

Writing Consciousness and the Transcendental Localized Modernity in Mahua Literature

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Abstract

Existing discourses on literary history often regard Malaysian literature in Chinese (better known as Mahua literature) as a continuation of the May 4th Movement's New Literature abroad. Perceptions of the relationship between Mahua literature and mainland Chinese literature, often from the viewpoint of historical origins and unilateral cultural connection, lack an in-depth retrospection on the influence of Western Enlightenment during the May 4th Movement. Thus, it is not surprising that the narrative in the current Mahua literary history quickly turns to the period of new emergent literature (*xinxing wenxue*) in the 1920s. Such an attempt, reflecting the influence of China's leftist-revolutionary literature, has gained the favor and respect of the writers of literary history. What we can be sure of is that, in the pursuits of the internal spirit and practical writing of the history of literature, what one can never deny is the obsession with the nation. However, that historical perspective cannot effectively explain the emergence of the writing consciousness in Mahua literature and also the

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spirit that gradually developed under Western colonialism. Mahua writing consciousness reflects the fluctuation of its historical development. The Chinese community in Malaya before World War II was frequently influenced by China's domestic political situation, and undoubtedly had left quite some significant traces in literary works. Initially, it was anarchism which was imported to Malaya in the 1920s, followed by the spread of communism, the ideological conflict between the Chinese Communist Party (MCP) and the Kuomintang (KMT), as well as the patriotism and high nationalist sentiments resulting from the anti-Japanese movement. Such incidents easily allowed people to accept China as the sole factor which had promoted the Mahua writing consciousness without question. Thus, Mahua literature, on this view, would be inevitably biased. In fact, the presence of colonialism not only contributed to the sentiments of anti-feudalism, anti-imperialism, and anti-colonialism of new emergent literature in the light of Chinese nationalism; more importantly, the social and political changes in mainland China had caused reaction from the Chinese community in Malaya, thus bringing the corresponding measures by the colonialist and various responses from the cultural/literary circles. In other words, the implementation of various administrative and legal measures was to denounce China as a precursor to the social and political movements by the overseas Chinese. Apparently, the consciousness of Mahua writing was deeply constrained by the China factor. However, what has often been overlooked is that the connotation of transcendental localized modernity was precisely germinated within the structure of colonialism, particularly the double-colonialism in the early post-war period, i.e., the Western capital mode of economic colonialism and the colonialism of Chinese communism. This paper tries to discern the specific role of the colonialism factor in the Mahua literature in the pre-war and early post-war period and furthermore, to survey its contribution in generating the consciousness of Mahua writing and the possible forms of Mahua modernity.

Keywords: Mahua writing consciousness, Nanyang, vast hinterland literature, dual-colonialism, transcendental localized modernity

Introduction: Mahua literature,² China and the West

Ethnic Chinese (*huazu* 华族), Chinese descendent (*huayi* 华裔), or simply Chinese (*huaren* 华人) basically is a new emergent group identity or ethnicity in line with the emergence of the modern Chinese history.³ Compared with the Chinese in mainland China who selectively accepted the influences of Western modernization, the Nanyang Chinese (or more accurately “overseas Chinese”⁴) almost had no other choice but to accept such a structured and passive way of life, which had determined the way they spent their time. For example, many of the early Chinese coolies, or so-called *zhuzai* (猪仔), were spending their leisure time in gambling, prostitution and opium smokings. The activities were controlled by the community’s internal mechanism, i.e. the Triad or secret societies, and later on were taken over by the Chinese Capitans. The passive

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- 2 From the anthropological point of view, the term Mahua (马华) is the combination of Ma (Malaysia) and Hua (Chinese). It simply means Malaysian Chinese. But from the literary point of view, the word Mahua in the phrase Mahua wenxue (马华文学) specifically refers to the writing in Chinese vernacular language by the Chinese in Malaya, Singapore as well as in Borneo. The term was coined in 1930s by the Malayan Communist Party and Chinese writers in British Malaya. See Yow Cheun How. “Antara China dan Tanah Tempatan: Satu Kajian Pemikiran Dwipusat Penulis Cina, 1919-1957” (Between China And Local Land: A Study of Dual-Centred Mentality of Chinese Writers in Malaya, 1919-1957). MA thesis (Penang: Universiti Sains Malaysia, 1998), 163-181.
 - 3 There are quite some number of academics tried to interpret the terms *huazu*, *huayi* and *huaren* and the outcome is quite similar. Zhuang Guotu, the Chinese scholar specialized in the area of overseas Chinese realized the fact that, “the concept of *huaren* is a common name, to a certain extent, referring to the group which maintained Chinese culture, and the non-China nationals with Chinese origin. In order to distinguish between local people and the mainland Chinese, normally mainland scholars would put the term *haiwai* (means overseas) in front of the word “Chinese”. In the past 20 years, the use of the term “ethnic Chinese” was in the high frequency, associated with the concept of *huaren wenhua* (Chinese culture) or *huazu wenhua* (culture of the Chinese ethnic). Even he believes that though the concept of “ethnic Chinese” related with the term *zhonghua minzu* (Chinese nation), but the use of the concept become more and more different from the latter, even proposed of the concept is to clarify the boundaries with the latter.” See Zhuang Guotu. *Huaqiao, huaren yu Zhongguo de guanxi*. (Guangzhou: High School Educational Publisher, 2001), 9.
 - 4 As compared to the term *Haiwai huaren* (海外华人, overseas Chinese) and *Nan Yang huaren* (南洋华人, Nanyang Chinese), *Haiyang huaren* (海洋华人, overseas Chinese) is a better term to describe the nature of diasporic Chinese around the world and it is free from China centered sentiment. Hence it is merely a new category of ethnic group which is by no means a by-product or surplus in the mechanism of Western capitalism in the last century.

nature of the Chinese response to the Western modernity is placed in the modernization process of modern China and the colonialism structure in the Southeast Asian region. As far as China and Southeast Asia, the ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia was the first to face the shock in the forefront of westernization. On the other hand, their cultural fabric in the beginning stages often deeply depended on the cultural types of their ancestral homeland, and this is not difficult to understand. However, we should note that, due to the factors of geography, lifestyle and the structure of consciousness, they were more closely linked to Nanyang 南洋 (literally means South Seas) rather than zhongyuan (中原, central plains). Therefore, they did not exclude the influence of other indigenous ethnic groups, such as customs and habits, in their cultural formation. This did not only provide an entrance for modern intervention of Western colonialism, but also gave birth to the conversion of Western modernity to indigenous Mahua modernity. However, we have to admit that such process and phenomena occurred in the system of Western colonialism, including – capitalist modernity in social, economic, administrative, educational and other new derivative systems. Nevertheless, their continuity with the history of mainland China had not broken. Bishnu N. Mahopatra has tried to describe the impact of colonialism in the following way:

...A significant break in the life of the colonized societies...usually explained by accounting for the significant impacts of colonialism on the colonized societies. Whether it is the new revenue system, new institutions for governance, the rise of public sphere, the practices of mapping the society through enumeration and its impact on communitarian politics, initiation of new production process, education and rise of new classes; the possibilities for forging new solidarities; the impact for colonial rules on family, patriarchy, and love and so on, there exist today a growing body of literature whose main objective is to document and interpret these changes (Bishnu N, 2001).

For this reason, the culture of Nanyang Chinese in particular revealed a distinctive character of dual-colonial nature. As displayed in the ideas and themes of literary works, it had mainly integrated the concept of realism promoted by Qu Qiubai, a well-known critic in early 1920s China, which was derived “from the prevailing reality of a critical spirit, coupled with a kind of historical significance that literature must be responsible for the reality” (Li, 1995), and the spirit has been repeatedly stressed by Fang Xiu in his concept of critical realism. Secondly, regarding the way of Mahua new

literature approaching to the Western modernity, the Mahua realist writers and critics no doubt had learned more from the history of colonialism than the capitalist structure which Calinescu called bourgeois modernity. As a consequence, aesthetic modernity basically had never gained attention of both Mahua writers and critics. That means Mahua literature from the beginning of its origin, to a large extent, had manifested its incomplete nature of modernity. The purpose of this paper is to explore the specific role of the China-West dual-colonialism upon Mahua literature from the pre-war to the post-war period, by surveying the concrete implementation of Mahua awareness in the writing and the similar state revealed in Mahua modernity.

Xinxing wenxue and the Incomplete Mahua Modernity

Mahua new literature in the earlier stage had witnessed the first impact of the wave of modern Chinese literature, the so-called origin by the impact of May 4th New Literature. According to Fang Xiu's conception, "the Chinese May 4th Cultural Movement had influenced Malaysia, including the region of Singapore, Borneo and Malaya, with new ideas as well as new spirit of the Chinese vernacular literature." (Fang, 1972). However, the impact of the May 4th on Mahua literature was only limited to the realism aspects of writing; the essence of enlightenment (i.e. science and democracy) as well as the spirit of liberalism had not been paid attention, or had failed to favour Mahua authors as well as literary historian and critics. More importantly, the Mahua audience never realized that the elites of the May 4th Movement were actually responding to the ideology of Western capitalism, especially in pursuing the goals of Chinese nationalism. To this point, Guo Moruo's concept of geming wenxue (革命文学, Revolutionary Literature) had clearly advocated the view, and the concept of wenxue geming (文学革命, Literary Revolution) was undoubtedly a bourgeois one. Guo Moruo's *Wenxue geming zhi huigu* (文学革命之回顾, *A Review on Literary Revolution*) had clearly pointed out that:

The May 4th New Culture Movement was actually a struggle between the capital society and the feudal society in the aspect of ideology. His two arguments are: firstly, Mr. Democracy (De xiansheng) and Mr. Science (Sai xiansheng), the instructors respected by Xin qingnian (新青年, New Youth), are the two gods in the modern capitalist society. Its spirit was to advocate freedom and equality; its work was done for the sake of capitalists who had succeeded in gaining their

ruling power in the political struggle; and it was working toward “a construction of a superstructure for the capitalist society”. Secondly, the two slogans of Xin qingnian relating to the literary revolution are: “to oppose the literature of feudal aristocracy” and “to build the pingmin wenxue (平民文学, Civilian Literature) on the basis of freedom and equality”, which was in line with the spirit of freedom, and in the form of anti-aristocratic taste. However, the so-called freedom was no more than the freedom of the emerging bourgeois; and the so-called civilians, were represented by the class of emerging bourgeoisie that had gained their immediate wealth. Therefore, the “freedom of Civilian Literature” as promoted by Xin qingnian, was actually no more than “a new feudal aristocracy”. Guo Moruo finally came to the conclusion that the so-called Chinese literary revolution and its nature were characterized by “a bourgeois revolution”. In 1931, Qu Qiubai, the famous leftist literary theorist in the “Puluo dazhong wenyi de xianshi wenti” (普罗大众文艺的现实问题). Literally means the problems of the proletarian arts in the sense of reality, more clearly defined the May 4th Literary Revolution as a “movement of the liberal bourgeois as well as Enlightenment literature and arts”.⁵

Now we come to the view that the origin of the Mahua New Emergence Literature in the 1920s could only be described as the superficial translation of the May 4th New Literature, or it is an incomplete translation of Chinese modernity, the core is none other than the spirit of the orientation of Chinese nationalism, but we can hardly deny that it had prematurely fixed the setting of the spirit of nationalism in Mahua literature. Firstly, from the early stage of the 1911 Revolution, in response to Sun Yat-sen’s call for *Pai Man Da Lu* (排满鞑虏, Exclusion of Manchu and Onslaught of Barbarian), the unique sense of nationalism was reflected in its spirit of Greater Han from the beginning, and later on anti-Japanese sentiment during the period of May 4th Movement by the Nanyang Chinese. Hence, it can be said that the beginning of the sense of Mahua writing in the 1920s was mainly initiated by China's domestic political factors especially Chinese nationalism, and the inherent cultural impact proposed by Fang Xiu came in two different levels. In this respect, it is necessary to widen and carry out extensive and in-depth discussions.

5 Cited in Lin Weimin. *Zhongguo zuoyi wenxue sichao* (Shanghai: East China Normal University Press, 2005), 238-239.

Undoubtedly, the literary history by Fang Xiu was actually just a historical view paired with left-winged principal articulated. Because the post-war left-winged movement in the 1950s was monitored and severely suppressed by the colonial government, and due to the international Cold War between the East and the West, it is understandable that Fang Xiu seemed to be very careful in his works. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that he had chosen the May 4th Movement as a disguise in narrating the origin of Mahua literary history.⁶ As stated above, the May 4th Movement is basically a liberal movement by the knowledgeable elite; although the spirit of the Enlightenment had shown certain nationalist ethos, it had nothing to do with the civilian population and certainly lacked of popular base and a wide range of mobilization forces.

Putting the essential spirit of the May 4th Movement in the historical reality of the Chinese in Singapore and Malaya, will contribute very much to the understanding of the incomplete influence of Western modernity upon Mahua literature. From the mid 19th century to the early 20th century, the vast majority of Chinese populations in Nanyang were mainly made up by the working class from the southern part of China, their level of culture and knowledge was rather low. Due to their low social status (they were mostly coolies), they tended to be intuitively offended by the Western modernity, or to adopt Western modernity categorically with negative attitude. Even the knowledgeable class or the immigrants with a high level of education background, also took the same attitude as the intellectuals in mainland China, and preferred to have the spirit of the modern nation-state as their final destination. Within China, they noticed the corruption of the Qing Dynasty and the abuse of Western power in China; in Southeast Asia, they had suffered under the colonial rule and the exploitation of capitalist economic system. In this regard, their reaction towards Western modernity was purely

6 In fact, the conception of Fang Xiu was based on the appropriation of political significance of the May 4th Movement by the Communist Party of China, including the affirmation of certain roles played by the elites in the history, as what had pointed out by Zhou Cezong, that is the liberation of traditional practices, the reformation of ideas and emotions, and the destroy of traditional values, so as to open the mind for changes (1981, 492-493). Thus, it is understandable that after the rise of Mahua vernacular literature, it was quickly dominated by the leftist revolutionary literature by the end of 1920s during the period of world great depression, with class struggle and anti-colonialism as the main purpose and supplementary purpose respectively.

mechanical. Compared to the pursuit of the profound connotation of May 4th ideology of Enlightenment by mainland China's elites, this spirit among the Nanyang Chinese was completely absent.

Due to the fact mentioned above, they turned to May 4th Revolutionary Literature which emphasized realism, and had devoted greater effort to it. This actually was related to the problems they had faced, i.e. the social and economic exploitation in Nanyang in the 1920s, which aroused their sympathy and in turn led to their participation. Therefore, we notice that during the rise of the Revolutionary Literature in 1928, and its quick domination of the leadership in the literary circle, the Nanyang Chinese paid immediate response to the new situation, which brought about the so-called *Xinxing wenxue* (新兴文学, New Emergent Literature). Outwardly, their actions not only struggled against hunger and exploitation,⁷ but also strongly criticized the ideology of the colonialism. This is what had been called "the awareness of anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism" by Fang Xiu. Such a reaction seemed to be subjected to the internal limitations of Nanyang Chinese culture. More importantly, it is the psychological response to the Western modernity under the dual-colonial circumstances. Due to the gradual transformation of mainland China to a semi-colonial society after the Opium War in 1840, the Chinese immigrants came to Nanyang under such psychological sentiment. They tried to avoid falling into another system of colonialism more thoroughly effected than what they had experienced in their homeland. In this light, the leftist discourse of imperialism and colonialism in the 1920s has only partially reflected the Mahua modernity. To put it more specifically, the Mahua modernity only inherited the spirit of the May 4th New Cultural Movement which emphasized on instance impact, i.e. against feudalism, colonialism as well as imperialism, and therefore lacked of a solid ideological basis of introspection, so had inevitably manifested itself as a deteriorating modernity. This determined the nature and characteristics of Mahua literature in the future, such as indifference to the pursuit of knowledge and academic critical works, irrational responses and gestures to the critics, geocentricism, etc. This incomplete modernity of Malaysian-Chinese history has constantly carried on with the passage of time.

7 Such situation had been revealed in the poetical drama entitled *Shizi jietou* (十字街头, The Crossroads) by Huan You (寰游).

From this point of view, it is not difficult to understand the fact that Fang Xiu only partially drew his new literary spirit of realism and romanticism from the May 4th Literary Movement. The core values of the entire movement—Attitude towards freedom (*ziyou zhuyi* 自由主义), and the Enlightenment (启蒙主义), which were the main thoughts in Western civilization since the period of Renaissance, were not given attention. And the criteria whereby literature written in vernacular language is taken as the origin of Mahua new literature can be regarded as the spirit of liberation accepted by the literary historians. What Jiang Menglin called the May 4th Movement as a type of liberation, the spirit which was adopted by Mahua culture, had constantly become the tone of spirit of anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism over the long duration in pre-war period.

However, the literary history by Fang Xiu is basically leftist coupled with a delicate relationship to the spirit of nationalism, and has formed a leftist mode of nationalism. In other words, in the works by Fang Xiu, the relationship between Chinese literature and Mahua literature was constituted on this leftist premise. No doubt this corroboration was closely related to the regional political climate from the pre-war era to the 1960s. At this stage, China's nationalism were repeatedly struck on the society of Nanyang Chinese; but what is certain is that between the 1920s to late 1950s, there was more influence of the left-wing movement from China, while nationalism was merely a recessive presence. This recessive nationalist literature was initially shown in the form of socialism-realism, and was carried on until the early postwar period when the British implemented a new policy of administration.⁸ When the Malayan Chinese started to realize the urgency of an independent nation, they found and displayed it in the form of leftist nationalism. For instance, the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) as the backbone of the left-wing culture in that period had timely played its role. Not only stressing their

8 On April 1, 1946, the British colonial government couple threats and promises, ordered the four Federated Malay States, i.e. Perak, Selangor, Negeri Sembilan, Pahang, and four other Non-Federated Malay States (Johor, Kelantan, Terengganu, Kedah), as well as Penang and Malacca to put under a single administrative system called Malayan Union. In this case, Singapore was excluded and put directly under the rule of Colonial Office in London. This was the key strategy of the British colonial government in order to effectively safeguard its economic and military interests in post-war Malaya.

concern on locality in literary and artistic creation, they also strongly refuted the thought which had long been dominating the Mahua literary circle. This clearly shows that the system of colonialism had contributed to the nationalist character, thus playing a crucial role in the formation and development of Mahua literature. In this regard, we have to further explore the system of colonialism. The specific questions we should ask are: What is the content of the system? What are the factors which were highly homogenous with the Chinese nationalism in the pre-war period had changed after the post-war period and then transformed towards a unique type of Mahua-National Literature? What is the nature of the dispute between Zhou Rong (周容) and Sha Ping (沙平) on the topic of Mahua wenyi dutexing lunzheng (马华文艺独特性论争, Polemic on the Uniqueness of Mahua Literature), and how is it related to the establishment of Mahua national awareness? I will try to further discuss these within such.

As mentioned earlier, the pre-war Malayan Chinese nationalist spirit at the outset was shaped by the political situation of China's internal constraints, Sun Yat-sen's call for *Pai Man Da Lu*, the spirit of Greater Han, and subsequently the appeal of anti-Japanese patriotic spirit. The colonial government was suspicious and fearful of the high nationalist spirit among the Malayan Chinese and their strong identification with China's domestic politics, and had tried to take containment measures.⁹ But the colonial government's main concern was that they did not want to see the local Chinese and indigenous peoples form an alliance or any form of interaction among the ethnic groups, which might destabilize its power in the region. This can be proven in the population census carried out by the colonial government, where in which the Chinese of different origins were often classified under a single name, i.e. Chinese.¹⁰ Obviously, this measure

9 For instance, the Banishment Ordinance of 1867, which was effectively implemented throughout the last century, and the Societies Act. These legal measures were designed to restrict the number of immigrants as well as to, curb China's political influence in Malaya and Singapore.

10 The colonial master also took the corresponding practices to other ethnic groups, including classifying the subcontinent South Asian migrants as a singular Indian, and the Javanese, Banjarese, Minangkabaus, Bugis and so on into a single group of Malay. Subsequently, this had led to the fundamental Malay nationalism in present Malaysia, especially uphold by United Malay National Organization (UMNO), the political party which has dominated Malaysia ruling coalition since 1957 to date.

further consolidated the nationalist sentiment among the Nanyang Chinese, and had sowed the seeds of ethnic problems. But the reality is that, the colonial government's attempt to impose a singular identity through the national policy contradicted the reality that these are different identities in Nanyang Chinese community. Before the World War II, the internally diversified Nanyang Chinese still defined their identities based on dialects, place of origin, and even occupation. The establishment of vernacular schools and political parties during the pre war period were set up by certain groups with close ties to industry. Internal tensions among the Nanyang Chinese were rife in the political, economic, cultural and educational fields as well as in the ways in which resources were distributed.¹¹ The delineation of class became increasingly clear, as many wealthy local leaders set up the first home of the so-called Malayan Chinese Association in 1948. Even some former Kuomintang (KMT) members of the local wealthy became the leaders in the party. Thus, due to the division along the lines of dialect, place of origin, occupation, class etc, these people almost dominated the entire discourse of overseas Chinese in the 20th century. By the end of the dual-colonial process, the above circumstances had changed gradually. The most notable result was the conversion of the Chinese *xiangyuan* 乡缘 (home-roots) consciousness to the concept of pre-national consciousness.

In the literary field, the above dichotomy was similar. Critics tend to perceive Mahua literature as the first tributary literature of the May 4th New Literature outside China, and the Chinese scholars have always regarded the relationship between the mainland Chinese literature and Mahua literature as one-way cultural transmission.¹² However, the vernacular language as the key factor in pre-war Mahua literature had never won an unequivocal response in Singapore and Malaya. According to

11 In this regard, Mai Liufang (Mak Lau Fong) has a very meticulous research, See *Fangyanqun rentong: zaoqi Xin Ma huaren de fenlei fazhe* (Taipei: Institute of Ethnological Studies, Academia Sinica, 1985). Also see Li Yiyuan, *Yige yizhi de shizhen* (Taipei: Institute of Ethnological Studies, Academia Sinica, 1970).

12 Borrowed the words by Li Zhi, a young Chinese scholar, "In our study on the constant process of the Chinese literature moving towards the world, the study of Chinese Literature in Southeast Asia region is rather of particular importance and significant." (See Li Zhi. "Wi Si xin wenxue 'geming' zai Xin Ma: Lun Nanyang diqu huawen wenxuezhong de 'wenbai zhi zheng'", *Journal of Malaysian Chinese Studies*, No. 4, 2001, 60.

Fang Xiu's literary history, the most active in promoting the vernacular language during the embryonic period (1919-1924) was *Xin Guomin ribao* (新国民日报, New National Daily). For instance, from 1919 to 1921, the publication of fiction in vernacular newspapers had maintained its growth. But in the following three years, the percentage of classical fictions in vernacular newspapers had shown a drastic decrease. In 1924, more classical (language) fiction had been published compared with the one in vernacular language, totaling 44 over 86 in contrasts with 2 over 116 in 1923. This reversal in figures is worthy of pondering.¹³ A preliminary observation of this phenomenon is that prior to the mid 1920s intellectuals and culturalist in Singapore and Malaya actually showed no unified in promoting the vernacular language. In addition, Zhang Shu'nai (张叔耐), a newspaper editor had suggested that it was better to achieve the drastic change of the language form in literary writing through the "moderate way". This is a distinct difference compared to the great passionate shown by the cultural circle in mainland China regarding the promotion of vernacular language. As a result, the issue had exposed certain tension and fraction among the writers at that time. We might say that it was China nationalism that had led to the underlying nationalist spirit in Mahua literature. And to a certain extent, the colonial policy had played its important role to that direction. The polemic on the issue of the Uniqueness of Mahua Literature in the early post-war period had led to relatively liberal policy of the colonial government, and finally triggered the debate on the issues of duannai (断奶, weaning) and jingdian quexi (经典缺席, absence of literary canon) 40 years later.¹⁴

13 For details see table of quantitative analysis provided by Li Zhi, *Ibid*, 62.

14 When Chen Xuefeng talked on the issue of duannai in the 1990s, it seems to have some correlation with the polemic in the post-war period, 'duannai' does not deny the origin between Mahua literature and Chinese literature, because this is a historical fact, and there is no way to deny. Now somebody throws the issue of duannai to the Mahua literary arena, we can only perceive that the writers are trying to tell the ancient tales, back again to recall the affairs happen in the past." (See Chen Xuefeng. Fangtan de buchong yu jieshi, in Chan Yeong Siew, Teoh Kong Tat, Lim Choon Bee, eds. *Lawei Mahua wenxue: 90 niandai Mahua wenxue zhenglunxing keti wenxuan* (Kuala Lumpur: Selangor Chinese Asembly Hall, The Federation of Alumni Associations of Taiwan Universities, Malaysia, 2002), 371.

From Dahoufang Wenyi to Mahua Ethnic Literature

In the development of modern history of China, the close relationship between Nanyang and China began with the 1898 Reformist Movement in the late Qing period. The failure of Chinese Empire Reform Association (Baohuang hui) led by Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao had finally led to their exile abroad, where they competed with the members of Sun Yat-sen's revolutionary party to promote activities among the overseas Chinese. These events had directly accelerated the development of Chinese schools and newspapers in the region. *Tian nan xinbao/Thien Nan Shin Pao* (天南新报), *Nanyang zonghui xinbao/Nanyang Chung Wei Pao* (南洋总汇报), *Tu nan ribao/Thoe Lam Jit Poh* (图南日报), *Zhong xing ribao/Chong Shing Yit Pao* (中兴日报) etc, were the responses of Nanyang Chinese to the reformist movement as well as the revolutionary movement in China. Due to the impact of mainland China during that particular period, Chinese schools in Nanyang were also began to adopt Putonghua in their teaching. This development not only affected the daily activities of the Nanyang Chinese community where it was clearly demarcated by different groups of dialects, but also provided a common imaginary space to the community. As the lingua franca, Putonghua was important in the characterization of a modern China, whereas the print media in the form of newspapers and books represented the impact of Western modernity on Nanyang Chinese. The impact of these two factors had led to the beginning of a modern nature of Nanyang Chinese community. The activities of revolutionary party members in Nanyang further strengthened the patriotic and nationalistic sentiments within the Nanyang Chinese community. The three pillars of Chinese community, i.e. Chinese schools, Chinese newspapers and Chinese association and guilds (namely huaxiao, huabao, huatuan), had become the main targets of the revolutionists. Prior to the 1920s, the reformist and the revolutionary forces were evenly matched. The former was represented by Singaporean writer-culturalist Khoo Seok Wan (邱菽园) while Tan Chor Nam (陈楚南) and Teo Eng Hock (张永福) represented the latter. Their co-existence fully showed the infiltration of China's political forces in Nanyang as well as the tension within the Chinese community.

For modern Chinese politicians, as well as social reformers and intellectuals, once they faced heavy setbacks at the front-line, they would always choose to leave China for Nanyang, where they would actively call for Nanyang Chinese to respond to the great rejuvenation of their ancestral homeland. In this sense, Nanyang had been assumed as a hinterland for China's political and cultural circle. The term "Nanyang", at this juncture,

shows its most significant connotation.¹⁵ If Chungking (Chongqing) was the hinterland and cultural centre within mainland China, Singapore and Malaya were the hinterland and cultural centre beyond China. This was the period during which European colonial powers actively explored and massively intruded the region. On the one hand, China was in the process of transitioning towards a modern nation-state, which unexpectedly had led to cultural colonialism. On the other hand, it was the period where the European powers had extensively carried out political expansion through their technologically

15 The term “Nanyang” was introduced alongside with the emergence of modern China. Li Changfu had reviewed the term from the historical perspective: Although my country has linked with South Seas quite long ago, but prior to the Tang and Song Dynasties, the region was known only by the name of Nan Man or Nan Yi (South Barbarian); there was not the name of Nanyang yet. During the Ming Dynasty, with the opening up of the sea routes, the traveling of ships between China and South Seas was very frequent. But there was no such name as Nanyang; we have only Dong Yang (East Seas) and Xi Yang (West Seas). ... Therefore, when Zheng He voyaged overseas, he was described as going to the West Seas. It was in the record of the Qing Dynasty that the name Nanyang was recorded. For instance, Haiguo Wenjian Lu (The Records on the Countries over the Sea) do have the term Dong Yang (East Seas), Dongnan Yang (East West Seas), and Nanyang (South Seas). There is also a specific chapter on Nanyang’s island in the book entitled Ying Huan Zhilue 瀛环志略 (Traveling Notes Around the Oceans), but the term Nanyang is rarely used. As to the use of the term in official letters and newspapers, it happened only recently in late Qing period (2001: 407). As for the territory bound by Nanyang, Chinese and foreign scholars have tried to have it interpreted, including Li Changfu (2001), Wang Gungwu (1988) and Donald Emerson (1984). Li divided Nanyang mainly into two geographical areas, namely bandao (Peninsula) and qundao (archipelago). The former refers to the Peninsular of Indochina, while the latter refers to the Malay archipelago (2001:408-409). However, the author tends to adopt Wang’s definition, mainly because Wang’s views are more accurately corresponding to the history of modern China. According to Wang, the term “Nanyang” refers to the places that are accessible by the routes through the South China Sea. Therefore, the area particularly relevant with the China is the strategic coastal zone between mainland China and Southeast Asia, as well as the Philippines and most of the islands of Indonesia. This excluded the routes on the land through which the Chinese entered Vietnam, Laos, Burma and Siam in different historical periods (1988, 207). In any case, “Nanyang” relations with China and its special significance to China were fully reflected in Li’s summary: “Firstly, geographically linked with our country or boundaries, or very close with one to another in terms of geographical distance. Secondly, in history it may be of our territory, or under the sovereignty of our country. Thirdly, in the current situation, the above territory is the residing centre for overseas Chinese, and its linkage with our economic sphere is rather close (See Li Zhi. *Wu Si xin wenxue “geming” zai Xin Ma: Lun Nanyang diqu huawen wenxuezhong de “wenbai zhi zheng”*. 2001, 408). To my understanding, what Li has tried to express not only reveals the close relationship between Nanyang and China in geographical, economic and historical term, but also carries some political significances, especially when the practice of tributary system is put into consideration.

advancement. The convergence of the two forces had given the cultural system of the Nanyang hinterland a thick colour of nationalism, and it was against this background that Mahua New Emergent Literature was given birth. Here, Dahoufang wenyi (大后方文艺, hinterland literature) is neither outbound in terms of meaning nor a historical concept,¹⁶ and is not necessary equal to Kangzhan wenxue (抗战文学, Literature of War Resistance) or Guofang wenxue (国防文学, Literature of National Defense). It is purely a flexible and self-contained literary concept. Specifically, it is the extension, as well as the satellite literature or overseas battlefield literature of mainland Chinese literature. Therefore, it is one of the components of the mega system of Chinese literature. Its activities not only perceived domestic developments as the sole target of concern, but also tended to compare the resistance in the British colonial settlements with what happened in China. At this point, its inter-dependency was clear. In this case, drama was the main form of expression. More accurately, the huobaoju (活报剧, literally means live forecast drama, a kind of streets play) was the general form of plays. The purpose for the said drama was to educate the masses and to promote the effectiveness of the anti-Japanese War. This kind of genre constituted the main content of hinterland literature during the war. In the shadow of the circumstances then, the impact of hinterland literature was significant in terms of its expressions of social discontent and literary culture than literariness. This subsequently brought to the emergence of the so-called typical type of Yu Dafu and Hu Yuzhi's thoughts (Lin, 1994). In particular, its main tasks were to support domestic literature as well as the political mission. Lin Wanjing (Lim Buan Chay) concluded Hu and Yu's mission in Nanyang as

16 The Dahoufang wenyi discussed here is a term inspired by the discourses widely used in Modern Chinese Literature, for instance Guotong qu wenyi (国统区文艺, The Literature of Kuomintang's Territory), Lunxian qu wenyi 沦陷区文艺 (The Literature of Occupied Territory), Genju di wenyi (根据地文艺, The Literature of Naval Base, also known as Literature of Liberated Territory in 1943). It had established its relations with the above three concepts during the early postwar period and had close relationships with literature and art. Besides having its own system, it had displayed both passive and active nature, depending on the cooperation between the Kuomintang and the Communist Party. It formed a special literary ecology during the anti-Japanese period. Undeniably, the Nanyang hinterland literature had made a lasting impact on the Mahua literature and arts in the later days, and had reflected the ups and downs of Mahua literary consciousness in the pre-war period. Hence, it is not an exaggeration to say that the Nanyang hinterland literature was a part of the territory of Modern Chinese Literature from pre-war till the early post-war period.

disaster relief and national salvation, besides promoting new ideas. They tried to utilize literature to promote social movements, and had directly given their involvement in cultural activities a social and political outlook. Lin has a vivid conclusion of their relief works and ideological base:

At that time, Yu Dafu and Hu Yuzhi seemed to be the top reputable figures in Nanyang cultural sphere. They had some kind of intangible capacity to strengthen the intellectual cohesion and unite the forces in various cultural sectors. They had advance thinking, and their articles were of high-quality, hence easy to mobilize the people. On the eve of Singapore's fall, the task assumed by Hu Yuzhi and Yu Dafu was no more than rescue and disaster relief through public opinion, and to ensure that the mission of disaster relief was efficiently carried out. They themselves were not political figures, but they had very strong sense of patriotism and very sincere enthusiasm for national salvation. They were not directly involved in the local left-wing political forces, nor they had the ambition to dominate the development of the local politics. Their political view was even quite a distance from that of the left-wingers (such as the MCP established in 1930), yet they still successfully mobilized the people in the works of disaster relief (Lin, 1994).

There was an upsurge of participants in the disaster relief and national salvation campaign. They were comprised mainly of mainland leftist literati, but the locals were profoundly affected as well, to the extent that the Nanyang Chinese was referred as *Haiwai de zhongguo changcheng* (海外的中国长城, overseas Great Wall of China) (Hu, 1996). In this context, the southern border hinterland was none other than a *Wenyi changcheng* (文艺长城, Great Wall Arts and Literature).¹⁷ Fang Xiu's Mahua literary

17 "Great Wall Arts and Literature" is a title of pre-war literary publication, by Tie Kang and Wu Tian. It was published in the "isolated island" of Shanghai in 1939. The third issue of the magazine published *Shanghai wenyijie tongren gei Nanyang huaqiao wenyijie de yi feng xin* (上海文艺界同人给南洋华侨文艺界的一封信, *A letter by Shanghai literature and arts activists to the colleagues of Nanyang Chinese*), and advocated that the common goal of "Great Wall Arts and Literature" could not be destroyed. A total number of 26 writers had put down their initials, including Dai Pingwan and Zuo Lian. Wu Tian, editor-in-chief of "Great Wall Arts and Literature", migrated south in 1936, and had taught in primary and secondary schools in Singapore, Seremban and other places. He was active in promoting the amateur drama movement. He then went back to Shanghai in 1939 and finally became a well-known dramatist and director. *Zouxiang xin Zhongguo* (走向新中国, *Heading toward New China*), the first movie soon after the succession of the Communist regime in China, was directed by Wu Tian. For Wu's biodata, see Ma Lun. *Xin Ma wentan renwu saomiao, 1825-1990* (Skudai, Malaysia: Shu Hui Press, 1991), 338-339.

history covers many of these southern hinterland literati, such as Xu Jie (许杰), Ma Ning (马宁)/Jing Qian (静倩), Chen Sima (陈嘶马)/ Su Nu (宿女), Han Ping (汉平 / Shi Yan Hong 石燕红), Gao Yunlan (高云览), Chen Canyon (陈残云), Wang Jiyuan (王纪元), Yang Sao (杨骚), Wu Tian (吴天, also known with the pen name Ye Ni 叶尼), Zhang Tianbai (张天白), Hu Yuzhi (胡愈之), Shen Zijiu (沈兹九), Yu Dafu (郁达夫), Liu Bin (流冰), Hu Yisheng (胡一声), Wang Renshu (王任叔 / Ba Ren 巴人), Wang Jinding (汪金丁), Du Yunxie (杜运燮), Xia Yan (夏衍), Yue Ye (岳野) and so forth. Scholars such as Lin Wanqing had keenly grasped the specific expectations of the southward migrated intellectuals on the Nanyang Chinese, i.e. to “support the anti-Japanese War and contribute generously, to put the biggest effort in supporting the mission at the front-line, and to be fully mobilized regardless of moral or material differences”.¹⁸ In December 1941, after the outbreak of the Pacific war, Yu Dafu was extensively involved in the newly set up Xinhua wenhuajie zhanshi gongzuotuan (新华文化界战时工作团, The Wartime Working Committee of Singapore Chinese Cultural Association), whose main concern was to mobilize the masses to participate in the anti-Japanese campaign. Yu Dafu was elected as the head of the committee, while Hu Yuzhi became deputy head and Wang Renshu head of publicity bureau. Others such as Wang Jiyuan, Wang Jinding, Yang Sao and Shen Zijiu were also involved in the mission. The less notable ties between this group of leftist literati eventually came under the light on the eve of Singapore’s surrender. At this moment, the spirit of Chinese nationalism finally converged with the left-wing forces and was consolidated, and the contemporary Chinese nationalism since the post-Revolution era underwent a transformation. Indirectly, it had put forward a hint in the inter-ethnic co-operation of the Malayan Chinese left-wing nationalists with other ethnic groups in the early post war period, and had further laid the foundation of local modernity of the Malaysian Chinese culture/modern literature. It is important to note that Chinese intellectuals’ relocation in Nanyang hinterland was closely related to the fluctuation of China modern history, and that these intellectuals were also directly involved in the shaping of the Mahua literary system in the first half of the 20th century. Fang Xiu sees these phenomena as an immigration wave of modern Chinese intellectuals. He divided Chinese intellectuals’ migration to the south into three different phases:

18 Ibid, 177.

The first was in April 1927, immediately after the Split of Ning Han (宁汉分裂). During the time, Chiang Kai-shek launched the “cleaning party” strategy, causing a large number of writers from Hainan Island, Shantou (Swatow), Xiamen (Amoy) and Shanghai to seek refuge in the south. Xu Jie was among the earliest to arrive. He was the editor of *Yi qun bao* (益群报 *Yik Khuan Poh*) in Kuala Lumpur; he also handled the literary supplements, trained young authors, and advocated Emergent Literature. He had played an important role... After the outbreak of Sino-Japanese War, more writers headed south, and some of them were more famous, such as Yu Dafu, Hu Yuzhi, Ba Ren, Yang Sao, etc.... After the war, especially during the Chinese civil war, there were a large number of writers fleeing south. Some scattered in India, Burma and Thailand during the Anti-Japanese War and intended to return to China after the post-war demobilization. But due to various reasons, they stayed in Malaya in the midway of return home. These groups were also included in this wave of immigration. This third installment of immigrant writers, such as Mi Jun, Han Meng, Ding Jiarui, Du Yunxie etc, had good levels of creativity; they had left to the local literary scene a number of matured works (Wei, Dai & Fang, 1999).

The three years mentioned by Fang Xiu above (1927, 1937, 1947) are basically overlapping with the existing discourse of San ge shinian (三个十年, three phases of ten years) in the modern Chinese literature and history. Guo and Li even include the Singaporean and Malayan left-wing literary trends in the 1920s as part of the structure of modern Chinese literary history (Guo & Li, 1998). Thus, I believe that putting the pre-war Mahua literature in the discourse of Chinese hinterland can better clarify the intrinsic link between China and Mahua. Moreover, it can better grasp the origin of Mahua literary writing and the beginning of its literary system. The anti-Japanese War and the national salvation campaign had not only drove the Chinese intellectuals to leave for the southern regions, but also stifled their creativity at the pinnacle of their literary careers. When Yu Dafu migrated south on December 28, 1938, he had entered his middle age at which he might be able to make another break through in his literary career. However, in the reality of Nanyang hinterland, this possibility never materialized. As is known, Yu Dafu stayed in Nanyang for about seven years, but he had left only a total of 222 pieces of miscellaneous works, including political essays, prose writings (including *zawen*, a kind of short critical essay) and essays on literary issues (Yu, 1990), as well as some traditional poems written prior to his heading south. Strictly speaking, he produced few works of literary merit during that period. Yet, his exile, in a sense, is

an important and significant symbol of modern Chinese literature. Furthermore, his exile in Nanyang and his missing are also a symbol of the end of modern Chinese literature in Nanyang hinterland. Huang Jinshu (Ng Kim Chew) has made such an interesting analogy to Yu Dafu's missing in Nanyang: Yu Dafu's death in the South at the starting point of the Chinese literature in Singapore, Malaya and Indonesia had forged an emptiness in productivity of a great desire (极大的欲望之生产性空洞) (Huang, 2004) has clearly implies the absence of Mahua literary classics/canon since the founding of the nation to date. He also touches on the barrenness of Mahua literary ecology, which finally leads him to his strong criticism of the bankruptcy of the realism writings embraced by most of the Mahua writers, particularly in Malaysia post-independence era. Although Huang Jinshu intends to use the case of Yu Dafu to declare the end of diasporic Chineseness, but he does not realize that the end is exactly the time for germination of Mahua writing awareness. The pioneers of this new era were from the camp of the left-wing, one of them being the well-known Jin Zhi Mang (金枝芒), who had emerged in the pre-war era.¹⁹ He is the man who triggered the polemic on the uniqueness of Mahua literature in the early post-war period, and his arguments seemed to be in line with the polemic on the issue of duannai (weaning) half a century later, i.e. in the second half of the 1990s. As I have pointed out in my previous writings, the polemic triggered by Jin Zhi Mang in 1947 is the beginning of the awareness of Mahua literature in terms of subjectivity construction. Compared to the discussion of Nanyang colour in the 1920s and the slogan of Malaya wenyi (马来亚文艺, Malayan Literature and Arts) and Difang wenyi (地方文艺, Local Literature and Arts) in the 1930s, it is clear that the "polemic was more

19 Jin Zhi Mang, originally named Chen Shuying (陈树英), was born in Changshu County in the Province of Jiangsu. He migrated to Malaya in 1936. His first place of stop-over is Tualang, a small fishing village in Perak. There he taught in Tong Han Chinese Primary school, at the same time he began his writing career. During the Japanese occupation in 1942, he participated in the Anti-Japanese Alliance, and in 1943 joined the Malayan Communist Party. He had been involved in the editing and publication of the party's periodicals, such as *Bei Ma daobao* (北马导报, *North Malaya Herald*), *Yi Bao ribao* (怡保日报, *Ipoh Daily*), *Renmin daobao* (人民导报, *People Herald*), *Zhanyou bao* (战友报, *Combatant Friends*), *Tuanjie bao* (团结报, *Unity*), *Huoxian shang* (火线上, *On the frontline of the Battle Field*) and some other books. In order to conceal his identity, apart from the name Jin Zhi Mang, he also used several pen names to publish his writings, such as Ru Ying (乳婴), Yin Zhi Yang (殷枝阳), Zhi Yang (枝阳), Zhou Rong (周容), Zhou Li (周力), Lao Lu (老陆), Xia Yang (夏阳), etc.

forward-looking. It had thoroughly clarified the problems of the perspective of Mahua literary writing. It also provided a more accurate focus and concern on writing in the future” (Zhuang, 2007). Jin Zhi Mang’s novel *Ji’e* (饥饿, *Hunger*), which was published in 1959, had filled “the great desire of empty production” in the hinterland literature, and stood as a symbol of a starting point of a new literary consciousness. Although it had inherited some of the May 4th new literary tradition, it remained a significant starting point of a new tradition; its spirit was local, though its strategy was radical. If that is the great connection with the modernity and nation-state in the 20th century modern Chinese literature, then this diasporic Chineseness is undoubtedly the result of the modernization process. It had spread overseas on the historical stage of the War of Resistance and National Salvation. On the one hand, by the means of revolutionist literature, it had achieved the nationalist Chinese literature in modern sense. On the other hand, it also contributed to the birth of local identity of the overseas Chinese as well as the consciousness of the Mahua literature. Jin Zhi Mang’s literary career spanned from Kang Ri Wei Ma (抗日卫马, the war of resistance against Japanese aggression and defense of Malaya) to Kang Yingzhimin zhanzheng (抗英殖民战争, Anti-British Colonial war) and the struggle for independence. He was a crucial participant and witness to the process of the literary history. On this point, we can say that Mahua literature had always belonged to the idea of national literature from the onset, but the state-nationalism of Mahua literature had come to an end with political separation and armed struggle by MCP. Seen from the perspective of the historical reality, this ethnic nation does not refer to the Chinese, but presents a prototype of an emerging nation temporarily known as Mahua minzu (马华民族, ethnic Mahua), or in the wider sense known as Chinese Malaysian. In terms of literary style, it should be known as Mahua wenxue (literally “Malaysian Literature in Chinese” as opposed to “Malaysian Chinese Literature”). At this historical stage, the Chinese hinterland literature finally underwent crucial changes in Singapore and Malaya. The imagination of nation by the Chinese in Singapore and Malaya from before the Japanese occupation now suffered serious pressure experienced great disillusionment. The situation brought further difficulties to Mahua literature in the early post-war period in its transition to nation-state imagination. The above mentioned ethnical-nation nevertheless was a totally new type of community imagination. It is understandable that the polemic on the uniqueness of Mahua literature at the time broke out in a radical form.

The fluctuations of Mahua nationalist sentiments, besides being related to China's political and social changes, were also closely linked with the responses of the colonial power, especially in the realm of economic and immigration policies. The colonial power did not want nationalism (including native Malay nationalism) to develop too strongly, as it wanted to maintain a lasting and effective control over the colony. But this does not mean that the colonial power opposed nationalist struggle. On the contrary, it allowed for a certain degree of nationalist movements, because it simply did not want to see the colonial subjects to become the same as their own.

Historians tell us that the modern infrastructures provided by the system of colonialism, including the importation of printing technology, the development of railway, roads and water transport, did not break off the continuity of the historical experience of the local ethnic groups; on the contrary, they had accelerated the cross-communal contacts and exchanges in the colonial region, which eventually speeded up the cohesion of the weak. Kahn has mentioned how the Malays used the infrastructures provided by the colonial power to facilitate the dissemination of nationalism and the spirit of cosmopolitanism:

Although it ultimately transformed this world, the expansion of colonial control in the last few decades of the 19th century did not create a sharp break in the history of this Malay world, functioning instead to incorporate the Malay Peninsula, particularly the western states, more closely into it, and making it in turn an increasingly significant node of commercial and religious interaction... Colonization was accompanied also by the development of an infrastructure of railways, roads, cart-ways and ports, facilitating the movement of Malay peoples and making it possible for them to penetrate interior regions and to integrate themselves more effectively into broader religious, cultural and commercial networks (Khan, 2006).

The experience of the Chinese under the colonial rule could be seen in an analogous way. British colonialism did not cause the fracture between the history of overseas Chinese and their ethnic experience, but instead through its modernization system (such as the newspaper printing technique and the start-up of schools with new system that had been introduced to Malaya in the second half of the 19th century), had further strengthened their link with China. The formation of the territory of hinterland literature could also be attributed to the colonialist modernity. In addition,

there was greater interaction between the overseas Chinese and local aborigines. Due to the geographical relations with Nanyang and the economic exchanges and political experiences with the indigenous people from one generation to another, Nanyang had become the hinterland for the exile of the people from the southern part of China. Thus overseas Chinese and the indigenous people in Southeast Asia actually shared a common historical experience. As a cultural community, the Peranakan Chinese who resided in Nanyang long before the arrival of other Chinese were the by products of the process of Western colonialist-modernization in Malaya. In this sense, their language, i.e. baba Malay, could be regarded as one of the Malay dialect.²⁰ Such interpretation is not a contradiction, because the intrusion of Western forces in Nanyang/Malay archipelago also brought China's soft strategy of colonization to the region. This is proven by the greater Chinese nationalist spirit found in the hinterland literature prior to the war. But the dual-colonial structure did not lead to the spirit of one-sided orientation of the oceans Chinese in Nanyang. Instead, they had created a more sensitive and profound introspection and self-adjustment ability. The shift of overseas Chinese nationalism in the pre-war period to the spirit of Chinese ethnical nationalism in the post-war period can be understood in this way, which formally marked the beginning of the sense of Mahua writing. As noted above, the leftist literature is the literary mainstream during this period. Apart from Jin Zhi Mang, the long-standing occult figure, there was Tie Ge (铁戈), the poet famous for the poem "Zai qi xia" (在旗下, Under the Flag). From the Malayan independence era²¹ to the dawn of post-colonial hybridity, the works of

20 On this point, we can easily see that the culture and literature of all ethnic groups (whether Chinese or non-Chinese) was in a so-called mutual diversion and was mixed. This is the origin of the modernity of Peranakan Chinese Literature. The specific elements, which were derived from the translation and imitation of Western elements, coupled with the translation of the Chinese and local experiences, in the end successfully created a new form of modernity in Malaysian Chinese culture.

21 In April 1949 the British Parliament made a commitment to Malaya's independence, in the hope to undermining and eventually destroying the Malayan Communist Party (MCP). Towards this goal, local elections, village councils and Chinese citizenship to over half the Chinese population were introduced. In 1955, an election for a majority of Federal Council seats were held. Thus, it was referring as the Malayan independence era within the period from 1955 to 1957, where the latter is the date of the Federation of Malaya proclaimed its independence. (see Barbara Watson Andaya, Leonard Y. Andaya, 274-277)

Western aesthetics gradually emerged. Wei Bei Hua (威北华), Lin Yingqiang (林英强), Yao Zi (姚紫), and Wen Zichuan (温梓川) were the writers in this earlier stage. Although both parties before and after had the characteristic of transcended-localized modernity,²² the former was clearly more inclined to ideological aspect, while the latter focused more on the aesthetic aspects of writing. Such transformation had also pioneered the Mahua modernist literature in 1960s.

Conclusion

Nation and the nation-state share a common historical context. Thus the molding of national literature also means it is recognized according to the concepts of state and national literature. In this regard, it has foretold the present plight of Mahua literature: though it is part of Malaysian literature, yet it is excluded beyond the boundaries of national literature (in Malay they called it *kesusasteraan kebangsaan*). In other words, Mahua literature belongs to a particular nation, but ironically it is not the legacy of any particular state or country. This paradox implies both centripetal and centrifugal tensions as Mahua literature fatally becomes a nation-non-national literature. As an ethnical literature, Mahua literature has no basis of national imagination, yet its ethnic imagination in the real sense. In the increasingly powerful literary discourses of national literature, Mahua literature is always hovering over the ethnical imagination. The paradox of its identity further underscores its diasporic nature. Therefore, its centripetal part will inevitably be erased. This is the current problem faced by all Chinese literatures outside mainland China. It is mainly a problem of handling the power relationship with the centres-- within and without, in the process of seeking for their own position and subjectivity. But it is undeniable that this has also created its charming presence.

22 Apart from the local identity shown by the MCP's leftist literature in the early post-war period, the local modernity also included the utilization of a post-colonial perspective as a self-determination approach by writers during the independence period. Although they could be regarded as completely free from nationalistic perspective, their works are obviously hybrid in nature; and the attitudes of the writers toward other culture are generally understandable. This is sufficient to show the transcendental and positive side of Mahua modernity.

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