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Prehistory of Taiwan Prose: Historiography and Cultural Subjectivity in Contemporary Anthologies

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Abstract: This article examines the historiographical intentions and cultural subjectivities underlying three major series anthologies of Taiwan prose from the first two decades of the 21st century. These collections demonstrate canonical ambitions and reflect divergent literary historiographies influenced by Taiwan's complex ethnic and ideological milieu. Analyzing their selection criteria and editorial discourse, the study identifies three epistemological orientations: affirming Taiwan's cultural subjectivity through national literature, reclaiming intellectual writing, and exposing the limits of diasporic Chinese identity. These anthologies are not neutral compilations but actively shape canon, cultural identity, and literary memory. In the absence of a monograph on the history of Taiwan prose, this article conceptualizes these anthologies as constituting a "prehistory" of prose historiography, examining how ethnicity and politics intersect in processes of canon formation. Thus, these selections function both as repositories and as historiographical interventions in Taiwan's evolving literary field. In terms of the operational mechanisms of literary historiography, although this study centers on Taiwan prose anthologies, its inquiry extends to the broader issue of how cultural identity informs and complicates the construction of the literary canon.
Keywords: Anthology, canonization, cultural identity, cultural subjectivity, historical perspective.

The notion of "series anthologies" can be broadly understood as aligning with the concept of the compendium or comprehensive anthology, commonly referred to in Sinophone literary discourse as *wénxué dàxì* (grand series). The term denotes a comprehensive, often multi-volume collection designed to represent the breadth and depth of a national or regional literary tradition. More than a mere textual compilation, the *wénxué dàxì* functions as both a curatorial and a historiographical project.

Wénxué dàxì has long functioned as a crucial vehicle for canon formation and the systematization of knowledge within the Sinophone literary field, carrying substantial symbolic

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capital[2] and cultural authority. As Chan (2014) notes, the term "dàxì" originates from Japanese publishing discourse and refers to the systematic collation and publication of texts within a specific domain. It highlights both the macro scale and internal coherence of such compilations: "dà" (grand) signifies the expansive scope, while "xì" (series) points to their structured organization (Chan, 2014, p. 1–2). As S. Wang (2008) observes, such series frequently adopt temporal and spatial criteria for text selection, thereby constructing a systematic literary knowledge field (S. Wang, 2008, p. 137). Typically curated by scholars or writers possessing high symbolic capital, these anthologies serve not only as instruments of canonization but also as frameworks for literary periodization and historiographical consolidation.

In the field of Taiwan literature,[3] several prominent grand series emerged after the mid-20th century, including *The New Literary Series of Contemporary China, The Grand Series of Modern Chinese Literature,* two iterations of *The Grand Series of Contemporary Chinese Literature,* and *The Grand Series of the United Daily Supplement* (compiled to mark the 30th anniversary of *United Daily News*). Most of these series adopt a periodized temporal logic in their compilation, seeking to influence a historical narrative and a representative genealogy for modern literature in Taiwan. These editorial undertakings are commonly deeply embedded in specific cultural positions and historiographical visions, with their selection criteria and representation of writers reflecting not only aesthetic standards but also intertwined concerns with cultural identity, ideology, and ethnocultural discourse. As such, they participate in a broader project of redefining the contours of Taiwan literature regarding language, ethnicity, and belonging.

It is crucial to note that, unlike poetry and fiction—which have obtained sustained historiographical attention—Taiwan prose lacks a comprehensive, formally recognized literary history. Owing to its definitional ambiguity, prose has typically been regarded as a residual genre, relegated to the margins of literary historiography (Cheng, 1999, p. 6). This absence has left prose historiography largely reliant on editorial practices such as anthology compilation. Thus, these collections demonstrate epistemological assumptions and historiographical orientations toward prose as a literary category, influencing how contemporary readers understand Taiwan prose and how literary history itself is implicitly constructed, particularly concerning its ethnic, linguistic, and cultural imaginaries.

In the preface to *The Grand Series of Hong Kong Literature 1919–1949,* Chan (2014) reviews four major literary grand series from Taiwan and summarizes the defining characteristics of this publishing format: "A 'literary grand series' is a systematic arrangement of literature from a particular temporal or regional scope, published in multiple volumes and presented as a comprehensive set" (p. 15). Therefore, even if certain anthologies are not explicitly labeled as *wénxué dàxì,* their scale and organization embody its key features and can be productively analyzed within the framework of such grand literary compilation, for example, *The National Literary Selections, The Twentieth-Century Literary Classics of Taiwan,* and *A Century of Huáwén Literature Selections.* These anthologies are typically multi-volume in form, encompassing extended temporal ranges and rich textual content, and are organized according to strict editorial planning and canon-forming principles. While their historiographical aims are commonly implicit, their chronological structures and selective logics effectively embody latent literary-historical

[2] The term symbolic capital is drawn from Bourdieu (1993), referring to the prestige and authority recognized within a cultural field. This article treats literary knowledge as a form of cultural capital to examine the ideological investments made by anthology editors.

[3] In the field of Taiwan studies, the term Taiwan literature is conventionally used, not due to grammatical oversight, but as an established academic usage. By contrast, "Taiwanese literature" typically refers specifically to literature written in the Taiwanese language (also referred to as Tâi-gí or Tâi-uân-uē).

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narratives. As such, when examining the historiographic impulses and compilation strategies underlying Taiwan prose historiography, these large-scale anthologies—regardless of whether they are explicitly titled as *wénxué dàxì*—cannot be overlooked.

This study approaches the anthology itself as a site of historiographical performance. Miller (1990) has argued that the construction of literary history is fundamentally a narrative act and that the structural and narrative choices of the historian inevitably reflect presuppositions about literary value and historical development. Genette (1997) similarly conceptualizes the anthology as a "reconfigured text," asserting that acts of selection, sequencing, and naming in such collections manifest clear canonical orientations and narrative intentions (pp.1–2). Hence, while the three anthologies examined in this study do not explicitly declare historiographical aims, their chronological organization and selective logics already function as vehicles for an implicit narrative of prose history.

This paper concentrates on three prose anthologies compiled during the first two decades of the 21st century: *The National Literary Selections: Prose Volume* (edited by W. Chen, 2004), *The Twentieth-Century Literary Classics of Taiwan: Prose Volume* (edited by Hsiang, 2006), and *A Century of Huáwén Prose Selections: Taiwan Volume* (edited by Chan and Choong, 2018). While these collections do not carry the formal designation of a grand literary series, their scale, organization, and canonizing ambitions clearly align them with the *wénxué dàxì* model. The boundaries they draw around literary categories, their periodization, and the authors and texts they include all contribute to alternative frameworks for narrating prose history, which merit analysis as a form of "pre-historiography." [4]

By examining these three anthologies, this article analyzes the specific historiographical modes and narrative structures each embodies. It argues that they represent three distinct epistemological approaches to the narration of Taiwan prose history. First, they link contemporary Taiwan prose to modern prose from the Japanese colonial period, both as a revision of official historiography and as a means of asserting Taiwan's cultural subjectivity. Second, they highlight the role of intellectual prose in Taiwan's literary development, marking a shift from lyrical[5] writing toward a mode of engagement with local experience. Third, they adopt Huáwén as a framework of identification, reflecting the context of Chinese diaspora but potentially obscuring the diverse origins and multiethnic composition of Taiwan literature.

Through a comparative reading of the selection principles and narrative intentions embedded in each anthology, this article illuminates the multifaceted dimensions of contemporary Taiwan prose historiography. In doing so, it addresses a critical gap in literary-historical scholarship and provides a framework for understanding canon formation within the contemporary literary field.

[4] The term *pre-historiography* is employed here to describe the implicit historical narratives embedded in large-scale literary anthologies that precede or stand in for formal literary histories. Such projects commonly articulate historiographical intentions through selection and organization, even in the absence of explicit claims to historical authorship.

[5] The lyrical mode is comparable to what is typically referred to as belletristic writing, which underscores personal sentiment, aesthetic style, and expressive subjectivity over argumentative or socially engaged content. This point will be further elaborated in a later section.

The Positive Integration of the Japanese Colonial Period

These three anthologies*, The National Literary Selections: Prose Volume, The Twentieth-Century Literary Classics of Taiwan: Prose Volume,* and *A Century of Huáwén Prose Selections: Taiwan Volume,* all extend their historical scope to include the Japanese colonial period, thereby participating in the broader project of reconstructing Taiwan's modern prose genealogy. This section first examines the logic and implications behind the inclusion of colonial-era prose in *The National Literary Selections: Prose Volume* and then compares its treatment of the period with that of the other two anthologies. In doing so, it examines how the integration of Japanese-era texts functions as a gesture of literary inclusion and as a historiographical intervention, an affirmative engagement with the cultural legacy of Taiwan's colonial past.

The Gradual Emergence of Taiwan Literature as National Literature

The emergence of literature from the Japanese colonial period as an object of critical attention did not occur naturally, nor was it achieved overnight. Rather, it unfolded gradually in tandem with the liberalization of Taiwanese society. A critical juncture in the reassessment of modern Taiwan literature from the colonial era occurred in the 1970s, led by what Hsiao (2010) refers to as the "Return-to-Reality Generation" (p.143). Beyond editorial efforts, Chen (2010) notes in a monograph on Taiwan literature that it was under the influence of the nativist literary movement of the 1970s that the postwar generation in Taiwan began to ask, "Who is Lai Ho?", This question instigated the compilation and publication of two anthologies of Taiwan literature from the Japanese colonial period in 1979 and the first complete edition of *The Collected Works of Mr. Lai Ho* (p. 46). Under the authoritarian rule of the Kuomintang, the colonial-era experience had previously been framed mainly through the lens of "anti-Japanese resistance," and literary works from that period were interpreted accordingly. It was only through the nationalist historical discourse of the 1970s, influenced by Taiwanese cultural nationalism, that a new collective memory of Taiwan (national) literature was constructed, allowing alternative understandings of the colonial experience to emerge (Hsiao, 2010, p. 194).

After the repeal of martial law in the late 1980s, research on modern Taiwan literature from the colonial period expanded with greater diversity and momentum. In addition to Hsiao's account, Chou (1997) observes that during the martial law era, historical narratives of the Japanese colonial period concentrated heavily on early armed resistance (p. 109). In recent years, however, Taiwan historiography has emerged as a burgeoning field, and the state-sanctioned "anti-Japanese" perspective is no longer dominant (Chou, 1997, p. 109). A particularly symbolic moment in this shift occurred in 1994, when the Council for Cultural Affairs sponsored the International Conference on Lai Ho and His Contemporaries: Taiwan Literature of the Japanese Colonial Period. This conference openly positioned colonial-era literature as a legitimate academic subject, dismantling taboos that had persisted during the martial law period. In 1997, a new "Understanding Taiwan" curriculum was introduced at the junior high school level, marking the first time that Taiwan's state-run compulsory education system encompassed a course explicitly centered on Taiwanese history. In 2000, Taiwan experienced its first peaceful transfer of power through democratic elections. The National Museum of Taiwan Literature was officially established in October 2003, affirming Taiwan literature as "national literature" at the institutional level. When *The National Literary Selections* was published in 2004, it can be understood as a continuation of this trajectory toward the assertion of Taiwanese subjectivity.

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Drawing on Western experiences of literary development, Clausen (1994) observes that the concept of "national literature" in Britain and other European nations emerged in the context of nineteenth-century nationalism.[6] Once this idea was established, cultural nationalists in newly independent postcolonial states commonly rejected the metaphor of literature as a "tree," which implies a single trunk and a singular origin rooted in one land. By the 20th century, English literature produced in Britain was no longer considered the definitive source for former colonies (Clausen, 1994, p. 64). However, the situation in Taiwan is more complex due to its contested national identity. Taiwan's distinctive historical trajectory, including its colonial past, multiple regime changes, and what some political groups regard as unresolved sovereignty, has given rise to competing conceptions of national culture and literature. Cultural nationalists in Taiwan, aligned with Clausen's perspective, argue that Taiwan literature has already "separated" from Chinese literature and should be acknowledged as a national literature in its own right. Conversely, Chinese cultural nationalists in Taiwan continue to perceive Taiwan literature as a branch of the broader Chinese literary tradition.

Nationalist frameworks continue to dominate the interpretation of literary works, as a text is invariably situated within the cultural tradition of the author's nation for understanding. This is due to the intimate connection between literary historiography and the construction of national identity (Sapiro, 2026, p. 107). If "national literature" is defined as the body of literature that citizens of a nation are expected to possess a basic understanding of, then Taiwan literature may now be considered "one among" the national literatures in Taiwan. In the vision of the curators of *The National Literary Selections,* national literature constitutes an essential component of the cultural literacy expected of modern citizens (Lai, 2004, p. 5). Through reading, individuals are invited to engage with the literature of the land and the individuals who nurtured them. As Lai (2004), chairperson of the Lai Ho Foundation and chief planner of the Selections, writes in the General Preface: "We hope that the citizens of Taiwan, now a democratic nation, will develop the literary literacy expected of modern citizens through this book series and, through literature, come to know the land and the people who raised them"(p. 5) Despite being on the verge of recognition, Taiwan literature has yet to be fully acknowledged as national literature. As such, the very act of compiling an anthology of "national literature" becomes an expression of hope—that Taiwan literature will ultimately attain full recognition. In this sense, *The National Literary Selections* embodies the curators' and editors' aspiration for Taiwan literature to be recognized as national literature (Chen, 2004b, p. 13; Hsiang, 2006, p. 17).

The Significance of Recognizing Modern Prose from the Japanese Colonial Period

Published in 2004, *The National Literary Selections* is arguably the most extensive of the three anthologies examined in this study, both in scope and scale. Spanning six genres, namely, modern poetry, prose, fiction, drama, classical poetry, and classical prose, the series comprises 14 volumes. The prose section alone is classified into three separate tomes, reflecting a monumental editorial effort to define the field of Taiwan prose. Although the structure generally follows conventional anthology formats, it adopts a deliberate chronological approach that reaches back into the Japanese colonial period. In doing so, it became one of the earliest anthologies in Taiwan's literary field to seriously acknowledge colonial-era modern prose as part of the canon of "national literature," playing a pioneering role in influencing this recognition.

[6] However, Clausen also argues that the concept of "national literature" has become outdated and that language offers a more appropriate basis for distinguishing one literature from another.

Editor Chen (2004b) affirms that *The National Literary Selections: Prose Volume* covers Taiwanese writers and prose works "since the emergence of Taiwan's new literature" (p. 12) At first glance, this may appear unremarkable, but it signals a significant historiographical shift. The dominant tendency among previous prose anthologies in Taiwan's publishing market was to trace the origins of Taiwan prose to Chinese New Literature, aligning the emergence of modern prose in Taiwan with China's May Fourth New Literature Movement. When such anthologies encompassed the prewar period, they rarely questioned the assumption that Taiwan's modern prose evolved directly from Chinese literary legacies. As Meng (2006) pointedly observes, "These texts never even mention prose writers of the Japanese colonial period […] as if a '*History of Taiwan Prose* during Japanese rule' had never existed" (p.217)

In this context, *The National Literary Selections: Prose Volume* (2004) is particularly significant for explicitly including prose written in Taiwan before World War II. This editorial decision is meaningful and epistemologically consequential within the framework of Taiwan's literary historiography.

Importantly, the inclusion of colonial-era prose is not treated as a token gesture. An entire volume is dedicated to exhibiting the accomplishments of modern prose from this period. According to the editor, 26.87% of the selected authors are from the Japanese colonial era, and one-third of the prose volumes is devoted to their work. As Chen (2004b, p. 13) explicates,

> Within our limited space, we reserved one-third of the content for senior writers from the Japanese colonial era. This decision was made not only in consideration of the historical development of prose but, more importantly, because there are virtually no comparable publications currently available. Filling this historiographical gap, I suppose, is one of the aims of *The National Literary Selections.*

Two subsequent *Series Anthologies, The Twentieth-Century Literary Classics of Taiwan: Prose Volume* and *A Century of Huáwén Prose Selections: Taiwan Volume,* also include modern prose from the Japanese colonial period, though to varying degrees. *The National Literary Selections: Prose Volume* (2004) features 18 Japanese-era authors, accounting for 26.87% of its total contributors. Conversely, *The Twentieth-Century Literary Classics of Taiwan: Prose Volume* (2006) includes 7 (9.33%) such authors, while *A Century of Huáwén Prose Selections: Taiwan Volume* (2018) includes only 3 (4.35%).

Table 1

Number and Proportion of Japanese-Era Authors Included in the Anthologies

Anthology title	Number of Japanese-era authors	Total number of authors	Percentage of Japanese-era authors (%)
The National Literary Selections: Prose Volume	18	67	26.87%
The Twentieth-Century Literary Classics of Taiwan: Prose Volume	7	75	9.33%
A Century of Huáwén Prose Selections: Taiwan Volume	3	69	4.35%

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As Table 1 illustrates, the minimal representation of colonial-era authors in *A Century of Huáwén Prose Selections: Taiwan Volume* (2018) proposes that such works function more as symbolic inclusions than as substantive elements within a historiographical framework.

Compared with the other two anthologies, *The National Literary Selections: Prose Volume* (2004) is the first to systematically incorporate and frame Japanese-era prose as integral to Taiwan's literary history. Although the subsequent anthologies also include texts from this period, they do so under distinct editorial frameworks and with differing emphases. Comparing these strategies helps elucidate how divergent anthologies enact distinct modes of historical narration. In the anthology, the colonial past is not treated as a marginal or isolated fragment but as a constitutive element in the formation of a literary nation.

Among all three anthologies, Lai Ho is the only Japanese-era author consistently included. As Chen (2004b) argues in his monograph on Lai Ho, Lai's prose "stands in stark contrast to what is conventionally referred to as 'lyrical prose'; rather, it blends lyricism with intellectual reflection" (p. 312). Building upon this point, Chao (2016) argues that the dominance of the lyrical tradition has contributed to the marginalization of Japanese-era modern prose in Taiwan's literary historiography. As he observes, "What is referred to as the 'lyrical tradition' in fact obscures the literary-historical position of modern prose during the Japanese period, highlighting the discontinuity between colonial and postwar prose writing" (p. 173).

In this context, the inclusion of Japanese-era modern prose in these anthologies can be understood as an effort to reassert the canonical value of a "non-lyrical" lineage within the Taiwan prose tradition. Building upon this foundation, the following section examines the epistemological trajectory of intellectual prose in the postwar period.

Moving from Sentiment to Intellect while Reclaiming Intellectual Prose

If anthology editing can be understood as a form of articulating a literary position, the previous section has demonstrated that Chen's (2004b) main assertion is that modern prose from the Japanese colonial period deserves adequate recognition. Contrarily, Hsiang (2006), who also edited a series anthology, makes an even more explicit intervention: he aims to challenge the prevailing tendency in earlier prose anthologies to select works primarily for their sentimental appeal.

Published in 2006, *The Twentieth-Century Literary Classics of Taiwan* comprises seven volumes in total, four of fiction and three of prose, all edited by Hsiang. According to him, the series "takes the 20th century as its temporal framework, aiming to encapsulate the overall achievements and stylistic features of twentieth-century Taiwan literature" (Hsiang, 2006, p. 17). This statement proposes that the publication aspires to the stature of a *wénxué dàxì,* aiming to offer a comprehensive overview of Taiwan's modern literature spanning more than 80 years. As a collection explicitly labeled "classics," its canonical ambition is all the more pronounced; the term "classics," a deliberate homophonic translation of *jīndiǎn* (golden classic), highlights the anthology's aspiration to define literary authority.

In an article on the dominant paradigm and its rebellion in Taiwan prose, Yuen (2020) argues that *The Twentieth-Century Literary Classics of Taiwan: Prose Volume* is distinguished by its resistance to the lyrical tradition, which gives the anthology its distinctive character. Yuen (2020) provides a comprehensive and contextualized account of how the canonical status of lyrical prose was gradually dismantled. According to his analysis, the dominance of lyrical writing after World War II was largely influenced by the Kuomintang's cultural policies and authoritarian rule. He

identifies two most decisive factors: (1) the mainstream literary field's rejection of the diverse prose traditions from the Japanese colonial period and its selective inheritance of the May Fourth legacy, favoring lyricism over argumentation and (2) the KMT's imposition of authoritarian literary policies during the White Terror era (Yuen, 2020, p. 26 & 32).

Yuen (2020) further affirms that in the 1970s, writers started to criticize the dominant lyrical model by reflecting on the postwar neglect of land, society, and individuals in Taiwan prose. These critiques can be understood as early efforts to deconstruct the lyrical paradigm. Moreover, Yuen (2020) argues that numerous scholars have overlooked the influence of the nativist literature debate on prose writing. In his view, the emergence of "nativist" writers during and after the debate in 1970s resonated with the realist ideals of nativist literature and constituted an undercurrent that challenged the lyrical tradition. He proposes that this helps explicate why the 1980s witnessed a proliferation of prose works grounded in Taiwanese experience (Yuen, 2020, p. 43).

In the editorial preface to *The Twentieth-Century Literary Classics of Taiwan: Prose Volume,* editor Hsiang (2006) explicitly critiques the lyrical tradition that had long dominated Taiwan prose. Building on this critique, the following analysis examines the volume's editorial statements and Hsiang's (2006) writings on intellectual prose, exhibiting how the anthology aims to expand the scope of Taiwan prose by foregrounding intellectual writing and how this editorial stance aligns with the discourse of a "return to reality" (p. 17).

Resituating Prose History by Exposing the Limits of Lyricism and Turning to Intellect

To challenge the dominant lyrical mode that has long influenced Taiwan prose, this section explores how Hsiang resituates prose history by foregrounding works rooted in intellectual engagement and public critique.

In the introduction to *The Twentieth-Century Literary Classics of Taiwan: Prose Volume,* Hsiang (2006) highlights that lyrical literary prose has generally been taken as the foundational criterion for defining literary prose. He further observes what he considers the dominant trajectory of Taiwan's prose writing: prose is anticipated to be "literary," "lyrical," "aesthetic," and "personal," whereas writings deemed "non-literary," "intellectual," "narrative," "rational," or "collective" have been systematically excluded from the category (Hsiang, 2006, p. 15). Additionally, he argues that, in postwar Taiwan, the compilation of prose anthologies, whether comprehensive literary series, themed selections, or annual collections, has almost invariably taken sentiment as the primary criterion. As he asks, "If prose remains confined to the realm of the lyrical, the miniature, the aesthetic, and the personal, then masterpieces like those of Lu Xun and Lai Ho—as well as those by Western figures such as Montaigne and Barthes, which are characterized by intellect, critique, exposition, and argumentation and are closely tied to collective memory and the public sphere—will inevitably be excluded" (Hsiang, 2006, p. 16). Hsiang (2006) explains that *The Twentieth-Century Literary Classics of Taiwan: Prose Volume* was curated precisely to redress this longstanding tendency (p. 18).

Moreover, Hsiang (2006) identifies a deeper reason for the scarcity of intellectual writing in Taiwan's prose tradition. Beyond the self-imposed boundaries within the modern prose community, where intellectual prose is commonly dismissed or excluded, he points to a pervasive reluctance to engage with society and, more significantly, with politics. He argues that this attitude is closely tied to the postwar martial law regime, which discouraged literary engagement with sociopolitical issues. Consequently, the literary community largely refrained from addressing social and political matters, and contemporary prose, in particular, suffered from this constraint. Over

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time, lyrical short prose became distorted under the pressures of this "misguided era," eventually emerging as the dominant form (Hsiang, 1997, pp. 85–86).

When the prose tradition of Chinese New Literature was "grafted" onto postwar Taiwan, it had already undergone a process of deliberate elimination. Prose with a critical edge, especially works addressing social problems or engaging in political commentary, was deemed unacceptable under the authoritarian regime and became virtually unsustainable during martial law. In the aftermath of the 1949 political shift, lyrical prose emphasizing leisure, aestheticism, and emotional tone gradually became the dominant form. Over time, prose writing increasingly leaned toward a lyrical mode of expression, influenced by the constraints of its historical and political context.

Instead of tracing modern prose in Taiwan back to the May Fourth New Literature movement in China, Hsiang's (2006) editorial choices position the modern prose of the Japanese colonial period as its historical lineage. In doing so, he deliberately recovers the long-neglected tradition of intellectual prose from the colonial era. He suggests that only by bringing colonial-era prose into view can one begin to correct the longstanding imbalance in Taiwan prose, a trajectory that has overwhelmingly favored sentiment over intellect (p. 21).

Toward a Balance of Sentiment and Intellect

We may turn to the definition proposed by Chen (2004a) to understand what is meant by intellectual prose. He proposes that "many prose works that contemplate the pressing issues of their time, without necessarily adopting a formal argumentative structure yet still exhibiting literary technique, can be described as intellectual prose" (Chen, 2004a, p. 307). In brief, intellectual prose refers to a mode of writing that engages with contemporary concerns through a literarily crafted style.

Additionally, in Yu's (1998) essay "*The Intellectual and the Emotional in Prose,*" he remarks: "The intellectual quality of prose is not the same as that of an academic paper; it should not be overly lengthy, nor rely on rigid or heavy-handed reasoning. Rather, the intellect in prose should emerge as a natural outpouring of wisdom, not a display of ostentatious erudition" (p. 11).

While Hsiang (2006) gives particular weight to the intellectual tradition of prose, *The Twentieth-Century Literary Classics of Taiwan: Prose Volume* is by no means an anthology of intellectual prose per se. The selections are not classified according to emotional or intellectual modes. As Chou (2013) observes, "Broadly speaking, the development of Taiwan prose is inclusive and eclectic; our major prose writers tend to embody both intellectual and emotional qualities" (131). Similarly, Yu (1998) argues that "dividing prose into intellectual and emotional categories is often arbitrary and ultimately unhelpful. Several exemplary works of prose exhibit a blend of intellect and emotion, and it is precisely this synthesis, rather than their separation, that gives them their distinction" (p. 17).

Thus, the editorial aim of the anthology is not to isolate a specific category of intellectual prose but rather to address and rectify the longstanding sentimental bias in Taiwan's prose tradition. Hsiang (1997) does not reject sentimental or lyrical writing; he argues that "intellectual and emotional prose are not mutually exclusive. The personal and the historical commonly function in complementary ways" (p. 86). This intent is further articulated in the promotional blurb on the back cover of the anthology: "In *The Twentieth-Century Literary Classics of Taiwan: Prose Volume,* historically and culturally reflective works of critique, argumentation, and intellectual insight are presented alongside the lyrical prose we have grown accustomed to reading and identifying with" (back cover).

In this sense, the anthology embraces intellectual and emotional dimensions, providing readers with a broader view of Taiwan, particularly its complex social realities. At its core, intellectual prose maintains a sense of social concern: it engages with contemporary conditions, confronts the public realm, and typically carries a sense of responsibility to contribute to societal reflection and transformation.

In sum, Hsiang (1997) devotes considerable space in the introduction to articulating the significance of intellectual qualities in prose, thereby signaling his intention to revise the prose canon. Through the inclusion of intellectual and documentary forms of writing, the anthology aims to expand the scope and the trajectory of Taiwan prose literature.

Foregrounding Taiwan Through Emotional and Social Understanding

Hsiang (2006) argues that prose should be capable of expressing feeling and knowing, that is, of responding to the affective structures and shared memories of Taiwan's collective existence (p. 18). Beyond the long-dominant tradition of sentimental or lyrical prose, he highlights that Taiwan prose inherently possesses another dimension: one that "approaches collective memory and the public sphere of society" (Hsiang, 2006, p. 18)

In alignment with Hsiang's view, Chen (2004b), editor of *The National Literary Selections: Prose Volume*, similarly notes in his preface that the collection aims to "satisfy both the intellectual and emotional reading needs of readers," allowing them to understand Taiwan's modern history and societal transformations (p. 12). Through these representative essays, readers may come to acknowledge "the confusions, hardships, and struggles of the Taiwanese people across different eras—their emotional ties to the land and the people and the joys and sorrows of their lived experiences" (Chen, 2004b, p. 12).

Contrarily, *A Century of Huáwén Prose Selections: Taiwan Volume*, edited by Chan and Choong (2018), leans more heavily toward individualized lyricism and narrative. As Choong (2018) affirms, although the anthology captures historical rhythms, "the increasingly dominant trend is toward personalized lyric and narrative prose" (p. 16). Compared with Hsiang's (2006) and Chen's (2004b) editorial perspectives, Chan and Choong (2018), thus, highlight personal experience over collective memory or public discourse.

Because of the Kuomintang government's imposition of Chinese cultural education and suppression of Taiwan's local history, "knowing Taiwan" was not a natural or self-evident process for much of the postwar period. It was not until the early 1970s—following a series of diplomatic setbacks, such as the Diaoyutai sovereignty dispute and Taiwan's withdrawal from the United Nations—that a shift toward a "return to reality" started to emerge. According to Hsiao (2010), international political events in the 1970s profoundly influenced the consciousness of Taiwan's intellectual youth, who "generally possessed a strong commitment to engaging with the social realities of Taiwan"(p. 205) He further elucidates that the collective trauma caused by the Diaoyutai movement, the rapprochement between the United States and the PRC, and Taiwan's expulsion from the United Nations contributed to a growing call for political reform among students and intellectuals.

To present a vision more closely aligned with Taiwan's lived realities, Hsiang (2006) aimed to compile an anthology that would "truthfully reflect" the conditions of Taiwanese society (p. 17). This ambition entailed integrating types of prose that had long been overlooked—writing that could allow readers to feel and know Taiwan's social realities and collective memory. In doing so, Hsiang (2006) fundamentally rethought the generic boundaries of prose itself. He called for a reconfiguration of the dominant prose canon, one that would no longer privilege sentiment alone

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but would instead embrace emotional and intellectual dimensions. The tradition of intellectual prose he champions resonates with Hsiao's (2010) discourse of "returning to reality" and reflects a broader literary commitment to engaging social conditions and foregrounding the perspectives of local writers (p. 16).

Ultimately, what emerges from these editorial efforts is a shared commitment to restoring a fuller vision of Taiwan, one that is felt emotionally and understood socially and historically. By integrating lyrical expression and intellectual reflection, these anthologies aim to deepen readers' engagement with Taiwan's lived realities and to reassert prose as a vital form for articulating the complexities of collective life.

Locating Taiwan Within the Huáwén Imagination Through a Mahua Diasporic Perspective

Between 2018 and 2019, Chiu Ko Publishing, one of Taiwan's most longstanding literary publishers, released *A Century of Huáwén Literature Selections*, a sixteen-volume series edited by Chan and Choong. This ambitious collection spans three literary genres, namely, fiction, prose, and poetry, and encompasses four geographical regions: Taiwan, China, Hong Kong, and Mahua, that is, Malaysian Chinese literature. Chronologically, the series covers a century of modern literary history, beginning in 1918 with Lu Xun's *A Madman's Diary*—a starting point explicitly highlighted by the editors—and extending to 2017. The two volumes titled *A Century of Huáwén Prose Selections: Taiwan Volume* comprise the seventh and eighth books in the series.

Both editors—Chan and Choong—are Mahua (Malaysian Chinese) writers who moved to Taiwan after completing secondary school in Malaysia and subsequently pursued higher education and established academic careers there. The term "Mahua" refers to individuals of Chinese descent born and raised in Malaysia who culturally and literarily express themselves in Chinese. Although "Malaysian Chinese" functions as a more neutral demographic label, "Mahua" places particular emphasis on cultural and linguistic identity. This diasporic background inevitably influences the editors' historical perspectives and literary orientation. As Choong (2000) recognizes, "As a Malaysian Chinese, the question of identity has always been central to my thinking" (p. 2).

From the editors' Mahua identities to the very nomenclature of the series, particularly its use of the term *Huáwén*, one can discern an underlying editorial framework informed by diasporic consciousness. At the heart of this framework lies a critical inquiry into the meaning and implications of the term "*Huá*," which is more closely aligned with a sense of cultural Chineseness than with any one geopolitical entity. Thus, it is essential to consider the diasporic vantage point from which the editors construct their literary vision to understand how the notion of Huáwén shapes the representation of Taiwan prose in this series.

Conflating Overseas Chinese Literature and Sinophone Literature

Huáwén literature emerged as a category in the 1980s, originally referring to literary works written in Chinese outside Mainland China—what Chinese scholars at the time classified as "Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macau, and overseas Chinese literature," in contrast to "Chinese literature" produced in China. Another term, "world Chinese literature," also coined in China, has sparked debate over whether it includes Chinese literature proper. In practice, however, research under this label remains largely concentrated on overseas Chinese writers (Chiu, 2019, p. 134). As China has increasingly institutionalized this field—designating "world Chinese literature" as a formal discipline—it has positioned itself as the discursive center for Chinese-language literatures

worldwide. While this field purports to encompass diverse Chinese-language writing across global regions, its centralization has reoriented much of the scholarly discourse toward China.

In the 2000s, in response to the increasingly Sinocentric orientation of terms associated with Huáwén literature, Shih (2011) proposed the concept of Sinophone literature as a means of decentering China from these discursive frameworks. Acknowledging the linguistic heterogeneity of Chinese, Shih (2011) underscored marginal Sinitic-language cultures formed under geopolitical conditions. As she explains, Sinophone studies "locate their objects of attention at the conjuncture of China's internal colonialism and Sinophone communities everywhere immigrants from China have settled" (p.710)

Within this framework, established conceptualizations of Huáwén literature were inevitably challenged and subjected to a shift in value and focus. To clarify the distinctions between these overlapping yet ideologically divergent terms, the following chart compares diverse labels employed to describe Chinese-language literary traditions:

Table 2

Comparative Chart: Huáwén Literature, Chinese Literature, and Related Terms

Term	Definition	Scope	Underlying ideology
Huáwén literature	Literature written in Chinese outside of China, distinct from "Chinese literature"	Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macau, Mahua, overseas Chinese	Attempts to represent Chinese-language literatures globally while maintaining ties to Chinese cultural heritage; commonly conflated with "Chinese literature" due to terminological ambiguity
Overseas Chinese literature	Literature written in Chinese by ethnic Chinese living abroad	Overseas Chinese communities	Underscores ethnicity and diaspora; may overlook local cultural integration
Chinese literature	Literature from or about China, typically written by Chinese nationals	Mainland China	Assumes a Sinocentric norm
Chinese-language literature	Literature written in Chinese, regardless of geographical or ethnic origin	Whole world including China	Linguistically inclusive; de-emphasizes nation-state boundaries; may be overly broad Linguistically inclusive across regions and nations; lacks cultural or geopolitical specificity

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Table 2
Continued

World Chinese literature	Concept initiated in China to encompass global Chinese-language literature; inclusion of China varies by usage	Global, though commonly concentrated on overseas authors in practice	May reinforce China-centric frameworks; typically part of China's disciplinary construction of global Chinese literature
Sinophone literature	Literature in Chinese produced from marginalized or postcolonial positions (e.g., Taiwan, Hong Kong, Tibet, and diasporic communities)	Peripheral communities, non-China centric regions	Explicitly critiques China-centrism; highlights colonial, migratory, and minoritized experiences

In the general preface to the *A Century of Huáwén Literature Selections* series, editors Chan and Choong (2018) trace the historical development of the term Huáwén literature and articulate strong criticisms of the recently emergent discourse on Sinophone literature within academic circles. They write:

> In the past decade or so, some scholars—viewing Huáwén literature as a politically charged, China-centric term aligned with the Chinese Communist Party—have sought to break away and redefine the field under the name of Sinophone literature. However, this act of renaming has been conceptually hasty and riddled with inconsistencies, despite becoming one of the most popular academic terms today. Fundamentally rooted in both theoretical and psychological forms of "anti-Communism," this shift has not, in essence, changed anything. Nor has it led to any substantial transformation in the creation or study of Huáwén literature in any specific country or region (Chan & Choong, 2018, p. 10).

Chan and Choong's (2018) position exhibit a clear disapproval of Shih's (2011) formulation of Sinophone literature and the diasporic discourse it advances to the point of explicit rejection. In the general preface to the *A Century of Huáwén Literature Selections* series, titled "Huáwén Literature, Century, and Selections," they state that the series is conceived as a major retrospective project tracing 100 years of Huáwén literature. The title itself comprises three key terms—"Huáwén," "century," and "selection"—which encapsulate the editorial vision behind the entire series (Chan & Choong, 2018, p. 9). In the preface, the editors highlight their deliberate choice of the term "Huáwén literature," noting that it not only "draws from the conventional meanings of Huáwén and Huáyǔ" but also explicitly "includes Mainland China" in its scope (Chan & Choong, 2018, p. 10).

This inclusive usage marks a shift from Choong's earlier research. In her dissertation, *The China Images in Chinese Prose in Asia (1949–1999)*, she asserted that "Huáwén prose sufficiently and accurately encompasses prose writing outside of China" (Choong, 2000, p. 4). Conversely, the *A Century of Huáwén Literature Selections* series adopts a broader definition: Huáwén literature refers to literary works written in Chinese (zhōngwén or hànwén) across all Chinese-writing regions, including China. In short, Chan and Choong (2018) redefine Huáwén literature in this series as inclusive of all Chinese-language literary production.

Choong (2000) offered a more nuanced explanation of the term Huáwén in an earlier article, stating: "Huáwén emphasizes dimensions of culture, language, and script rather than the political entity of 'China.' Especially in contexts like Mahua literature, Philippine Chinese literature, and Singaporean Chinese literature, Huáwén highlights literary creation in the Chinese language, distinguishing it from works in other languages in these multilingual and multiethnic nations. Furthermore, this term can also encompass works created in Chinese in Taiwan and Hong Kong" (p. 3).

According to Choong (2000), the "Huá" in Huáwén does not refer to the political nation-state of China but instead signifies a cultural and linguistic affiliation, what might be called a symbolic or spiritual "cultural China" (p. 3). Nonetheless, this very distinction reveals what may be considered her "political unconscious":[7] a tacit resistance to equating language and culture with the Chinese nation-state, even as she reaffirms a unified cultural identity. From this argument, it can be inferred that Choong's (2000) vision of Huáwén prose positions Taiwan prose alongside that of Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines, and Indonesia, positioning it as one branch among many within a larger Huáwén literary world originating from China. Her chapter on Asian prose is titled "Displacement: At the Margins of China," while the chapters on Hong Kong, Singaporean, and Mahua prose are grouped under the heading "From Life Memory to Cultural Motherhood." Whether through the centering of China or through metaphors of cultural origin, these framings strongly evoke a diasporic sensibility influenced by the idea of a symbolic "cultural China" and the lived experience of the Chinese diaspora.

Teoh (2018) has critiqued the Sinocentric perspective on the diaspora, stating:

> Scholars who adopt a China-centered approach to diasporic culture often emphasize the primordial aspects of the "Chinese diaspora." When discussing the sociocultural contexts of Chinese migrant communities and their Chinese-language literary expressions outside of China, their enduring preoccupation with Chinese culture and Chineseness frequently overrides other dimensions of the texts. As a result, they tend to overlook the heterogeneity and complexity of these local literatures, treating such works merely as overseas extensions of Chinese literature and viewing them as continuations of a singular Chinese cultural tradition (p. 97).

Coincidentally, Tee (2017), another Mahua scholar, similarly notes in his essay:

> The diasporic Chinese community, both in name and essence, finds it difficult to detach from its diasporic history and ethnic diasporic identity. This is a key source of difference between diasporic Chinese and other ethnic groups in Malaysian history. As such, Malaysian Chinese continue to be considered 'diasporic Chinese,' and their literary writings likewise exhibit the characteristics of diasporic literature. (Para. 6)

Taken together with Choong's (2000) interpretation of Huáwén as cultural and linguistic rather than political, we can see that Huáwén identity itself represents a form of diasporic historiographical perspective—a worldview grounded in the notion of "cultural China," which encompasses multiple Chinese-language writings within a shared cultural lineage. As Tee (2017) observes, diasporic ethnicity remains an indelible aspect of diasporic Chinese identity, one that remains embedded in their cultural and literary expression.

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[7] On the concept of the "political unconscious," see Jameson's *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*, in which he argues that literary texts are always register ideological tensions beneath their surface narrative. As he famously states, "the political perspective [is] not as some supplementary method [...] but rather as the absolute horizon of all reading and all interpretation" (Jameson, 1981, p. 1).

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Ethnic Imbalance and Genealogical Flattening in the Huáwén Imagination

A close examination of the selected writers, historical framing, and literary genealogies across the three anthologies reveals crucial distinctions in how Taiwan prose is positioned within, or outside of, a Huáwén literary framework.

From an ethnic perspective, a comparative analysis of the three prose anthologies discussed in this paper highlights a telling situation. Both *The National Literary Selections: Prose Volume* and *The Twentieth-Century Literary Classics of Taiwan: Prose Volume*, which are grounded in a Taiwan-centered framework, encompass a significantly higher proportion of native Taiwanese writers than Mainlander writers—with "native Taiwanese" referring to writers of earlier local descent and "Mainlander" to those who migrated from China with the Kuomintang government after 1949—a distinction that has deeply influenced Taiwan's postwar cultural politics. Contrarily, under the diasporic historiographical perspective of "cultural China," *A Century of Huáwén Prose Selections: Taiwan Volume* presents an inverse demographic: the proportion of Mainlander writers markedly surpasses that of native Taiwanese writers. More critically, the anthology includes no prose by Indigenous writers at all. This absence highlights the ethnic imbalance generated when Taiwan's literary history is interpreted through the lens of Huáwén or diasporic historiography, specifically in its exclusion of Indigenous peoples of Taiwan.

Regarding temporal and geographical scope, *A Century of Huáwén Prose Selections: Taiwan Volume* appears, at first glance, to align with the other two anthologies in its attempt to trace the development of modern Taiwan prose back to the pre-World War II period. Despite this surface similarity, the series explicitly identifies the publication of Lu Xun's "A Madman's Diary" as its historiographical point of departure, thereby portraying Taiwan prose as a branch offshoot of the May Fourth New Literature movement in China.

Chan and Choong (2018) have likened Huáwén to a "cultural seed" (p. 9). In effect, *A Century of Huáwén Prose Selections: Taiwan Volume* positions the May Fourth Movement as the singular origin of modern prose. That is, all Huáwén prose is portrayed as having branched out from "Chinese (vernacular) prose," with Taiwan prose presented as one offshoot among others, alongside Malaysian Chinese and Hong Kong prose, each compiled into separate volumes. Choong (2018) explicitly affirms this genealogical framework in her preface to the Taiwan volume, affirming that "modern prose arose from the May Fourth Movement" (p. 16).

Nonetheless, it would be reductive to claim that Taiwan's modern prose owes its genealogy solely to Chinese New Literature, a move that serves the ideological narrative of a culturally unified Chinese nation. As Chao's (2016) research also recognizes, the influence of Chinese New Literature on modern Taiwan prose is not denied. Nevertheless, Chao (2016) identifies at least two additional, potentially parallel genealogies beyond the May Fourth lineage: the modern transformation of classical prose in colonial Taiwan and the introduction of Japanese "zuihitsu"-style essayistic writing during the colonial period (pp. 44–45).

The claim that modern Taiwan prose was influenced by Japanese literature has also been noted by Chinese scholar Wang (2018). Wang (2018) further observes that Chinese modern prose itself was shaped by Japan's modern essayistic styles, which developed after the introduction of English and American essay traditions into Japan. For instance, Zhou Zuoren's prose was deeply marked by the stylistic traits of the "zuihitsu" (Wang, 2018, pp. 295–297).

Instead of debating whether Taiwan modern prose is unrelated to Chinese New Literature, it is more productive to understand its formation as influenced by various overlapping and interwoven influences, including, but not restricted to, China's New Literature, classical literature

in colonial Taiwan, and Westernized modern Japanese literature. From this perspective, taking "modern prose during the Japanese colonial period" as a methodological point of departure offers a meaningful alternative to the singular genealogical orientation imposed by the diasporic historiographical approach.

Conclusion

Thus far, the field of Taiwan literary studies has yet to produce a comprehensive *History of Taiwan Prose*. Consequently, two common approaches have emerged: "period-based studies in place of history" and "anthologies in place of history," that is, the use of period-based critical essays or curated anthologies as substitutes for a formal historiographical monograph.

Anthologies function as concrete manifestations of literary canon formation. Large-scale anthologies, specifically those produced with high cultural authority, commonly play a vital role in shaping literary knowledge systems. They function as key instruments in canonizing literature and institutionalizing literary discourse. Such grand compilations typically span wide temporal and spatial scopes and include a wealth of texts. Through meticulous editorial planning and deliberate classicization, they exert significant influence on the formation of literary authority and the transmission of literary knowledge, ultimately playing a critical role in canon construction and literary historiography.

This article examines three major anthologies published in the field of Taiwan literature in the 21st century: *The National Literary Selections, The Twentieth-Century Literary Classics of Taiwan,* and *A Century of Huáwén Literature Selections.* Concentrating specifically on the prose volumes of these series, this study treats them as preliminary exercises in the historiography of Taiwan prose. These collections are not merely anthologies, but forms of historiographical writing influenced by distinct narrative frameworks, ideological orientations, and cultural standpoints, effectively marking a prehistory to any future comprehensive "*History of Taiwan Prose*."

Each of the three anthologies reveals a distinct historiographical trajectory. *The National Literary Selections: Prose Volume* (2004) encompasses a relatively high proportion of Japanese-era prose and highlights the need to recognize and reconnect with Taiwan's modern literary development under Japanese rule. It represents an effort to revise the narrative of literary history of Taiwan across the prewar and postwar divide. *The Twentieth-Century Literary Classics of Taiwan: Prose Volume* (2006) underscores the significance of intellectual prose in Taiwan's prose tradition, providing a critical response to the dominance of emotive, lyrical, and belletristic prose in the history of modern writing in Taiwan. *A Century of Huáwén Literature Selections: Taiwan Volume* (2018) attempts to integrate Taiwan prose with the broader framework of "Huáwén literature." Nonetheless, its emphasis on "Chinese identity" reflects a diasporic historiographical approach, one that narrows the understanding of Taiwan literature and constrains the articulation of Taiwan's literary subjectivity. The canonical frameworks established by these anthologies simultaneously influence and delimit literary narratives, reflecting the intricate tensions between culture and identity in the construction of the *History of Taiwan Prose*.

In this light, prose in Taiwan should not be considered merely a literary genre; it must also be viewed as a medium through which cultural subjectivity and historiographical imagination are expressed. Any future attempt to write a comprehensive *History of Taiwan Prose* must inevitably grapple with the implicit assumptions and divergent tendencies embedded in these anthologies, as they provide critical insight into the contours and contradictions of Taiwan's literary development.

Considering their differing perspectives, these anthologies offer distinct yet interconnected historiographical narratives. Although varied in their editorial visions and ideological orientations,

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they collectively serve as discursive arenas where competing visions of literary history, national identity, and cultural memory are negotiated. As such, they illuminate the evolving dynamics of canon formation in Taiwan literature and offer essential groundwork for reimagining how a more inclusive and multifaceted "*History of Taiwan Prose*" might one day be constructed.

In terms of the operational mechanisms of literary historiography, although this study centers on prose anthologies in Taiwan, its inquiry extends to the broader issue of how cultural identity informs and complicates the construction of the literary canon. This study provides a critical foundation for future historiographical work on literary canon by offering a framework to guide more inclusive and nuanced literary histories.

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