

Protest Literature during the Japanese Occupation

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An Overview of Anti-Japanese Activities during the Occupation Period

As a result of the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895, Taiwan became Japan's first colony and was under Japanese control for fifty years and four months (1895-1945).

The cruel and inhuman rule of imperial Japan was implemented by the governor-general of Taiwan, who adopted all manner of oppressive political measures. The purpose of all policies, from the establishment of *Law No. 63* and the bandit penal laws to the implementation of the *baojia* (mutual responsibility system), and the policy of calling for surrender, was to destroy the anti-Japanese tradition of the people since the Republic of Taiwan [declared in 1895]. But the people of Taiwan would not submit. Preceded by the uprisings of the 1900s and influenced by the Boxer Rebellion in mainland China, by 1910 a number of large-scale armed uprisings against the Japanese had occurred, including the Miaoli Incident and the Xilai Nunnery Incident, among others. The colonial government used armed force to suppress the people and win superficial victories. However, the anti-Japanese revolutionary tradition of the people did not vanish; but rather it manifested itself in protest activities aimed at political, economic, and social liberation.

In response to the social situation and the times, the Japanese colonial authorities had no choice but to change from a policy of discrimination to one of assimilation, the false "fair play to all concerned" (*isshi-dōjiri*). Harsh military rule also had to move toward civilian rule.

In 1921, on the twenty-fifth anniversary of Japanese rule over Taiwan, midway through the fifty years of Japanese rule, the Taiwan Cultural Association (Taiwan Bunka Kyōkai/Taiwan Wenhua Xiehui) was founded. Taiwan's more progressive intellectuals had been profoundly influenced by two streams of international thought: The first was the movement for self-determination among peoples after the First World War, as colonial peoples worldwide sought independence, including the Korean Independence Movement of 1931, the Turkish National Revolution, and the May Fourth Movement in China; the second was the Marxist trend and the October Revolution in Russia, a political ideology with the purpose of achieving the dictatorship of the proletariat by means of class struggle.

With the onset of the Taishō Period, there were democratic political parties in Japan itself and the colony of Taiwan utilized this democratic Taishō Period to obtain a good deal of space for activities. With the Taiwan Cultural Association as its center, Taiwan sought political autonomy through the Movement to Establish a Taiwanese Assembly. The Taiwan Cultural Association, composed primarily of the bourgeoisie, had leaned toward national liberation and the anti-Japanese activities of the members were conservative and limited in scope and they did not approve of the more radical approach of the proletariat. The splintering of the Taiwan Cultural Association and the founding of the Taiwan Peasants' Union (Taiwan Nōmin Kumiai), were followed by the consolidation of the Taiwan People's Party, (Taiwan Minshū Tō/Taiwan Minzhong Dang) and the establishment of the Taiwan branch of the Japanese Communist Party, and thus the whole course of Taiwan's anti-Japanese protest activity was characterized by the theme of class liberation.

In July 1937 the Japanese attacked and invaded China. The outbreak of the war in the Pacific was seen four years later. The Japanese colonial government in Taiwan initiated the Imperial

Subjectification Movement (Kōminka Undō), a tool of oppression, and commended service in the movement as a means of incorporating Taiwan and its people into its aggressive system. The use of Mandarin was prohibited in 1937 and Chinese articles were banned from newspapers and periodicals. Soon, the movement to change surnames commenced, together with the regulation of the temples to erase all forms of Han consciousness. In 1941, after the Association for Public Service by Imperial Subjects (Kōmin Hokō Kai) was founded, volunteer and conscription systems were implemented, which forced Taiwan's youth into a disastrous aggressive war to be used as canon fodder for the Japanese.

Under such implacable military rule, Taiwan's anti-Japanese protest activities were halted, but the revolutionary anti-Japanese tradition lived on in the hearts of the people, where, like a spring watering many households, it helped preserve a deep sense of cultural continuity.

Taiwan's New Literature Movement during the Japanese Occupation

From its inception the New Literature Movement (Xin Wenxue Yundong) was closely linked with the anti-Japanese protest movement for political, economic, and social liberation. It was but one link in the anti-Japanese protest movement.

In 1920 Taiwan's young intellectuals inaugurated Taiwan Youth (Taiwan Qingnian) as a forum for the people of Taiwan to discuss culture, thought, and literature as a way to resist colonial rule. The intellectuals of the day were indirectly influenced by ideas of national self-determination and democracy, and directly inspired by China's literary revolution during the May Fourth Period.

Thus in the early period of New Literature, there were a number of literary debates, all of which—from the debate of new vs. old literature to the promotion of the Taiwanese vernacular, from the advocacy of regional literature to the spread of agrarian literature—were inextricably linked with Taiwan's anti-Japanese national protest movement. Whether a Taiwan writer wrote in Chinese or Japa-

nese was unimportant, all displayed some form of protest in their depiction of the reality of the life of the common people and the political environment. The people of Taiwan all suffered under the oppressive weight of Japanese colonial rule. Therefore every level of daily life, every detail, was linked with the adverse political circumstances of colonial rule. The reality they lived was the reality of the exploitation and tyranny of colonial rule.

When a writer decided what to write about, regardless of whether it was the trivial affairs of a family or romance between boy and girl, it was always linked to the cruel reality of colonial rule.

Thus, all literary works from the occupation period are colored by protest. However, such works often were censored and could not be published, and the writers were arrested. With no way to earn a living, it was not uncommon for a writer to commit suicide.

Taiwan's New Literature was, from beginning to end, realist literature deeply rooted in the sufferings of the Taiwanese people. It is for this reason that it became a literature to console and rouse the spirit of the people.

In the twenty-year period in which Taiwan's New Literature burgeoned in conjunction with anti-Japanese activities, ideological biases appeared among Taiwan's writers with their differing worldviews. But when it came to protesting colonial rule, all were possessed of the same will. Although some examples of "imperial subject literature" appeared during the Pacific War, such "capitulations" were filled with grief and helplessness.

In general, the ideology of Taiwanese writers belonged to three systems. The first is bourgeois nationalism. Zhang Wojun, who was deeply influenced by the May Fourth literary revolution on which he established the theoretical base of Taiwan's New Literature, is perhaps the most representative writer. Zhang Wojun, who had personal conversations with Lu Xun in Beijing, maintained the following assertions:

Taiwan literature is a tributary of China's literature.

We advocate hereafter all use of the modern vernacular as the medium for literature. By modern vernacular we mean Mandarin, China's national language. In other words, the

language used by the Taiwanese should be unified with the Chinese, namely we should make the language we use now conform to that of China.

Wu Zhuoliu, born in 1900, who began writing fiction in Japanese in 1936 and later made the transition to Chinese, occupies a place in the history of Taiwan literature for important works such as *Yaxiya de gu'er* [Asia's Orphan; Japanese, *Ajia no kojji*], *Wuhuaguo* [The Fig Tree; Japanese, *Ichijiku*], and *Taiwan ren-jō* [Taiwan Forsythia]. Although as a writer he belonged to the bourgeoisie, he not only was a strong nationalist but possessed a strong Taiwan consciousness as well. However, farmers and workers are conspicuously absent from his fiction. He admitted that the ancestors of the Taiwanese were Han Chinese, but he also affirmed that throughout the course of history, the fate of the Taiwanese has become a collective one:

Of course the ancestors of the Taiwanese are Han Chinese.

Of all the Chinese people, the Taiwanese have been the least subservient to outsiders.

The Taiwanese are a product of Taiwan's history and environment.

Yang K'uei was born in 1905, ten years after Taiwan was ceded to Japan. By 1928 he was studying in Tokyo. In April of the same year, the Taiwan Communist Party was founded in the French concession of Shanghai, with the establishment soon after of a special branch in Tokyo in September. Yang K'uei joined the party at that time. Yang K'uei was a Yamakawa-ist* his entire life. Even after the Retrocession, he rarely brought up nationalist issues. What he was most concerned about was the liberation of Taiwan's poor workers and farmers. His most famous story, "Shinbun hatatsufu" [The Newspaper Carrier], appeared in *Bungaku byōron* [Literary Criticism] in 1934 and was republished after the Retrocession as "Songbaofu" in Chinese. In the story, he depicted the conflict between oppressed and oppressor as a class struggle:

* Yamakawa Hitashi (1880-1958) a founding member of the Japanese Communist Party, in which he served as a leading theorist of the laborers and farmers faction.

Most Japanese laborers were good people like Mr. Tanaka. Japanese laborers are opposed to browbeating and oppressing the Taiwanese.

Japanese workers also are opposed to the browbeating and oppression of the Taiwanese by the Japanese government. It is the privileged who make the Taiwanese suffer.

Alright. Let's join hands and fight! They make you suffer and they make us suffer; they are alike as our common enemy.

Lai Ho, the father of Taiwan literature, was absolutely in favor of national self-determination. He was also a profound humanist, who embraced the poor, suffering masses. His sole aim in life was to topple imperialist rule and be free of colonial rule. For him, nationalism and Marxism possessed the same goal of political, economic, and social liberation for Taiwan. There was nothing they could not strive for together. He joined the Taiwan Cultural Association and the Taiwan People's Party, and continued to participate in spite of a growing split in the Association between left and right. This demonstrates his independent position. Despite participating in real political protest activities, he fully embraced his mission as a writer and never stopped writing. Protest literature of the Japanese occupation period began with Lai Ho, and his protest literature amply represents the anti-Japanese spirit of Taiwan's New Literature.

In his story, "Yigan 'chengzai'" [The Steelyard], Lai Ho depicts how Qin Decan, a vegetable seller, is bullied and oppressed by the Japanese police, and how his spirit of protest is unyielding:

Do you mean to tell me we should give our goods away?

What? Are you saying that his official position gives him the right to humiliate and terrorize people at will?

Later, Qin Decan murders the policeman.

Another story, "Shansong de ren de gushi" [The Story of a Litigious Man], although it takes place in the Qing Dynasty, is a secretly sarcastic piece about the sufferings of the Taiwanese under Japanese imperial rule.

People cannot forsake the land; to do so means death. Life's happiness stems entirely from the bounty of the land. The

land belongs to the king; the people are the king's people; therefore all people should have rights to a piece of land, a base on which to create life's happiness. Now, for no apparent reason, Zhishe owns the vast fields in the mountain wilds. He lets them lie fallow denying many people a source of happiness in life. It should not be so. And even more unreasonable is his collecting money for graves, which forces the very poor to abandon their dead in ditches. For this reason, it is only right that the government should take away his lands and give them to the people so that they all might have the opportunity to own some land and enjoy the benefits accruing thereto. Therefore the government has to assert the kingly way of justice for most of the people.

There is no road for the living and no land for the dead. There is no pasture for the sheep and no grass for the ox.

III. A Close Look at Four Representative Works of Protest Literature

Lai Ho's "The Steelyard"

This short story of less than ten thousand characters appeared in *Taiwan minbao* [Taiwanese People's Press] from February 4 to 21, 1926. It is another outstanding story that appeared on the heels of his first short story "Dou naore" [Festival High Jinks], published in 1925. With the failure of the policy to unite with the Soviet Union and cooperate with the communists, China was on the verge of splitting apart. The left wing of the Taiwan Cultural Association was gaining ground, and the association was disintegrating. In 1927 the Taiwan People's Party, led by Chiang Wei-shui, who took "the Guomindang as his master," was founded with the political objective of cooperation between left and right. Lai Ho was a board member of both the Taiwan Cultural Association and the Taiwan People's Party and actually participated in anti-Japanese activities. "The Steelyard" fully reflects Taiwan under colonial rule and the difficulties of an oppressed people.

Qin Decan (a homophone for "miserable") is an archetypal descendant of landless peasants. His father rented several *mu* of

land on which he managed to earn a meager living. But when his father died, the landlord repossessed the land. His mother, who "made straw sandals and raised chickens, ducks, and pigs," struggled to raise Qin Decan. When he grew up, he worked as a long-term hired hand, but when all available plots were rented by the Japanese sugar company, he could not afford the expensive rent for a plot, and was unable to farm.

After marrying and having children, Qin Decan had to go to the village to sell vegetables. With great difficulty he borrowed a steelyard from a neighbor so that he could do business. When a Japanese policeman came to control the market, Qin Decan offered to sell him vegetables at a reduced price but refused to give them to him free. Using the pretext that his steelyard was in violation of the weights and measures regulations, the policeman ordered him to pay a fine of three *juan* or serve three days in jail. Stubborn and poor, Qin Decan chose the three days in jail. However, that evening his wife paid the fine and got him out of jail.

Qin Decan, who had lost everything, murdered the policeman on night patrol on the street.

Lai Ho's story, written in a realist manner using simple and unadorned language, portrays the poverty and exploitation of miserable peasants and poor people during the colonial period. With respect to the contact between the ruled and the ruler, the losses suffered by the ruled are all vividly depicted, and this work may be hailed as an outstanding work of protest literature depicting the circumstances of oppression. Especially the short line at the end: "Around that time, a rumor spread through the market that a policeman on night patrol had been killed on his route." The light conversational tone provides greater impact. It hints that the people of Taiwan were not content to be slaves and that ultimately there was the possibility that they could rise up to overthrow colonial rule. Lai Ho often said that the bourgeoisie and intellectuals of Taiwan were slaves of the Japanese empire and that the average person, particularly the farmers were the "slaves of slaves." In this story Lai Ho also exposes the feudal system of exploitation between peasant and landlord, and thus resistance literature has a two-fold function: to protest Japanese colonial rule and the inhuman feudal production system of the island's villages.

Yang K'uei's "The Newspaper Carrier"

In December 1979 *Taiwan xiaoshuo xuan* [Anthology of Taiwan Fiction] was on display in Beijing's Xinhua Bookstore. In all, the book contained twenty-two short stories, mostly postwar works by Taiwan writers, with one exception—Yang K'uei's "The Newspaper Carrier," which had first appeared before the war in 1932.

"The Newspaper Carrier" appeared in the *New People's Press*, a later incarnation of the *Taiwanese People's Press*, through Lai Ho's mediation. Only the first part appeared before it was censored by the Japanese colonial authorities. Later, Yang K'uei submitted the story, which was written in Japanese, to *Bungaku hyōron* [Literary Review] in response to its first call for contributions to be considered for a literary award. A novella of thirty thousand words, it was awarded second place (first place was omitted) in a field of eighty-seven stories.

It was the first time a work in Japanese by a Taiwanese author was published in a Japanese literary magazine. Afterward, stories in Japanese by Taiwanese authors began to appear in well-known Japanese literary magazines. Next appeared Lü He-jo's "Gyusha" [Oxcart], which was published in the January issue of *Literary Review*; the same year saw the publication of Zhang Wen-huan's "Chichi no kao" [Father's Face] in the first issue of *Chūō kōron* [Central Public Opinion]; followed by Lung Ying-tung's "Papaya no aru machi" [The Town with the Papaya Trees], which appeared in the April 1938 issue of *Kaizō* [Reconstruction].

Yang K'uei was born into an artisan family of tinsmiths in Xinhua. From an early age he held strong ideas about nationalism and protest—the Xilai Nunnery Incident in particular, in which the Japanese massacred many people, left a deep impression on him. Since his school days at the public Second Middle School, Yang K'uei had begun to become familiar with trends in world thought, and ultimately set socialism as his life's goal. In a sense, his "The Newspaper Carrier" is a realization of his faith in socialism. What kind of story is it?

Tokunaga Sunao, a prominent Japanese writer and one of the judges who selected "The Newspaper Carrier" for the award said: "This is not a brilliant work. It is not even a work of fiction; never-

theless, it has the power to absorb the reader. It suggests American capitalism's sanguinary conquest of the Indians. For this work to become a work for all people, it would need more artistry and symbolic imagery."

Lu Xun, who was very concerned about all weak and marginalized people of the world, had Hu Feng translate the story and then published it in *Shijie zhishi* [World Knowledge] in Shanghai in 1935. Later it was included in the *Zuoxiao minzu xiaoshuo xuan* [An Anthology of Stories of Small and Weak Nations] and *Chaonian Taiwan duanpian ji: shanling* [Mountain Spirit: An Anthology of Stories from Korea and Taiwan].

When the story was included in *An Anthology of Stories of Small and Weak Nations*, Hu Feng wrote the following brief introductory remarks: "Since Taiwan was ceded to Japan in 1895, no one has written profoundly about the sufferings of the aborigines and the Chinese people under the heel of Japanese imperial rule. 'The Newspaper Carrier' is the first work of literature depicting in protest the actual situations of their sufferings."

The editorial committee of *An Anthology of Taiwan Fiction*, published in 1979, wrote in the postscript: "Depicted are the sufferings of the people of Taiwan under Japanese imperial rule and their struggle of resistance."

"The Newspaper Carrier" is divided into two parts. One part deals with how a Japanese capitalist, with the help of Japanese officials and the police and using the pretext of the needs of the Sugar Association, deprives the Taiwanese of their lands. It is very similar to the situation in Lai Ho's "The Steelyard." Yang, the main character, loses everything. The protagonist's father is jailed and tortured to death because he protested the Sugar Association's levies on his property. His mother sells the family's only remaining property and sends the money to her son who is working and studying in Tokyo, and then hangs herself.

The second part takes place in Tokyo. Yang is unable to find work and is tricked by a false advertisement into applying for a job as a newspaper carrier. In the end, his deposit is taken and he loses his job. Later he takes part in a successful strike in which the employer is defeated.

"The Newspaper Carrier" ends with the following words: "In

studying the last few months, I have finally been able to fulfill mother's dying wish. Gazing at Taiwan from the deck of the huge ship, *Penglai*, I firmly believe that under the rule of Japanese imperialism this precious isle, although appearing to be beautiful and brimming with abundance, will burst forth with the stench of bloody pus once punctured by a needle!"

Lü He-jo's "Oxcart"

Lü He-jo's story "Oxcart" was accepted as a contribution to *Literary Review* and appeared in the January 1935 issue, three months after Yang K'uei's "The Newspaper Carrier" appeared there. Lü He-jo was born in 1914 in Fengyuan, Taichung and graduated from the Taichung Normal School. The famous Japanese author, Miyamoto Yuriko, had this to say about Lü He-jo's story, his maiden publication: "Lü He-jo's 'Oxcart' is a work by a colonial writer, and is reminiscent of Yang K'uei's 'The Newspaper Carrier,' published two issues earlier. Regarding the effect of the work as a whole, although the story is technically proficient in detailed images, it is emotively less effective than 'The Newspaper Carrier,' which leaves much to be desired in terms of technique. But the story is moving in places. The people of the colonies have suffered for many decades."

When "Oxcart" appeared, Taiwan had been under Japanese rule for forty years. For this reason, the spirit of resistance expressed in the work seems less pronounced than in "The Newspaper Carrier," the depiction of the main character's slide into poverty is more realistic and done with more detail, and for this reason, is no less indicting than "The Newspaper Carrier."

Yang Tianding, the main character of "Oxcart" is a carter who hauls goods for a living. But there is ever less work for him, and he has trouble earning a living. His wife, Amei, must go to work at the local pineapple canning factory to help make ends meet.

Yang Tianding has trouble finding work because more people are using trucks and there is less need for oxcarts. This is the result of Japanese capitalism controlling the farming villages of Taiwan. It is the exploitation of the entire colonial system that leaves Yang Tianding unemployed and forces him into a life of crime.

Even though carting is no longer profitable, Yang Tianding is determined to save money for a deposit to rent a plot from the landlord. But this is easier said than done. He is not only unable to earn eighty *sen* in one day, but he also is discovered sleeping in his cart by the police and will have his license revoked. During the occupation period, even a carter had to be licensed by the authorities.

Amei stoops to prostitution. In order to earn the two *yen* he needs to pay the fine, Yang Tianding resorts to stealing someone's geese to sell at market, but he is caught and jailed.

Taiwan became a dehumanizing place. Under the giant shadow of Japanese rule, everyone became utterly destitute.

On the road, Yang Tianding encounters Old Lin, who, with great perspicacity, decries the cruelty of Japanese rule. Old Lin had just been released from his six months in jail for stealing.

Look at this Japanese era. All the work where you can make a lot of money, Japanese have taken it all away. Right? I say it's stupid for us to work . . . Rather than sweat and slave to earn forty or fifty *sen*, well, I'm better off hanging around and having a good time by gambling. I roll 'em once like this, you see, and get ten or twenty *juan* . . . And look, if you lose, you go out on a job one night and you're all right if you get away with something that's worth money—you're in the money again. If you're caught, it's only a year or so . . . Take me, for instance. When I can't make ends meet, I go there on purpose to get supported. There's really nothing to be afraid of. The guards are my friends now.

"Oxcart" is not the strident outcry that "The Newspaper Carrier" is. Lü He-jo writes with cold realism, detailing the process by which people are forced into poverty, losing everything. The story is a forceful historical testimony. The story shows that despite the semblance of prosperity on the surface attained under forty years of colonial rule, the underlying reality is that most people still cannot afford three meals and support themselves. Isn't this a more effective form of resistance and denouncement?

Lung Ying-tsung's "The Town with the Papaya Trees"

In April 1937—the year of the Marco Polo Bridge Incident—"The Town with the Papaya Trees," a work by an unknown Taiwan author, was submitted to *Reconstruction* as part of a literary award competition and was recommended as an outstanding work. The author, Lung Ying-tsung (Liu Jung-tsung), was a new face unknown in Japanese literary circles and had never published in his own hometown in Taiwan.

Ozaki Hideki, a noted Japanese literary critic, believes that resistance by Taiwanese authors can be divided into three stages represented by three works: "The Newspaper Carrier," "Oxcart," and "The Town with the Papaya Trees." He believes that "The Newspaper Carrier" represents the height of the resistance spirit; "Oxcart" represents a partial acceptance of or helplessness in the face of colonial rule; and "The Town with the Papaya Trees" represents a form of submission. Naturally, this observation is the result of making a comparison on the basis of protest and resistance to Japanese colonial rule. However, if we read the story closely, we find that the so-called "submission" is, in fact, plot and character elements that conceal a truly heightened spirit of protest.

The main character, Chen Yousan, is a middle school graduate and a member of the so-called new intelligentsia of the day. By a fluke he obtains a job as an accountant in the village administrative office. Taiwan's intellectuals were like dead souls under Japanese colonial rule: Discriminated against and oppressed, they were like beasts of burden driven at will by the colonial government. Their future was bleak and dark. And although they tried to climb to higher levels by flattering and fawning, they were still considered "Chinese slaves" by their rulers.

In the beginning, Chen Yousan was highly idealistic and hard-working. He wanted to climb through the ranks to occupy an official position on equal footing with the rulers. But he was soon forced to realize that this was an impossible illusion not borne out in reality. Even if his dream was fulfilled, he would still be just a beast to serve the ruling class. His downfall begins here—he soon takes to drinking and becomes a derelict. An even bigger blow

comes when Cuie, the girl he loves, is forced to marry a wealthy person because her father loses his job.

In addition to depicting the cruel reality under colonial rule, he also depicts the overriding power of Taiwan's feudal society. The destructiveness of the feudal system stems from the undermining of Taiwanese society; in fact, it complements colonial rule.

But the fire of protest continues to burn in Chen Yousan's heart. He continues to dream of a peaceful society of fairness and justice. In such a society, people would not oppress others, the strong would not rule over the weak, and there would be no exploitation or humiliation. Everyone would be born to be equal and filled with the joy of life.

Through the words of a consumptive intellectual, Lung Ying-tsung accuses and protests:

Will this dark age of despair before our eyes block us forever?

Is the happy utopian society we long for coming or not? It would be clear only through stern scientific thinking without sentimentality and daydreams . . . Happiness cannot be attained without suffering and effort . . . Do not fall into useless despair and degeneration; live properly . . . At present it is all darkness and suffering, but soon a beautiful, new society will arrive.

This sounds like a prayer, but in fact it is the heartfelt wishes of the Taiwanese people. They dream of getting rid of the darkness and suffering of colonial rule and awaiting the arrival of a beautiful, free, and democratic new society. Can the word "submission" fully articulate the essence of the story?

With the Retrocession, the Taiwanese were able to cast off colonial rule and, although they were able to find the key to unlock the door to freedom and democracy, problems remained. The spirit of protest literature in the Japanese occupation period was continued by a new generation of writers. They found a new target for protest and accusation. Their pursuit of a more perfect society forced them onward.

The road of protest literature is long and without end.