Teaching Asian Canadian Women’s Fictions to Undergraduates in Taiwan: Perspective and Design

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Widespread global transformations, the consequent evolution of English and American Studies, and the increasing attention paid to ethnic studies and minority discourse are the important factors conducive to the restructuring of contemporary literary studies in the world. Scholars and teaching professionals in Taiwan, for instance, have responded vigorously to the global changes. They now devote their painstaking efforts as well as energy not only to the studies of post-colonialism, World literatures in English, minority discourse, feminism, and other modern forms of literary investigation, but also to the introduction of various kinds of western critical theories in university curricula. Consequently, a wide spectrum of courses, such as "The Literature of the Third World," "Postmodern Fiction," "Feminist Fiction," "Postcolonial Literature," "The New Literatures in English," "Asian-American/Asian Canadian Literature," and the like, not only find their way in the syllabi of the university curriculum but also gain popularity among both undergraduates and graduates. To cope with the changes in university curriculum, arouse students’ interest, and foster the image of Asian Canadian literature in Taiwan become my aims in offering an upper-level undergraduate course entitled “Asian Canadian Women Fictions.”

Asian Canadian literature, though considered to be one of the components of the Canadian literary tradition, has not been given much attention in the academic circles in Taiwan. It has not yet attained its rightful place in our university curriculum. As an obvious form of multiculturalism, it must be considered in regard to its sociological and political antecedents.

It is fashionable also to treat ethnicity in the light of other theoretical concepts such as feminism, minority discourse, and the re-definition of canons. Although not neglecting these relations, this upper-level undergraduate course will focus primarily on the study of fictions written by some of the well-known Asian Canadian women writers and on the analysis of the qualities which have always been considered most important to literary works, and the truth in their depiction of human life and experience. From this perspective, the course will also place a special emphasis on the delineation of feminist principles, ethnic political goals, gender identities and relations, relationships between dominant cultures, racism, and the experience as well as
attitudes of the fictional characters as ordinary human beings. Since the autobiographical element is strong in each of these works, the course will also seek to analyze their personal or individual strains from those depending upon social and national backgrounds. My focus will be entirely on fictions written by women because novels are not only the genre most readily available in Taiwan but also the most popular. The texts, which are selected because of their thematic affinities, particularly their treatment of feminist issues, include Sky Lee’s *Disappearing Moon Café* (1990), Joy Kogawa’s *Obasan* (1983), Hiromi Goto’s *Chorus of Mushrooms* (1994), Evelyn Lau’s *Runaway: Diary of a Street Girl* (1989), and Lydia Kwan’s *This Place Called Absence: A Novel* (2000). Our textual analysis of these narratives will concentrate on such elements as structure, thematics, feminist issues, major moments of development, and other techniques. A list of discussion topics for each novel serving as guidelines will be distributed to students to aid in their pre-class preparation and reading.

My major concern is to find out how Taiwanese college students, who are equipped with the knowledge of Chinese and Anglo-American literatures but not with Asian Canadian sensibilities and experience with Canadian life, would react to and interact with these texts. Would "inside" knowledge of Chinese and Anglo-American culture affect the students’ level of comprehension? To what degree would the Taiwanese students identify with the fictional characters? As a point of departure, *Obasan* will be used in this paper as an example to illustrate my points.