

# Sarawak Chinese Literature in Taiwan or Local Sarawak Chinese Literature: A Perspective from Regional Experience towards Rainforest Writing<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract** In this new century, the ideology of literary history is no longer stringent; as a result, the geographical view of literature should be changed accordingly. When we agree that Sarawak Chinese literature cannot be categorised under Mahua literature, can we then classify all Sarawak Chinese literature into one category? This is the main argument of the paper. This paper consists of three parts. The first part discusses what constitutes Sarawak Chinese literature with enhanced local characteristics, in reference to Bornean features. The second part divides Sarawakian Chinese authors in two groups, namely “Taiwan-based authors” and “local authors” and further examines how regional experience affects their works. It is, however, difficult to distinguish which part is affected by Taiwan’s influence and which part is their self-creation, especially in this era of globalisation. In spite of that, we can narrow the scope of study down to the works of rainforest writing of Sarawakian Chinese writers to gain a more refined study. Therefore, through a comparison between the fictional works of Li Yong Ping 李永平 and Chang Kuei Hsin 张贵兴, who have long since taken up Taiwanese citizenship, and rainforest writing of local authors, the differences and individual complexity between both will then be investigated and deliberated. Finally, the dialogues or contrasts between Sarawak Chinese literature in Taiwan and local Sarawak Chinese literature will be analysed.

**Key words** Sarawak Chinese Literature; Taiwan-based Experience; Regional Experience; Rainforest Writing

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### Introduction

Within Mahua literature, the term “Sarawak literature” or “Sarawak Chinese literature” can be defined by the geospatial location in its literary works, and also interpreted as a sphere of literary imagination, engendering constant discussion and debate among writers (especially Sarawakian Chinese writers) and critics. Some Sarawakian Chinese writers do not see themselves as Mahua writers but emphasis on the identity of “Sarawakian Chinese.” For instance, Li Yong Ping, who resides in Taiwan, once said, “I have never been close to Malaysia, never write something about Peninsular Malaysia. I write only about the island of Borneo” (Wu & Shi). “I’m angry, I have told the Taiwanese literary field again and again, that I have no comment on ‘Mahua literature’ but Li Yong Ping is not a Mahua author. Malaysia for me is only a strange concept with no personal relationship” (Wu & Shi). Local author Tian Si 田思 also concurred, “Due to some aspects of history, we think the term ‘Sarawak Chinese literature’ more faithfully conveys the unique situation in Sarawak with its own history, geography and culture, which are different from West Malaysia” (Huang). Thus, how do we define “Sarawak Chinese literature”? Or what is “Sarawak Chinese literature”?

The earliest Sarawak Chinese literature appeared in the 1950s, and developed from 1956 to 1962, serving as a testimony of the transition of identity consciousness from overseas Chinese to local citizens among Sarawakian Chinese. After a change in Mainland China’s nationality policy in 1954, Sarawakian Chinese started to consider issues regarding nationality and identity, as shown in the popular poem “Homeland” 祖国 written by Sarawakian Chinese poet, Wu An 吴岸 in 1957, describing a Sarawak-born Chinese young man bidding his mother, who is returning to China, adieu: “Your homeland was once my heaven, you want me to remember again and again, under the soil were our ancestors, I always remember—but mother, so long! My homeland is calling me, she is under my feet, not on the other side, but this breezy, rainy, sunny land! This bleak island swept by raging tides!” (Wu 44) The young man in the poem chooses to stay because his homeland is no longer China but the land under his feet - Sarawak, a final goodbye to the so-called “China Identity” (Pan 89-103).

The foundation of Sarawak Chinese literature was in fact earlier than the

formation of the country of Malaya; Sarawak only joined to be part of Malaysia in 1963. Hence, local Chinese acknowledged Sarawak first and then Malaysia. Similarly, there was first Sarawak literature before it becomes a part of Mahua literature. If political considerations are put aside, Sarawak Chinese literature should be an independent entity. Despite Sarawak being a state in Malaysia, there lies a significant divide in the customs and beliefs, and even political views between East and West Malaysia, two lands geographically separated by the South China Sea. Thus, when Sarawak Chinese literature has developed its “local characteristics,” they then can decline to be subsumed under Mahua literature.

It is to be noted that, when Sarawak Chinese literature began to expand, Sarawakian Chinese writers did not draw close to Mahua literature; instead, they promoted a “Borneo narrative.” This more or less shows the essence and geographical characteristic of Sarawak Chinese literature. This concept of “Borneo narrative” was first introduced by Sarawakian Chinese writer Tian Si during a talk organised by Sibu Zhong Hua Literature Association in December 2002. Being the third largest island in the world, Borneo consists of Malaysian Sarawak and Sabah, Brunei and Indonesian Kalimantan. Tian Si believed that creating a Borneo narrative, with the diverse ethnic groups, cultures, ecology and landscapes on the island, is a strategy to extend and expand the scope and substance of Sarawak Chinese literature, and to enhance its value as local literature. The concept of enhancing its role as “local” literature is worth pondering. It indicates the “local characteristic” of Sarawak Chinese literature cannot be categorised under Mahua literature; instead, its “local characteristic” or so-called “uniqueness” is very much related to the island of Borneo. Ever since Tian Si proposed this “Borneo narrative,” there is enormous support from other Sarawakian Chinese authors such as Si Wen Ting 石问亭, Shen Qin Wang 沈庆旺, Lan Bo 蓝波; Mentor Publishing in Kuala Lumpur even published a collection of books under the “Borneo Series” in support of this idea, with titles for example *Hunting and Fishing in Borneo* 《猎钓婆罗洲》 by Yang Yi Xiong 杨艺雄, *Rainforest in Metamorphosis* 《蜕变的山林》 by Shen Qin Wang, *Searching for Bu Da Fu* 《寻找不达夫》 and *Sarawak Rainforest Recipes* 《砂拉越雨林食谱》 by Lan Bo.

This refusal to be incorporated in Mahua literature does not signify an opposing stance but instead an attitude to search for individual geographical characteristics and unique styles. Cross-examining geographical characteristics and writing styles of the authors, we can see the influence of geographical location or aesthetic styles more clearly. When we agree that Sarawak Chinese literature does not belong to Mahua literature, can we then classify all Sarawak Chinese literature

into one category? This is the main argument of the paper. This paper consists of three parts. The first part discusses what constitutes Sarawak Chinese literature with enhanced local characteristics, in reference to Bornean features. The second part divides Sarawakian Chinese authors in two groups, namely “Taiwan-based authors” and “local authors” and further examines how regional experience affects their works. It is, however, difficult to distinguish which part is affected by Taiwanese influence and which part is their self-creation, especially in this era of globalisation. In spite of that, we can narrow the scope of study down to the works of rainforest writing of Sarawakian Chinese writers to gain a more refined study. Therefore, through a comparison between the fictional works of Li Yong Ping and Chang Kuei Hsin, who have long since taken up Taiwanese citizenship, and rainforest writing of local authors, the differences and individual complexity between both will then be investigated and deliberated. Finally, the dialogues or contrasts between Sarawak Chinese literature in Taiwan and local Sarawak Chinese literature will be analysed.

### **Borneo Narratives: The Contrast between Local and Taiwan-Based Writings**

In proposing the idea of Borneo narratives, Tian Si lists “mysterious rainforests” as the first feature of local characteristics of Sarawak Chinese literature and argues that the Borneo narrative can be generalized as rainforest literature (Tian, “The Essence of Sarawak Chinese Literature” 22). He also concludes that the Sarawak Chinese literature is not only different from the Chinese literature in China, Taiwan, North America, but also utterly different from that in West Malaysia (Tian, “The Essence of Sarawak Chinese Literature” 31). In addition, Malaysian scholar Chong Yi Wen 钟怡雯, who studied in Taiwan, once expressed that, with rapid urban development in West Malaysia, writers are largely based in cities after the 80s; rainforests have become a common imagination among authors and readers in West Malaysia. But the authors in East Malaysia especially in Sarawak truly write about rainforests (Chong 133). Starting with the mysteriousness of Bornean rainforests, this paper will then compare literary works by local Sarawak Chinese and Taiwan-based authors.

The literary works of local Sarawakian Chinese writers are mostly poetry and prose, based on documenting reality and the content focused on regional characteristics. The main geographical characteristics of Sarawak Chinese literature is no doubt the “rainforest.” Sarawak is located in the northwest of the world’s third largest island, Borneo; with abundant rainfalls, lofty mountains and streams, and a population of only about two million, Sarawak is still largely covered by mysterious rainforests which arouse boundless imagination. The literary works that incorporate

the rainforest in the title include *Rainforests in Metamorphosis* (2007) by Shen Qing Wang, *Sarawak Rainforest Recipes* (2009) by Lan Bo, *Banquet of the Rainforest* 《雨林的盛宴》(2002) by Lim An Song 林岸松, *Rainforest Poetry* 《雨林诗雨》(2012) by Tian Si . These works consist of prose, poetry and even recipes. In comparison to local Sarawak Chinese literature, most of the literary works by Taiwan-based Sarawakian Chinese writers are fiction. The main works include *Herds of Elephants* 《群象》(1998), *Monkey Cup* 《猴杯》(2000), *My South Seas Sleeping Beauty* 《我思念的長眠中的南國公主》(2001) by Chang Kuei Hsin and *The snow falls in clouds: recollections of a Borneo childhood* 《雨雪霏霏：婆羅洲童年記事》(2002), *The End of the River: Volume 1* 《大河盡頭（上卷）》(2007), *The End of the River: Volume 2* 《大河盡頭（下卷）》(2010), *The book of Zhu Ling* 《朱翎書》(2015) by Li Yong Ping. However, Taiwan-based writers do not limit themselves to writing only about Sarawak; they also write about the other parts of the island of Borneo. This shows the real “Borneo narrative.”

The rainforest boasts an abundance of wildlife. Chong Yi Wen pointed out that the biggest problem of rainforest writing is, besides a minority of botanists and professionals, no one really knows what kind of unique species the rainforest can offer (Chong 119). Local Sarawakian Chinese writer Yang Yi Xiong’s prose *Hunting and Fishing in Borneo* recorded his hunting and fishing stories and the legends of wild boar, bison, crocodiles, dolphins, lizards and so on. Yang Yi Xiong is a hunter and fisherman, one of the minority who is knows much about the habits of wild animals. He writes not only his personal experience and what he has heard, but also some additional information about animals, for example “crocodiles”: “Crocodiles are dinosaurs’ cousins; 65 million years ago, dinosaurs and most of the reptiles were extinct as they could not adapt themselves to the harsh climate change during the end of the Mesozoic. Crocodiles survived through this catastrophe; they adapted and withstood environmental change caused by climate change...” (Yang 107) Chang Kuei Hsin in his novel *Herds of Elephants* writes about crocodiles too. He cited the sentences with “crocodiles” in some Chinese classical texts such as *Miscellaneous Records* 《物类相感志》, *A Record of Foreign Matters* 《異物志》, *Records of Diverse Matters* 《博物志》, *Analytical Dictionary of Chinese Characters* 《说文》, *Compendium of Materia Medical* 《本草綱目》, *The Customs of Cambodia* 《真蜡風土記》, *Guan Tze. Water and Earth* 《管子·水地篇》 and so on to indicate that the crocodile is a variant of the dragon. Moreover, the novel also specifically mentions that the “crocodile” is the “mystification of the dragon. Speciation. Secularisation of the crocodile... Zhongyuan’s 中原 Dragon, is terrifying. Giant crocodile who eats human” (Chang, *Monkey Cup* 30). In contrary to Yang Yi

Xiong's personal experience, the information provided by Chang Kuei Hsin is based on texts spiced with mythical elements.

Apart from referring the "crocodile" as the embodiment of the mythical "dragon," Chang Kuei Hsin also demonises the "rhino." In his novel *Monkey Cup*, a rhino governor, who is reared by human but remains untamed, kills several people, mirroring the monster Nian 年兽, a mythical creature with frightening figure/sound. Also demonised is the reptile "lizard." They are portrayed as an uncontrollable army of carnivores, attracted in droves by the corpse of the rhino governor, refusing to be driven away by people's burning. All this illustrates the wildness of the rainforest. Conversely, in the prose *Hunting and Fishing in Borneo* by Yang Yi Xiong, the lizard has a lovely image: a greedy lizard is fooled by human and eats its fill of stones, happily!

One of the iconic floras in the rainforests is the "pitcher plant." In Tian Si's poem entitled "pitcher plant" (Tian, "Pitcher Plant" 155-156), the pitcher plant is a victim of modernization and pollution; it carries the message of a love for nature and environmental protection. The crystal clear water in the pitcher reflects the blue sky that reminds people the preciousness of nature. In the novel *Monkey Cup* of Chang Kuei Hsin, an infant's corpse floats in the crystal clear digestive juice in the pitcher. The pitcher plant is portrayed as a carnivorous beast, the pitcher representing a 10-month pregnant woman, devouring a new born infant, further intensifying the dramatic flavour of the novel.

Another distinctive feature of the island of Borneo or Sarawak Chinese literature, besides the rainforest, is diverse ethnic groups. There are about 27 different ethnicities in Sarawak. The largest ethnic group is the Iban, comprising 30% of the population; 29% of Chinese; 21% of Malay; and other minorities including Bidayuh, Melanau, Indians, Javanese and inland indigenous tribes. The writers, no matter Taiwan-based or local, depict relationships between various ethnic groups. In contrast to those based in Taiwan, local Sarawak Chinese literature highlights the peaceful coexistence between ethnic groups, such as the prose "long house magician" (Tian, "The Magician in the Longhouse" 21-25) written by Tian Si. The story describes a Chinese magician married to a Dayak girl and lives in the longhouse, having a good relationship with the indigenous. Sarawak Chinese literature in Taiwan, on the other hand, often expresses the unequal relationship between the ethnicities, such as Chang Kuei Hsin's novel. Indigenous girls mostly admire Chinese men and being more liberal in sexuality, they are taken advantage of easily by Chinese men. Some Chinese men are those in power who persecute simple natives, and even use their power or gains to seduce indigenous girls; this can be

described as a form of colonialism by settlers. Li Yong Ping's novels also contain this clash between ethnic groups but they represent the expansion of European colonialism. White men demand indigenous women (even girls) to dedicate their bodies by using political forces or in the name of religion (sometimes the Bible and sometimes the Koran). The most classic character is the so-called "magician of long house," Baba Ao Si 峇爸澳西 in Li Yong Ping's novels *The End of the River* and *The book of Zhu Ling*. He uses his title and power as the counsel to the Queen and the legal adviser to the Indonesian government to travel all indigenous longhouses, winning children's heart with sweets, giving dolls to underage girls by magic tricks, and eventually taking their virginities. That is the reason why Sarawak Chinese literature in Taiwan is discussed and viewed as the Nanyang version of *Heart of Darkness* by critics.

When Sarawak Chinese literature is no longer categorised under Mahua literature and when the geographical location shifts to the island of Borneo, the regional characteristics or the so-called "local characteristics" of Sarawak Chinese Literature become clearly visible. Thus, this paper would like to narrow the scope of research down to writings with geographical characteristics of the island of Borneo, in order to compare the differences between "Taiwan-based" authors and "local" authors and develop a new perspective.

### **Taiwan-Based Sarawak Chinese Literature: A Suspicion of Absence?**

Tian Si, who commends local literary works of Sarawak Chinese literature, is dissatisfied with Taiwan-based Chang Kuei Hsin and Li Yong Ping, accusing their Borneo narratives as being "distorted." Citing a description of the Rajang River in Chang Kuei Hsin's novel *Herd of Elephants*, he criticises the description as being pretentious, nauseating, provoking a sense resistance, and he believes that these "outrageous" descriptions are a plenty in *Herd of Elephants* rendering it unreadable. In his opinion, he thinks that the real writing of Borneo has to rely on local authors; they must be the people of the island who "devote boundless love to this piece of land and harbour hope and longing for her future" (Tian, "Borneo Narrative" 36). He argues that art should be processed on the basis of reality.

The first point against Tian Si's remark is that *Herd of Elephants* is a fictional work and fiction is not based on reality. Secondly, we can go back to the paragraphs which Tian Si has cited to determine whether the novel of Chang Kuei Hsin has "defamed" the Rajang River or is "unreasonable" in any way:

Sunny. Dawn. The first ray of the rising sun in the rainforest is just as bright as

a poisonous toad. .... Farm animals eat and defecate, eat and defecate, their digestive and urinary system are fully functional, healthy and free. The boy, De Zhong 德中 said goodbye to his tribes at the riverside, rowing on the river. Less than two kilometers, two of them took turn to squat and poo on the deck behind. Feces fall into the river, just like infants' arms. Infants' legs. Some gather on the shore, like an infant's corpse. With a paddle in hand, De Zhong steered the boat like a master, as if there was a motor installed at the stern. The boy felt a bit dizzy, he kept washing his face with river water, the more he washed, the more dizzy and filthy he felt, as if he went into the cesspool. 30 meters in front raised a cloud from the river. Buzzed. Buzzed. Buzzed. Something on the river. Fall. Rise. Rise. Fall. Both of them scrunched up their nose by one hand and rowed slowly by another hand. Cloud passed through starboard. Green head red head and black head flies thickly covered driftage that surrounded by a group of big and small fish. (Chang, *Herds of Elephants* 71)

Tian Si's citation ends here. If this single paragraph is extracted to describe the Rajang River, it really is extremely nauseating. But when we continue to read on:

Waves by the sampan startled the flies; they became a more majestic cloud on the river, the revealing driftage was full of a dense layer of orange, yellow and pink maggots. Waves rolling, dark cloud appeared at the east, and the west. A corpse. Butt faced up, with legs and arms, rotten flesh, visible bone, maggot fuzzily made a “大” shape around. Still a broken green jersey on the corpse. Green jersey. Uniform of the Flaming army. .... (Chang, *Herds of Elephants* 71)

we can finally understand why the water in the Rajang River only makes the boy dirtier the more he washes himself, why the water stinks, why the countless flies. This does not mean that the river is contaminated or this is the norm there; it is explained later in the story that there is a dead body there. The dead body is in line with the plot of the novel, which depicts the frequent infighting of Sarawakian communists who refuse to surrender and hide in the mountains. Even the boy's uncle kills people to protect themselves often. This is a reasonable description of the Rajang River which befits the plot of the story.

Although Tian Si does not cite any paragraph from Li Yong Ping's novels in his criticism of the latter's works, similar to Chang's style, Li's stories can often

be seen as “blasphemous” to Borneo in their descriptions that serve the plots. The Kabuyasi 卡布雅思 River denotes an arena of lust, played out in a story where an underage indigenous girl is presented by her mother to a Western man followed by the soiled girl being accused of seducing a saint and eventually expelled from the tribe. When discussing the issue of “distortion,” Taiwanese-born American scholar, David Der-wei Wang 王德威 has pointed out that, although Li has expressed his willingness to follow the tradition of realist novels of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, his distinctive and compelling writing style still renders him more of a modernist.

Therefore, it seems the biggest difference between Sarawak Chinese literature in Taiwan and local Sarawak Chinese literature is in the aesthetic value. Tian Si quotes the discussion of “writing in order to express emotions” and “fabricating emotions for more stylish writing” of Lie Xie’s 刘勰 *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons* 《文心雕龙》. He commends that those “writing in order to express emotions” convey honest thoughts and feelings arisen from real life, thus demonstrating a higher level of artistic achievement. On the contrary, those who “fabricate emotions for more stylish writing” use ornate language to show off literary skills, producing only a kind of word-games (Tian, “Writing in order to express emotions’ and ‘fabricate emotions for more stylish writing” 18-20). This more or less can be summarised as the view of local Sarawak Chinese writers towards Taiwan-based Sarawak Chinese literature. The former is reality-oriented and adheres to the idea of “expressing emotions in order to write.” This view is appropriate if it refers to prose. However, when reading the mainly fictional works in Taiwan-based Sarawak Chinese literature, we can quote Jin Sheng Tan’s 金圣叹 commentaries, which are “the meaning lies in the event, and does not lie in the writing” 以文运事 and “the meaning lies in the writing, and does not lie in the event” 因文运事. On the one hand, local Sarawak Chinese literature is similar to *Records of the Grand Historian* 《史記》, which restricts the authors to writing factual events. On the other hand, Sarawak Chinese literature in Taiwan is regarded as *Water Margin* 《水浒传》, where “I can pen everything I want creatively,” having the artistic license to create fiction. From a purely artistic point of view, the latter has a relatively high level of attainments.

However, the argument of this paper is not about the aesthetic style in Chang Kuei Hsin’s and Li Yong Ping’s fictional works. There is abundant research about this: Chang’s sexualisation writing, classicization and textualisation of the rainforest; Li’s obsession with Chinese characters, sinfulness, confession and repentance; both being among the best of modernist authors. Therefore, I do not want to add to this discussion, nor ponder on Taiwanese elements in their writings on Taiwan. Instead, I

would like to examine Taiwanese elements in their writings on Bornean rainforests. It is done by defining “somewhere” from “elsewhere” because only the “absence” can illustrate the “presence” and we can only define all possibilities of the “presence” by investigating the “absence.”

Taiwanese elements are ever present in Chang Kuei Hsin’s and Li Yong Ping’s novels. A trace of Taiwan first appears in one of Chang Kuei Hsin’s rainforest novel series, *Monkey Cup*. The protagonist in the story is a Sarawakian Chinese male teacher who is charged with the seduction of underage girls in Taiwan. Taiwan is where the protagonist yearns for but where he cannot stay; he has to go back to Sarawak. The memory in Taiwan keeps flashing in his mind when he is back in Sarawak, but this memory is not in linear form. It is presented in the form of “Sarawak — Taiwan — Sarawak.” In addition to the memory in Taiwan, there are also memories of Sarawak before he went to Taiwan. These memories constitute multiple meanings such as past and present, regrets and ideals, homeland and foreign country. When it comes to *My South Seas Sleeping Beauty*, the influence of Taiwan becomes more apparent. The mother of the narrator is a Taiwanese, the father of the narrator studied in Taiwan before and the narrator himself also studies in Taiwan and has a Taiwanese girlfriend. However, the Taiwan in this story and the Taiwan in *Monkey Cup* are different: “Taiwan” has become a reality in contrast to a virtual space, from “absent” to “present.”

For another Taiwan-based Sarawakian Chinese literature writer Li Yong Ping, the influence of Taiwan is shown from the beginning of his rainforest novel series. In *The snow falls in clouds: recollections of a Borneo childhood*, the narrator is a Sarawakian Chinese young man in Taiwan, who tells a Taiwanese girl Zhu Ling about his rainforest stories. In his memory, there are three Taiwanese women living in Sarawak, victimised as comfort women of World War II, receiving men ranging from Japanese Imperial soldiers to Malay upstarts. Li’s second novel in this rainforest series, *The End of the River* continues this style of narration. A Sarawakian Chinese author in Taipei tells the Taiwanese girl Zhu Ling about his teenage years in the rainforest on the island of Borneo. In Li’s recent book, *The Book of Zhu Ling*, however, the Taiwanese girl Zhu Ling becomes the narrator, who tells her adventures when travelling through geographic space to Borneo. However, this is not living but wandering; the narrator ultimately returns to Taiwan. “Taiwan,” as a real “presence,” is never absent in Li Yong Ping’s novels, in contrast to Borneo, which represents the “absence” in his novels. The meaning and gestures of Taiwan and Borneo, for Taiwan-based Sarawakian Chinese authors, are mirrored images reflecting each other. Taiwan is the entity whereas Borneo is merely a shadow.

Finally, let us further explore the contrast between “presence” and “absence.” We notice first that there is no real exchange between local and Taiwan-based Sarawakian Chinese writers; local writers express their opinions on Taiwan-based writers, who do not respond. Taiwan-based writers are absent from such discussion. Furthermore, does the interchangeability of Taiwan and Borneo in Taiwan-based Sarawak Chinese literature raise questions of the absence of Taiwan-based writers? Hence, I would explore next the questions: if the Bornean rainforest in Taiwan-based Sarawak Chinese literature is only a shadow, how do Li and Chang construct their fictitious cities? If all is fictitious, what does the Bornean rainforest mean to them?

### “Local” Regional Experience, “Taiwan-Based” Homeland Imagination

Chang Kuei Hsin and Li Yong Ping established their rainforest legends through three novels. But these works undergo tremendous change in the description of the rainforest. From *Herds of Elephants* to *My South Seas Sleeping Beauty*, Chang’s rainforest changes from the real rainforest to the protagonist’s home; the so-called rainforest is a manmade garden of his Taiwanese’s mother. The mother not only keeps remaining native plants in the garden but also plants myriads of exotic flowers and trees around the house. The artificial garden has also become his father’s playground, where a variety of animals and even two tigers are released for hunting. His father’s Taiwanese friend Lin Yuan (林元) also joins the group and installs scores of indigenous virgin girls there. An artificial rainforest garden, an artificial tribe of indigenous girls, and cultured plants and animals all symbolise nature, but represents a total violation of natural law. Such rainforest is very personal, closed, artificial and contemporary, built on the basis of imagination. Thus, Chang Kuei Hsin can write “his” mythical rainforest freely in his imaginary world.

The transformation of Li Yong Ping is more visible compared to Chang Kuei Hsin, but their transformation is different. If you think that the rainforest in Chang Kuei Hsin’s fiction is inward and closed, then the rainforest described by Li Yong Ping is expanding and outward. In his rainforest novels, from *The Snow Falls in Clouds: Recollections of a Borneo Childhood* to *The End of The River* and then to *The Book of Zhu Ling*, Li Yong Ping’s imagination has reached the Point of “Doing as One Pleases.” From Li Yong Ping’s hometown, Kuching to the rainforest in Borneo, to boating on the river, and walking at the Kabuyasi riverside 卡布雅思河畔, he is entering territories completely unfamiliar to him. Other than that, temporal and spatial restrictions are disregarded in the novel *The Book of Zhu Ling*. Zhu Ling can do whatever she wants; for example, she can just turn into an adult or

stop growing at will. No airplane is needed when she wants to go to the rainforest in Borneo from Taipei; the writer allows her to arrive in the blink of an eye. Disregarding any language barrier, Zhu Ling does not know the Malay language but can understand an indigenous girl's lengthy stories and they become very good friends. Breaking the boundary of yin and yang, dead Baba Au Xi appears as a living corporeal and continues to collect the bodies of virgins on the river, and has a battle with Zhu Ling. Zhu Ling, as the protagonist, can also meet historical figure, James Brooke. Together with James Brooke, she witnesses historical events. This novel is just like the Nanyang version of "The General's Monument" 将军碑 by Taiwanese Writer, Zhang Da Chun 张大春 .

Li Yong Ping completely discards the "real" element in his narration. Perhaps this cannot solely be attributed to his deliberate attempt to create a fantasy: "write and write, unconsciously, I broke into Isao Takahata and Hayao Miyazaki's animation world" (Li, "Preface/ A tribute to Isao Takahata yu Hayao Miyazaki" 15), but a natural development. We can catch a glimpse of his thought the preface in Li Yong Ping's novel *The End of the River: Volume 2*:

The remembrance of the river — this book — started when I just came to teach at a new university in eastern Taiwan and lived in a brand new hostel. One night, I woke up at midnight, sitting under a bright lamp on this huge and desolate campus in the valley, a mood of melancholy descended me, and I started to think of the past. All dogs howling here and there at the moon, an idea suddenly came to my mind, I took a few paper and a pen quickly, calling your name in my heart, calling your spirit solemnly by looking at the quiet, stood-still Amis holy mountain, the black Qilai mountain with a crescent moon , outside the window: Zhu Ling, come back! Please listen to me again, to what happened in Nanyang when I was young. (Li, "Preface for Volume 2/Asking Zhu Ling: What is Fate" 16)

The experience he gained is the experience in Taiwan. The holy Batu Tiban Mountain in Borneo in the novel is in fact the holy Amis Mountain in Taiwan. The writer imagines another mountain at the view of the mountain; hence the binary opposition of "Taipei" and "Borneo" is relaxing and the two become interchangeable. When he encounters a bottleneck in writing, the image of Taiwan appears again:

Later, I bought a house halfway up the mountain in Tamsui, Taipei County by a

most wonderful chance — A Nanyang old wanderer, bought a property for the first time in his life! I couldn't sleep the night when we moved in, sitting alone by the window, staring at the foggy Mount Guanyin that lies across the river like a black mountain ghost, I lost in a daze. Suddenly the fog dissipated, a beam of light burst outside the window. .... So, I started to write again the first night I moved to Tamsui, our remembrance of the river began again - but this time it is official and no turning back — we set sail. (Li, "Preface for Volume 2/Asking Zhu Ling: What is Fate" 18)

This is a perfect writing of regional experience. As the memory of Borneo slowly fades away and personal feelings become weaker, the writer has to transform the Bornean rainforest writing by any means. Be it a change in perspective, or detachment from reality through recall, or seeking comfort through lingering with the past, or even recreating a lot of fictitious scenes through historical events and reincarnation.

All these attempts are to render a new possibility for his Bornean rainforest — and the possibility to linger and to continue writing. Through this, Li Yong Ping "recreates" Borneo. To "recreate" is not to revert to the original state, but to reinterpret: "The author went backstage and let his heroine experience and learn about the new, strange, beautiful and extremely frightening world with her own senses and mind. Zhu Ling has an independent and a true 'voyage of discovery' on the island of Borneo instead of a guided sightseeing tour"(Li, "Preface/ A tribute to Isao Takahata yu Hayao Miyazaki" 14). In other words, "a guided sightseeing tour" has a predetermined boundary shaped and planned according to someone else's experience and feelings. When he gives up the experience and joins the "journey of discovery," the rainforest on the island of Borneo is no longer recognized passively via his personal interpretation, but actively influences and participates in his writing, eliciting a dialogue. Referring to Tian Si's criticism towards Sarawakian Chinese authors — distortion, albeit one-sided, it certainly is fitting.

Another question: when the rainforest in Borneo no longer exists in the real geographic space and in the real experience of others, but in the imagination of the writers, does it mean that any corners of the world can be imaginary settings for the writers? If so, why do Sarawakian Chinese authors in Taiwan still choose to write about Borneo? This leads us to the dialectical relationship between the regional 鄉土 and Yuan Xiang 原鄉.

"Yuan Xiang" literally means "the original homeland." In contrast to the present homeland, the term "original" implies not only the temporal and spatial

changes in the original homeland, but also the longing imagination of the lost homeland here and now. On the other hand, the term “regional” emphasizes on concrete local experience of a person, having more realist features. Thus, “Yuan Xiang” is a concept that can be constructed and imagined, allowing for emotional commitment and a sense of belonging. “Yuan Xiang” thus goes beyond geography; it represents some origin of life meaning yearned for or the so-called “emotional attachment.” Yuan Xiang implies a person has left the original homeland and there lies a spatial distance. However, it must be pointed out that “Yuan Xiang attachment” is not necessarily opposite to “regional attachment,” nor does it in conflict with the locality consciousness.

Local writers insist on local experience, while those in Taiwan convey the imagination of Yuan Xiang, a kind of Sarawak Chinese literature which grows with imagination — a misplaced “Borneo.” David Wang Der-wei has pointed out that, the crux of Li Yong Ping’s long and longer story is that his homeland imagination has surpassed the simple structure of a regional literature; his stories of root searching need a setting which is larger than Kuching ( 古晋 ), Ji Ling ( 吉陵 ), and Haidong ( 海东 ). (Wang 8) Local writers and Taiwan-based writers represent two circumstances in the writing of Borneo. The local writers, who were born and raised here, are intensely attached towards their motherland, and write about what they see. Conversely, those in Taiwan have less personal experience; even if they had, the majority of them are old memories. Their regional flavour can be seen as imagination, or conveys symbolic meanings: the mysterious rainforest, abyss of desire. In such case, Sarawak Chinese literature in Taiwan becomes primitive, devoid of reason and boundary; no wonder local authors think they are outrageous fabrication or distortion. However, the choice of Taiwan-based Sarawak Chinese writers Li Yong Ping and Chang Kuei Hsin to write about Borneo also partially reflects their regional attachment or consciousness.

When Taiwan-based Sarawak Chinese writers want to construct a fantasy beyond reality, Borneo becomes their Utopia in their memory: “Walking into the rainforest, as if a baby went back to the mother’s womb, sucking earnestly, worry-free,” (Chang, “Preface/Returning to the Rainforest” 11) “The rainforest is generous-hearted, the unpleasantness and depression in real life are diluted by the rainforest without leaving any trace” (Chang, “Preface/Returning to the Rainforest” 11). About utopia, Foucault said: “They are the places which have a direct or reverse relationship with the real society. They either represent the real society in a perfect way or they reverse the society, but in any case a fictional place is not a real space” (Foucault 403). Utopia as an imaginary place, in fact, reflects “my absence” and

“self-reconstruction.” The imagined rainforest in Borneo is a virtual space that even these Taiwan-based Sarawak Chinese authors cannot enter.

### Conclusion

As discussed above, the main concern of this paper is the complex development, not the common origin. As an illustration, albeit sharing the same national administration, Malaysia and Sarawak go beyond the often highlighted subordinate relationship owing to their differences in geography and culture. Although Sarawak Chinese literature may refuse to be subsumed under Mahua literature along with literature from other regions in West Malaysia, the stance is not one of diametrical opposition but one that highlights more of the regional characteristics of Sarawak Chinese literature, which encompasses rainforest ecosystems, interaction and exchange within the multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society in Sarawak. Adopting this perspective, the paper further explores the difference between local and Taiwan-based Sarawak Chinese literature in their portrayal of Borneo flavour. Next, the paper deduces from the works of Taiwan-based Sarawak Chinese writers, Chang Kuei Hsin and Li Yong Ping, who are both inside and outside of Sarawak, that there could be an end to their “Borneo diaspora,” and that “Taiwaneseeness” would be more and more evident in their works, either consciously or subconsciously.

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