

Professor Chi Pang-yuan, recipient of the 2015 AAS-in-Asia Lifetime Achievement Award

The River Flows On

Byline: PAT GAO



Editor and author Chi Pang-yuan has devoted her life to expanding the international presence of Taiwanese literature.

I went to Dalian [in mainland China] to see on my hometown coast the sea flowing toward Taiwan. For two consecutive days, I went to a seaside park alone and sat on stone stairs, watching the Bohai Sea running into the Yellow Sea, then into the East [China] Sea and eventually into the wide and deep Pacific Ocean. In Taiwan more than 2,000 kilometers away, the sea goes around the island to the southern tip of Oluanpi and near its lighthouse forms the Yakou Sea, an expanse of clear, blue, calm and beautiful seawater. Here, they say wind and wave are dumb and silent.

Everything returns to eternal peace.

--Great-Flowing River, Chi Pang-yuan, 2009

In 1999, Cheng Ching-wen, one of Taiwan's best-known contemporary writers, received the Kiriya Pacific Rim Book Prize for *Three-Legged Horse*, a collection of 12 short stories. Now renamed the Kiriya Prize, the annual book award was launched in 1996 by Pacific Rim Voices in California to recognize one fiction and one nonfiction book that best reflect the organization's vision of creating greater understanding of and among Pacific Rim and South Asian nations and their peoples. Cheng, a retired bank employee, was singled out from 115 other candidates for providing "a vivid portrait of Taiwan's past and

present, and of the impact of Taiwan's long experience of Japanese occupation [1895-1945]," according to the prize's description.

Cheng's work could not have gained a major international award and extended its readership to the English-speaking world without the crucial efforts of Chi Pang-yuan, one of the editors of Cheng's volume of short stories and a retired professor of foreign languages and literatures at National Taiwan University (NTU). Chi's autobiography *Great-Flowing River* was published this year and is named after the Liao River flowing through her hometown in mainland China. In it she describes an ongoing Columbia University Press project called the *Modern Chinese Literature from Taiwan* series that includes *Three-Legged Horse*, saying the series is "the last unexpected surprise of my life and a good opportunity to fulfill my wish." The publication of the series is in many ways an acknowledgement of the energy and academic enthusiasm Chi has brought to the promotion of Taiwanese literature in the international community.

Born in 1924 in northeastern China's Liaoning province, she came to Taiwan in 1947 after finishing her university degree to work as a teaching assistant in NTU's Department of Foreign Literature, since renamed the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures. In 1950, she moved to Taichung, central Taiwan, with her husband, who worked for the Taiwan Railway Administration and was transferred there. After working as a senior high school English teacher for several years, in 1958 Chi started teaching at the Taiwan Provincial College of Agriculture, now named National Chung Hsing University, and helped found the school's foreign literature department in 1968. She began teaching at NTU in 1970 and then became a full-time professor in 1977. She retired in 1988 and was granted honorary professor status by NTU the next year.

First Major Effort



From left to right: Chi Pang-yuan and her literary partners Lin Hai-yin, former editor of the United Daily News literary page; Lin Wen-yueh, former professor in National Taiwan University's Department of Chinese Literature; and Nancy Ing, former editor-in-chief of *The Chinese PEN* (Courtesy of Common Wealth Publishing Co.)

In 1972, Chi also became the director of the National Institute for Compilation and Translation's Department of Humanities and Social Sciences. In her first formal position outside teaching, one of Chi's major jobs was overseeing an English translation project of Taiwan's literary works chosen and edited by Chi and four other scholars. The result was *An Anthology of Contemporary Chinese Literature*, which was published in 1975 by Washington University Press in Seattle. This approximately 700,000-word compendium of translated

poems, essays and shorter novels written by Taiwanese authors from 1949 to 1974 marked the first major systematic effort to present Taiwan's modern literature to foreign researchers and readers. In her autobiography, Chi writes of this anthology that longer novels "would have more fully and more deeply explored the set themes, but the limited book length and available staff ruled out longer novels."

Chi got her literary wish, however, in the form of the mostly lengthy novels translated into English in the Modern Chinese Literature from Taiwan series, which was initially sponsored by the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation for International Scholarly Exchange and the Cabinet-level Council for Cultural Affairs. "She might not be the first one to promote the translation of Taiwanese works into English, but she is the best and the most competent," author Cheng Ching-wen says. "Without her efforts, the world might have waited one or two decades more to learn about Taiwanese literature."

In 1992, Chi became the editor-in-chief of The Chinese PEN, later renamed The Taipei Chinese PEN, a quarterly released by the Taipei Chinese Center of International PEN (an acronym for poets, essayists and novelists), a London-based writers' organization established in 1921. The local quarterly journal has been published since 1972 without interruption, translating Taiwanese prose and poetry into English. It is still the only periodical to publish translations of literary works by Taiwanese authors on a regular basis. One of the first promoters of Taiwanese literature abroad, under Chi's leadership the journal explored a new depth and breadth of literary issues, including such trends as environmental and feminist concerns.

Major topics translated by Chi's efficient team also included writings by first and second-generation "mainlander" authors, sometimes collectively called "nostalgia literature," which echoed Chi's own mainland Chinese origin and addressed a general recognition of literary output from mainlander writers. Translated stories by these authors are collected in *The Last of the Whampoa Breed* (2004) in the Modern Chinese Literature from Taiwan series.

Over nearly four decades, The Taipei Chinese PEN has translated more than 1,500 stories, essays, poems and profiles of Taiwanese artists into English, and these pieces have often been featured in International PEN's publications. In *Great-Flowing River*, Chi writes that the quarterly is "a faithful, firm bridge for Taiwanese literature" that reflects "an enduring cultural self-confidence that transcends geographical boundaries." Writer Cheng Ching-wen says that, for Chi and her literary partners, literature has its own standard of excellence, one that does not distinguish between the local Taiwanese and mainlander genres, which Chi explains as a stance free from concerns of "political correctness."

Although controversy has raged in literary circles about the definition of Taiwanese literature, Chi sees it as a natural phenomenon with an unchanging nature, despite the different names it has been given. She defines it as the total sum of the literary works written in Taiwan about Taiwan's people, affairs, myths and legends. "Writings by authors whose families have lived in Taiwan for many generations are Taiwanese literature for sure," Chi writes. "The homesick works by exiled people and immigrants who drifted to Taiwan during the great splitting in Chinese history are also Taiwanese literature."

Powerful Fusion

The international visibility of the Modern Chinese Literature from Taiwan series increased dramatically in 1999 with the selection of author Cheng Ching-wen's *Three-Legged Horse* for the Kiriyama Pacific Rim Book Prize, with critics noting its powerful fusion of history, character and subtle symbolism with Taiwanese subject matter. The short fiction collection's title story is set immediately after the end of Japanese rule and refers to a man who carved lame horses to atone for previously working for the colonial police force, a job dubbed "three-legged" by Taiwanese people. Actually, rather than for financial or political gain, the protagonist's motivation for turning against his fellow villagers stemmed from his childhood, when he was ridiculed for having a white birthmark on his nose.

Chi is a member of the editorial board for the Modern Chinese Literature from Taiwan translation series and one of those responsible for editing Cheng's book; the other members of the board are G儼an Malmqvist of the Swedish Academy and Wang Der-wei of Harvard University's Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations. Shan Te-hsing, a research fellow in Academia Sinica's Institute of European and American Studies, points out that the series presents some of the most representative Taiwanese novels of the past several decades. "The works show the editors' wide perspective and diverse, pluralistic concerns," says Shan, who is also president of the Comparative Literature Association of the Republic of China. In addition to *Three-Legged Horse*, other titles in the series have gained major recognition. *Notes of a Desolate Man*, for example, was selected as one of *The New York Times*' Notable Books of 1999, while *The Los Angeles Times* also selected the series' *The Taste of Apples* and *Frontier Taiwan: An Anthology of Modern Chinese Poetry* for its Best Books of 2001 list.

Chi's quest to increase knowledge of Taiwanese literature's viewpoints and perspectives further led her to help found the National Museum of Taiwan Literature in 2003 in Tainan City, southern Taiwan. "Literature is impartial and can shake off political or economic disturbances," Chi writes. "A national literature museum has its literary dignity regardless of Taiwan's political future." In the past, only smaller private museums called attention to major Taiwanese writers. Housed in a historical building constructed by the Japanese in 1916, the national museum seeks to bring the international study of Taiwanese literature to the forefront.

Chi's long-term devotion to the English translation and promotion of Taiwanese literature at home and abroad through her teaching and editing has left a deep imprint on Taiwan's literary history. "Her efforts transcend any specific partisan or regional views and have won widespread recognition and respect from readers, writers and scholars in Taiwan and abroad," Academia Sinica's Shan Te-hsing says. Like the great river that flows through her hometown, Chi's steady, determined flow of edited works runs into and adds depth to the calm, beautiful sea of Taiwanese literature.

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