

Imagining Co-Prosperity: Imperial Japan and the Literary Sphere of Great East Asia, 1937-1945

【Abstract】

This dissertation examines the entanglement of memory, history and cultural experience within the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere during the Second Sino-Japanese War or Greater East Asia War between 1937 and 1945. From a comprehensive perspective of boundary crossing, this dissertation intends to study the conceptualization and formation of a unified East Asian literary ideal and its literary and cultural institutions by examining the discourse of a Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere in the context of Japanese Imperialism. It further explores the reception and transformation of knowledge, power, and cultural struggles shaped by this literary construction within the cultural sphere. Through the observation of the process of wartime mobilization and the development of imperial ideology, this dissertation reveals that the Japanese Empire intended to implant the image of an imagined community in Japan, the Japanese colonies, and occupied areas. By enlisting this imagined community, the Japanese Imperial would forge a cooperative institution, the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, within which “Asia is One.” On the other hand, intellectuals in different parts of Japanese East Asia adopted different positions in response to the imposition of this imagined Co-Prosperity Sphere. By scrutinizing their responses, we will discern these writers’ shifting positions and diverse strategies of “collaboration” under different types of rule and across various regions.

The dissertation traces the progress of Japanese Imperialism as the discursive center of the East Asia Literary Sphere. Five regions from the Chinese character-using portions of the empire were chosen as case studies: Japanese colonies such as Taiwan, Korea, as well as puppet regimes like those in Manchukuo, and occupied North and Central China. By surveying the literary performances in these East Asian regions that were under the influenced of the discourse of Great East Asia, we could get past the surface and scrutinize the reality of the ideology of the Japanese Literary Co-Prosperity Sphere. The Greater East Asian Literary Movement was a byproduct of the development of Japanese nationalism. All literary activities were manipulated by the Japanese state apparatus, including the establishment of writers’ alliance, the dispatching of the Pen Writers’ Brigade, the writing of Patriotic Literature, as well as the reportage from Conscript Writers. The discourse of *Hakkō ichiu* (All the world under one roof) became the core of Japanese national ideology. Japanese became the sole language taught in schools throughout the Japanese empire in an attempt to replace ties of blood and ethnicity with a linguistic affiliation. Through this linguistic

unity, Imperial Japan fostered the unity of an “East Asian ethnicity.” Writing in diverse genres such as War Literature, Labor Literature, Increasing Production Literature and National Literature, Japanese writers in different parts of East Asia manifested the imperialist dream of a Greater East Asia. Moreover, through the establishment of organizations such as the Association of Literary Patriotism, writers in the Greater East Asia Literary Sphere gained a legitimate channel to communicate and exchange their ideas on literature. In other words, East Asian writers constructed and developed their own discourses of “Literary Co-Prosperity” within this context.

【Keywords】

Greater East Asian Literature, Assembly of Writers, Literary Co-Prosperity, Patriotic Literature, Crossing Boundary, Imagination.

