

Literary Governance

Our native language is too much of a matter of unreflective habit with us for us to be able to set it in the full light of an objective study. Something of the same difficulty is felt in relation also to our native literature.

William Dwight Whitney, *Oriental and Linguistic Studies* (1873)

The more you speak Beijing Mandarin, the less confident you are. You know someone's laughing at you, because you're not from Beijing. And you know you can never have the proper elocution. Not one sentence you utter is in the pleasing Beijing tone. You're displaying an inferior copy.

Song Zelai, *Lectures on Reciting Taiwanese Poetry* (2002)

William Dwight Whitney understood the temptations of the native speaker. Having been born into a language means, among other things, that one can claim it in a special way. Lest native speakers abuse this privilege, they ought to try out other languages assiduously, learning to do without the given nativity that lets them take things for granted.¹ Admittedly, this is hard to do—to approach one's mother tongue in the same way that a stranger would. But Whitney thinks this is all the more important for understanding the literature written in one's own language in relation to that of others, for “we hardly know what it is, and what it is worth, until we come to compare it with another.”²

The good of comparison seems agreeable enough. A sure way to break an “unreflexive habit” is to bring awareness to its naturalized presence. Yet language is not always given to a native speaker to feel at home with or to wear like a layer of skin. Contemporary Singaporean Chinese writer Wong Meng Voon, for instance, remarks on the denaturing of the mother tongue in a place like Singapore, where the trend of “Englishization” in the 1980s threatened the continuation of Chinese-language education.³ In such cases, the native tongue can be an unstable commodity. In Wong's short-short story “Book Burning” (“Fenshu”),

an old man prepares to move in with his daughter and has to downsize his lifelong book collection for the new apartment.⁴ He is allowed to keep only the few novels that his daughter and her husband deem quintessentially Chinese, should they ever wish to “seek their cultural roots” (*xungen*): *Drum of the Red Chamber*, *Water Margins*, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*—but all in English translation. With no one willing to take the Chinese-language books even for free, the old man finally resigns himself to destroying them, mournfully watching centuries of the written culture burn to ashes.

Wong’s attention to cultural illiteracy and translation voices a local concern in a larger chorus about the fate of the Chinese language (along with its hundreds of dialects) in the world. Protests over the Cantonese mother tongue in Hong Kong in summer 2010, similarly, is only the tip of a historical iceberg.⁵ When a native speaker cannot count on having access to his or her own mother tongue, all the experiences that are attached to knowing a language intimately—reading, writing, listening, and speaking—appear equally imperiled. But the question of interest here is not about protecting a rightful entitlement. Rather, what did linguistic nativity promise to deliver in the first place such that its loss is unthinkable and culturally devastating? In what ways do standardization, access to language, orthography, and the idea of a national literature manipulate that vulnerable affinity between a native speaker and language?

This book investigates the different contentions about the modern Chinese language in the literatures of its diasporic communities around the world. Its focus is the ways in which writers, readers, critics, language policies, bilingualism, technologies of orthography, and the materiality of writing come to facilitate a global process that I call “literary governance.” Literary governance emerges wherever there is an open or veiled, imposed or voluntary coordination between linguistic antagonisms and the idea of the “native speaker.” It develops from both local and global tensions between the ongoing political and material processes of how one accesses a language and script through learned orthography, on the one hand, and the continual reliance on a notion of a primary, naturalized linguistic home like the “mother tongue” to support expressions of cultural belonging, on the other. Together, these dynamics produce national literature as a common interest as well as a source of strife.

Admittedly, the question of the native speaker and its corollary, the mother tongue, has not been the traditional focus of inquiries into national languages or their respective literatures. One generally relies on, and expects, a certain mastery of language in examining literature. A historian might readily locate the seminal moments of convergence between language and nationalism in the

thoughts of Johann Gottlieb Fichte or Johann Gottfried Herder, but not tell us how the two merged as the same felt imperative. A linguist, in contrast, may analyze standard and national languages within a dynamic ecology of diverse language contacts and hierarchy. Nonetheless, each speaking subject is assumed to come already armed with a language of his or her own. Without having already met a threshold of linguistic competence, one has little chance of participating in the social strife of languages or becoming a traceable object of analysis. The native speaker, as the main token of this measure, guarantees an innate access to the mother tongue that facilitates a unitary conception of language as a prior endowment. Nothing speaks louder to this fact than that, despite its ubiquity, this tolerated essentialism has been treated as no more than a mundane fact. Linguistic nativity—from its most outward institutionalization to naturalized passions—sits at the core of literary governance. With this central feature, networks of normalization operate both within and outside of monolingual national traditions, motivating writers and readers to observe a common currency of language. The gravitation toward the mother tongue continues to draw and to polarize its users, as is evident in a recent controversy over the Chinese language.

Linguistic Nativity

In early March 2009, a new proposal for the Chinese written language unleashed a widely publicized debate. At the annual session of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference, Vice Chairman of the Overseas Chinese Federation Pan Qinglin called for an end to the use of simplified characters and a return to the traditional, or long, form. The conditions for the Chinese language, he argued, have changed significantly since the implementation of several simplification schemes from the 1950s through the 1970s. With the advent of the electronic age and currently available input methods in Chinese-language software, whether the character for “love” (*ai*), for instance, is easier to learn with ten or thirteen strokes matters little. That the simplified ten-stroke version dispenses with the logographic component of “heart” in “love”—thereby leaving love heartless, Pan lamented—has significantly impaired the expressive and aesthetic content of the Chinese logographic system. Reinstating traditional characters not only would rectify this problem but would also help reconcile the geographical and political differences among Chinese people at large. Having spent time away from China himself, overseas, Pan was drawn to the importance of communicability among Chinese-language speakers

around the globe, who are divided in such a way that has separated mainland China from the rest of the Sinoophone world.

Pan's suggestion elicited a number of hostile responses. Some observers, including academics and linguists, likened the reinstatement of traditional orthography to a return to feudalism, reversing decades of progress in increased literacy. Others were less averse to rehabilitating the long form, seeing it as re-connecting with a rich literary tradition that far predates the mid-twentieth century. The suggestion also provoked strong popular reactions from native speakers and foreign learners in print and on the internet. From China to Singapore and the United States, people posted their personal experiences in learning stroke orders, offering anecdotes of laborious mnemonics and attempts to master standard Mandarin. Foreign learners remarked on the degree of difficulty involved, while mainland Chinese speakers, having learned only simplified scripts, scarcely saw the point of restoring the pared-down logograms to their fuller form. The emotional investment in the Chinese language, for those who have known it all their lives, is synonymous with being Chinese.

This latest call for the reunification of simplified and traditional scripts reflects the greatest known divide in the modern Chinese language. The two orthographies, associated with the communist and nationalist split in the late 1940s, have come to symbolize more than a half-century's political unease. The attempt to unify and codify standard orthography and pronunciation not only for the Han Chinese speakers but also for China's ethnic minorities—from the Zhuang to the Tibetans, the Uighurs, and the Mongols—has also been an integral part of communist state planning.⁶ There are currently 2,236 simplified characters, more than half of the three to four thousand required for average literacy.⁷ The difference between a few strokes more or less, in the larger scheme of things, however, represents a relatively recent construct for recruiting Chinese loyalities.

While portrayals of orthographic disagreement between traditional and simplified forms have produced strong feelings on both sides of the Taiwan Straits, the division also conceals their shared undertaking in the modern history of the Chinese language. The nationalists, in fact, had already put forth a simplification plan for 324 characters in 1935.⁸ The proposal was never ratified because of internal disagreement but was later pursued more systematically by the communists, resulting in the announcement of 515 simplified characters and 54 simplified radical components in 1956. Another expansion in 1964 increased the number to 2,236 characters, which, with some modifi-

cations made since, is the current standard. More important, simplification itself is not an agenda new to the modern period. Several thousand abridged forms can already be found in ancient styles of calligraphy, dictionaries, military documents, and accounting records of daily transactions that used abbreviated characters as a matter of expediency.⁹

Despite the historical precedence, the invention of a native, national script holds a powerful sway over emotional loyalties. When the nationalists retreated to Taiwan, the plan for simplification was again discussed. Luo Jialun, who had previously supported the linguistic reforms on the mainland, was the leading proponent.¹⁰ At the time, the conditions could not have seemed more favorable. Taiwan was just coming out of fifty years of Japanese colonial rule and its intense language assimilation campaigns. The mood for re-Mandarinization, at least initially, was no less than euphoric. Already in late 1943, the Nationalist government was making preparations for the island's return to China.¹¹ The planners made their best assessment of the impending task.¹² They reasoned that the Taiwanese would be relieved at not having to speak the colonial language and so would gladly go back to using their home dialects, which would bridge a natural return to the Chinese national language. The process, as the language planners envisioned it, would be swift.¹³ When Wei Jianguo, the head of the delegated language committee, made a radio address on his arrival in Taiwan in 1946, he explained the task of re-Mandarinization in plain terms:

What is *guoyu* ["national language"]? We all know that, once Taiwan is returned, the first urgent matter to attend to is the dissemination of *guoyu*. To the average person, *guoyu* is what we Chinese speak, from Shanghai to Chongqing, Nanjing, Wenzhou, Swatow, to Guangzhou, Xiamen, Fuzhou. . . . As long as it doesn't use abcd . . . or ㄅ ㄆ ㄇ ㄏ, anything can be considered *guoyu*.¹⁴

Wei rallied support for expunging other competing forms of foreign orthography. The transition back to Mandarin seemed desirable and inevitable. The problem on the ground, however, was not how the Chinese ideograph was phoneticized in writing, but rather that the pronunciation itself was no longer Chinese. By then, many Taiwanese had learned Chinese characters only as Japanese kanji: the ideographs were the same ideograph but had a different pronunciation and sometimes a different meaning. The partially shared orthography between Chinese and Japanese made the recovery of *guoyu* (*kokugo* in Japanese) ambiguous. It was not clear what the object of decontamination was, despite one 1946

official Mandarin-learning pamphlet's urgent calling: "The national script (*guozì*) has been afflicted with an evil spirit, put under a wicked spell, and lost its true soul in the consciousness of our Taiwan brothers."¹⁵

Exorcising the sinoscript of its undesirable articulation in a foreign language, it seemed, was tantamount to Taiwan's renewal. At the same time, a different tension was brewing. For those who grew up exclusively under Japanese colonial rule, Mandarin, not Japanese, was the foreign language. Mandarin was thus also being challenged from within, as the inhabitants of Taiwan were largely southern Min topolect speakers. The language problem was at once cross-national and intranational. At stake was not only ridding Taiwan of Japanese influence but also finessing the longer conflict of tongues that had been reduced as a priority in the presence of colonialism. The new state of affairs required a firm subordination of the Taiwanese languages to Mandarin even as the local tongues of Min and Hakka were being called on to oust the colonial national language. Careful not to lose local support, Nationalist Party delegates invoked the positive notion of *biaozhun yǔ*, or standard speech, to bolster the new national language, emphasizing the proximity of, rather than the gulf between, Min and Mandarin. Wei recognized that *guoyǔ* required a reassociation of intimacy with Mandarin in order to strip the idea of a national language of its Japanese content. He made an appeal by using a familial analogy that separates Japanese and Taiwanese by two degrees of kinship while likening the relation between Mandarin and Min to siblings.¹⁶

Three months later, however, Wei began to see the enormity of the task before him.¹⁷ He noticed that, apart from grammar, the Taiwanese used Chinese characters according to their meanings in kanji. The locals were responding to re-Mandarinization as though they were foreigners learning a second language. Moreover, in public places they would instinctively revert to speaking Japanese. While these details could be remedied through gradual reeducation, they pointed to something that was much more troubling. Wei noted a basic lack of "feeling" (*ganjue*), or emotional attachment, among the Taiwanese to the language of their ancestral land (*zuxu*).¹⁸ Despite the initially perceived enthusiasm for *guoyǔ*, something was fundamentally absent—a heartfelt, native allegiance. Wei saw this, above all, as the gravest impediment to Mandarinization.

Though these infelicities of repatriation have largely been attributed to the political ideologies behind the two kinds of orthography, what is meant by the feeling of nativity gives a broader commentary on the different allegiances

to language. When seen in the colonial context, the idea of a native tongue stands for the language of the oppressed. Its reinstatement marks a key step in a people's anticolonial nationalist autonomy. Yet, in this case, the native Taiwanese tongue is not the national language of Mandarin. It contradicts and even opposes the latter's arbitrariness as the legitimate idiom of a nation. Despite the promotion of standard pronunciation and Mandarin usage, there was in fact very little standard Mandarin to be heard. Very few of the mainland delegates themselves, as it turned out, had mastered the Chinese national idiom even as they were prescribing its proper usage and elocution. They were equally unative to the proposed native language. This tension between standard languages and dialects will come to shape the relationship between Mandarin and China's other languages, and their literary production outside of mainland China. With the initial attempts to reinstall the national language as a postcolonial measure in Taiwan, the deep rift in the façade of a unified language was palpable.

Seen in this light, the recent controversy over the choice of script sits on top of a greater long-standing conflict between spoken sounds and written script. These local antagonisms have been as distinct and varied as China's geographical area. Each of the seven current major topolect groups, for example, features a dominant dialect. Cantonese is better known than the Yue topolect group to which it belongs, whereas Xiamen (Fuzhou or Amoy) has been the representative majority dialect of Min. Under the major headings are still other more numerous subdialects and local inflections that further divide the linguistic map in ways that are not always agreeable. The local pride in speaking Shanghaiese, for instance, the leading dialect of the Wu topolect, regularly outweighs that of speaking the national language. Mandarin itself, to name the standard, consists of four northern subdialect groups and, depending on the speaker, is known as *putonghua* ("common speech") in China, *guoyǔ* ("national language") in Taiwan, and *huayu* ("Chinese language") among overseas Chinese communities. Given this diversity in sound and reference, a shared language, indeed, guarantees little commonality.

Amid the impassioned pleas, moreover, few people have taken note of an important change. From the late nineteenth century to the 1980s, concerns over the future of the Chinese language had mainly revolved around how to reconcile the Chinese ideographic writing with alphabetic Romanization. In recent years, however, the emphasis has shifted to the task of consolidating its standard orthography abroad and the question of which system would best unite the Chinese. There is no longer any doubt, as there had been in the

past, that the Chinese language, much like its growing national identity in the twenty-first century, would again come under the threat of Western alphabetic dominance, notably English. Discussions of the national language are also shifting the focus to the overseas Chinese who form an untapped reserve for a coming supranational community.

It is at the threshold of this powerful act of social and political confirmation through language that this book probes the following questions: If the idea of a national language is not what it professes to be, what, then, about the native tongue? Can the latter guarantee what standardized languages do not, namely a feeling of intimacy and "givenness" that precedes all other forms of allegiance? How does the notion of the native speaker invest in a kind of paradoxical linguistic power that is at once precarious and self-evident? These questions bring into view a greater underlying problem of taking linguistic nativity as a constitutive "feeling" for any national idiom and, as we shall see, its corresponding national-language literature. An examination of these concerns also shows how the same investment is detectable in the anti-institutional expressions of the mother tongue. In this regard, a conscious endorsement or official declaration alone does not guarantee a credible allegiance. How might one begin to interrogate a feeling of the certainty of belonging in language, a belief in the mother tongue as one's own?

The Unit of the National Language

To date, we have not been very well equipped to answer these questions. Few conventions of the literary trade have been more foundational or divisive than the simple act of classifying a piece of work by the language in which it is written.¹⁹ The national unit of language assigns literature not only to geographical zones, but also to fields of cultural jurisdiction, expertise, and domains of internal housekeeping. Those who are peering in from the outside rely on it as a threshold of comparison, whereas those who are in it as area and national specialists hardly see a need for its justification. The practice persists, despite the recognition that within each national field the institutionalization of the national language did not come about naturally or willingly. This prior standardization of language access, in this way, seldom reenters literary analysis as anything other than a given.

Yet it is also true that, for about a half-century, no amount of critical energy has been spared when it comes to the question of language as power. From the

interiority of subjects to external ideological and social shaping, language has been exhaustively interrogated, theorized about, dismantled, and reassembled. We have been on our way to it, crossing borders with it, tracing it, and even constituted in it. Broadly conceived, language acquisition serves the theoretical shorthand of signaling the main psychic threshold of sociality, where all subjects pay a hefty fee upon entry. Setting up a rich framework for excavating all sorts of textual ambiguity and repressed content, this generalizing condition has been enthusiastically applied equally to the eighteenth-century English writer and the twentieth-century postcolonial author from the Commonwealth. Reflecting the distribution of academic capital, its power of persuasion has also trickled into other national areas with varying degrees of acceptance.

One cannot ignore the fact that there has been no shortage of skepticism about the transdisciplinary application of language mainly as semiotics, curbing across historical and social dialogism. In this regard, Mikhail Bakhtin and Valentin Voloshinov's often-quoted objection to the arbitrary nature of the sign and the unbridged opposition between *langue* and *parole* in Ferdinand de Saussure's theory remains to be fully reckoned with: "What interests the mathematically minded rationalists is not the relationship of the sign to the actual reality it reflects nor to the individual who is its originator, but the *relationship of sign to sign within a closed system* already accepted and authorized" (original emphasis).²⁰ That Saussure was, to Bakhtin and Voloshinov, interested only in the "inner logic of the system of signs itself" rather than in "the ideological meanings that give the signs their content" reduced the social life of language to null.²¹

At the same time, when it comes to interrogating the very personal relationship to one's mother tongue, Bakhtin and Voloshinov only point toward, rather than clarify, the problem at hand when they say that "people do not 'accept' their native language—it is in their native language that they first reach awareness."²² While purting the inaugural moment of nativity squarely within the social, they also suggest that the assignation of subjectivity accords to a falsified awareness. Here, one is again back in the machine as a cog, where language confers the first awareness that is necessary for sociality. The native language again eludes an analysis of open-ended social or ideological formations, succumbing to the prerequisite that, only by already being in the language system, much in the Saussurean sense, can anyone lay claim to being a subject at all.

Whether the native language can be said to exist for the speaker in objective terms perhaps should be less of a worry than how the speaker certainly acts as

though it does. The entanglement of belief and institutional construct may be a problem for those who prefer theoretical consistency but less so for the social fabric of language use. When shared, this "social magic" generates the cohesive force of any speech community, in the sense that its members *de facto* agree to take a linguistic construct and its rules as the governing principles of reality.²³ It would not especially benefit anyone to step completely outside of that misrecognition. The possibility of gains and rewards comes with everyone trying to strategize the best they can by observing or bending the rules. Again, one has to be qualified to enter the language game. For some, this native advantage cannot be simply acquired, as it constitutes a very personally endowed sort of literary aesthetic and experience:

It is the mother tongue that offers us the most intense access—the most secure and the most intimate—to aesthetic emotion and to the comprehension of what is or what is not poetry. . . . The linguistic roots or the cultural bonds are irresistible and take precedence over all other elements. . . . How could a native speaker of Spanish of average education read a new collection of poems by [Jorge Luis] Borges without feeling an elemental, almost biological delight on being submerged in his words, yielding to the pleasure of so many echoes built up over a lifetime, a prior condition to an appreciation of the magical skill that the Argentine writer exercises over the Spanish language?²⁴

Literary scholar Claudio Guillén describes a "biological delight" so commonly assumed as the prerequisite of literary taste that it is almost unremarkable. Indeed, why else would one be drawn to the language of literature, if not for that titillating, aesthetically gratifying feeling? And who can resist the knowing pleasures of the insider, who can intuitively discern not only the stylistic innovation of a literary utterance but also the accumulated echoes of appreciation that speak exclusively to the native ear?²⁵ Bakhtin, for one, would not dispute this, as he takes that same nativity as the prerequisite to the circle of dialogism: "The sensitive ear will always catch even the most distant echoes of a carnival sense of the world."²⁶

If this "intense access" gives entry into an inner circle, it also forces a closure of a different kind. Embodied in the literary aesthete, dialogism turns into a perfected encapsulated unity between *langue* and *parole*. The native speaker, in effect, becomes the stopgap between two contrary systems. He alone bridges the impersonal circulation of language and the individual acti-

vation of its specific power. The recognition of this problematic binary register has opened up many possibilities for thinking about subjectivity and language in a way that appears to tackle the problem at its core. But it has also favored a new priority that treats the speaking and writing subject's access to language as a rediscovered trauma of social birth rather than the tangible product of literary governance. The basic access to the mother tongue, in fact, is not at the disposal of every native speaker. Consider, for instance, Taiwanese Hakka writer Zhong Zhaozheng's remarks on growing up under two native dialects and two imposed national languages:

I am a native of Taiwan, born and bred. When I was growing up, especially when I was seven years old and entered public school (during the Japanese occupation, the schools that were set up for local children were called "public" schools), I was forced to learn Japanese. Before that time, I had only used Hoklo and Hakka. This was because my father was of Hakka descent and my mother was of Hoklo descent. My relatives were also half Hakka and half Hoklo, so I grew up hearing both languages. After I went to school and gradually got older, my Japanese ability also advanced. By the time I entered middle school, while we were in school we used only Japanese. During those middle school years, I even thought only in Japanese. Now I've abandoned Japanese and switched to Chinese (*Zhongwen*, i.e., Mandarin) when I write. After getting a bit used to it, I've also started to think in Chinese.

But then a problem came along. Normally when I'm writing, I think in Chinese and write my thoughts down in Chinese. This is as it should be, and I find nothing objectionable about it. But when I come to dialog, then there's a big difference. When a character in one of my stories says something, clearly it's one kind [of language], but when I write it down it's another kind [of language]. It goes without saying that, between these [two kinds of language, my writing has] to undergo a process of translation.²⁷

Having been raised in colonial Taiwan, Zhong's linguistic experience straddles two different standards under the Japanese and the nationalists, neither of which had anything to do with his mother tongue, which was split between two dialects. Unlike what Guillén describes as the natural property of the native speaker, Zhong expresses significant difficulty in finding his way around a language system with enough native deftness and cultural credibility. Just how one manages to arrive at the inside of language, to command its use and to maneuver its effect, and to become an anointed member of its

community of speakers hardly looks easy. This is all the more so because the thorny question of how one enters sociality, whether in sociological or psychoanalytical treatments of language, has often been categorically relegated to the fact of having been born into it. Short of aphasia or other forms of physical impediment, one can simply count on the event of entering into language. The certainty conveniently allows the attachment of each subject to a fixed, native locus. Analyses of any subsequent conflict or misunderstanding that arises do not really do much to alter the assumption of this prior linguistic nativity. They are, rather, inspired by it to build theories around its deprivation, restoration, translation, and pluralization.

In view of the growing phenomenon that encompasses global migration, nonnative speakers of second or third languages, and those who were forcibly alienated from their mother tongues, linguistic nativity can no longer be assumed as a once-and-for-all endowment. Instead of a threshold of social birth, it marks a repeating process of acquisition. This considerably frustrates the manner in which we have become reliant on the fact of national languages, compelling us to see, instead, the entry into language as an unevenly distributed privilege, marked under the various rubrics like the mother tongue, literacy, and standard language. In this important sense, the linguistic turn in literary studies has yet to turn fully on itself. How, indeed, does one examine the fact that we are always speaking and writing in a language that has already been standardized? This would require a sobering look at how the notion of the mother tongue has shaped the practice of literary criticism as much as it has the production of literature at large.

Taking on this task, this book addresses the ways in which one views national languages and national literatures. Focusing on Sinoophone writing in the Chinese-speaking world and its important bilingual forays, I employ the term "governance" to underscore the tactics of collaboration across different occasions of Chinese-language writing. Governance, in this sense, means less a control from the top down than the ways in which linguistic alliances and literary production organize themselves around incentives of recognition and power. The conflicting dimensions of language standardization and reform, native speakers and mother tongues, and national literature and diasporic writing all meet, trade, and thereby enlarge this network of mutual gains and losses. In the most obvious instance, the resulting tensions produce irreconcilable rivalries. In a more expansive fashion, however, they facilitate an emerging form of literary cooperation among different scales—local, national, and global.

Analyzing language as a medium of access rather than a right to identity, this book probes the different ways in which the Chinese language as national or mother tongue moves through different venues of authentication and offshore locations. This opens up other possibilities for analyzing identity itself—along with all its attendant concepts of nativism, nostalgia, nationalism, and "Chineseness"—as a situational proxy for manipulating linguistic capital. This new perspective also expands the scope of literary studies beyond the existing thresholds of comparison in order to highlight an intranational and global conception of literature and language use. It interrogates how subnational differences have been traditionally minimized in order to push into the foreground nation-based comparisons. In this important way, the uniqueness of linguistic nativity is treated within these pages as a currency instead of a stamp of authenticity. It mirrors an occasional alliance to be declared and retracted according to the state of autonomy enjoyed by any given writer, work, or literary field.

Writing with reference to the different language dominance and standardization in places like Malaysia, the United States, and Taiwan, Chinese-language writers redefine the orthographic and native scope of language from within, sometimes in translation and even with recourse to a different language. These processes offer few moments of clear triumph or successful extrication but inhabit the deeper ambiguities of language power. In all cases, the kinds of alliances that are forged do not support simple notions of belonging. Sentimentality or nostalgia has very little place in this polycentric network of precarious literary alliances, limited resources, and shifting linguistic loyalties. A preoccupation with identity politics, similarly, may miss the accountability of the material negotiations that I introduce here. If the Chinese language is what keeps Sinoophone writers together as a global community, it is also the medium they learn to manipulate in order to hold themselves apart.

It must be said that, within these pages, I do not suggest, as some have, the solution of abolishing standardization, denationalization, or pluralizing Chinese by way of a terminological quick fix for greater inclusion. Neither is the purpose of this study to exhaustively list all possible sites—from Thailand to Australia, Canada to the Philippines, Tibet to Peru—of alternative Sinoophone literary productions. Indeed, it may seem like an effective strategy, in the short term, to poke at the soft waistline of national literature by citing yet another neglected example from Brunei, Macau, Cuba, or more peripheralized frontiers of the Sinoophone world. That alone, however, does not guarantee a

corresponding stride in conceptualization. I analyze "Sinophone," a recent coinage in English, as first and foremost a problem of sound and script, thereby taking the phonics suggested in the word Sinophone seriously as facets of the history and materiality of writing.²⁸ My aim is to provide a framework that compels an account of the hidden linguistic assumptions that support the governance of any literary field. In this way, the framework accommodates those who seek to break with Sinocentric positions but also offers discrete links across time and circumstance. If "Sinophone" is to be a useful analytical category and not just a new name, then literary governance offers a framework appropriate for such a concept and other currently expanding scopes of national and comparative literatures.

Through this lens, one can understand how writers mobilize the currency of national and cultural prestige to gain a greater foothold in the literary world rather than to express something like Chineseness in the spirit of repatriation or even defiance. In this sense, literary governance is neither Michel Foucault's much reiterated notion of governmentality nor similar analyses of state power. It hinges most importantly on the notion of the native language, or mother tongue, which bolsters a broad spectrum of linguistic allegiances, from the obvious center of literary prestige to the forgotten extremities. Linguistic nativity propels both the quest for literary prestige and the various challenges to its institutionalization. How exactly to acquire the basic currency of literature through language access and literacy proposes anew questions that have often been either silenced in the practice of literary criticism or relegated to the tasks of teachers of languages and applied linguistics. This book takes that silence, and its collaboration with other unspoken rules in modern diasporic Chinese literature, as a new departing point for understanding the different meanings of national-language writing in a global context.

Trajectories

To this end, the book is divided into eight chapters, each examining a facet of literary governance with reference to a specific linguistic locus. Beginning with an inquiry into the term itself, Chapter 2 investigates the historical making of Chinese language as a national unit in the late nineteenth century, tracking its materiality through an underexamined history of revamping the Chinese writing system with phonetic scripts that were intended to replace the customary Chinese characters. This process of consolidating speech through

sounding scripts—and its various failures—shaped how the contemporary stakes in Sinophone writing have been defined. Chinese national writing, in essence, was an experiment that deferred, rather than resolved, the problems with which it began.

The various experiments of the late Qing period did not have an immediate follow-up. Yet the pursuit of the power of the national, standard language continued through other means. The most celebrated Chinese bilingual Anglophone writer, Lin Yutang, stood at the new intersection between national standardization and internationalization with his invention of a Chinese-language typewriter. Taking the language wars into a global arena of mechanical and electronic technology, he introduced a method of Chinese-language classification that made the logograph commutable into an alphabetic logic of sequentiality. This new technology of writing had several important ramifications during the Cold War period in that the Chinese language was increasingly perceived in direct opposition to alphabetic writing. This perception influenced the fate of Basic English in China and the direction of machine translation in the postwar period in the United States. How the Chinese typewriter ushered in a new global language war between Chinese and English is the main focus.

Turning to the more familiar side of Lin Yutang's bilingualism as a writer, Chapter 4 places him in the context of other Chinese Anglophone writers such as Eileen Chang and Ha Jin. This discussion responds to recent, positive treatments of bilingualism in the spirit of multilingual diversity by posing a new set of questions about accountability. Departing from the prevailing focus on translation, I ask what happens when literary texts cannot make that threshold of linguistic crossing, or cross it so well that the author faces accusations of plagiarism. Pushing a step beyond the call to open the borders of language in a multilingual milieu, this chapter analyzes the different ways in which concepts of linguistic mobility, such as translation and bilingualism, open up illicit and licit passageways between audiences and the world. It also questions the utility of linguistic allegiances when makeshift alliances are both required and inevitable.

If the Chinese language is thus reconceived as a global medium that gains new power through accommodation and access, what, then, makes up the global space in which its literary production operates? To answer this question, Chapter 5 returns to the late nineteenth century, when the idea of world literature was initially proposed by China's first Chinese Francophone bilingual

writer-cum-diplomat, Chen Jitong. Little-known today, Chen had a specific vantage point on how China was to navigate through an international political space that depended heavily on special access to a world audience. In this sense, he was involved in three key events that reflected the stakes of China's relation to the world: (1) the outcome of the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895 and the first declared republic in East Asia, the Republic of Formosa; (2) the promotion of a “world literature” that was in fact the cultural arm of a rivalry between French and Chinese, Eastern and Western cultures; and (3) an admiration for republicanism that colored both his conception of a world Republic of Letters and hopes for China's participation in international law.

Chen's conception of world literature, together with his bold experiment to use republicanism as bait in eliciting international support, leaves Formosa, or Taiwan, as the dangling modifier of Sinocentrism. Chapter 6 examines how this historical outpost of mainland civilization and nationalism has developed its own distinct linguistic modernity and set of nativist intentions. Focusing on its history of foreign orthography in the modern period, I discuss the various points of intervention in the Taiwanese vernacular and its attempted Romanizations, especially as proposed by Cai Peihuo, an early social reformer who put an unusually open view on orthography into practice. To show how this history developed into the recent indigenization movement, I end with an examination of contemporary Taiwanese writer Song Zelai's efforts to revive writing in the mother tongue.

Moving further east in the southern loop of Chinese literary diaspora, Chapter 7 turns the question of linguistic allegiance toward an inner frontier to interrogate the notions of native speakers and mother tongues, as they continue to incite debates over the relation between contemporary Sino-phone writing and traditional Sinocentrism. Examining the works of Malaysian Chinese author and critic Kim Chew Ng, this chapter places Ng's fictional dialogues with the modern Chinese literary genealogy in the context of the north-south divide that defined the initial terms of national-language standardization. Restaging these historical considerations of the Chinese language as a literary rewriting of lineage, genealogy, and kinship, Ng and others demonstrate the permeability of such a line of cultural descent and its segmentation in the modern history of migration and diaspora.

While such an antithetical stance is the most commonly voiced challenge to the Chinese center, there are still those who opt for a more subtle but viral change through cohabitation and accommodation. The very “mediality” of the

Chinese language, in this way, has become an object of several important contemporary innovations in literature as well as art. The subject of the final chapter is how another Malaysian Chinese writer, Zhang Guixing, restages the ancient theories of Chinese to this end. Allegorizing writing as an inaccessible object, he embarks on a particular interpretation of writing as camouflage, embedded in the migratory topography of Southeast Asia. By subverting the quintessential sinoscript—pictogram or literally “elephant-shape” script—to this challenge, Zhang advances a different perspective on language, one that is deeply bound to the historical problem of accessing education in the Chinese mother tongue during the tumultuous periods of British colonial rule and Malaysia's postcolonial national independence. Zhang's invocation of both the philosophical origins of writing and the reality of being able to write at all compels one to think about language as a medium of joint local and foreign habitation, an idea that is visually represented in the globally received works of contemporary artists like Gu Wenda and Xu Bing.

Through the lens of each of these locales, Sino-phone writing does not appear to belong to a particular space or national language. Its individuation ultimately depends on the intersection between location and language in constructing a sense of nativity that can be as powerful as it is dividing. Without understanding how nativist passions are forged from the materiality of sound and script, one cannot appreciate the full extent to which they have come to govern the objective reflections of the literary establishment, from the national to the diasporic. With this goal in mind, we begin with an inquiry into the Chinese national language.