On November 3, 1942, fifteen hundred of the leading writers, editors, and critics from China, Manchuria, Mongolia, Taiwan,1 Korea, and Japan gathered at the Imperial Hotel in Tokyo to attend the first Greater East Asian Writers Conference (Dai Tôa Bungakusha Taikai 大東亜文学者大会). Before the official opening of their meeting, they first bowed deeply in the direction of the imperial palace. Two days before the conference, these delegates from Japan’s colonies and quasi-colonies had been taken, in the fog and drizzle, to pay homage to the imperial palace, the Meiji Shrine, and the Yasukuni Shrine. At the conference, the Korean writer Lee Kôshû 李光洙 (b. 1892), the father of modern Korean literature, made a passionate statement on behalf of writers from the colonies:

The spirit of Greater East Asia must be truth itself; it cannot be a man-made thing, like something created by the League of Nations. We are not here to establish this Greater East Asian spirit but to discover it. To put it in the most easily understood terms, the foundation, the marrow, of this Greater East Asian spirit is the spirit of sacrificing the self. . . . The spirit of offering oneself up, of sacrificing the self, is, I believe, the most elevated of the ways of men and is the path closest to the perfect truth. Why? Because our goal, our goal as Japanese, is not scheming to become a strong nation like America or Great Britain, but to save all the people in the world. . . . However, it will not be us as individuals, but rather the emperor, who accomplishes this goal. Our part is to die singing the praises of the emperor. I firmly believe that the spirit of

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sacrificing the self, offering oneself up completely, must be the foundation of the Greater East Asian spirit. [Kawamura Minato 1997a: 10–11] This zealous speech by Lee, a nationalist writer who later turned collaborator, was well received at the conference, but it would come back to haunt him in the postwar Korean discourse on colonial literature. This type of hyperbolic language, though commonplace at the time among Japanese nationals, still garnered great attention coming from the mouth of a colonial subject. Later, in a private moment, Lee related the difficulties faced by Korean writers to the Japanese authors Kusano Shinpei and Kawakami Tetsutarō.

The Greater East Asian Writers Conference provided an arena where colonized writers could affirm their allegiance to the empire while the empire in turn showcased the cultural and intellectual trophies it had acquired through colonialism. The second conference (August 1943) was again held in Tokyo. The Japanese side mobilized prominent Japanese writers such as Kume Masao, Kikuchi Kan, Takamura Kōtarō, Kobayashi Hideo, Yokomitsu Riichi, and Miyoshi Tatsuji—a veritable Who’s Who of modern Japanese literature at the time. The third and final conference was held in Nanjing, China, in November 1944. Again, other than Taiwan, all territories in the Japanese empire sent representatives. The fourth conference was scheduled to be held in Shinkyō (新京), the new capital of Manchukuo, but never came to fruition due to the end of the war.

This series of conferences marked the creation of an East Asian literary sphere that was coterminous with the Japanese empire and centered on the Japanese literary and cultural tradition. Within this sphere, education in the Japanese language, exposure to Japanese-language media, diffusion of Japanese popular culture, and the presence of a Japanese political and legal system all fostered a common worldview and promoted a common literary discourse. Although the empire was built upon military conquest, authoritarian administration, systematic discrimination, and the violent suppression of all dissent—and even though one aspect of colonial administration was the systematic monitoring and censorship of literary production—one must judge the creation of this transnational Asian literary sphere as a significant accomplishment. How, in the short space of a half-century, was Japan able to form from the disparate cultural and historical traditions of East Asia, Southeast Asia, and the South Pacific a single literary space where
peoples of diverse nationality and ethnicity could exchange ideas and share their literary creations? What was the effect of this process on the individual cultures and communities subsumed within this new Japanese world? How did the non-Japanese members understand their relationship to the local and national cultural traditions of their ancestors, and how did they justify abandoning their native traditions for those of the Japanese empire?

Although the political and economic aspects of the Japanese empire have been the topic of many studies, the literature of the colonies—including works by Japanese travelers relaying their impressions of the colonies, the creations of Japanese expatriates who made the colonies their home, and the prose and poetry of colonial subjects writing in Japanese—has been largely ignored in the postwar Japanese literary world. It is a sensitive topic because Japan occupies the unique position of having both suffered the impact of Western colonialism, through the unequal treaties of the early Meiji period, and imposed its imperial will on its Asian neighbors. The issue is further complicated by the wartime ideology of a Greater East Asia, which was founded on an insightful analysis of the West’s imperialist exploitation of East Asia but in fact was used to justify and legitimate Japan’s violent takeover, subjugation, and exploitation of the other peoples of the region.

The publication of Edward Said’s *Orientalism* and the rise of (post)colonial studies as an academic discipline—coupled with the passing of the Shōwa emperor, which removed certain taboos concerning the colonial era—has led to reexamination of all aspects of Japan’s colonial history. Many studies that appeared in the 1990s focused on cultural aspects of the Japanese colonial enterprise. Oguma Eiji’s groundbreaking studies (1995, 1998) have altered our understanding of the Japanese discourse on ethnic identity. Komagome Takeshi’s study of the colonial education system, as well as the work of Lee Yeounseuk (1996), Koyasu Nobukuni (1996), Yasuda Toshiaki (1997, 1998, 1999), Shi Gang (1993), and Osa Shizue (1998) on the construction of the modern Japanese language, reveal the mutual influence of the colonial educational apparatus and the education administration of Japan. Cultural critics like Ueno Chizuko (1998) have explored the precarious relationship of gender and nationalism in the colonial period.

Literary studies of the colonial period are a more recent phenomenon. Kawamura Minato’s many studies of colonial literature in the colonies, focusing on Korea and Manchuria, paved the way for in-depth examinations of individual authors. Scholars like Leo Ching (1994,
Yvonne Chang (1997, 1999a), Tarumi Chie (1995a), Kawahara Isao (1997), and Fujii Shôzo (1998) have all examined the literary production of this era from the perspective of postcolonial criticism. The reprinting of many rare and obscure works from this era by Nakajima Toshio and Kawahara Isao (1998, 1999) has greatly facilitated the growth of this field.

This book is divided into three parts covering Japanese visitors to the colonies, a prominent Japanese expatriate author, and the native writers of Taiwan. Part I treats the discursive creation of the empire through the writings of Japanese authors on the colonies and their inhabitants. It looks first at the South as an organizing concept that defined the relationship of Japan to one part of Asia. It was a part of Asia in which Japan saw both its past—in the theories of Yanagita Kunio and others regarding a southern origin of the Japanese people—and its future in the “southward advance” (nanshin 南進) that was for many the preferred path of expansion for a Japan bursting at the seams from population pressures and anxious to flex its modern military might. The South provided a space within the Japanese worldview for the primitive and savage, which we see reflected in early tales of idyllic island paradises of the South Seas and later in much more disturbing tales of the savage violence that lurked in the hearts of semi-assimilated Taiwanese aborigines. We see a late conception of the region reflected in the wartime stories and experiences of two Japanese authors, Hayashi Fumiko and Nakajima Atsushi, who lived in these areas briefly and wrote accounts that were widely read in the metropolis. Taiwan, part of the Japanese empire since 1895, was a particularly popular focus for speculation about the South. Satô Haruo’s “Devilbird,” adapted from a Taiwanese aboriginal myth about scapegoating, functions as a metaphor for the persecution of colonized ethnic minorities within Japan following the Kantô Earthquake of 1923.

Nishikawa Mitsuru, the focus of Part II, provides a more nuanced view of Taiwan and a link to the native literary scene that developed during the colonial period. Having spent most of his life in Taiwan, Nishikawa was intimately familiar with the complex, multiethnic, multilingual society that had developed there. Through his many quasi-ethnographic productions on local Taiwanese culture, Nishikawa advocated not only the assimilation of Taiwan’s populace to Japanese language, customs, and beliefs but also the incorporation of Taiwan’s distinct heritage into Japan as a new regional variant. Part II concludes with a close, intertextual read-
ing of two stories by Nishikawa that reflect his romanticist appropriation of Taiwan’s precolonial past and his genderized relationship to the colonized culture.

Part III, the final section of the book, addresses the literary response to the colonial experience in Taiwan by native Taiwanese authors writing in Japanese. First we examine the linguistic problems associated with Japanese colonial literature. A modern, standard vernacular Japanese (Kokugo) was a necessary precursor to modern Japanese literature, and the transmission of this language to colonial subjects required a new introspection into the structure of Japanese and its relationship to other Asian tongues. The situation in Taiwan was particularly complex because of the lack of a written vernacular Taiwanese, the multiplicity of languages spoken on the island, and the recent development of vernacular literature in Mandarin. The result was a linguistic environment characterized by multilingualism and extreme hybridity.

Despite these obstacles, a robust literature did evolve on Taiwan, though it has yet to find its proper place within the canons of either Japanese or Chinese literary history. The remainder of this introduction focuses on two groups of writers who contributed to this tradition: the nativists and the imperial-subject writers. The first group, flourishing in the 1920s and 1930s, comprised writers who had been educated primarily in Japanese but maintained strong ties to the Chinese literary tradition and were not wholly at ease in identifying with Japanese civilization. Authors like Yang Kui, Zhang Wenhuan, and Lü Heruo were strongly influenced by issues of social justice advocated by the Proletarian Literature movement. In stories like “Newspaper Boy” and “Native Chicks,” Yang Kui details the corrosive effect of class and gender-based oppression on the Taiwanese people. Zhang Wenhuan proposes a pastoral utopian response to the onslaught of modernization brought to Taiwan by the Japanese colonial administration. The multitalented Lü Heruo is adept at capturing the human dimension of relations between Japanese and Taiwanese. He is best known for “Oxcart,” which tells of a man who is gradually driven into destitution by Japanese colonial appropriations and regulations, but in stories like “Camellia” we see a Japanese photographer who becomes so enthralled by the Taiwanese countryside that he barely escapes with his soul.

The status of the imperial-subject writers is more controversial, and their literary productions have not been the subject of serious scholarly examination. Writing primarily in the last years of the Japanese colonial
period, when the pressure for assimilation to Japanese culture reached its peak, authors like Zhou Jinpo, Wang Changxiong, and Chen Huoquan confronted directly the questions of cultural hybridity raised by these pressures. In Zhou Jinpo’s earliest works, exemplified by “Water Cancer,” we see highly cultivated young men educated in metropolitan Japan who struggle with how to reform traditional Taiwan; but in later works, such as “Weather, Belief, and Chronic Disease,” we see a mature convert to Shinto who finds release and a reinvigoration of traditional family life through the time-honored Chinese rituals of his youth. Chen Huoquan’s “The Way” features a protagonist who strives to increase production in his factory. When he fails to be rewarded because of his ethnicity, he redoubles his efforts to become Japanese and eventually enlists and fights for the Japanese army. Although the common nationalist reading of these tales has condemned them as traitorous advocacy of the colonizer’s interests, in the context of the time they can be read as an ironic attempt to subvert the oppressor’s power by mimicking his language through what Leela Ghandi has called the “Caliban paradigm.”

The epilogue to the book considers the continuing production of literature in the Japanese language in postwar, postcolonial Taiwan. Although this literature has been denounced by postcolonial critics and heralded by Japanese nationalists as a type of colonial nostalgia, I argue that it is, in fact, a strategic affirmation of a distinct Taiwanese identity. Taiwan’s complex cultural legacy is still evident today in the creolization of the modern language, which mixes Taiwanese, Japanese, and even English elements into the now dominant Mandarin base.

The multicultural, multilingual environment of the Japanese colonial empire raises many questions of naming and terminology. In referring to the indigenous inhabitants of Taiwan, I have used the term “aborigine,” which translates the Chinese term “yuanzhumin” 原住民, currently the favored designation for these people. In describing the attitudes of the Japanese colonizers and ethnic Chinese population toward these peoples, however, I have employed terms like “barbarian” and “savage” because equivalent terms are used in the discourse of that time. All these terms fail to represent the social, ethnic, and linguistic diversity of the aboriginal peoples of Taiwan during the colonial period.

In referring to the ethnically Chinese inhabitants of Taiwan, who migrated there from China over the last four centuries, I typically use the term “Taiwanese.” Taiwan is a Chinese term and was not used to refer to the island before its colonization by the Chinese; moreover,
Taiwanren 台湾人, or “people of Taiwan,” is the term used most commonly during both the colonial and postcolonial periods for the ethnically Chinese inhabitants of Taiwan. This is not meant to imply that the aboriginal people are not native inhabitants of the island, and when I use the term “native” I refer to both the aborigines and the Taiwanese.

Generally I have given the personal names of Taiwanese in modern Mandarin pronunciation transcribed in the pinyin romanization system.8 This practice is somewhat anomalous, since it is unlikely that anyone ever referred to them by these sounds at the time. Japanese would have used the Sino-Japanese (onyomi) pronunciation of their Chinese characters or referred to them by their Japanese names (if they had them); locals would have referred to them in some dialect of Taiwanese (Zhangzhou or Quanzhou) or in Hakka, depending on the person’s background and the situation. Using the Mandarin reading imposes uniformity on this linguistic mélange and permits readers to refer to other sources on these individuals. Moreover, we still have not advanced far beyond the 1930s in developing a common way of transcribing the Taiwanese language. Where I do have occasion to cite words in Taiwanese, I rely on the transcription in K. T. Tăn’s *A Chinese-English Dictionary: Taiwan Dialect* (1978).