 Networks, Politics, and the Literary Public Sphere: The Foundation of Modern Democracy in Taiwan (1970s–1990s)

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Abstract

This article examines how literature is a networked social space of political repression and resistance, refracting broader contestations over national sovereignty, self-determination, and identity. Politicizing the traditionally apolitical “world of letters” in Habermas’s *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, this article employs a novel analysis of the influence that the literary public sphere wields over political consciousness. Using the historical case of Taiwan’s literary networks from the 1970s to the 1990s, this article asserts that the literary public sphere produces a rational-critical generalization of knowledge and exposure to dissonant perspectives that invigorates civil society by creating intelligentsia. Through intelligentsia, ideas within the Taiwanese literary public sphere birthed powerful *Dangwai* parties that instituted democracy, informed their platforms, and ushered in a new wave of political elites. The Taiwanese case demonstrates how civic tasks can predict political tasks with enough force to stimulate a unique postcolonial political consciousness and spark a revolution.

Keywords

East Asia, Taiwan, Jürgen Habermas, literary public sphere, politics and literature, sociological theory, historical networks, historical sociology, social change and modernization

Introduction

One of the most important achievements in the study of the public sphere has been to interrogate its influence on democratic political practice in social life (Fraser, 1990). We owe a great deal of this achievement to the *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (hereafter, *STPS*), wherein Jürgen Habermas (1962/1989) conducts a historical sweep of 18th- and 19th-century England, France, and Germany to trace the development of the public use of rational-critical thought. The preoccupying theme of his theoretical concern in *STPS*, and read through his other works (Habermas, 1985, 1987, 1996), is an inquiry into the conditions that facilitate communicative rationality as pertinent to deliberative democracy. Central to his discussion is the introduction of the public sphere and its relation to external forces that impinge on the use of rational-critical thought.

A great deal of attention has been paid to the development of rational-critical thought in civil society, shaping the nature of its debates across the social sciences and humanities with staggering breadth (Calhoun, 1992, 1993). However, much less attention has been devoted to the literary public sphere, and in particular, how it impinges upon the development of rational-critical thought (Anheier & Gerhards, 1991; Crossley et al., 2004; McKee, 2006). Existing investigations of the literary public sphere and critiques of Habermas’s public sphere have heavily focused on the constitution of private individuals that comprise the sphere. Such discussions have adopted the literary public sphere as part of explications on poetics (Randall, 2008), the disconnection of the private identity from the public sphere (Calhoun, 1995, pp. 244–245), the development of a cultivated personality in a bourgeois self-consciousness, such as voluntary love (Armstrong, 1987), the location of civil society in pre-political and private realms (Somers, 1995), and the ideological values embodied in a sentiment-based subject where self-identity is grounded in sentiment, rather than kinship or native-place ties (H. Lee, 2001). These lines of inquiry have generated interesting insights on the social bases of identity, but largely treat the literary public sphere in disconnection from the political sphere, despite its importance to the public sphere in *STPS*.

Furthermore, discussions of the public sphere and democracy have predominantly focused on Anglo-American
contexts, where democracy has deep historical and civic roots, ignoring non-Anglo-American contexts where these assumptions no longer hold and overlooking altogether the literary public sphere within these contexts (Huang, 1993; Rowe, 1990). To address these lacunae, this article uses the modern development of democracy in Taiwan as a case study to address the neglected role of the literary public sphere in forecasting transformations in politics, encapsulating a shift from political tasks to civic tasks (Habermas, 1962/1989, p. 52). For Habermas, and for this article, democracy is defined as a grassroots affair among citizens who debate about active views, which eventually expands into institutionalized forms (Müller-Doohm, 2016). In STPS, Habermas provides an articulate account of how political tasks precede civic tasks, perhaps most intuitively evinced by how various political systems institute different types of laws that govern behaviors in civil society. However, Habermas neglects the reverse—how civic tasks shape the way political communication is conducted and political systems constructed. This article aims to open dialogue on this line of inquiry in the context of East Asia.

As Dalleo (2011) suggests, the subject of the public sphere in former colonial societies takes on new meaning and significance. Unlike noncolonial societies, the literary public sphere in colonial societies is uniquely implicated in the “instrumentality of politics” that prefigures ongoing tensions between civil society and a repressive state (Dalleo, 2010, p. 57). Colonial societies are defined by more authoritarian states that assert a stronger grip over cultural constructions of nationhood and tend toward repressive means to curb dissent (Go, 2003, 2011).

As Go (2004) argues, the legitimacy of colonial governance is predicated on its control over discourses in the public sphere. Scaffolding a prominent line of critique in postcolonial theory, this interpretation of the public sphere has demonstrated how the state controls the native citizenry by exerting influence over the discursive meanings of social categories to which people belong, such as race, ethnicity, and nationhood itself (Mignolo, 2012; Prakash, 1994; Spivak, 1999). Political cultures emerge as a category of efforts to strip the citizenry of political and class consciousness (Go, 2008; Stoler & Cooper, 1997). Evoking his roots in the Frankfurt school’s critical theory, Habermas saw this to be a Marxian-Adornoian regression of consciousness—the incapacity to recognize one’s own repression in civil society and the cultural erosion of the mental astuteness required of this task (Adorno, 2005; Au, 2019; Benzer, 2011; Calhoun, 1992, p. 2).

In such societies, literature is one of the few social spaces for free speech and political resistance (Diouf, 2003; Sinha, 2001). Echoing Habermas’s conception of the public sphere, scholars of Chinese and Caribbean literature have demonstrated how the act of writing is a political one—creating variant media as vehicles for subversion against state ideology, reclaiming memories and narratives of nationhood and identity in favor of self-determination, and organizing shifts in public opinion (Dalleo, 2010; Donnell, 2007; Hsiung & Wang, 2018; Nesbitt, 2003). The literary public sphere, thus, embodies and visualizes the rhetorical frames adopted by social movements in contestation against those of the state (Habermas, 1962/1989, p. 60; see also Hamzah, 2013).

In connection with this loosely bound literature on the emancipatory potential of the literary public sphere for political process, I examine the role it played in the democratization of Taiwan. Doing so simultaneously addresses a gap in this literature by applying the literary public sphere in STPS to East Asia, a region largely overlooked in its applications hitherto (see Lim et al., 1999).

I first provide an overview of the relevant aspects of Habermas’s theorizations on the literary public sphere in STPS. These aspects will be connected to Mannheim’s concept of the intelligentsia to examine how the literary public sphere facilitates reason. Here, I demonstrate the significance of Mannheim’s conceptualization of ideology, as mental structures formed at a grassroots level, for understanding the distinctions and interdependencies between expertise and general knowledge as they co-conconstruct each other among the public. Where contemporary studies of political ideology conceive of ideology as a social order woven into already institutionalized political parties in power and repertoires of knowledge (Jost et al., 2009), I address the “black-box” of ideology by examining the processes through which such bodies of knowledge form in the public sphere.

After, I interrogate the convergences between these sections and the Taiwanese case, focusing on the development of the Taiwanese literary public sphere. To this end, I illustrate how similar conditions were present in the Taiwanese literary public sphere, yet nevertheless inspired the use of rational-critical thought, a new political consciousness, and an intelligentsia network of “free-thinking individuals.” An intelligentsia network facilitates democracy by catalyzing the development of “better” public opinion through dialogue between different perspectives and inserting insights into rule by informing rulers’ decisions, anticipating Parliament.

The circulation and popularity of literary magazines concreted ideas which not only gave rise to powerful Dangwai parties that instituted democracy in Taiwan, but which directly informed their platforms, demonstrating how civic tasks from the literary public sphere can predict political tasks with enough force to start a revolution and found democracy.

The contribution of this article is threefold: (a) it illustrates the development of the (literary) public sphere in East Asian contexts, with specific cultural characteristics distinct from Anglo-American and other postcolonial societies. (b) The Taiwanese case demonstrates the contemporary relevance of the literary public sphere to stimulating the rational-critical thought needed to establish a modern democracy. (c) It reconstructs a social theoretical account of the interdependencies between the literary and political public spheres by...
setting up a particular historical context to examine the broader social forces that mediate these connections, which leaves room for future empirical work to adopt this line of inquiry in other historical and national contexts.

**Method**

This article is a historical case study of the Taiwanese public sphere from its authoritarian beginnings in 1970 to its democratization in the 1980s and 1990s. A historical sociological analysis is carried out through an examination of archival government reports on education and linguistic policies, Taiwanese literary magazines, and scholarly (books and journal articles) and news secondary sources on Taiwan’s literary networks from the 1970s to the 1990s. This article investigates the social structures that order the literary public sphere located in one particular space (Taiwan), while attending to the interplay of action and structure (Skocpol, 1984, pp. 1–2).

The historical case of Taiwan thus evokes a “regulative generalization,” prominently outlined by Searle (1969, pp. 33–35) as the assumption that the occurrence of behaviors is explicitly or implicitly regulated. Comparing regulative generalization to seemingly stochastic driving patterns on the road, Evers and Wu (2006) emphasize

one does not need to see too many examples of oncoming vehicles in order to reach the necessary regulative generalisation concerning which side of the road is safest to drive on. Thus, in so far as we construe certain behaviours as conforming to regulative rules, we can make inferences from a relatively small number of instances to a general rule. (p. 512)

This article examines configurations in Taiwan’s particular social structures with respect to the literary public sphere to demonstrate how an East Asian postcolonial society, in general, politicizes toward democracy through the literary public sphere.

In this manner, this argument supplements the predominant narratives that attribute democratization in Taiwan to a combination of aggrivated social movements, robust economic development and aggregate upward mobility with a largening middle-class, and foreign pressures (Tien & Shiau, 1992). This article shows the literary origins of the political discourses about civil liberty and postmaterialist values that underwrite all these factors, as well as the social structural conditions surrounding the production of these discourses. This article also foregrounds the social psychological development of rational-critical thought within the expansion of the literary public sphere that further allowed these political discourses to thrive.

**The Foundations of the Literary Public Sphere**

In Habermas’s investigation of the 18th and 19th centuries, the use of rational-critical thought was traditionally confined
The KMT, after retreating to Taiwan following their defeat by the Chinese Communist Party on the mainland in 1949, inflicted upon the Taiwanese a set of resincific policies that suppressed local Taiwanese cultural expression, among other forms of discrimination that favored mainland Chinese. These capillary forms of discrimination included employment discrimination, disproportionate representation in politics and media, the eradication of Taiwanese cultural influences in architecture and the arts, educational policies centered around Mandarin Chinese, and severe punishment for deviating from these Sino-centric policies (Dreyer, 2003). Resinification was Chiang Kai-Shek’s attempt to expunge the Taiwanese of Japanese colonial influences and to instill in them values of the Chinese culture in preparation for his imagined eventual reclamation of the mainland.

The antagonism that arose among the Taiwanese expressed itself in an ideological reaction known as Taiwanization, a category of efforts to formulate a unique Taiwanese identity distinct from and in rejection of influences from mainland China (Au, 2017a). Literature played a central role in expressing and publicizing the characteristics of this new identity. Magazines, journals, and other public forums emerged in a broad Taiwanese Literature Movement that critiqued the then-Taiwanese state and shared opinions on the best method for forging a new identity, gaining momentum near the 1970s. A series of changes swept through this literary public sphere that included (a) the intellectual dilution of ideas in magazines to appeal to larger masses and (b) the evaporation of interaction in letters oriented toward an audience, akin to those in STPS’ historical cases (Habermas, 1962/1989, pp. 48–49). Yet, as will be demonstrated, these changes far from collapsed the public sphere. Instead, they came to create an intelligentsia network of “free-thinking individuals” mediated by the public use of rational-critical thought. Ultimately, civic tasks within the literary public sphere empowered political tasks by injecting centralized public opinions into the apparatus of governance, which ultimately evolved into the foundation of democracy.

The Taiwanese Literature Movement: Generalized Knowledge and Rational-Critical Thought

The Taiwanese Literature movement began near the end of the 1960s, but did not gain prominence until the 1970s and even the 1980s. Why did it take so long to attract attention, given that widespread dissatisfied public opinion had accumulated for decades (Au, 2017b)? Reflecting upon the Taiwanese Literature movement in the context of a Habermasian literary public sphere, we can surmise that dissatisfaction demanded rational-critical thought to actonize into resistance. Further drawing parallels with the confinement of the public use of reason to the prince and his courts in 17th-century Europe, we learn that the use of rational-critical
thought was restricted by and to Chiang Kai-Shek and his court (the KMT). The expression of dissenting opinions in speech or conduct was cuffed by the threat of severe punishment, exemplified in the stringent policies on punishing local Taiwanese language use and cultural expressions. Thus, dissatisfaction among the Taiwanese public, though present, remained largely latent.

What, then, inspired this growth of rational-critical thought manifested in the Taiwanese Literature movement? Three key events shook political stability in the nation: Taiwan’s (diplo-
matically known as the Republic of China) loss of a seat in the United Nations to the People’s Republic of China in 1971, the death of Chiang Kai-Shek in 1975, and the decision to sever relations with Taiwan in 1978/1979 by the United States under then-President Jimmy Carter. The apparent political zeitgeist that seized Taiwan in this period, therefore, reaffirmed the need for independence. Reinterpreted, Taiwan had suffered the deprivation of recognition on a global scale, national humiliation of being marked inferior to China, the loss of its historical political leader who established the hated resinicization policies, and rejection of its identity from the most powerful nation in the world. That even the United Nations or the United States refused to recognize Taiwan stimulated doubts about the adequacy of the then-current leadership. And since Chiang Kai-Shek, seen as the major instrument of resinicization, had died, the opportunity to actualize reform had come.

These changes inspired new critical discourses in the literary public sphere. Magazines began appearing that envisioned a government ruled by leaders outside the KMT. The popular, yet controversial Formosa Magazine (Meilidao Zazhi) was created during this period, whose stated goal was to challenge the KMT’s rule. Its issues illuminated the history of Taiwan and its personalities (Hsiao, 2006), criticized the systematic discrimination of the Aborigines (native Taiwanese), accused the KMT of prioritizing the obtainment of wealth from the Taiwanese before leaving it, and illuminated the historical Taiwanese resistance against the Japanese (Hsu, 2014, pp. 88–89). Thus, the opposition embodied in the Formosa and similar outlets was not just resistance against the KMT rule, but also against the modern construction of the Taiwanese identity. Taiwan being under martial law, the KMT reacted with coercive measures, organizing the imprisonment of the Formosa Magazine’s core members in what became known as the Kaohsiung incident in 1979.

Although short-lived (lasting from August to November 1979), the controversial spirit of opposition in the Formosa Magazine lived on after its violent termination. The Kaohsiung incident sparked reflection among writers on how to define a Taiwanese identity. Among them, defeatists first decried the futility of Taiwanese writers and their attempts to give shape to this identity. These events sparked uproar among the Taiwanese literary networks, who responded by demarcating the boundaries between Taiwanese and Chinese literature. They denounced the defeatist critics, asserting that there was no need to integrate the Taiwanese literature into a larger narrative of Chinese literature or that doing so amounted to “historical disorientation [or distortion]” (Tang, 1999). China Tide championed the Campaign for Native Literature Movement, establishing the background for the “Debate on the Taiwanese consciousness” (1983–1984), which tabled an intense debate on navigating a binary Taiwanese versus Chinese identity. The debate soon expanded to a myriad of pro-Taiwan as well as pro-China magazines, including Root Weekly, Taiwan Era, China Tide, and Forward.

The forms of Taiwanese literature that followed in the 1980s onward were heavily influenced by the “Debate on Taiwanese consciousness” and the martyrdom of the Formosa magazine. As if succeeding them, the new Taiwanese literature that followed exhibited an intensified focus on championing a Taiwanese identity that has persisted till today (Au, 2017b). The Asian published a statement in collaboration with the Taiwanese Association of the United States, stipulating six requests, four of which were related to the Taiwanese resistance against the KMT (Hsu, 2014, p. 91): first, the future of Taiwan was to be decided by the people; second, to release the prisoners of the Kaohsiung incident; third, to eliminate restrictions on parties and the press; and fourth, to re-elect the Legislative Yuan.

Poems then appeared, written by a broader public in Taiwan, that scrutinized the Taiwanese identity’s suffering under Chinese influences, including the great Lee Kuei-Shien, who was recognized as “Poet of the Millenium” by the International Poets Academy and later nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature. A perusal of his work, for instance, reveals grievances voiced against the perceived erosion of the Taiwanese identity (“Blood Transfusion”; K.-S. Lee, 2015), the distinctness of the Taiwanese identity (“Taiwan Island”; K.-S. Lee, 2015), Taiwanese independence (“Dialectic of Love”; Gao, 2003), and political imprisonment (“Resident Birds”; Gao, 2003).

A repertoire of distinctly Taiwanese national literature and a tradition of maintaining this repertoire have since held strong in Taiwan, including contributions of local writers as well as classical works of Taiwanese writers. From the late 1980s onward, such efforts grew visible with the creation of the Taiwan PEN in 1987 (a collective of writers who strongly identify with the island). Institutionally, entire departments devoted to Taiwanese Literature were established in universities, first with Aletheia University in 1997, and followed by the induction of new courses invested in exploring and disseminating awareness on Taiwanese literature. National museums aimed at collecting documents and exhibitions for the general public were then funded, such as the National Museum of Taiwan Literature in 2003. All this was further compounded by the efforts of freelance writers who labored to popularize a distinct Taiwanese national identity, such as Tung Wei-Ge’s Study of a God’s Life, the novelette that won first place in a fiction contest sponsored by the United Daily News, among other magazines that acquired the civil
freedom and financial resources to sponsor such contests in an increasingly liberal literary public sphere.

The development of the Taiwanese Literature movement evokes parallels with Habermas’s literary public sphere and how lack of interaction anticipates generalized knowledge and a network of intellectuals who lead the public use of rational-critical thought. The new Taiwanese literature from the 1980s onward demonstrated the needs of a Taiwanese literary public for independence and resistance against China. Textbook edits that sinicized Taiwanese history, distorted Taiwanese names and histories, and overemphasized a relationship with China had inevitably fashioned generations of Taiwanese students into Confucian literati of the most restricted kind in history: knowledgeable about the relatively alien Chinese nation, but negligent of the culture, geography, and literature of where they grew up and lived in (Nan, 1987). Thus, the public’s exposure to the bold confrontations on the issue of a distinct Taiwanese national identity raised by opposition magazines instilled in the nascent Taiwanese consciousness the value of independence, increasingly perceived to be equated with a distinct Taiwanese national identity.

Reflected in this evolution was a movement toward the public use of rational-critical thought observed in the medium of magazines, which better resemble critical journals—that is, more than moral weeklies—criticism from artists—that is, more than moral weeklies—criticism from the public, whose popularity stemmed from the ability to satisfy needs among the reading public to challenge the regime in power. At the same time, rational-critical thought, though evicted from the public sphere hitherto, grew and thrived in the private sphere, in response to stimulation provided by the literary public sphere. The Taiwanese case throws into sharp relief how the eruption of rational-critical thought itself facilitated the many debates on national identity and communicated the significance of a Taiwanese identity in counter to resinicization. Resinicization undoubtedly angered the public, but their anger required more guidance to mobilize actual political change—re-education and an audience of intellectuals who would support centralized opinions. Both these elements were developed through the intellectual dilution of literary content to generalized knowledge and the people’s exposure to rational-critical thought that dissented against the principles of resinicization and challenged the state.

**The Dangwai Movement: From Civic to Political Tasks**

Capitalizing on the debates and dissent raised in the literary public sphere, independent parties sprouted from public dissatisfaction with the KMT. Among them, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), now the government in power in Taiwan as of 2016, was formed and gained prominence during the 1980s. The DPP famously incorporated claims and Taiwan-centric accounts of history generated within the Taiwanese Literature movement into their public speeches and street demonstrations. Bringing Taiwan’s colonial history into clear focus became a strategy to evoke parallels between Taiwan’s colonial overlords in the past and the Chinese Communists of the then-present, echoing Taiwan’s perpetual estrangement from sovereignty. This sentiment was fortified by the lionization of imprisoned opposition leaders, portrayed as heroes or heroines in a narrative of martyrdom, and their family members who succeeded their legacies (Hsu, 2014). Thus, national sentiments imported from
the literary public sphere had crystallized within these Dangwai or DPP activities to signal the need for a new type of governance: democratic values, founded on the idea of equal civil rights.

The rise of these new Dangwai leaders formed through the public use of rational-critical thought anticipated the ascension of Lee Teng-Hui in 1988, who, although was brought up in the KMT, chose to reverse the oppressive policies from the KMT. Openly endorsing the notion of a distinct Taiwanese identity, Lee officialized Taiwanization as a cultural policy that guided Taiwanese nationalist educational reform and ultimately succeeded in ending the institutionalized racial discrimination against the Taiwanese in employment and media. Preceding Lee, the mainlander elites had controlled Taiwan through collusion with elites within the KMT. Lee’s rise to power effectively discontinued this scheme: he condemned discrimination experienced by the Taiwanese by mainlanders, and even refused to nominate mainlander members to run in the 1992 election for the Legislative Yuan, and recognized his upbringing as a Japanese under the colonial government (Hsu, 2014, pp. 90–91).

The impact of exposure to Lee’s dissident perspectives was felt in the spread of scholarly activity or an institutionalized public use of rational-critical thought. Research rose drastically in the area of Taiwanese history in the years following Lee’s election in 1988, constituting what Wang (2005) refers to as a “Taiwan studies fever” stretching from the late 1980s onward. In academia, the proportion of MA theses on the history of Taiwan rose from 6.67% in 1987 to 13.79% in 1988, then 16.13% by 1990, and 26.73% by 1995. Paralleling this monumental growth in the publishing industry, what was once fewer than 30 books published on Taiwan annually skyrocketed to close to 100 by 1990 and 450 in 1995. Implicated is how rational-critical thought within the public sphere strengthens with exposure to dissonant worldviews in literary networks in challenge of the status quo. This diversity is evinced by the aforementioned infighting among Taiwanese literary networks, when writers consolidated into cliques consisting of defeatist critics against Taiwanese nationalism and Taiwanization writers who favored independence. With one of the largest readerships in the 1970s, the Taiwan Political Review, for instance, prominently published work that framed historical first-generation immigration from mainland China as members of a “New Taiwanese”—a sub-class Taiwanese identity, but which expunged them of associations with a Chinese identity (Hsu, 2014, p. 88; Ma, 1993). Although this eventually culminated in the journal’s closure by the state, the controversial political challenge to state-endorsed categories of ethnic identity refracted larger debates on nativist versus mainland governance that embroiled the era (Hsia, 1975; Hsiau, 1997; Lin, 1992). Prominent writer Ye Shitao (1977, 1982), in seeking to understand the social bases of originality in Taiwanese literature, aggressively pushed for nativist self-determination and documented how the notion of literary independence informed the literary zeitgeist of the 1970s through to the 1990s.

This zeitgeist also invoked cautionary remarks from writers on the boundaries of inclusion into Taiwanese nativity. Apart from outright rejection of Taiwanese literary independence from mainland writers (Lin, 1989; Zhuang, 1987), Taiwan-based writers called attention to the exclusionist character of the nativist movement, rejecting Taiwanese writers who were not native-born (Gao, 1981, 1985; Ma, 1992, 1993; Wang, 1982), Chen Ying-Chen (1977/1984), for instance, was a well-known essayist who argued that the Taiwanese and Chinese bodies of literature should not be demarcated from one another, but enjoined in a common postcolonial position relative to Anglo-American nations that systematically exploited Third World nations. Ma Sen (1992), a literature professor, added to this picture by emphasizing the primacy of literary language in inferring the identity of a writer, suggesting that Taiwanese literature (written in Chinese) was therefore subsumed into Chinese literature (see also Hung, 1992; Tang, 1999).

The dialectic between variant, competing arguments about authenticity and originality in Taiwanese literature was generative of a new political consciousness about national sovereignty. Indeed, these debates were consequential for politicization particularly because those educated by
the literary public sphere became intellectuals who applied reason to different fields, like religion, politics, economics, as did the philosophes. Intelligentsia educated in the upper rungs of the literary public sphere entered into politics. Huang Hsin-Chieh and his personal circle, who were former editors at the *Taiwan Political Review* and later at the *Formosa Magazine*, leveraged their insights from the literary public sphere to inform the ideological tenets of the emerging political *Dangwai* parties, becoming leaders themselves (Chai, 2008; Jacobs, 2016, pp. 104–108). The influence of the intelligentsia in the *Dangwai* parties destabilized the stranglehold of resinicization ideology on civil society and the state toward the 1990s and eventually seized control of government. In addition to Lee Teng-Hui’s presidential victory, a cadre of intelligentsia who had earned acclaim in the literary public sphere during the 1970s and 1980s rose to power. Huang Hsin-Chieh’s political faction was swept into the Legislative Yuan, elected by a populace weary of military rule under resinicization and who had been socialized into nativist literary ideas.

What began as a civic task for the intelligentsia, writing about a new political consciousness in the literary public sphere during the Taiwanization movement, thus informed political tasks by disseminating information and generating significant public support for a movement. This process eventually, decades later, paved way for their ascension to power and inspired a revolution of democratic politics in Taiwan.

**Conclusion**

Following the development of a political consciousness in literature is a delicate task. It risks simplifying the complexities and tensions that lurk thinly beneath the surface of any contentious politics, particularly in as monumental a shift as from authoritarian to democratic forms of governance. It is not possible to contextualize every literary production or event, nor elaborate on every context that embeds them. This article has asserted, however, that it is possible and valuable to identify and trace the trajectory of a political consciousness in position to the literature using the concepts of rational-critical thought and intelligentsia in the theoretical casing of a literary public sphere.

Habermas’s investigation of the literary public sphere in *STPS* has contributed substantially to the ongoing effort of navigating the relationship between the private and public spheres. His work provides a historically rich and sophisticated inquiry into the development of rational-critical thought as influenced by transformations within the literary public sphere and its link with political consciousness.

The case of Taiwan shows how such transformations in the literary public sphere produce the conditions that anticipate democracy. Mirroring *STPS*’ literary public sphere in 17th-century Europe, Taiwan’s literary public sphere generalized knowledge and proliferated public critiques of the status quo. They corroborated the wide-reaching implications of the shift from strictly “political tasks of a citizenry acting in common” to operating as a site of critical public debate (Habermas, 1962/1989, p. 52). These transformations effected the public use of rational-critical thought, generating public opinion that was (a) consolidated and (b) represented the popular interests of the people.

Popular magazines focused on dispensing generalized knowledge and providing exposure to dissonant political perspectives enabled the rise of intelligentsia and the centralization of public opinions that contested the legitimacy of the state and its resinicization ideology. In the case of Taiwan, the significant role of such changes in facilitating the public use of rational-critical thought is corroborated by a distinct Taiwanese identity, formulated through the Taiwan Literature movement and its adherent debates on national identity. This, in turn, culminated in the actionization of popular resistance from intellectual dissent hitherto bound up in the conjugal family of the intimate sphere (Habermas, 1962/1989, p. 54), spurring challenges to the ruling authorities (the KMT-run state). Furthermore, democratic values articulated in the literary public sphere became the abstract laws that created a new, Taiwan-centric political consciousness.

As more and more members of the literary public sphere became intelligentsia, the *Dangwai* movement was formed. Mobilizing with strategies and worldviews directly drawn from the Taiwan Literature movement and the literary public sphere, the *Dangwai* movement led by intelligentsia actionized public dissent in ways that created the DPP. The DPP’s utilization of public dissent and their massive popularity throughout the years, from group to political party to the ruling party of Taiwan, underscores how civic tasks can predict political tasks with enough power to even start a revolution and found a democracy.

This article shows how literature can act as a networked social space of political repression and resistance, refracting broader contestations over national sovereignty, self-determination, and identity. In this regard, this article has demonstrated how the Taiwanese case offers a sensitizing device for the uniqueness of political consciousness born in postcolonial democracies in general. Unlike Anglo-American democracies, civil society in Taiwan was oriented around a local history of oppression. Domestic policies and literature thus came to inform a culturally unique form of postcolonial political consciousness. Created in position to a conception of an alien state—a mainland Chinese occupation—it inflamed and continues to inflame civic and political relations between the Taiwanese and mainland Chinese societies through competing visions of ethnic identification and national imaginaries.

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Notes

1. This refracts the tension between Habermas’s “lifeworld” (civil society) as the combination of culture, society, and personality vis-à-vis “system” as a repressive state seeking ideological and social control (Baxter, 1987).

2. The public sphere conceived by Habermas, after all, is not a physical space, but a set of behaviors, norms, and practices among a private people gathering as a public (Habermas, 1962/1989, p. 27).

3. Habermas’s example of the Physiocrats underscores this fact (Habermas, 1962/1989, p. 55), who, as Enlightenment French economists, began considering public opinion’s integration into monarchy or the sovereign, to the effect of establishing rule with “better” public opinion.

4. Although some participation came from transnational ties (in the United States), the call for democracy and the politicization of literary discourses about civil liberty were predominantly domestic efforts spearheaded by local networks of writers.

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