguments for Taiwanese Indigenous literature were still inchoate. To be more specific, despite the existence of Indigenous literary phenomena, they were not fully perceived or acknowledged as part of literary traditions with the right to their own histories.

Like the rise of Taiwan literature, the emergence of “Indigenous Literatures in Taiwan” has been the outcome of a series of political and social struggles. Beginning in the 1980s, with the rise of Taiwanese democratic activism and a global push for Indigenous cultural revivals, Taiwanese Indigenous peoples became involved in a combination of activism and writing linked to the articulation of their literatures. In particular, the Taiwan Association for the Promotion of Indigenous Rights (臺灣原住民族權利促進會 *Taiwan yuanzhu minzu quanli cujinhui*), established in Taipei in 1984, was the first organization to mobilize the pan-Indigenous population in Taiwan, launching a minority rights movement on their behalf (Hsieh 76). This Association effectively initiated public discussions about the status of Indigenous peoples in Taiwan, thus raising self-awareness. Also, the publication of literary works and reporting by and about Indigenous peoples became more common, and the first generation of Indigenous writers, such as Tuobasi Tamapima (田雅各/拓拔斯·塔瑪匹瑪), Walis Nokan (吳俊傑/瓦歷斯·諾幹), and Syaman Rapongan (施努來/夏曼·藍波安) began to receive literary awards. These writers attracted public attention by participating in protests for Indigenous rights and promoting ethnic self-awareness in their works. In the early 1990s, Indigenous literature entered a period of burgeoning growth, with the 1993 establishment of the Shanghai Culture Magazine Agency (山海文化雜誌社 *Shanghai wenhua zazhishi*) marking the beginning of a movement to explicitly construct and defend “Taiwanese Indigenous Literature” as a distinct category.

Interestingly, the Indigenous literature advocated for at the time was not defined by Indigenous peoples but by Han writers. In the late 1980s, Chin-fa Wu (吳錦發) compiled *Miserable Forests* (悲情山林 *Beiqing Shanlin*, 1987) and *Willing to Marry a Mountain Man* (願嫁山地郎 *Yuan jia shandi lang*, 1989). These books refer to the literature of Indigenous peoples as “mountain novels,” “mountain prose,” and “mountain literature.” However, in *Discussions on Modern Literature of Indigenous Peoples in Taiwan* (論臺灣原住民現代文學 *Lun Taiwan yuanzhumin xiandai wenxue*, 1989), edited by Wu, the term “Indigenous literature” was used for the first time. Note that although the term “Indigenous peoples” can be traced to the Japanese colonial era (原住民, げんじゅうみん, *genjūmin*), it was not recognized officially in Taiwan until 1994, when it was approved by vote at the National Assembly in response to a petition by the Taiwan Association for the Promotion of Indigenous

Rights. Only then was the patronizing and derogatory term “mountain compatriots” (山地同胞 *shandi tongbao*) formally changed to “Indigenous peoples.” In 1997, the legal status and right to political participation for Indigenous peoples were enshrined in Article 10 of the Additional Articles of the Constitution of the Republic of China (Hsu, “Yuanzhumin” 176).

“Indigenous peoples” was strategically deployed by activists to promote pan-Indigenous solidarity. However, Taiwan’s Indigenous population is composed of many different ethnic groups further categorizable by geographic homeland, such as the mountains, plains, or outlying islands. Not only are Indigenous peoples distinguished according to their living environments, but their languages and cultures also differ significantly. Their conceptual unification into a pan-Indigenous whole is premised on shared experiences of cultural, social, economic, and political oppression under colonization. Indigenous activists collectively agreed on the Chinese term “*yuanzhu minzu*” (原住民族, literally “original ethnic inhabitants” and equivalent to the English “Indigenous peoples”) as a means of publicly asserting their agency and right to political representation as the earliest occupants of this land (Hsu, “Ruoshi” 214). Thus, this term was established to emphasize a common experience of colonization, an implied confrontation with and resistance to settler colonialism, and a discursive restoration of Indigenous peoples as the rightful stewards of Taiwan.

In this sense, “Indigenous peoples” is a new identity determined both legislatively and administratively by the state, making Indigenous literature a type of emergent literature yet to be fully codified but being constructed in relationship to a national literature. During the process of canon formation, literary awards play an important role in defining Indigenous literature. In 1992, the Mountain Compatriot Art Festival (山胞藝術季 *shanbao yishu ji*), established by private and governmental organizations, subjectively defined and influenced the composition and interpretation of Indigenous literatures, genres, and writers for the first time (Wei 308). The Shanhai Literary Award (山海文學獎 *shanghai wenzue jiang*), founded in 1995, further defined Indigenous literature by setting qualifications for nominees, languages, and genres. Eligible nominees were “Indigenous People, including those with half-Indigenous lineage (either paternal or maternal) with a passion for literary creation” (Ministry of Culture). The scope of literary languages was expanded to include works written in romanizations of Indigenous languages, multilingual works, and works written in Chinese. Moreover, in addition to short stories, essays, and poetry, two additional categories, “Tribal Histories of Traditional Literature” (傳統文學類部落史 *chuantong wenzue lei buluo shi*) and “Native Language Writing” (母語創作 *muyu chuanguo*), were created to accommodate Indigenous literature’s generic diversity.

Like those literatures that take a nation or an ethnic group as their subject, Taiwanese Indigenous literature has to unify itself internally and defend its uniqueness from Han-Taiwanese literature to gain recognition. Given that the rise of Indigenous literature is a part of Indigenous rights movements, works selected for canonization have tended to be those featuring “decolonialization” and “resistance.” As the Indigenous writer Walis Nokan stated in the early 1990s, “the themes of literary works currently presented by Indigenous writers are mainly the transformation of Indigenous society and the contradictions, struggles, and ultimate fate of Indigenous society on the land of Taiwan” (“Yua”). This statement is significantly similar to Ye’s definition of Taiwan literature in that the establishment of Indigenous literature is premised upon the existence of “Indigenous Peoples” and an “Indigenous Consciousness.” In other words, a shared anti-colonial, resistant impetus is what allows Indigenous literature to appear as an organic entity. Thus, the relationship between Indigenous and Han literature has been constructed as one of both continued dialogue and mutual opposition.

The boom in the publication of Indigenous literature was accompanied by a vibrant discussion on how to establish an Indigenous literary history. A prominent focus of these debates is Indigenous literature’s relationship to (and/or place within) Taiwanese literary history. As Yi-Chun Wei (魏怡君) states, such a relationship can be summarized into two forms: “co-constituted historiography” (共構入史 *gong gou ru shi*) and “self-constituted historiography” (自築入史 *zi zhu ru shi*) (59). The former supports interrelated and increased interaction between Indigenous literature and Taiwan literature, while the latter advocates for the establishment of an “autonomous field of Indigenous Literature” to ensure Indigenous peoples have a literary history with themselves as subjects (59-64). Admittedly, the “fusion” emphasized by “co-constitutive historiography” may be a trap whereby including a minority ethnic group’s literature within the national literary history may paradoxically perpetuate its marginalization, particularly when the significance of minority works cannot be adequately evaluated according to the aesthetic criteria of mainstream literature. That said, “self-constituted historiography” is by no means a perfect alternative, as it may easily overlook the dialectical relation between mainstream and minority literature.

An examination of several of the most representative works of Taiwanese literary history reveals that when they touch on Indigenous literary history at all, it tends to be via a framework of historical co-constitution—but none of them are adequate. Indeed, the most comprehensive Taiwanese literary history to date, Chen’s 800-page magnum opus *A History of Modern Taiwanese Literature*, only devotes nine

pages to Indigenous literature (630-39). Although it does contain an overview of the historical experiences of Taiwan's Indigenous peoples from the Qing dynasty to the Japanese Colonial and Republican periods, it is only to make a record of Indigenous literature as one of the "fringe voices" that emerged in the 1980s literary movements. As an "emergent literature," Indigenous literature was thus relegated to a supplemental position, the purpose of which was simply to attest to the "diversity" of Taiwan literature. Only as Indigenous literature began to delineate its own history could it lay claim to historical co-construction.

In addition to the above-mentioned monographs, the *Taiwan Literature: English Translation Series* edited by Kuo-ch'ing Tu (杜國清) takes "Aboriginal Literature in Taiwan" as the theme of its third issue. Tu's Foreword to the volume is one of the first sources on Taiwanese Indigenous literature written in English. According to Tu, "aboriginal literature in Taiwan" refers to "literary works with the theme or subject matter related to the life, culture, thoughts, and feelings of the aboriginal peoples in Taiwan, regardless of whether the author is a Han Chinese or an aborigine" (xv). Here it is evident that so-called "Aboriginal literature" is not limited to literature written by Indigenous peoples. Furthermore, Tu divides "aboriginal literature in Taiwan" into three phases: the first is oral literature in the form of myths, legends, and ballads passed down from generation to generation; the second encompasses literature written by Japanese or Han Taiwanese; while the third comprises post-1980 literary works written in Chinese by Aboriginal writers (i.e., those written in Chinese by Aboriginal writers with a distinct ethnic and cultural consciousness). Tu further distinguishes between four factors of specific significance that can be found in Taiwanese Aboriginal literature, the first referring to the notion that Indigenous peoples "make up what has been missing in Taiwan Literature" and "have made the vocabulary and syntax of Chinese more varied" (xvii). He then asserts that Aboriginal literature "has expanded the range of time and space in Taiwan Literature" and "demonstrate[s] most eloquently the particularities of Taiwan Literature that are different from Chinese Literature in general" (xviii). Here, Tu uses a co-constitutive framework to construct the relationship between Taiwanese Indigenous literature and Taiwan literature, with "Indigenous" instrumentalized as a means of expanding the borders of and adding diversity to Taiwan literature.

John Balcom's *Indigenous Writers of Taiwan* (2005) was also one of the first translated anthologies of Taiwanese Indigenous literature. It comprises English translations of original works by Indigenous writers. While Balcom provides a fifteen-page introduction about the history of the Indigenous peoples of Taiwan, a mere four pages are devoted to the literature itself. His classification of the history of

Taiwanese Indigenous literature follows Tu's model. However, he also quotes Wu and refers to “*shandi wenxue*” (山地文學) and “*yuanzhu minzu wenxue*” (原住民族文學) as “Aboriginal literature” and “Indigenous literature,” respectively.

Although brief accounts of Indigenous literary history appear in the introductions of other anthologies and reference works, they tend to focus on a select group of the most successful Indigenous authors in the post-1980s period, such as Tuobasi Tamapima, Walis Nokan, and Syaman Rapongan. Thus, they fall short of constructing systematic historical and temporal frameworks for understanding Taiwanese Indigenous literature and fail to sufficiently cover the diversity among Taiwanese Indigenous peoples.³

Literary History of Taiwan Indigenous Peoples

Although the discursive construction of Indigenous literary history has been an ongoing process, the 2009 publication of Pasuya Poiconu's *Peoples* marked a decisive turning point. Poiconu's analysis proceeds from the following questions: how is Indigenous literature constructed as an organic whole? What temporal concerns are at play in the process? How does one articulate a relationship between Indigenous literature and Taiwan literature? As the first Indigenous literary history, *Peoples* is a strikingly capacious work. Published in two volumes totaling over 1,200 pages, it far outstrips the length of Ye's 350-page *A History of Taiwan Literature* and Chen's 800-page *A History of Modern Taiwanese Literature*. That the first volume of Taiwanese Indigenous literary history should be so formidable in scope is indicative of Poiconu's dedication to such a project.

Before the publication of this volume, Poiconu completed an immense amount of preliminary research, including the publication of the influential article “What is Indigenous Literature?”, which proposes a four-fold definition of Indigenous literature based on factors including the identity of the author, the languages used,

³ Other works worthy of mention include Palabang; H. Huang; and Chen's “Taiwan Indigenous Literature: Crossing the Language Boundaries.” However, these sources are mostly of an introductory nature, and their accounts of Taiwanese Indigenous literature mostly begin with the publication of literary works by Indigenous authors in Mandarin during the post-1980s era. Thus, they are less concerned with the construction of Indigenous literary history as such. Other volumes of literary history, such as Wang's *Taiwan: cong wenxue kan lishi* and *A New Literary History of Modern China* only briefly mention Taiwanese Indigenous literature rather than attempting to discursively construct it. Although an in-depth analysis of these works is outside the scope of the present study, I would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers for bringing these sources to my attention.

and the presence or absence of an Indigenous Consciousness:

The narrowest definition: an Indigenous author, writing in an Indigenous language, about Indigenous themes, from an Indigenous perspective. Slightly broader: an Indigenous author, writing in Chinese, or another language, from an Indigenous perspective. Even broader: an Indigenous author, writing in Chinese or other languages, not necessarily displaying Indigenous Consciousness. Broadest definition, an author without an Indigenous identity writing about Indigenous peoples or cultures. (190)

In *Peoples*, Poiconu doesn't include literature from the final, "broadest" category. In other words, Indigenous identity is an essential condition for the construction of Indigenous literary history. Also, as described above, in the Taiwanese context "Indigenous" represents many different ethnic identities. Thus, as the book's title emphasizes, it is a literary history of a pluralized Indigenous peoples. Taiwanese Indigenous literature therefore differs from Taiwan literature in that the former differentiates itself based on the identity of the author, while the latter can be defined by place (literature written in or about Taiwan), ethnicity (literature of Taiwan's peoples), or language (literature written in Taiwan's languages).

Of course, the reason these plural ethnic groups can become a unified "community" or "totality" is because of shared historical experiences and trajectories of development, namely, various foreign powers using "civilization" as an excuse for their colonial governance of Indigenous peoples and theft of Indigenous lands. Given that these collective experiences of dispossession are a prerequisite for the emergence of "Indigeneity" as a unifying category, reversing these processes by reclaiming the right to interpret "civilization" and recovering a sense of authority and confidence when it comes to the practice and transmission of Indigenous values is also a core motivation behind the writing of Indigenous literary history.

Thus, unlike a typical ethnonational literary history, Indigenous literary history doesn't begin with its first written works of literature. Instead, it must look for the sources of its precolonial traditions as they existed before contact with external literary cultures. These include various oral traditions, including myths and songs. Poiconu thus divides Indigenous literary history into two segments: the "Oral Period" and "Indigenous Literature after the Adoption of Writing," each of which is afforded its own volume of approximately equal length. Oral sources are primarily recorded directly from elders or reconstructed from the written records of Dutch, Spanish, Qing,

and Japanese officials (*Peoples* 18-20). The inclusion of myths, legends, and songs into literary history is significant in that it takes material that was once relegated to the domain of anthropology (Shimada's "archeology" or "folklore") and places it formally within the realm of literature. This strategy expands the scope of Indigenous literature and provides a basis for the connection between the literatures of various Indigenous groups.

As oral history leaves behind no textual traces and has no definitive time of inscription, its inclusion in literary history mandates a break from the linear chronological structures that histories of textual literary traditions typically adopt.

Seeing as myths, legends, and songs lack a clear temporal setting, to include them in literary history, one must break down temporal chronologies and barriers between different Indigenous groups, instead grouping works of different Indigenous peoples according to similar motifs.⁴ Given that Taiwanese Indigenous peoples historically were spread across Taiwan and outlying islands and thus had only limited contact with each other, it follows that their myths and legends differ significantly. However, by grouping them according to shared motifs, they can be successfully integrated into an organic entity under a broader framework of "Indigeneity."

According to Poiconu, the inclusion of myths, legends, and oral literature is based on "an assumption of existence," which "constructs a past that accords with our contemporary understandings of Indigenous experience" (23). The motivation behind this is not only to extend the historical scope of Indigenous literary history but also to reconstruct and reimagine living traditions, which can serve pedagogical functions and be passed on to future generations. This teleological approach follows some of the basic frameworks for the construction of a national literary history. In his Introduction, Poiconu reflexively addresses the issue of metanarratives in the construction of literary history as follows:

Before engaging in the compilation and articulation of literary history, questions such as "do [Indigenous peoples] have a literary tradition?" and "what are the tools or media with which [their literary tradition] is constructed?" will be [subject to debate]. Furthermore, when it comes to the issue of literary historical subjectivity, the essential question is "do [Indigenous peoples] have their own autonomous perspective?"

⁴ These motifs include the creation of heaven and earth, the great floods, the establishment of clans and villages, mythical and supernatural persons, wars between Indigenous groups, relations between people, animals, and plants, etc.

(8)⁵

After all, as Poiconu acknowledges, the composition of literary history is not just a matter of categorizing the literary texts and events of the past; rather, it is an undertaking that emerges from our need for a coherent historical tradition in the present. To construct a tradition through a conscious engagement with historical materials is to allow “the past to connect with the present” and “to intimately connect with those who came before us” (23). Through such a process, the scholar’s historical ethos plays a key role in the selection and arrangement of materials.

With the onset of the era of colonial contact and exploration, the non-linear chronology of the “Oral Period” covered in the first volume is interrupted, and Indigenous literature is brought into the realm of linear, historical time. Poiconu describes such a shift as follows:

There was a time when Indigenous Peoples lived according to the natural cycles of the sun and moon, in an environment secluded from other peoples in the surrounding world . . . then, the era of maritime trade brought their secluded lifeways to an abrupt end and set in motion the processes by which they would be dispossessed of their sovereignty. (522-23)

This statement is quite similar to those made by Shimada because it traces Taiwan’s written history back to the period of maritime trade rather than the moment of first contact with Han peoples. Poiconu thus summarizes the written records of Indigenous peoples left behind by the Dutch, Spanish, Estonian, French, and Japanese as marking their entrance into written literary traditions. More importantly, he makes a point of compiling sources in which Indigenous peoples offer accounts of themselves in order to provide their perspectives on historical events oft recounted by colonizers. This represents a formidable effort at constructing history from an Indigenous perspective, one that challenges mainstream Han narratives, which often use the Koxinga era as the starting point of Taiwanese literary history. Poiconu deconstructs Taiwanese literary history as seen from a Han perspective, offering an alternative starting point from which to conceptualize the various literary histories of Taiwan.

The transition from the “Oral Period” to “Indigenous Literature after the

⁵ The Chinese version of Poiconu’s book is published in two volumes. At the time of this writing, only the first volume has been translated into English. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

Adoption of Writing” is also marked by the move to a linear chronology. However, this apparent linearity is intimately entangled with “Indigenous Time,” as the chapters in Volume II suggest: “Indigenous Peoples Entering into the Nation-state System,” “Post WWII Indigenous Literature Written in Chinese,” “Writings from the Era of Indigenous Movements,” “Indigenous Literature from the Period of Indigenous Identity Construction,” “Indigenous Literature in the Twenty-first Century,” “The Past, Present, and Future of Indigenous Literature.” Poiconu’s approach to organizing literary history differs markedly from Ye, who organized by decade, and from Chen, who organized by the literary movements of particular eras, including “New Literature,” “Realist Literature,” “Kominka Literature,” “Anti-communist Literature,” “Modernism,” and “Nativist Literature.” The temporal organization of *Peoples* reflects a historical periodization schema significant to Indigenous peoples themselves.

Temporal innovation is not the only remarkable feature of Poiconu’s work. Volume II adopts a chronological approach to discuss historically contemporary authors from different Indigenous peoples, thus breaking down inter-ethnic divisions. However, his definition of “authors” is also relatively loose, including writers of poetry, prose, and drama, as well as contributors to magazines and other print media. This broad concept of authorship breaks with the tendency of Indigenous literary histories to focus primarily on Walis Nokan, Syaman Rapongan, and other celebrated figures; this might be considered one of the work’s primary critical interventions. Although Volume II’s historical narrative focuses on writers and their works, the authors discussed don’t necessarily have any specific generational or intergenerational connection to one another. Thus, although the volume is held together by the broader temporal framework of “developments in Indigenous history,” the connections between authors and works appear loose or even fragmentary.⁶ When compared to Taiwanese literary histories, which tend to focus on literary circles, journals, and stylistic trends to construct relationships between authors and works of a similar period, *Peoples* doesn’t seem to display distinct horizontal connections between authors of the same period. Instead, Indigenous identity becomes the crucial

⁶ In Volume II, Poiconu starts with authors active in the first half of the twentieth century, including Balriwakes Raera (陸森寶/巴利瓦克斯·勒拉, 1910-88, Puyuma), Losing Watan (林瑞昌/樂信·瓦旦, 1899-1954, Atayal), Male Badu (葉榮光/馬賴·巴都, 1932-2016, Atayal), Uong’e Yatauyungana (高一生/吾雍·雅達烏猶卡那, 1908-54, Cou), and Yapasuyong Yulunana (湯守仁/雅巴斯勇·優路拿納, 1924-54, Cou). He then considers those active in the twenty-first century, such as Dadelavan Ibau (塗玉鳳/伊苞達德拉凡·伊苞, 1967-, Paiwan), Neqou Soqluman (全振榮/乜寇·索克魯曼, 1975, Bunun), and others.

factor that connects the literature of disparate writers, lending internal coherence to the work as a whole.

To summarize, Poiconu's work establishes a baseline of possible content for the newly emergent field of Indigenous literary studies to consider as its purview. *Peoples* creates a framework for a pan-Indigenous approach to literary history, and it also opens up new possibilities for distinctly Indigenous approaches to chronology. Using motifs to categorize oral literature before moving to a writer- or works-based approach to written literature also represents an innovative approach to overcoming the heterogeneity among Taiwanese Indigenous peoples and the changing nature of their literatures. *Peoples* introduces readers to a vast body of literature that is both autonomous and self-sufficient, written in a temporal framework created by and for Indigenous peoples. At the same time, the work maintains distance between Taiwanese Indigenous and Taiwanese literary histories. Although Indigenous literature has some spatiotemporal overlap with Taiwan literature, it consciously retains a standpoint outside of the Han Taiwanese concept of "Taiwan Consciousness," thereby protecting a space for Indigenous-centric interpretations of history.

Conclusion

Having analyzed the construction of literary histories in general and Taiwanese Indigenous literary history in particular, this study returns to its original question: how might we understand the construction of literary history in an era of deconstruction? In her 2005 article "Do Indigenous People Need Literature?" Kuei-fen Chiu (邱貴芬) points out that the writings of Taiwanese Indigenous peoples can more or less be divided into two categories. The first is "grievance literature" (控訴文學 *kongsu wenxue*) and the second is literature focused on excavating and preserving gradually eroding Indigenous traditions. Chiu argues that although this indicates Indigenous peoples' determination to reclaim the right to interpret their own cultures, a drawback of this discursive strategy is that it relies on an appeal to "reality." However, if literature is an "art of fabrication," a product of an author's imagination, the decision of Indigenous authors to write the "reality" of their communities could lead to a "ghettoization" as conceptualized by minority studies (Chiu). In response to Chiu, Indigenous author Salizan Takisvilainan (沙力浪) raises an alternative view:

If one were to enforce an arbitrary separation between Indigenous authors and Indigeneity, what would that do for us? First of all, we could no longer call these works "Indigenous Literature!" What's more,

if we strip these works of their Indigeneity, stage them as “Taiwan Literature” and critically compare them, what would be left, a mere skeleton. (Salizan)

Chiu’s hope is for Indigenous literature to continue to develop aesthetically. However, Indigenous authors themselves care more about the problem of constructing Indigenous literature. According to Salizan, if Indigenous literature is deprived of “Indigeneity” as an organizing principle, then it has nothing to distinguish itself from “Taiwan Literature,” which would be tantamount to a loss of Indigenous subjectivity. A similar sentiment runs as an undercurrent throughout *Peoples*. Poiconu offers a different perspective on Indigenous literature, not by redirecting existing literary frameworks but rather by redefining literature itself by taking Indigenous oral traditions, once the purview of anthropology, and transforming them into a shared resource that becomes the basis for the construction of a pan-Indigenous literary tradition in the present. Strictly speaking, these views are not incompatible. It is just that Chiu takes a deconstructionist stance in the hopes that Indigenous literature can free itself from the limitations of an essentialist, minoritized ethnic and literary domain, while many Indigenous authors race to construct an autonomous Indigenous subjectivity. The debate therefore reflects the epistemic gap between deconstructionist and constructionist standpoints.

“Indigenous Consciousness” arose alongside the movements to construct Taiwanese identity in the 1980s and 1990s. “Indigenous” as an ethnic category is a new identity that represents the coalition of multiple different ethnic groups. Based on this definition, Indigenous literature is also an emergent literature. In the past, the literary history of Taiwanese Indigenous peoples was relegated to a minor sub-branch of “Chinese” or “Taiwanese” literary history. Now it has established its own autonomous literary history. However, “Indigenous” is still an identity whose promise has yet to be fully realized, particularly because the cultural memory of Indigenous peoples is still in the process of recovering from hundreds of years of colonial oppression. Thus, there is a legitimate argument to be made for an ethnonationalist framework of literary history when it comes to the problem of constructing Indigenous identity in Taiwan.

As the first work of its kind, *Peoples* fulfills its mission to construct an Indigenous literary history where once there was none. Thus, “cultural authentication” and “self-advocacy” are two of the author’s main objectives. Despite this, we can see ample evidence of the author’s desire to engage in an interventionist dialogue with mainstream Chinese and Taiwanese literary historical narratives. What productive

dialogues might be created if we take Ye's definition of "Taiwan Consciousness" as "the collective records and spirit of a ragtag band of pioneering people struggling against nature" ("Taiwan" 69) and juxtapose it with an Indigenous perspective on the same events, when, "threatened by foreign military forces and diseases, [Indigenous Peoples] underwent massive population losses, and saw their status as stewards of Taiwan replaced" (Poiconu, *Peoples* 523). Here we see how Poiconu's offering of an Indigenous critical perspective has the potential to forever disrupt and transform historical accounts of the Taiwanese experience.

Not only this, Poiconu also seeks to forge connections between Taiwanese Indigenous literature and the so-called "Fourth World." Of course, the struggles of Indigenous peoples to protect Indigenous cultural and environmental ecologies are ongoing and global in scope. Ever since the period of maritime trade and European expansion, Indigenous peoples have been fighting against the forces of colonial conquest. Therefore, Indigenous movements to resist cultural erasure are both a product of globalization and a global phenomenon. Because Taiwan's Indigenous peoples' historical experiences have some parallels with those of the Americas, Australia, and the Pacific Islands, Indigenous studies must maintain both local and global perspectives to fully grasp the intricacies and interlocking processes of Indigenous dispossession and de-colonial resistance. This aspect of Indigenous literary studies undoubtedly can contribute a vital channel for challenging existing epistemological understandings of Taiwan literature and connecting it to the world. Critical, dialogic engagement with "Indigenous Consciousness" and Indigenous literature is a must if Taiwan literature hopes to retain its creative vitality and de-colonial ethos.

This brings us to our final question: are Indigenous peoples the only ones who can write Indigenous literary history? I believe that the writing of literary history can never be perfect, but it can be mutually complementary. Construction and deconstruction may occur simultaneously. The diverse perspectives that emerge from differently situated authors can spur literary histories along their trajectories toward comprehensiveness even as they remain essentially open-ended and subject to transformation.

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[Received 5 September 2022; accepted 20 February 2023]