

Tracing the Track in History: Continuance and Transition of Taiwanese Old and New Literature (1895-1924)

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ABSTRACT

Current discussions of the history of Taiwanese literature often take the 1920s as the dawn of Taiwanese New Literature when scholars like Chen Xin (陳焮), Chen Duan-ming (陳端明), and Huang Chao-qin (黃朝琴) advocated the use of vernacular Chinese (白話文). Focus of the discussion has been on the debate between the New and Old Literature. Such emphasis seems to imply that the rise of the Taiwanese New Literature is viewed as an enemy of the Old Literature. Does such 'enmity' exist between the two? Or is such "broken relationship" is the only perspective when viewing the development of the two literatures?

From a different viewpoint, this paper explores the desire and urge for new learning and new literature among the Taiwanese under the spread of Western influence from 1895-1924, which fostered the rise of the New Literature. Furthermore, during the transition from the 'Old' to 'New', traditional scholars with great influence in the literary arena also issued statements advocating for literature reform. This gave support and impetus to the new changes, thus catalyzing the development of the New Literature. Hence, rather than broken, the relationship between the New and Old Literature is a continued one.

While the ground seemed to be ready for literary reform and the rise of the New Literature, its growth was affected by the Japanese emphasis of Han Poetry (漢詩) as the social model of the Old Literature. Cultural, political and social constraints further intensified the tension between the Old and New Literature. As a result, the dawn and rise of the New Literature in Taiwan came much later its counterpart in Japan and China.

Keywords: Taiwan new literature, Traditional literature, Transition period, Modernity, Opposition position based on historical view