Taiwan Literature: A Minoritizing Project*

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Abstract
Inspired by Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of minor literature, this paper seeks a viable perspective of understanding Taiwan literature in the transnational/global context. As it is well known, minor literature does not specify any particular type of literature or indicate any literature produced by specific groups; rather, it designates an internal linguistic variation or transformation, a form of becoming that is associated with social change and a people-to-come. Taiwan literature, Lai He as a case in point, whose establishment replies mostly on its linguistic experiments on Mandarin and whose accomplishment immediately forms solidarity within its community, provides a perfect example for minor literature. However, to draw analogies between the two does not intend to testify to the existence of a minor literature; rather, it proposes to look into a local literature through the lens of the minor, exploring how it can become a mode of writing and existence for the dominated people. It argues that the minor as a perspective may shed light on the understanding of a literature of the dominated beyond linguistic, ethnic, national and cultural boundaries, especially in the flux of transnational/global flows.

Keywords
Taiwan literature, Lai He, minor literature, translation, minor transnationalism

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Beyond the Postcolonial

Contemporary Third World literary and cultural studies face a great challenge, the nature of which is at once pragmatic and theoretical, caused by the condition of globalization. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, who claim the advent of a new world order designated as Empire, indicate the dissolution of an outside world and the pervasive power in the space of the new world: “In this smooth space of Empire, there is no place of power—it is both everywhere and nowhere. Empire is an ou-topia, or really a non-place” (190). In their analysis of the “symptoms” of the passage from the paradigm of modern sovereignty toward that of imperial sovereignty, Hardt and Negri question the validity of both postcolonial and postmodern criticism, which still targets the problematic of modernity and fails to recognize the ideology of the world market and tools of imperial control. They argue that hybridities as described by Homi Bhabha have not really “opened an age of unqualified freedom but rather yielded to new forms of rule that operate on a global scale” (134). It seems that national and cultural borders still function and yet in a different manner; Hardt and Negri raise the question of racism by asking “what is the postmodern form of racism and what are its strategies in today’s imperial society” (191; emphasis original).

In the context of literary and cultural studies, globalization indicates crossings of linguistic and cultural flows, which accordingly calls into question the definitions of ethnic, national, linguistic and cultural boundaries. It is in the same vein that Gayatri G. Spivak proposes a “planetary” perspective on literary and cultural studies by claiming the death of the comparative literature discipline, for the linguistic and national boundaries on which traditional comparative studies are based are unsustainable due to the intensifying transnational/global flows. What Spivak’s proposal indicates is a new version of “world literature,” a new mapping of literature in the global market and a new “experience of the impossible” (102) for the dominated people. Then, the question here is how a Third World literature should be treated within the discourse of global multiculturalism, which emphasizes local particularity on the one hand and celebrates global cultural amalgamation on the other. Or to put it more precisely, how can the language of the Third World people and their literature survive the dominant language and culture—i.e. the transnational/global linguistic and cultural flows.

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2 The concept of “world literature,” coined by Goethe is now become a primary issue in contemporary literary studies. Through re-locating the concept in a global world, new literary approaches have been proposed and new issues been re-considered. See, for example, What is World Literature by David Damrosch.
Taiwan literature exemplifies such paradigm shifts and conflicts in the study of Third World literature in the global age. The development of modern Taiwan literature has been closely associated with the experience of being dominated and deeply implicated in the struggle of national and cultural identity. Understandably, in recent decades, Taiwan’s literary discourse has been oscillating between the affirmation of an “authentic” local culture and the celebration of global cultural amalgamation. Nativism and postcolonial discourse that define national and cultural boundaries are confronted with global multiculturalism that celebrates crossings of borders. How will the national and cultural imagination that builds on colonial nostalgia and legacies negotiate the global forces that tend to assimilate local subjectivity into the global homogenization? It is undeniable that postcolonial studies has provided an important tool for the study of literature and culture of the dominated; however, as it appears inadequate for understanding floating cultural flows and mobile subjects that cross boundaries, what strategies for local literary and cultural production can be found and what form of global poetics can be formulated?

With these concerns, this paper, drawing on Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s concept of “minor literature,” seeks a viable perspective of understanding a local literature in the transnational/global context. Minor literature does not specify any particular type of literature or indicate any literature produced by specific groups; it instead designates an internal linguistic variation or transformation, a becoming associated with social change and a people-to-come. Modern Taiwan literature begins with linguistic experimentation that occurs within the dominant language and its achievements immediately become causes for solidarity within a specifically defined community. For in-depth discussion, Lai He, whose writing represents an exemplary linguistic experiment during the Japanese colonial period, is chosen as an example. However, the attempt to draw a comparison between Lai’s writing and minor literature is undertaken less to testify to the existence of a minor literature than in order to look into a local literature through the lens of the minor. Thus the purpose of this essay is twofold: First, this paper will probe into how Lai He’s strategy for his creative writing can be recognized as the Deleuzoguattarian concept of the “minor” that suggests a mode of existence for the minority during the colonial time. Second, it will argue that minor literature as a particular form of global poetics may shed light on the understanding of a literature of the dominated beyond linguistic, ethnic, national and cultural boundaries, especially in the flux of transnational/global flows.
Lai He’s Writing and “Minor Literature”

The Taiwanese writer Lai He (1894-1943), known as “father” of new Taiwan Literature, has great merits in the field of modern Taiwan literature. He invented a new form of literary expression that inaugurated the development of modern literature on the island during the Japanese colonial period. His writing, which mostly relies on linguistic experiments on Mandarin and Japanese, is characterized by a hybrid form of multiple linguistic and cultural systems, which reflects directly Taiwan’s colonial situation of polylingualism and cultural hybridity. Lai’s work, which mainly focuses on the colonized people and depicts their unbearable hardship during the Japanese occupation, to a certain degree, has consolidated local Taiwanese community and encouraged resistance against Japanese colonialism. No wonder that Lai He has become the main focus of recent local literary and cultural criticism concerned with nativism and postcolonial discourse. The criticism has no doubt been imbued with national, ethnic, political, and cultural implications. In what follows we will further investigate these issues through the lens of minor literature, viewing Lai’s writing as an enactment of a linguistic experiment on the society in the face of colonialism.

Due to the lack of a well-established writing system, Lai had to write in a language other than his native tongue. As a writer of the colonized, Lai refused to use the language of the colonizer (Japanese) and instead chose Chinese characters (hanzi) to transcribe vernacular Taiwanese that he considered a better tool to present local conditions. As a result, Lai’s writing manifests itself as a process of translation, that is, from classic Chinese (hanwen), through modern Mandarin (zhongwen), and into Taiwanese (taiwen). Lai transcribed Taiwanese into Chinese characters, and the process of transcription inevitably becomes a process of translation, resulting in a hybrid combination of various linguistic elements that include Mandarin, Japanese, and Taiwanese. Considering Chinese characters are more ideographical symbols than phonetic signs, Lai insisted on Chinese characters in his transcription; as a result, his Taiwanese writing was often mistaken as Mandarin, although it actually led to a difficulty for Mandarin readers. Also, Lai found it difficult to transcribe Taiwanese in Mandarin because of its limited capability to express an ethos specific to the local context. Consequently, Lai’s Taiwanese writing as transcription is in essence paradoxical: despite the use of Chinese characters, the transcription of

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3 This of course has something to do with his educational background. Lai He received a classical Chinese education from a traditional private school and also attended a public school, where he received a modern vocational education in Japanese.
Taiwanese cannot be mistaken as Mandarin since it has deviated very much from standard Mandarin. On the other hand, Chinese characters with their ideographical implications and literary connotations continuously intervene in the regular patterns and grammars of Taiwanese, and consequently, prevent the language from establishing standard usage and fixed signification.

In view of the impossibility of complete translation or transcription of Taiwanese into Mandarin, Lai’s writing becomes a hybrid form of linguistic mixtures characterized by ubiquitous untranslated words. Thus Lai’s writing as translation has never shown transference from one language into another, but traces of translation that break, diverge, and converge in the sentences. Here is an example from the short story “A Letter from a Comrade” (1935), a work in the later period of his career:

郵便！在配達夫的喊聲裏，「卜」的一聲，一張批擲在机上，走去提起來。

“Mail,” the postman yells, and a letter, with the sound “pu,” is thrown on the desk. I walk towards and pick it up. (255)

As shown in the original language, readers can observe the mixture of various linguistic elements that communicate each other by virtue of Chinese characters. Being transcribed into Chinese characters that are common to Mandarin and Japanese, Lai’s Taiwanese writing reveals the disjunction and conjunction of “traces” of translation. In fact, the combination of multiple languages has become a trademark of Lai’s Taiwanese writing, known as taiwan hwawen. In the paragraph quoted above, a few Japanese vocabularies (郵便, 配達夫, 机) are blended into sentences without translation; or the original form of Japanese kanji (Chinese characters) is retained in Taiwanese writing. One may argue that these foreign words have already been absorbed into the local tongue and become its integral part. Similar situations can also be observed in Mandarin. For example, such characters as 批 and 提 can be considered as Mandarin but used differently. The point is that Taiwanese writing underwent a process of transformation in its encounter with such foreign languages as Mandarin and Japanese during the colonial period, naturally or artificially. In addition, such linguistic transformation was not limited to the introduction of new vocabularies, but also affected semantic, syntactic and grammatical patterns, which were intensified by the use of Chinese characters. At times, Chinese characters, thanks to their ideographical symbols that may suggest
similar meanings, are removed freely from one language system and inserted into another; however, this process of removal and insertion does indeed sometimes cause confusion since significations vary according to syntax formation and grammar rules in different languages. In fact, in Lai’s writing, obsolete and classical characters were frequently chosen for his Taiwanese writing to distinguish itself from Mandarin and Japanese. The introduction of foreign Chinese characters not only makes the sentence difficult to understand; it also forces the Taiwanese language to transform itself at the level of its semantics, syntax, and grammar. At first sight, a sentence like 一張批箋在機上 (a letter is thrown on the desk) and 走去撿起來 (walk towards and pick it up) may seem acceptable to Mandarin readers; however, they are in fact strange and awkward and may lead to difficulties in understanding. They are in fact the local tongue transcribed in Mandarin. As such, these Chinese characters, which are detached (randomly or purposely) from one language and grafted onto another, make Taiwanese writing both familiar and alien. These characters that travel in between languages indeed signal a migration of signs among various linguistic territories. This is Lai’s experiment with language, a vigorous attempt at inventing a literary expression for a new sensibility, which is of course accomplished through dismantling, displacing, and substituting Chinese characters and their significations.

The floating linguistic signs along with their significations can be considered as “remainders” from the perspective of translation. These remainders, as Jean-Jacques Lecercle would suggest, map a linguistic “frontier” where various linguistic signs and their signification that have diverged from previous language systems converge, connect, and whereby define new boundaries of languages. The remainder is usually recognized as the “exception” and denied by syntax or grammar. Lecercle, however, in his book *The Violence of Language* views the remainder as “the linguistic equivalent of the Freudian unconscious, excluded or repressed by the rules of grammar, but trying to return in jokes, slips of the tongue, solecisms, and poetry” (23). According to him, the remainder could act as a new metaphor for the “frontier” (23). Following Lecercle, the ubiquitous remainders in Lai’s writing should not be considered simply as “residues” due to incomplete translation but constitutive elements of his writing. Furthermore, the migration of linguistic signs heralded by these remainders can be regarded as a “transgression,” a linguistic act with its potential to map a new linguistic territory and formulate a new language. Similarly, Michel Foucault, in his discussion of Georges Bataille, characterizes transgression as follows: “Transgression is neither violence in a divided world (in an ethical world) nor a victory over limits (in a dialectical or
revolutionary world); and exactly for this reason, its role is to measure the excessive
distance that it opens at the heart of the limit and to trace the flashing line that
causes the limit to arise” (446). Taking the conception of transgression as such, to
consider Lai’s writing as a linguistic transgression is not an effort to clarify the
limits of classical Chinese, Mandarin and Taiwanese, or to separate out Japanese
from these languages; rather, our purpose is to “measure” the degree that the
divergent signs and their significations have deviated from their previous language
systems and mapped a linguistic frontier where these converging linguistic elements
are transforming a new linguistic rules and literary expression. Lai’s transcription of
Taiwanese into Mandarin has never been a complete transference from one
language into another; rather, it introduces a linguistic frontier in between various
languages. The remainders in the process of writing indicate not simply the
impossibility of a complete translation but also a migration of signs across linguistic
and cultural boundaries. This is what is called “style” of Lai’s writing, a term, in
Lecercle’s words, is to be understood as “the result of the separation and struggle
between the writer’s own language (sa langue propre) and the maternal tongue that
he tries to appropriate” (238).

As mentioned above, Lai He has created a new form of literary expression
through his particular use of language; he has actually inaugurated a new literature
characterized by a linguistic transformation. In this regard, Deleuze and Guattari’s
concept of minor literature is illuminating in that it is conceived as a way to
undermine or “minoritize” the normative or “major” usage of a language. For
Deleuze and Guattari, minor literature is fundamentally a particular way of
linguistic usage or style that they discover and develop in Franz Kafka’s precise and
ascetic writing of Prague German. Kafka is absolutely a major German literary
figure, and yet as a Jewish decent writing in Prague German, he is a “minor” writer.
But here “minor” is not simply an indication of his ethnic minority status, but also
the linguistic and literary condition of his writing in German. In short, in Deleuze
and Guattair’s view, Kafka’s Prague German is itself a “deterritorialized” language,
one that lacks a natural, integral ethnic German speech community. According to
Ronald Bogue, such condition has made the language undergo numerous
deformations, and “its impoverishment has forced a limited vocabulary to assume
multiple functions, each term taking on an intensive and shifting polyvocality”
(Deleuze on Literature 96). A further condition occurred in Yiddish: “a
hyperdeterminarialized German, in continuous flux, brief and rapid, traversed by great
migrations, a medley of whim and law, an amalgam of dialects with no standard
speech, a field of forces that is less known than intuitively understood” (Bogue, Deleuze on Literature 97).

It is inspiring to make analogies between Lai’s transcription of Taiwanese in Mandarin and Kafka’s writing in Prague German. During the Japanese colonial period, classical Chinese writing dominated the literary and cultural domains whereas Japanese dominated the political realm despite the fact that the majority of residents on the island were composed of the Taiwanese-speaking population, mainly the hoklo and hakka ethnic groups. Taiwanese is therefore a “minor” language in the sense that minor is recognized qualitatively rather than quantitatively. Likewise, it is not surprising to note that Mandarin was a “deteriorialized” language since there was no Mandarin speech community that would sustain its survival during Japanese colonial period. In fact, classical Chinese and Mandarin writings were only circulated among limited literary groups and Japanese among social elites. And yet, in Deleuze and Guattari’s view, that Prague German (and Yiddish) can be designated as a “minor” language is not simply because it detaches from a natural and integral German speech community, but primarily because of its way of inhabiting a language.

A similar manipulation as Prague German or Yiddish is observable in Lai’s Taiwanese writing, if it can be considered as a “minor” writing. Without an integral Mandarin speech community, mandarin underwent a process of deformation on the island. Lai’s Taiwanese writing in Mandarin has shown a migration of signs, a deviation from its traditional or standard regulations. It is through such an appropriation of Mandarin that Lai has invented a new form of expression and inaugurated a new literature. From the scope of translation, Lai’s writing also displays a particular manipulation between Mandarin and Taiwanese; however, it appears impossible not simply because they both use Chinese characters but also because the two languages are too linguistically related and culturally intertwined. As it appears, the transporting of Chinese characters into Taiwanese writing becomes a reverse process that translates Taiwanese back into Mandarin. The translation consequently blurs the boundaries between them. What is at stake is of course not to pass judgment on whether the translation has been succeeded or completed; on the contrary, translation activates from within the language itself: variations immanent within its grammatical, syntactic and semantic patterns. Therefore, Lai’s writing of Taiwanese in Mandarin as minor writing has to be understood as “minority constructs within a major language” (Deleuze and Guattari, Kafka 16).

Deleuze and Guattari have described three characteristics of minor literature. First, “in it language is affected with a high coefficient of deterritorialization”
In other words, the particular way of using a language indicates a departure from the language by intensifying features immanent within it. Thus, following Deleuze and Guattari, Lai’s employment of Chinese characters in his Taiwanese writing may exemplify the “minor” utilization of language, as these divergent linguistic elements tend to intensify the inherent features of Mandarin and deterritorialize the language itself by continuously deviating from standard usage and regular patterns (the major usage). To Mandarin readers, Lai’s writing appears strange, alien, awkward, ridiculous, paradoxical, exotic, and sometimes illegible, for it has violated semantic, syntactic, grammatical patterns of standard Mandarin. On the other hand, it activates a transformation of language from within in which a new form of expression for Taiwanese writing begins to take shape. In Lai’s case, the potential to violate the standard usage and to induce disequilibrium within language is embodied by the remainders produced in the process of his writing as translation.

Deleuze and Guattari address the second characteristic: “everything in them is political” (Kafka 16). As opposed to major literature in that individual concerns remain personal and “the social milieu servers as mere environment or a background,” minor literature indicates a “cramped space forces each individual intrigue to connect immediately to politics” (Kafka 17). It is in the same vein that Kafka’s work is read as a “political program” rather than an “Oedipal phantasm” (Kafka 17). This political dimension of literature can be easily observed in Lai’s writing as well as his minority status during the Japanese colonial period. As mentioned above, Lai as an author writing in Taiwan Mandarin is no doubt a minor and minority writer. His work targets the unbearable hardship and struggles of ordinary Taiwanese people under colonial oppression. Despite his vivid descriptions of those suffering characters, Lai’s concerns do not have so much to do with the individual miseries suffered by his compatriots as the socio-political conditions in which they have lived. Consequently, the characters, settings, events, stories framed by colonial conflicts and struggles are immediately political in a colonized society.

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4 The French word milieu, according to Brian Massumi, translator of A Thousand Plateaus, as a technical term used by Deleuze and Guattari should convey meanings of “surroundings,” “medium,” and “middle” (xvii).

5 The political implication of minor literature recalls Fredric Jameson’s argument in his well known essay “Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism” that all Third World texts are always “national allegories” in which the public and the private spheres intertwine (69). Jameson is right to point out that the “libidinal investment” in the Third World literature, for example in Lu Xun’s text, tend to be understood as primarily “political and social” (72). Whereas Jameson focuses on the “libidinal investment” and “structure” of its allegory as opposed to that of the West, Deleuze and Guattari emphasize the assemblages of desire that function as machines.
However, to characterize Lai’s writing as minor literature is not simply to emphasize his socio-political concerns and his minor/minority status, but rather to indicate that his writing depicts directly the power relations and social structure. More significantly, not only does he describe the invincible power and control, but he also seeks ways to escape, in spite of constant failures. We recall, for example, the fate of Chin Te-sen, the protagonist of Lai’s famous short story “A Steelyard,” who attempts to escape in vain from his misery caused by Japanese colonial domination. Hence, to paraphrase Deleuze and Guattari’s words, the struggles and frustrations of characters can be seen as blocks of desires by the unbeatable power networks immanent within the society, which are best exemplified by the colonial administrations, officials, policemen as well as laws, polices, rules, and orders. In short, Lai’s work depicts the operation of invisible power relations, whose dismantling and re-constructing of these relations that constitute the social order are immediately politics. Viewed in this light, the condition of the colonized society is not simply a background on which the story is based and the social concerns are not expressions of certain socialist ideologies. On the contrary, Lai’s writing as a “political program” depicts a world which “absorbs everyone no less than as a matter of life and death” (Kafka 17).

Deleuze and Guattari emphasize the collectivity of minor literature, its third characteristic: “in it everything takes on a collective value” (Kafka 17). They designate minor literature as one that lacks “masters,” which they consider an advantage. Without masters to emulate, each minor author “constitutes a common action” and “produces an active solidarity” (Kafka 17). This characteristic is particular related to the second one in that the “political dimension has contaminated every statement (énoncé)” (Kafka 17). Lai He has endeavored to speak for the colonized Taiwanese people without imitating any master since there is none in the field of Taiwan literature. It is indisputable that Lai’s literature has expressed the people’s concern and been imbued with “national” consciousness, but what is more essential here is, in Deleuze and Guattari’s words, that “the literary machine alone is determined to fill the conditions of a collective enunciation that is lacking elsewhere in this milieu” (Kafka 18). Therefore, the missing people and society that Lai constantly depicts in his work somehow correspond to the workings of the literary machine as imagined by Deleuze and Guattari.

It is worth noting that Lecercle, following Deleuze and Guattari, addresses the

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6 Lai He was, on occasions, perfectly prepared to admit to having been influenced by foreign authors; see, for example, his postscript to the short story “A Steelyard” (43-55). But what is at stake for the moment is his great concern for the colonized people of Taiwan.
violence of language, arguing that “the term must be taken literally—not the violence of symbol, but the violence of intervention . . . not of metaphor but of metamorphosis” (227). This conclusion may be derived from Deleuze and Guattari’s perspective of language as pragmatics. For Deleuze and Guattari, language becomes a means to intervene in the constitution of social patterns as a result of its performativity. To the extent that language intervenes in the patterns of conventions, its transformation would induce a change in social customs and institutions. Seen in this light, the necessary means of semantic choices, syntactic selections, and grammar changes may induce a revolutionary force immanent within the social milieu. Therefore, Lai’s writing is not merely a reflection of social life of the colonized people during Japanese occupation; rather, it describes a new sensibility through a dismantling of the collective assemblages of linguistic statements that make possible the coming people and community. This is of course not to say that Lai’s work has depicted an imaginary utopian society, but rather, that his writing itself participates in a “fabulation” of a future people and society.

**Translation as a Minoritizing Project**

In the comparison between “Taiwan Mandarin” and Prague German, minor writing is mostly understood as a minor use of language, and minor literature as

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7 Deleuze and Guattari see Kafka’s novel as an assemblage with two sides: “a collective assemblage of enunciation” and “a machinic assemblage of desire” (Kafka 81). To link the assemblages to the social power structure, Bogue explains, “Machinic assemblages are the various patterns of practices and elements through which a world’s entities are formed, and collective assemblages of enunciations are patterns of actions, institutions and conventions that make possible linguistic statements” (Deleuze on Literature 98).

8 The concept “fabulation” is borrowed from Henri Bergson and used by Deleuze as one closely associated with “fiction, invention, and the power of the false” (Bouge, “Bergsonian Fabulation and the People to Come” 101). Bogue writes, “Fabulation for Bergson has the power of forcing its images on reality and countering the operations of reason and intelligence, but only in the service of a restrictive morality and a closed society. For Deleuze, the fabulative function is the function proper to art, which projects into the world images so intense that they take a life of their own” (“Bergsonian Fabulation and the People to Come” 104).

9 It should be noted that Lai’s transcription of Taiwanese labeled as “Taiwan Mandarin” (taiwan hwawen) is not quite the same as the usual idea of “Taiwan Mandarin” (taiwan guoyu), a particular use of Mandarin in postwar Taiwan after Kuomingtan reinforced Mandarin language programs in education system and issued it as the only official language on the island. Although they share common features of deviation from standard Mandarin in tone, semantic, and syntactic patterns as they are accommodated to the local use, Lai’s writing of taiwan hwawen, as a way of appropriating Mandarin, represents more of a writing experiment than a simple linguistic variation.
“minority constructs within a major language” (Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka* 16). Since minor language indicates a minority’s means of appropriating the majority’s tongue, it does not specify a particular “dialect” or language of a minority, but in essence becoming of a language. It is from this perspective that Lai He’s Taiwanese writing in Mandarin can be recognized as a *minor* use of Mandarin. Such particular use of language speaks of the multilingualism of a minor writer. Deleuze and Guattari write: “To be a foreigner, but in one’s own tongue, not only when speaking a language other than one’s own. To be bilingual, multilingual, but in one and the same language, without even a dialect or patois” (*A Thousand Plateaus* 98). This, however, does not mean to speak a language other than one’s own, rather, to speak in one’s own language like a foreigner. A minor writer dwells in his own language but lives as a foreigner. This is a condition similar to what Jacques Derrida calls “monolingualism”: “I only have one language; it is not mine” (1). This is exactly the condition in which Lai He had to write and only write in Mandarin, the impossibility of writing and not writing in Mandarin. But this “marginal” or “minority” situation is also what Deleuze and Guattari has ascribed to minor writers: “this situation allows the writer all the more the possibility to express another possible community and to forge the means for another consciousness and another sensibility” (*Kafka* 17). Caught in such a position, Lai He embarks on a linguistic experiment, which actualizes certain circuits of power relations and enacts social transformation toward a people-to-come.

Interestingly enough, Lawrence Venuti relates the idea of minor literature to the practice of translation. Through “submitting the major language to constant variation, forcing it to become minor, delegitimising, deterritorialising it, alienating it,” Venuti believes, translated literary texts will enhance its “radical heterogeneity” and thus create a minor literature (10). For Venuti, translation can be regarded as a “minoritizing project” because the translated texts intervene in regular patters (vocabularies, semantics, syntax, grammar, etc.) of the target language, increasing its foreignness and thereby resulting in constant variation. Venuti’s suggestion provides an inspiring perspective from which to view Lai’s appropriation of Mandarin. Lai’s writing as a minoritizing project at least has two implications: first, the remainders produced in the process of translation will enhance its heterogeneity,

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10 In *The Scandal of Translation*, Venuti considers his own translation of Italian works by I. U. Tarchetti into English as a “minoritizing project” (13-20). Similarly, Michael Cronin recognizes the appropriation of the colonizer’s language by the colonized as a “minoritizing project,” for such an appropriation as a movement in language can be seen as a fundamental element in translation. More importantly, such activity may also consolidate an identity for the colonized (154).
which accordingly induces disequilibrium and enacts transformation immanent within the language itself. Second, such linguistic variations may also open vectors for social change since language functions as a means of action that intervenes in the construction of social conventions. It is evident that Lai has endeavored to express another possible community and sensibility through his invention of literary expression, despite uncertainties about the future. However, it should be noted that Lai’s Taiwanese writing as a minoritizing project cannot be seen as an attempt to substitute the minor for the major language and its cannons, but rather a literary activity that accentuates linguistic heterogeneity and enacts the lines of continuous variation within the language itself. Deleuze and Guattari make it clear that “it is certainly not by using a minor language as a dialect, by regionalizing or ghettoizing, that one becomes revolutionary; rather, by using a number of minority elements, by connecting, conjugating them, one invents a specific, unforeseen, autonomous becoming” (A Thousand Plateaus 106).

The “Absolute Local” and “Minor Transnationalism”

Now we are ready to return back the question that we raise in the very beginning of the paper. As one might ask, what alternative perspective or viable strategy could the Deleuzoguattarian concept of minor literature provide for the survival of a local literature, especially in the global context where the crossings of literary and cultural flows are intensifying? Not surprisingly, the concept of minor literature with its connotation of minority has frequently been associated with literatures of minorities, of secondary authors, of small nations, of avant-garde, etc. And yet, in Deleuze and Guattari’s view, minor literature specifies no particular literature, but a way of inhabiting language and a particular form of writing. Thus, a minor use of a major language as a way of appropriating language cannot be reduced to the use of a minority’s language. The use of a minority’s language never promises the production of minor literature; on the contrary, insistence on using a minority’s language often consolidates its fixed rules and social structures. In short, major and minor are not two different languages, but two “different treatments of language,” the former consists “in extracting constants,” and the latter “in placing it in continuous variation” (A Thousand Plateaus 106). Likewise, the majoritarian are understood as “a constant and homogeneous system” and the minoritarian a “potential, creative and created, becoming” (A Thousand Plateaus 106).

Not surprisingly, the political dimension and collective value of minor literature are often confused with identity politics, especially when they are
associated with minority communities. Deleuze and Guattari apparently oppose simple political and cultural identity since minor literature announces a process of becoming that effaces any fixed identity. Also, minor literature rejects wholesale hybridity because the production of a minor literature must be based on certain linguistic and social milieu. What is essential in minor literature is to fabulate an alternative future community and to forge the means for another sensibility by dismantling the existing social institutions and convention rather than accentuating them. Therefore, minor literature as a “political program” for the people-to-come cannot be simply understood as general political campaigning for particular purposes or social concerns of leftist literature; rather, it performs a linguistic experiment on the society, intensifying the revolutionary forces within and opening vectors for future transformation.

Indeed, the concept of minor literature with its emphasis on the minor and its potential to subvert the dominant rules seems valuable for the “minority discourse,” especially in the context of postcolonial aura or global multiculturalism. Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih, who borrow Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts of minor literature and rhizome, propose the model of “minor transnationalism” that highlights the “transversal movements of culture.” By minor transnationalism, Lionnet and Shih emphasize the “productive” relationship between the minor and major, for the model inspires “new forms of identification that negotiate with national, ethnic, and cultural boundaries, thus allowing for the emergence of the minor’s inherence complexity and multiplicity” (8). Pointing out the limitations of postcolonial studies to “foreground the productive cultural work of minorities,” Lionnet and Shih consider minor transnationalisms a better tool to present their experiences especially in the transnational context (11).

Closely related to such terms as postnational, nomadic, and flexible, minor transnational subjects are often mistaken as “free-floating signifiers without psychic and material investment in one or more given particular geopolitical spaces” (Lionnet and Shih 8). As Lionnet and Shih make efforts to distinguish those ideas by calling for a relocation of “minor” or “minority” within the new formation of global multiculturalism, it is helpful to return to Deleuze and Guattari’s conception of minor literature. According to them, minor literature indicates a deterritorialization, and yet it is accompanied by an immediate reterritorialization in a certain social milieu. However, reterritorialization is not to reclaim an authority or to consolidate a fixed identity; Deleuze and Guattari state, “Reterritorialization must not be confused with a return to a primitive or older territoriality; it necessarily implies a set of artifices by which one element, itself deterritorialized, servers as a
new territoriality for another, which has lost its territoriality as well” (A Thousand Plateaus 174). It is in the same vein that we understand minor writing as a process of becoming, a transformation rather than a quest for a particular identity. Likewise, minor literature admits no undistinguished hybridity, for minor writing concerns assemblages in a given social milieu. Minor transnational subjects are not simply “free-floating signifiers,” but “nomadic subjects” affected by the assemblages of desire and enunciation.

In his discussion of global cultural politics, Bogue, drawing on Deleuze and Guattari’s contrasting concepts of “striated space” and “smooth space” as two distinct ways of inhabiting space, differentiates between the “global relative” and the “local absolute” against the usual assumption that the global opposes the local.11 Following Deleuze and Guattari, the “global relative” (striated space) is defined as a dominant, totalizing force that seeks to control and regulate all elements, and hence bring them into fixed relation with one another. The “local absolute,” (smooth space) by contrast, invites an awareness of the local in its limitation of its perceptival constitutive horizons. In the context of globalization, the “global relative” can be recognized as a stance that attempts to dominate the planet, to impose a world order that reduces all components to relative constituents of that order, and “local absolute,” another one in which a local reality is inhabited, a “a site of proliferation toward unlimited horizons” (“Nomadism, Globalism and Cultural Studies” 131-36). Such elaboration may further our understanding of minor literature as a minoritizing project and thus suggests a model of global poetics.

Therefore, our considering Lai’s writing as a minoritizing project that indicates a deterritorialization of standard Mandarin does not intend to testify to the existence of a minor literature. Rather, it aims to explore how the Deleuzoguattarian concept of the minor could become a strategy for creative writing and a mode of existence for the dominated people during the colonial time. Lai’s writing as practice of translation, labeled as a particular form of “East Asian hybrid Chinese writing,”12 has embodied a minor writing in the face of imperial and colonial domination. Unlike contemporary local writers who “translated” locality in the colonizer’s language (Japanese), Lai, through appropriating Mandarin, actually invented a new form of literary expression in which translation became a means of

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11 Bogue cites Deleuze and Guattari: “That which is at once limited and limiting is striated space, the relative global”; “a local absolute, an absolute that has its manifestation in the local, and its engendering in a series of local operations with varying orientations” (A Thousand Plateaus 382; qtd. in “Nomadism, Globalism and Cultural Studies” 133, emphasis original).

12 A term coined by Chen Pei-Feng in his study of multilingualism in literature and culture in colonial Taiwan. see Chen, 109.
resistance against the dominant colonial language and culture, and more significantly, a linguistic innovation that inaugurated a literature for a “nation” or a people.¹³ Lai’s writing as translation also witnessed a social change and an encounter with modernity where the national/ethnic character was criticized and a history of subjectivity was constituted. What Lai’s writing has accomplished is not simply its enactment of linguistic transformation within Mandarin, but also its intervention into the polylingualism and cultural hybridity that characterize Taiwan’s colonial situation. I would argue that Lai’s linguistic experiment may provide a practical literary strategy for the survival and renewal of a local literature in the face of globalization. Polylingualism and cultural hybridity are still primary features of the global age. Deleuze and Guattari say, “How many people today live in a language that is not their own?” (Kafka 19). In the flux of transnational flows, it seems impossible to speak only one’s own language, or actually one has been speaking a language that is not his/her own. For the dominated people or people in the Third World, their language and culture are facing the threat of extinction posed by the dominant languages and cultures. But how can they speak for themselves? The idea of minor literature may suggest a new perspective and define a new form of global poetics. As the model of “minor transnationalism” calls for the redefinition of the productive relations between the national and transnational, the “minor” or “minoritarian” stance may provide a perspectival horizon by which the global is envisioned on the base of the local.

Works Cited
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¹³ The term “nation” is used with caution here. One might argue that Lai He in fact inaugurated a “national” literature since his writings established a new literature that depicted the conditions of the colonized people and provoked a strong sense of the community. Similar arguments are common in recent Taiwanese literary criticism, especially from the scope of nativism or colonial/postcolonial discourse. However, it is difficult to make a judgment about how Lai’s employment of Mandarin in his writing could be recognized as resistance to Japanese colonialism and to what extent his literature could provoke Taiwanese “national” consciousness under Japanese occupation. In addition, the status quo in Taiwan is such that recognition by the majority of the international community of the country as a nation-state is continually deferred. Thus the political connotation of Taiwanese “national” literature remains ambiguous. And yet, our primary purpose in this essay has been to argue that Lai’s literature indeed envisions an alternative community to come rather than a community in stasis, and more importantly, its great concern about the people within a community. Viewed in this light, the term “nation” should be considered differently; it means less identity than collectivity of a community, or something of the kind.
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