

## **Nativist Literature, History and Ballads: The Establishment of an Interpretive Community for Taiwan Literature under Colonial Rule**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Modern readers are not born as they are. Instead, they are nurtured, cultivated and united to form an interpretive community. The emergence of an interpretive community of literature requires not only a shared language but also similar historical experience as its basis.

Having gone through the nativist literature movement and debate of the 1930s, people in Taiwan gradually developed a mutual perspective on literary style, and at the same time, came to realize the importance of a common historical interpretation on the development of literature. Nevertheless, the Japanese colonizers had been swift in getting a head start and getting an upper hand in establishing a collective history. During the Kominka or Japanization Movement, the colonial government attempted to bond Taiwan and Japan into an interpretive community of literature through vigorous creation of historical novels. However, with the defeat of Japan in the Second World War, such plan failed to achieve its original objective. On the other hand, popular ballads in Taiwanese at that time became a branch of Taiwan literature in the form of audio text.

After World War II, the Nationalists took over Taiwan from the Japanese. There were debates on nativist literature in both the 1940s and 1970s. Under the new policies of fostering both nationalism and Mandarin usage, the formation of a new interpretive community from the literary society comprising native Taiwanese and Mainlander readers and authors all from different social circumstances and with different historical experiences and memories was a task both daunting and pressing. Without a solid knowledge base of Taiwan history, the only historical experience and memory shared by the wide spectrum of readers and authors from Taiwan and the Mainland was the oppression and cruelty suffered under Japanese imperialism. Hence,

such sentiments serve as the calling and provide the bonding for an interpretive community. Popular Taiwanese ballads of the 1930s, originally deemed vulgar or mediocre and considered as an obstacle to cultural integration in the 1970s, were reincarnated as classics depicting Taiwanese resistance against Japanese invasion. These pop songs of bygone era were transformed into ‘traditional ballads’, emblems of collective historical experience of the multitude.

All previous nativist literature movements and debates embodied both cultural and political meanings of the formation of an interpretive community of Taiwan literature. Such phenomenon also highlights the unique features and characteristics of Taiwan literature developed under colonial rule in the absence of a common historical perspective.

**Keywords:** Nativist Literature Debate, Interpretive Community of Literature, History, Colonial Rule, Anti-Japanese Nationalism, Taiwanese Ballads