



Review

Reviewed Work(s): Representing Atrocity in Taiwan: The 2/28 Incident and White Terror in Fiction and Film by Silvia Lin

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Because *For Home and Country* considers such an array of propaganda tools, all of which seem to embrace/deploy stereotypes of the adversary while celebrating the righteousness of the American or British or French nuclear family, this text is an engaging one. When a reader of today encounters images such as those of postcards that use children to defame the evil enemy via adult-centric scatological humor or the various “trading” cards distributed by Black Cat cigarettes showing women performing patriotic jobs, the dangers and historical roles of such propaganda pieces resound. Kingsbury’s text is a useful one for scholars whose research focus concerns any one of the major visual or textual devices or communication genres about which she writes. While those who study music, or women’s fiction, or the product advertising of the nineteen-teens might feel that her treatment of these areas is incomplete, which it can’t help but be in a survey such as this, what these scholars can gain from her study is a better understanding, resulting from her clear critical apparatus, of the interplay between these tools as they mutually worked to motivate Allied women and children on the home front to perform a particular role that served the state in wartime. Kingsbury carefully reveals to readers *why* and *how* such textual, photographic, illustrative, and filmic images were brought into the service of war and of the state, but her particular focus is on the ways in which women and children populate such images. Kingsbury offers, thus, an analysis that strives to reinforce for scholars of early-twentieth-century popular culture, literature, and visual media the lengths to which “the state” will go to enlist “the family” and the moral inversions that are a consequence of such efforts. ✱

Silvia Lin. *Representing Atrocity in Taiwan: The 2/28 Incident and White Terror in Fiction and Film*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2007. 240p.

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The power of literature and the other creative arts on the global stage is that they can function as an antidote to state power in many different ways. The literature and film of contemporary Taiwan, for example, far exceeds in quality the quantity of its population or the lasting geo-political significance of its state. This has been said of other countries in the past, such as Ireland, generally speaking marginalized on the global playing field. Silvia Lin’s book on literature and film that represent the political repression of the Kuomintang-backed February 28th Incident of 1947, slaughtering an estimated 15 to 30 thousand and silencing a generation of intellectuals, and the resultant forty years of “White Terror” that accompanied the economic rise of Taiwan, brings to light some outstanding works that will

be of interest to anyone who enjoys great literature and film and anyone who values the *exposé* style of cultural production that emerged from suspect regimes in Latin America, Eastern Europe, and South Africa. Her book is subtle and nuanced, revealing the complexities, ambiguities, and unique qualities of a dozen or more literary and cinematic works from the late 1940s to the 1980s and 1990s. The work also is savvy and informed, engaging the theoretical contributions of such scholars as Dominick LaCapra, Pierre Janet, Mieke Bal, Ann Whitehead, Lydia Liu, Maurice Halbwach, Maureen Turim, Avrom Fleishman, Thomas Elsaesser, and others. In the course of her elucidation of how political repression is represented in the written and cinematic texts of Taiwan, Lin addresses a passel of critical themes including trauma, redemption, revenge, memory, gender, ethnicity, privacy, melodrama, victimhood, and realism. The result is a complicated and neglected topic managed economically and lucidly in a volume that will surely intervene in Chinese cultural studies but also will prove attractive to anyone concerned with the overarching issue of atrocity and the literary and cinematic representation of the “disappeared.”

Lin’s book is divided into two main parts, each of which comprises three chapters. In the first part, she primarily focuses on literature and in the second on film. There is some interconnectedness that goes beyond thematic continuity, as some of the literary works have been adapted to the screen. She prefaces her work with an introduction and ends with a prologue. In the beginning pages of the introduction, she amply illustrates how challenging the subject matter is, for to date there still is in Taiwan no satisfying reckoning of the White Terror period from 1947 to 1987, no consensus has materialized from the people, and no objective assessment of the past has been written, nor under the present circumstances could it. Indeed, a substantial component of Lin’s argument consists of showing how attitudes toward atrocity in Taiwan’s recent past are affected and inflected by the ethnic background of individuals and the particular historical conjuncture in which those attitudes are being articulated. Thus, a daring and pioneering work written in 1983, for example, might actually exhibit a far more muted representation of past atrocities than would a work of 1989 or 1996. One thing, however, is certain: the long period of forced silence of any public (and most private) discussion of 2/28 and its aftermath has left a lasting, indelible scar on the Taiwanese body politic.

The consequence of the 2/28 demonstrations, subsequent violent crackdown, and the martial law under which civilians lived for the better part of the ensuing four decades was not solely the liquidation of dissidents through detention and extrajudicial execution. An attendant consequence was that the entire historical

period transpired during a virtual vacuum of any utterance of the events. Lin has unearthed one interesting story from 1947—Ou Tansheng’s “Intoxication”—that addresses the topic; but the other works that mention, let alone depict, 2/28 were not written or published until the 1980s. This has led to the unique phenomenon of works that appear far after the fact, and the problematic nature of reconstructing the historical record is often foregrounded in them. The five works that Lin discusses in chapter one all feature ethnicity as a major theme, how it colors gender and marital relations, friendships, and attitudes toward the past. Ou Tansheng’s name is not well known in Taiwan, because his work was published once in the immediate aftermath of 2/28 and subsequently suppressed until it was reprinted four decades later. Of the four other authors covered in this chapter, all basically contemporaries of each other, Lin Wenyi and Lin Shenjing would be considered minor writers while Zhong Zhaozheng and Li Qiao count as two of the most influential and prominent Taiwanese authors of the past several decades. Sylvia Lin does an interesting job of teasing out some ironic similarities between Ou’s very early work and Lin Wenyi’s short story “Under the Snow” (1987). Both works personify the way that ethnic identity has contaminated relations between the sexes. They both paint dismal pictures of the way in which relationships of those from perceived unequal ethnic groups have hindered the ability of the individuals from developing positive and equal sexual relations. Zhong’s *Angry Tides* (1993), published six years after the lifting of martial law, is one of the most expansive treatments of the early period, as it spans the period from the end of World War II to the early days of the 2/28 massacre and crackdown. Zhong also spends copious space portraying such things as the failure of marriage and loss of a baby, as well as the way the crackdown drove some Taiwanese who were previously colonized by the Japanese (1895-1945) back into the arms of their colonizers. Lin Shenjing’s 1986 work, structured much like a detective novel, creates a parallel between three “sworn” brothers of the 1940s (à la Chinese martial arts culture) and three of their grandchildren’s generation of the early 1980s. The intertwined plot allows for an interesting contrast between the “heroic” atmosphere of early, more heady times, and the “decadent” times that material excess have begotten more recently. The story suggests that ethnic relations have improved but the overall socio-cultural milieu has deteriorated. Li Qiao’s now classic novella “Notes on Taimu Mountain” endeavors to “fill in” the repressed and now lost record of Taiwanese intellectual and victim of political disappearance Lü Heruo by establishing a fictional narrative of a character who resembles Lü, an Austronesian indigenous character who harbors him, and a nameless bounty hunter who provides a verbal defense for his pursuit. Lin argues that Li Qiao privileges the “victim” over the “hero” in his rendering of the White Terror period.

Lin's second chapter delineates the ways in which literary works textually confront collective "amnesia" to which the suppression of information about 2/28 and its aftermath have given rise. Her discussion of Lan Bozhou's "The Song of the Covered Wagon" from 1988 (later loosely adapted by Hou Hsiao-hsien into *Good Men, Good Women* and analyzed in chapter four) and Dong Nian's "Last Winter" (1979) indicate that authors themselves commingle realistic and documentary style with epistemological problems, enticing readers to think of their works in terms of realistic representation of the past but simultaneously undermining their efforts to ascertain that past. An intriguing technique of Dong's, for example, is that his work is chronological by month and date, thus giving the reader the impression of a systematically evolving record, but the years are confused and not organized along a linear structure. Further, both works exemplify the entangled web of private affairs and public events, suggesting in some cases that the intrusive public domain is unavoidable but at the same time employing depictions of people's personal lives as countervailing narratives that may be superior to the public record. In the concluding chapter of this portion of the book, Lin selects four stories that epitomize the female, the female body, and the female psyche as the site of political and national contestation. Her discussion of Chen Yingzhen's classic work "The Mountain Road," viewed as sacred scripture by many on the intellectual left in Taiwan, is a courageous attempt to offer a subtle critique of Chen's subjugation of the female heroine to the goals of Marxist economic and political critique. Victimhood in the aftermath of 2/28 almost by definition becomes a gendered construct, because it is the males who in most cases are killed in confrontations, arrested, and/or executed and the females who, removed from direct contact with the violence, live on as vestiges of their father's, husband's, or brother's martyrdom. Li Ang, one of Taiwan's most celebrated female authors, eviscerates this consistent theme in leftist literature by describing a woman who not only survives but goes on to seek office in the legislature, though not for the reasons one might assume. She seeks reunification with her estranged husband through participation in politics and thereby embodies a character that is not one-dimensionally political.

In the second half of the book, Lin sets out to ask how visual images represent atrocity differently from written ones. Employing the critical framework of Maureen Turim on memory, Lin suggests that, since flashbacks are apprehended by the audience in the film-present alongside current actions, they serve as a causal link between past events and the contemporary. Lin's extensive discussion of Hou's film mentioned above, which utilizes flashback, interspersed parallel narratives, and voice over, creates a fragmentary and artificial impression in the spectator that

further the untrustworthy status of the various accounts of the past rather than clarifying it, let alone glorifying it or its agents. Hou's film also elevates the notion that personal events have overtaken and pushed public issues to the side to an even higher level than the literary works of just a few years before. Lin also shows how the cinematic works (Hsu Hsiao-ming's *Heartbreak Island* is also an adaptation—of Dong Nian's much earlier story) differ greatly from their literary antecedents, both because they were produced at different historical points and because the media are different. Like Hou, Hsu's film displaces the political with the personal. Lin's contrast does not end with the distinctions she makes between the two media of literature and cinema. Chapter five contains an extended comparison of Hou's *A City of Sadness* (1989), the first feature length rendering of 2/28, and Lin Zhengsheng's (Lin Cheng-sheng) *March of Happiness* released ten years later. One of the most brilliant aspects of this chapter is that her analysis of *A City of Sadness* moves beyond my own 2004 article on the film to render several key examples of the impossibility of scenes being interpreted as part of the memory of the characters to whom the audience presumes they belong. Her close reading reveals some deep cognitive dissonances in the film that continue to raise questions not just about the violence and repugnance of 2/28 and its aftermath but about our continuing inability to come to terms with it. Lin's later film, on the other hand, is far more Manichean than Hou's, actually positing victims and villains in ways in which Hou's deep-seated ambivalence either is unable or refuses to do. *March of Happiness*, unlike Hou's work, is not set firmly in the past, but is cast in the "subjunctive mood," Lin argues, to provoke the audience into speculating upon what was possible, to propose that Taiwan could and should have been a better place than political circumstances allowed.

Lin's final chapter on Wan Ren's *Super Citizen Ko* also concerns the status of the past, tragedy, heroism, and, most important, redemption and atonement. But particularly worth noting is Lin's discussion of the intermingling in Wan's film of archival documentary footage both from the Japanese colonial period and from the heyday of Chiang Kai-shek's Kuomintang days. He embeds these public visual images into the recollections of fictional characters and reduces the historical visual record to the level of fiction. Lin asks how we cope with the issue of culpability when even those imprisoned during the White Terror bear some responsibility for the persecution and deaths of others. We are left to wonder what memories can exist when personal stories have been suppressed and lost while public recollections have been amplified and replayed to the extent that they replace those now irretrievable traces. However, Lin draws on the work of Dominick LaCapra's use of mourning to show how loss can be recognized and

through the consumption of literature or film, like the process of the dream work, one can take partial leave of it and move on. Thus, Lin strives in the epilogue of her book to emphasize the positive, to look forward, concluding that a self-reflexive approach, which has become more common practice in recent years, allows Taiwanese to think more dispassionately about the past and more hopefully about the future. ✱

Audrey Goodman. *Lost Homelands: Ruin and Reconstruction in the 20th-Century Southwest*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2010. 241p.

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At a time that regional studies are struggling vis-à-vis the ever-increasing focus on globalism in literary scholarship, Audrey Goodman has written a book that promises to reenergize Southwestern studies. In *Lost Homelands: Ruin and Reconstruction in the 20th-Century Southwest*, Goodman traces the ties that bind this U.S. region to larger social, political, and global shifts that have shaped the U.S. since the Great Depression and tallies the costs of these entanglements for the Southwest, but she also presents hope for the “reconstruction” of the region.

Analyzing texts and images side-by-side, the author discovers a set of common concerns about the fragmentation of the individual, the breakdown of community, the transformation and exploitation of the natural landscape, and the repression of alternative stories and histories of the Southwest. If the Great Depression marked the end of migrants’ hopes for “relatively stable homelands,” she writes, the 1940s and ’50s were at the beginning of the nation’s ever-more sophisticated scientific development, increased militarization efforts that found expression in numerous atomic tests, and the attendant contamination of Southwestern landscape itself (5). Meanwhile, the region has also provided the setting for progressively more complex cross-cultural and cross-border relationships that shape experiences of migration and exile. Even as she thus records the region’s disintegration, Goodman discovers in the fragments—“ruins”—of the Southwest-as-homeland a point of departure for recovery that may enable a new sense of belonging and community: “By making us mindful of the present and encouraging us to excavate the many layers of the past,” Goodman writes, “photographic and literary representations of Southwestern landscapes can engage us in the challenging process of living with ruins and constructing homelands in a culture that overtly values mobility, growth, and change” (10).

The book is structured thematically with each chapter focusing on a specific type of vernacular landscape: “The Road,” “The Village,” “The Bridge,” “The