

**“Literature Without Nation”:  
A Study of “*Mahua* Literature in Taiwan” as  
*Transnational Literature***

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ABSTRACT

Placing *MahuaLiT* [Chinese Malaysian literature in Taiwan] in the context of borderlessness as border, this paper makes use of Ng Kim Chew’s concept of literatures in Chinese without nation to relocate *MahuaLiT* in the polysystem of TaiwanLit from a transnational perspective. As a border literature, *MahuaLiT* exemplifies the mobility and transnationality of new or emergent Chinese literatures in the Pacific Rim. While Taiwan serves as a flexible and resourceful literary environment for the transnational, diasporic or expatriate producers of literatures in Chinese, the position of *MahuaLiT* is quite ambiguous. On the one hand, critics of TaiwanLit complain that writers of *MahuaLiT* tend to write more about the world that they have left behind than the place that they live. On the other hand, they are accused by *Mahua* critics in Malaysian of misrepresenting their equatorial homeland. Such a double (dis)position of *MahuaLiT* provokes reflections on its cultural identity and *transnationality*.

KEY WORDS

*Mahua* literature, *MahuaLiT*, TaiwanLit, diaspora, border literature, *transnationality*, literature without nation, borderlessness as border



As a border literature in the Malaysian literary polysystem, *Mahua* literature [literature in Chinese by Malaysian writers] is confined to the boundary of ethnic literature and it is not given the legitimacy to enjoy the status of national literature. This statement clearly points out the nature and position of *Mahua* literature in Malaysia: it is a literature produced in the country, but since it is not written in the national language (Malay), it is a Malaysian literature that is not recognized by the official discourse as national literature. In other words, it is defined by the non-geographical borders of race and language. Critics have employed terms such as sectional literature, communal literature, ethnic literature, and “Malaysian literature” to describe the structural relationship between the literary products written in Chinese in Malaysia and the national concept of Malaysian literature. These terms, however, fail to indicate the border space and subject position of *Mahua* literature in Malaysia; they merely re-state that, though produced by Malaysian, *Mahua* literature is denied its national nature in the public sphere. Existing on the borderlines of such literary and political discourses, *Mahua* literature, in fact, positions itself as a border literature to interrogate the question of national literature.

When writers of *Mahua* literature, for various reasons, travel to Taiwan and produce literary works in the nation, they relocate themselves by connecting the border position of *Mahua* literature with TaiwanLit [Taiwan literature/Taiwanese literature] in the context of transnationalism.<sup>1</sup> The literature produced in Taiwan by *Mahua* writers, who form a diasporic literary community that crosses different borders *within* and *without* Taiwanese literary field, is termed “*Mahua* literature in Taiwan” [hereafter *MahuaLiT*].<sup>2</sup> In my argument,

*MahuaLiT* is a **border and transnational** literature because it is not situated in the central position of Taiwanese literary polysystem (as well as that of *Mahua* literary polysystem) and it is always already bordering and (re)crossing borders, and hence going beyond borderlines. Moreover, crossing the geographical Malaysian border into the Taiwanese boundary, *Mahua* writers make the sojourning place their “home,” hence the crossing of the semantic border of *homelessness* and/as *home*.<sup>3</sup> Such a proposition manifests the significance of “border” in *MahuaLiT* and the concept of “borderlessness as border” in constructing a theory of literature of (Asian) transnationalism. Besides positing *MahuaLiT* as a border and **transnational** literature to illustrate its nature and position in TaiwanLit (and *Mahua* literature), this paper also uses it as an example to explore the theory of *transnational* Chinese literatures in Asia by emphasizing the *transnationality* of the Asian diasporic writers and focusing upon the idea of literature (in Chinese) with borderlessness as border. In discussing the concept of *transnationalism*, I share with Ng Kim Chew his idea of “literatures in Chinese without nation,” which provides a perspective beyond the immutable and homogeneous identities of national literature.

The construction of *MahuaLiT* as a border and *transnational* literature produced by a diasporic literary community in the metropolis reveals a link between borderlessness and border—a link of different borders that intersect *Mahua*, Malaysian and Taiwanese literary fields. In *MahuaLiT*, the Taiwanese literary field is transformed from a *place* into a borderless *space*. Though as a *transnational* literature *MahuaLiT* transgresses the national border into the literary field of Taiwan, it often does not write about the present place. Paradoxically, when *MahuaLiT* is viewed as a border literature, the borderlessness of the literary space of Taiwanese literary field becomes a bordered place. It is by this postulation of the seemingly paradoxical concept of borderlessness as border that I situate *MahuaLiT* as a border and *transnational* literature in both Taiwanese and *Mahua* literary polysystems. The focus of this paper, however, is mainly on the connection between *MahuaLiT* and TaiwanLit, though reference to

*Mahua* literature is inevitable.

The existence of *MahuaLiT* as a transnational literature in Taiwan has a long history which dates from the early 1960's, when ethnic Chinese Malaysian students were encouraged to travel to Taiwan for higher education under the Nationalist (KMT: Kuomintang) government's Overseas Chinese educational policy. Some of these students were already active writers in Malaysia, but there were also others who began their writing career after their arrival in Taiwan. In the Taiwanese context, the Chinese Malaysian students from abroad were regarded as *qiaosheng* (僑生 overseas born students), suggesting that they were Chinese born as natives outside China and were sojourners in foreign countries. While staying in Taiwan these Chinese Malaysian students held alien residential documents instead of being granted citizenship.<sup>4</sup> Their educational passage, however, was also regarded as an act of *huigui zuguo* (回歸祖國 returning to the motherland) by the Nationalist government. Taiwan, of course, was not the country of origin for the ancestors of diasporic Chinese,<sup>5</sup> and therefore could not be their motherland. Their journey was, in fact, a symbolic passage to a new world of cultural rediscovery or resinization.

The Chinese Malaysian writers who participated actively in the Taiwanese literary field in the 1960's and 1970's could be said to exemplify such a "cultural return" paradigm of the Malaysian diasporic Chinese writers in Taiwan. They not only contributed to local literary magazines such as *Xiandai wenxue* (現代文學) and *Zhongwai wenxue* (中外文學 *Chung-Wai Literary Monthly*) but also established their own literary societies and launched their own poetical magazines. Two specific examples may help illustrate such a paradigm. The first one is the *Xingzuo shishe* (星座詩社 the constellation poetry society), established mostly by a group of *qiaosheng* from Malaysia and Hong Kong, namely, Chen Huihua (陳慧樺), Wang Runhua (王潤華), Dan Ying (淡瑩), and Ao Ao (翱翱; now better known as Zhang Cuo 張錯 or Domonique Cheung), which published the *Xingzuo shikan* (星座詩刊 the constellation poetry magazine). The second example is the *Shenzhou shishe* (神州詩社; the word "Shenzhou," literary meaning

“the divine land,” is a metaphor of China), established mostly by *qiaosheng* from the Malaysian state of Perak, notably Wen Ruian (溫瑞安), Fang Ezheng (方娥真), Zhou Qingxiao (周清嘯), and Huang Hunxing (黃昏星), who published the *shenzhou shikan* (神州詩刊) and *Qingnian Zhongguo zazhi* (青年中國雜誌). While members of the Xingzuo group were active in Taiwan in the 1960's, the Shenzhou's prime time was in the second half of the 1970's.

The phrase “cultural return” already indicates a cultural link between the diasporic Chinese literary community and the metropolitan Taipei. It emphasizes the dominant position of Taiwanese literary field as the center of modern literature in Chinese in the 1960's and 1970's. It also metaphorically suggests the flow of a tributary literature into the cultural mainstream, as represented by the return of the members of Xingzuo and Shenzhou and the publication of their literary production in Taiwan. It further suggests the incorporation and co-option of the diasporic and border voices into the cultural center. In spite of this, in 1972, the rationalization of designating the *qiaosheng* writers' sojourning in Taiwan as a “cultural return” and “self-exile” became the focus of a cultural debate in *Zhongguo shibao* (*China Times*).<sup>6</sup> The issue was soon taken up by some writers in the Chinese Malaysian literary community in 1973. Though the concept of transnationality was not the central issue, the debate was a controversy over national as well as transnational cultural identity. The question, of course, is: what is the cultural identity of these “Overseas Chinese” writers who reside in Taiwan and write outside their nation, and who still write about memories of tropical rainforests and rubber plantations in their homeland? Should they be regarded as *Mahua* writers? The question of cultural identity already involves complicated issues such as absence, presence, (re)location, language, place, and home, but that of transnational cultural identity makes them more ambivalent.

The respective “return” to Taiwan of *Mahua*LiT writers like Li Yongping (李永平), Wen Ruian, and Lin Xingqian (林幸謙) in different periods indicates a gesture of embracing the dominant Chinese literary and cultural ideology by diasporic Chinese. Li, who traveled to Taiwan in the late 1960's, attempts to embody in his novels,

particularly *Jiling chunqiu* (吉陵春秋 *The Jiling Chronicles*) and *Haidong qing* (海東青 Haidong Blues), a textual utopia of “pure” Chinese language. Wen, who represents the case of the diasporic Chinese’s cultural return of the 1970’s, on the other hand, attempted to actualize his “Northern voyage of expectation” by promoting the concept of a “cultural China,” knowing that Taiwan is not China *de facto*. Ironically, in 1981 Wen was deported by the KMT government, which claimed to be the promoter of Chinese culture, under the accusation that he disseminated Communist publications. Lin, a representative figure of the cultural return paradigm of the younger *Mahua* generation, came to Taiwan in the late 1980’s and established himself as a budding poet and essay writer. But he left the island-country for Hong Kong when he felt disillusioned with the ideological changes in Taiwan.

Lin Xingqian’s disillusionment exposes the deficiency of using such a paradigm to describe the younger writers of *MahuaLiT* who emerged as a literary community in the late 1980’s and 1990’s in Taiwan. A different interpretive paradigm is thus needed here to think from a transnational perspective. For writers such as Ng Kim Chew (黃錦樹), Chen Dawei (陳大為), Zhong Yiwen (鍾怡雯), and Xin Jinshun (辛金順), their journey to Taiwan, like that of their predecessors, was originally an educational and cultural passage and, later on, their sojourning in the island-country a professional or an unconscious political choice.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, though these writers of *MahuaLiT* teach at various universities in Taiwan, they return to their Malaysian homeland from time to time. In addition, their works are also published in literary magazines and newspaper supplements of Malaysia. In short, they frequently travel back and forth between their homelands and residing territories, suggesting a different form of diaspora that Shirley Geok-lin Lim, in an essay on transnational Hong Kong poets, terms “traveling transnationalism” (Lim 2002).

The paradigm shift from cultural return to traveling transnationalism can be contextualized in the period after the 1987 *Operasi Lalang* (Operation long-bladed grass) and of the rise of the age of Mahathirism in Malaysia.<sup>8</sup> The *Operasi Lalang* in December 1987

was the Mahathir government's action against political, social, and cultural dissidents in the name of preventing ethnic conflict. Many people, ethnic Chinese and Indian particularly, in disappointment with the political development and future of the country, emigrated to other Asian and Commonwealth countries. Yet, in the case of the writers of *MahuaLiT*, who left the country in the post-*Operasi Lalang* era, many of them frequently return to their homeland for short term stays. So there is a process of leaving-returning in the transnational move. They leave because physically they do not want to stay; they return because they cannot leave the site of their cultural and life memory. They can always return physically, but they don't want to; they want to return to the time past but, since it is time lost, they can only search for it in memory, not in reality. What matters therefore is not the place, but the space in their mind and memory. Thus when they write, they mostly write about their experience of things past and time lost in their Malaysian homelands.

Such a relationship between writers of *MahuaLiT* and their homeland could be viewed as a representation of the bordered subject of changing or fragmented identities in transnational mobility and relocation. Though most writers of *MahuaLiT* have chosen to live transnationally in another country, they remain Malaysian citizens so as to maintain their national identity. We can thus posit that, on the one hand, they choose to preserve a link with their homeland but, on the other hand, they are divided between double or fragmented identities. By adopting Taiwan as a cultural home, they become the metropolitan, like the migrant in Salman Rushdie's novels, as argued by Gayatri Spivak and other critics.<sup>9</sup>

Positioning *MahuaLiT* as a transnational literature rather than a tributary literature relocated to an alternative center helps explain the reason that writers of *MahuaLiT* tell stories more about their homeland than things in Taiwan. These writers simply attempt to preserve their diasporic Chinese cultural identity in their writing by sustaining the memories of their childhood, hometowns, cities, and ethnic history. Yet such an identity is embodied in the literary artifacts they produced in metropolitan Taipei, where Taiwanese nativism and nationalism are

the components of mainstream cultural ideology, and the cultural market is dominated by consumerism and fetishism.

In Taiwan the years after the late 1980's marked the post-martial law age, in which the country began to re-construct its own subjectivity as well as its political, cultural, national, and ethnic identities. Along with the rise of Taiwanese nativism and nationalism, the period also witnessed the flow of Western grand theories, such as postmodernism, postcolonialism, and globalism, into the cultural field of Taiwan. It was also during this period that the institutionalization and (re)definition of TaiwanLit took place. In this context, since TaiwanLit has reclaimed its own Taiwanese identity, it is anachronistic and insignificant to view the existence of *MahuaLiT* as a mode of "return to cultural China." Instead, it should be viewed as part of the transnational process in which intellectuals move from postcolonial places to other metropolis.

The interaction and intersection of *MahuaLiT* and TaiwanLit within the Taiwanese literary polysystem in terms of identity politics, however, manifests the ambiguous position of *MahuaLiT*. On the one hand, as a border literature, *MahuaLiT* is politically incorrect and un-Taiwanese (or un-nativistic) because it generally expresses or carries over the Malaysian experience of the writers. On the other hand, some *MahuaLiT* writers, such as Li Yongping and Zhang Guixing, besides telling stories from their Malaysian imagination and experience, attempt to translate the language used from vernacular Chinese (*Huawen*) common in diasporic Chinese communities to standard Chinese (*Guoyu*).<sup>10</sup> The result of such cultural translation could be regarded as a kind of misplacement and displacement because what contemporary TaiwanLit embraces is a cultural syncretism and hybridized literary style rather than one of pure Chinese.

Whereas critics of local TaiwanLit often state that *MahuaLiT* tends to express more about the world that its writers have left behind than the place that they are living at the moment, their peers in Malaysia accuse the writers of *MahuaLiT* of misrepresenting their equatorial homeland. The (Taiwanese) complaint and (Malaysian) accusation, in fact, suggest a mis-link of cultural translation, putting *MahuaLiT* in the midst of the liminality between reality and fiction.

Such a double (dis)position of the writers of *MahuaLiT*, moreover, provokes reflections on the issues of transnationality and homelessness as home or borderlessness as border of contemporary TaiwanLit in particular and new Chinese literatures at large.

It is Ng Kim Chew’s critique of such a view that acutely exposes the problematic of positioning *MahuaLiT* from the singular perspective of national literature. In a recent brilliant essay on *MahuaLiT* of *Mahua* literature / Un-TaiwanLit of Taiwanese literature (馬華文學的「在台馬華文學」或台灣文學的「非台灣文學」<sup>11</sup>) entitled “Wu guoji huawen wenxue: zaitai Mahua wenxue de shiqianshi, huo Taiwan wenxue shishang de feiTaiwan wenxue—yige wenxueshi de bijiao gangling” (無國籍華文文學：在台馬華文學的史前史，或台灣文學史上的非台灣文學——一個文學史的比較綱領 Literatures in Chinese without nation: The prehistory of *MahuaLiT*, or the unTaiwanLit in Taiwanese literary history—a comparative outline of literary history), Ng Kim Chew deconstructs the border (dis)position of *MahuaLiT* in Taiwan (and in Malaysia) by proposing the concept of “Literatures in Chinese without nation” (無國籍華文文學). Hence the question involved here is that of literary (*trans*)nationalism and/or that of the (*trans*)nationality of the writers. Ng’s radical concept, in short, involves the questions of literary, cultural, and political IDENTITIES. Ng also uses terms such as “nation [ethnic]-non-national literature” (民族—非國家文學) and “non-national literature” (非民族—國家文學) to describe the border and *trans*national position of *Mahua* literature in the Malaysian literary system. Radical or not, Ng’s concept has much in common with the concept of *MahuaLiT* as border and transnational literature discussed in this paper.

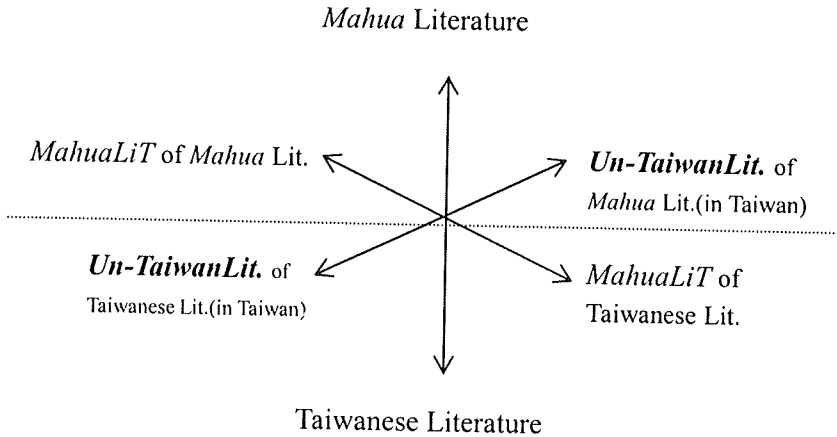
Comparing the historiography of TaiwanLit with that of *Mahua* literature, Ng Kim Chew advocates that since Taiwan is (still) not a nation (but an imagined community?), from the perspective of (national) literary history, we may say that “(national) TaiwanLit is a literature without nation *de facto* because TaiwanLit refuses to accept its status of exilic Chinese literature or border literature under the ideology of greater Chinese culturalism” (2006:218). *Mahua* literature, accordingly, is also a literature without nation in Ng’s argument.

Whereas the assumption of TaiwanLit as a literature without nation is derived from the politics of recognition, theory of *Mahua* literature as a literature without nation is based on the fact that Chinese is not an official or national language in Malaysia. Writes Ng:

Relatively speaking, even from the aspect of the language used by *Mahua* literature (Chinese as non-official language), we can say that it is excluded by national literature and hence forced to confined itself to its ethnic and linguistic boundary. It is therefore legitimate for us to say that *Mahua* literature is a literature without nation or an ethnic-non-national literature. (2006:217)

In his paper Ng points out that the position of *Mahua*LiT as a (*trans*)national literature lies actually in the intersection of the two literatures without nation. Such a position, of course, does not secure *Mahua*LiT a position at all since it does not concur with the nativist definition of TaiwanLit, which is based on “Taiwanese consciousness, Taiwanese localism, Taiwanese ethnicity, and patriotism.” In this context, Ng concludes, *Mahua*LiT is “by no means TaiwanLit (for it is even not eligible to be patriotic) and hence should be categorized as the unTaiwanLit in Taiwanese literary history” (2006: 217–18).<sup>12</sup> It is from this perspective of the self-decentralization and deterritorialization of *Mahua*LiT that I view Ng’s theoretical endeavor as a project of *transnational* literature.

The following diagram is a schematic explication of Ng Kim Chew’s theory of literature without nation, showing the nature of *Mahua*LiT as a *transnational* literature that is marginalized by the two national literatures which are in fact “literatures without nation”:



**Schema 1**

*The nature of MahuaLiT as a transnational literature*<sup>13</sup>

Following the schema, we have proposition One: The *Mahua* literary texts that are produced transnationally in Taiwan and known as “*MahuaLiT*” (*Mahua* literature in Taiwan) are indeed the “*MahuaLiT* of Taiwanese literature,” since they are produced in Taiwan, not in Malaysia, meaning they are TaiwanLit, not *Mahua* literature. But to argue that *MahuaLiT* is Taiwanese literature involves a re-examination of the definition of TaiwanLit. According to Huang Deshi (黃得時), the authors of TaiwanLit texts are those with a Taiwanese background (meaning born in Taiwan) and who carry out their writing acts in Taiwan.<sup>14</sup> These *MahuaLiT* authors, of course, were not born in Taiwan, though over the years they have established their writing career in the island-country. So either the exclusive definition is insufficient or texts of *MahuaLiT* are indeed not TaiwanLit.

The Taiwanese literary polysystem, however, consists of literatures from different Taiwanese (and non-Taiwanese) ethnic communities such as Mainlander-Chinese, Hokkien or Minnan speaking Chinese, Hakka, the Native (Aboriginal), and diasporic Chinese (Overseas Chinese) who reside in Taiwan. Together they form a literary field or polysystem producing works or symbolic goods in

various languages—predominantly Chinese (*Guoyu* the national language/*Huawen*).<sup>15</sup> Among literatures produced in Chinese by the diasporic Chinese writers who reside in Taiwan is *MahuaLiT*. In my argument, though these writers were not born in Taiwan, they carry out their writing activities in Taiwan, and hence their literary products are eligible to be part of TaiwanLit, regardless of its un-Taiwanness. Such a definition of transnational TaiwanLit is obviously more inclusive than the notion of national literature.

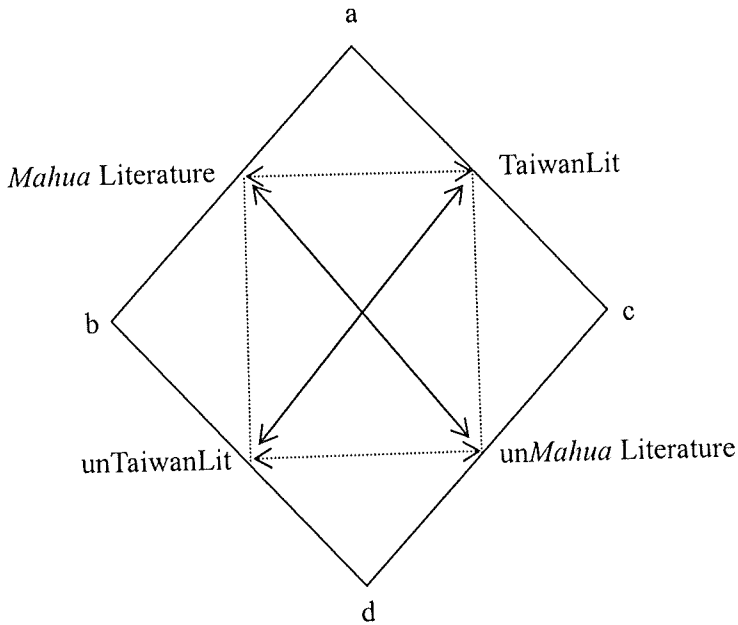
Another proposition suggested by Ng's model is that *MahuaLiT*, as "un-TaiwanLit" in the Taiwanese literary system, could also be termed as the "un-TaiwanLit of *Mahua* literature" since it is un-Taiwanese, meaning it is *Mahua* literature, not TaiwanLit. But how could these un-TaiwanLit texts produced in Taiwan be considered *MahuaLiT* when they are not produced in Malaysia? Again, if we use Huang Deshi's criteria in defining what is and what is not TaiwanLit, *MahuaLiT* could only be *Mahua* literature, for these writers were born in Malaysia and they have not declined their nationality, though they do not write in Malaysia. To incorporate *MahuaLiT* into *Mahua* literature, Chen Dawei proposes the division of the *Mahua* literary field into three different zones: that is, *MahuaLiT*, *Mahua* literature produced in East Malaysia, and *Mahua* literature produced in West Malaysia (Chen 2001:32). In such a case, *MahuaLiT* is an extra-territorialized, or, deterritorialized *Mahua* literature since Taiwan is not a geographical zone of Malaysia. The nationality or national identity of the writer, however, is an insiders' criterion in defining *Mahua* literature. When the Malaysian Chinese Writers' Association published the *Anthology of Mahua Literature* in the new millennium, Li Yijun (李憶著), the anthology's fiction volume editor, wrote:

My selecting principle is based on the nationality of the author. If the authors are no more Malaysian citizens, their works will not be included. However, for those who have become citizens of other countries, if they published their works when they were still Malaysian, the texts are considered *Mahua* literature. (Li Yijun 2001: vi)

Hence, according to Chen and Li, as long as the literary text is produced by a *Mahua* writer of Malaysian nationality, it is a *Mahua* text, regardless of the writer's residing place. This of course varies from Huang Deshi's definition of TaiwanLit, which emphasizes both the identity/nationality of the writer and the place of production (Made in Taiwan!).

In the Malaysian context, Ng Kim Chew's theory of "literature without nation," in fact, helps point out that *Mahua* literature has no position in the agenda and the grand narrative of "national literature," a concept of the government's pro-Malay culture policy. In short, it also involves the politics of recognition. In Malaysia, the official discourse embraced monolingualism in the 1960's, and Malay, has since enjoyed its prestigious status as the sole national language, though Chinese and Tamil are also used in each ethnic community respectively, and English is the lingua franca. *Mahua* literature, as a sectional literature, becomes a border literature and a literature of lesser diffusion since its market is limited to those who can read and write Chinese. From another perspective, *Mahua* literature is a minor literature (*littérature mineure*) in Deleuze and Guattari's sense of the term, and could be discussed from the idea of minor transnationalism.<sup>16</sup>

Ng Kim Chew's theory, in fact, is built on the paradoxicality of *MahuaLiT* as un-TaiwanLit of both *Mahua* and Taiwan literatures due to its border position. The following diagram, which is derived from the Greimasian semiotic square, with modification, shows clearly the various positions of *MahuaLiT* at the intersection of the (dialectics of the) two "literatures without nation" as proposed by Ng. Argued paradoxically, *MahuaLiT* could be **both** TaiwanLit **and** *Mahua* (a), **either** TaiwanLit **or** *Mahua* literature (b, c), and **neither** TaiwanLit **nor** *Mahua* literature (d):



**Schema 2**

*The Positions of MahuaLiT as Transnational literature/border literature*

Though Ng does not use the term “transnational literature” or “border literature” in his paper, the two terms clearly define *MahuaLiT*’s intersecting and alienated position in both Taiwan and *Mahua* literary polysystems. Ng Kim Chew’s paper, in fact, attempts to draw attention to the possibility of finding a “third space” to locate such a border literature. According to him, the aim of his theory of *MahuaLiT* as a literature without nation is to “explore a third possibility beyond the two narrative modes of extreme nationalism: the possibility of a literature in Chinese that preserves a kind of creative tension with the nation” (2006:212).

In conclusion, *MahuaLiT* as *Mahua* literature is always already a border literature since in Malaysia it is officially denied the status of

national literature. When this non-national literature (re)crosses the national border into the field of TaiwanLit, it is again designated a border and non-national literature. But, given the fact that *MahuaLiT*, as a border literature, transcrosses the borders of institutionalization and national literatures in both Malaysian and Taiwanese literary polysystems, it is significant to re-map it dialectically into the network of Sinophone literatures in the age of transnationalism and globalization.<sup>17</sup> Ng Kim Chew's comparative study of the writing of literary history of TaiwanLit and *Mahua* literature, then, offers a model to challenge the mode of literary historiography that is based on the immutable ideology of national literature. In this sense, Ng's model helps develop a *transnational* and multicultural perspective that goes beyond the notion of border into borderlessness in constructing the cultural and national identities of *MahuaLiT*.

#### NOTES

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\*\* *The phrase "literature without nation" in the title is an appropriation of Ng Kim Chew's concept of "Literatures in Chinese without nation." I thank him for sharing with me his splendid idea. See Ng Kim Chew 2006.*

*The invaluable suggestions for revision from the anonymous reviewers also deserve my gratitude here.*

<sup>1</sup> In this paper I use the term "**TaiwanLit**" as the English translation of *Taiwan wenxue* (台灣文學) and as a substitution for the not quite grammatical phrase "Taiwan literature" and the somewhat misleading and ambiguous term "Taiwanese literature" (literature in Taiwanese language[s] or literature by Taiwanese?). I am, of course, inspired by the acronym of "CanLit" for Canadian literature in Canadian literary discourse.

<sup>2</sup> While *Mahua* in the phrase "*Mahua* literature" is a blend of the Romanized words *Malai(xi)ya huawen*, which is now commonly used to mean

“Malay(si)an Chinese-language,” *MahuaLiT* is my acronym for “*Mahua* literature in Taiwan.”

<sup>3</sup> Here the reference of “homelessness” and “home” is to Abdul JanMohamed, who, in his seminal paper, describes the situation of those he calls “the specular border intellectual” as “*worldliness without world, homelessness as home*” (1992). Of course he refers specifically to intellectuals like Edward Said and Richard Wright. But here I borrow the two phrases to define the nature and position of “*Mahua* literature in Taiwan” as a border and transnational literature.

<sup>4</sup> But in those days *qiaosheng* from Hong Kong and Macao who returned to Taiwan were granted ROC/Taiwanese nationality automatically.

<sup>5</sup> In this paper the term “diasporic Chinese,” rather than the outmoded usage “Overseas Chinese,” is employed to refer to the Chinese immigrants and their descendants in countries outside China.

<sup>6</sup> Perhaps it was the first time *Mahua* literature was seriously discussed outside Malaysia.

<sup>7</sup> The Malaysian government introduced the education quota system when the National Economic Policy was implemented in the early 1970’s, under which a much higher percentage of admission to universities was reserved for the Bumiputra (natives, including Malays). The non-bumiputra applicants, failing to be admitted, were forced to resort to other countries, including Taiwan. This is one of the factors contributed to the educational passage to Taiwan of many non-bumiputra applicants of Chinese background since the 1980’s.

<sup>8</sup> “Mahathirism” has now become a term to describe the political and economic phenomena of Malaysia under the prime-ministership of Mahathir. C.f., Khoo Boo Teik, *Paradoxes of Mahathirism: An Intellectual Biography of Mahathir Mohamad* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford UP, 1995) and John Hilley, *Malaysia: Mahathirism, Hegemony and the New Opposition* (London: Zed Books, 2001).

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Spivak, “Reading *The Satanic Verses*,” *Public Culture* 2.1 (1989): 79–99.

<sup>10</sup> This issue has been explored quite thoroughly by Ng Kim Chew in his “Lisan de Poluo Zhou zhizi han tade muqin, fuqin: lun LiYongping de ‘wenzi xiuxing’” (流離的婆羅洲之子和他的母親、父親：論李永平的「文字修行」

The diasporic son of Borneo and his mother and father: on Li Yongping's pious life of words), in his *Mahua wenxue yu Zhongguoxing* (馬華文學與中國性 *Mahua Literature and Chineseness*) (Taipei: Meta 元尊文化, 1988) 299–350.

<sup>11</sup>Or rather, Un-TaiwanLit of *Mahua* literature / *MahuaLiT* of TaiwanLit (馬華文學的「非台灣文學」或台灣文學的「在台馬華文學」).

<sup>12</sup>Qiu Guifen (邱貴芬 Chiu Kuei-fen) responds to Ng Kim Chew's essay by pointing out the issue of violence in the writing of literary history. She suggests that it is possible that writers of TaiwanLit might not be pure-blooded Chinese, but hybridized Taiwanese, so it is right to assume that TaiwanLit is not a literature in Chinese. This is, of course, an innocent logic based on an anthropological perspective. Such a nativist view of TaiwanLit, according to Qiu, is "a consensus in the studies of TaiwanLit from a local perspective" (Qiu 2006:286). Qiu's critique, however, problematizes the comparative study of *Mahua* literature and TaiwanLit that based on the assumption that both are (diasporic) literatures in Chinese. One might then ask: where is the border of such a study of comparative identities?

<sup>13</sup>This schema also appears in my paper "Lisan shuangxiang: zuowei Yazhou kuaguo Huawen shuxie de zaiTai Mahua wenxue" (離散雙鄉：作為亞洲跨國華文書寫的在台馬華文學 Double Diaspora: *Mahua* Literature in Taiwan as Asian Transnational Chinese Literature), *Zhongguo xiandai wenxue Quaterly* (中國現代文學) 9 (June 2006): 61–72.

<sup>14</sup>See Huang's 1943 article reprinted in Ye Shitao 1996: 1–17.

<sup>15</sup>For the polysystem of TaiwanLit, see my paper entitled "Taiwan wenxue: yige 'Taiwan wenxue fuxitong' fangan" (台灣文學：一個「台灣文學複系統」方案 TaiwanLit: towards a theory of Taiwanese literary polysystem)," *Zhongxie Taiwan wenxueshi lunwenji* (重寫台灣文學史論文集 *Rewriting Taiwanese Literary History: A Collection of Papers on TaiwanLit*), ed. Ng Kim Chew and Tee Kim Tong (Taipei: Rye Field Books, 2007).

<sup>16</sup>*Mahua* literature is a minor literature that is "impossible not to write" because it exists in a linguistic environment in which Malay or National Literature is a strong or powerful literature. Though it is double deterritorialized (both from Malaysian National literature and Chinese literature in China), *Mahua* literature manifests an ethnic and community consciousness. For my discussion of *Mahua* literature as minor literature, see

my “Xiao wenxue, fu xitong: Dongnanya Huawen wenxue de (yuyan wenti yu) yiyi” (小文學·複系統：東南亞華文文學的（語言問題與）意義 Minor literature, polysystem: the (linguistic problem and) meaning of Southeast Asian Chinese literature), *Dangdai wenxue yu renwen shengtai* (當代文學與人文生態 *Contemporary Literature and the Ecology of Humanities*), ed. Wu Yaorong (吳耀宗) (Taipei: Wanjuanlou 萬卷樓, 2003) 313–27.

For discussion of minor transnationalism, see, for example, the essays collected in Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih, eds, *Minor Transnationalism* (Durham: Duke UP, 2005).

<sup>17</sup>In a recent inspiring essay, David Der-wei Wang has proposed the use of the term “Sinophone Literature” to include all modern literatures in Chinese. According to Wang, the term, on the one hand, corresponds to terms such as “Anglophone Literature,” “Francophone Literature,” and “Hispanophone Literature” but on the other hand differs from them in terms of the relationship between Chinese language and Chinese culture in diasporic Chinese society and those in China. Wang writes:

In the past hundred years or so, owing to political and economic factors, a great number of Chinese migrated abroad, especially to Southeast Asia. They established various types of communities, in which a Chinese linguistic and cultural aura was consciously formed. In spite of all the familial and national disorders and changes, Chinese writing has always been a symbol of cultural (if not political) continuity for the Chinese subjects of these regions. A typical example is *Mahua* literature. (Wang 2006)

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