"Crisis" Discourse and the Study of Literature

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John Searle may be right in that 20th-century American education has regularly pronounced itself as being in a state of crisis, from the aftershock of Sputnik to the era of "Johnny Can't Read" (85), yet the discourse of crisis since the 1980s seems to have increased both in intensity and complexity in recent publications within the field of literary studies. While the characterization of what that "crisis" is varies from one critic to another; for once, all seem to be anxiously calling attention to the present state of that discipline, which many agree, though based upon quite different diagnoses, is in dire need of housekeeping.

The intensity of the crisis discourse concerning the state of literary studies in the US may have much to do with the discursive convergence of various social and political forces on the one academic field that has come to be seen as offering optimal room for cultural-political debate. The contest for the power to formulate/interpret the alleged crisis thus constitutes the vicissitudes of a hegemonic process in which involved parties struggle to create a sort of "world picture" in which the shape of literary studies is to locate its point of reference. And as comparative studies of the discursive maneuvers surrounding institutional change could shed light on the varied function and operation of discourse within different cultural and institutional contexts, the crisis discourse generated by the P[olitical] C[orrectness] debate in the US could very well serve as a point of departure from which reflections could be done upon the institutional status of and the hegemonic process surrounding English studies in Taiwan.

"Crisis" of Culture

Participants in the cultural political debate in the US are not unaware of the gravity of its impact. Michael Berube keenly observes that by 1993 discursive maneuvers initiated by the cultural right had already successfully "altered the terrain of American cultural politics" to such an extent that various developments on the

cultural and political scenes have come to be seen as malicious faces of the same beast, namely continental philosophy, whose contemporary embodiment is to be found in none other than the thriving theories in the field of literary studies (12). Thus, what began in 1988 as deliberations by the Academic Senate to change or retain the eight-year-old "core reading list" (of 15 required western classics plus other major works) for the Western civilization course required of all freshmen at Stanford University--a curricular reform geared mainly toward new concerns within the literary profession as well as toward changing configurations of the student population--quickly developed into a national debate when the cultural right effectively characterized the curricular reform as a crisis that would lead to no less than "the decline of the West" (Gates & Clifton).

Such accusations certainly would not stop at the gate of individual campuses. The "plot," allegedly initiated by ethnic minorities and feminists to depreciate the classics, thus putting an end to long-standing cultural values, is traced all the way back to the radical movements of the 1960s, which are said to have given birth to the national policy of affirmative action (which the right has long denounced as "reverse discrimination") and the social movement for equal rights for women (which the right deems as likewise disrupting the merit system in employment and education). Couched within such a discourse of cultural decline and political conspiracy, the curricular reform at Stanford and similar changes in other universities take on a new significance. To the cultural right, the reforms are clear signs of a collective loss of nerve and faith in American education, which capitulates to ideological demands and thus lowers intellectual standards. The recent institution of speech codes on some racially sensitive college campuses in response to the increasingly frequent exchange of racially provocative statements is further perceived as another plot to intimidate those of the conservative political persuasion.

Significantly, antagonism has been directed at the field of literary studies where, according to the right, those ethnic minorities and feminists have been brewing their radical ideas under the banner of postmodernism, "a strange radical ideology that decries the United States and the West as hopelessly oppressive and that focuses on the reactionary prejudices of Western culture"; in place of this western culture, the radicals allegedly emphasize "hyperethnicity, Afrocentrism, and other notions of the avant-garde" (Berman 2-3). Such fundamental shifts in tone and in approach, perceived as taking place in the bedrock of American cultural education--the English studies--and thought to be inimical to the contemplative and humanistic study of literature and culture, intensify the sense of crisis felt by the cultural right. And as recent developments in the field of literary studies come to be discursively presented as the root of all evil, engendering unfairness or inequality along sexual or racial lines in addition to downright unpatriotic concepts--such a characterization taps right into the deeply ingrained sense of uneasiness felt by many Americans in a time

of economic and political stagnation, an uneasiness that culminated in the by now infamous "P[olitical] C[orrectness]" debate, making its way onto the covers or the front pages of nation-wide journals and newspapers in the fall of 1990.

The cultural context in which intellectual developments in the field of literary studies would come to be regarded as of national importance has been prepared by another series of crisis-sounding discourse in the previous decade. In 1984, William Bennett, then chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities, has criticized the lack of focus and standards in university education in a pamphlet called *To Reclaim a Legacy*. The unexpected best sellers of Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind* (1987) and E. D. Hirsch's *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* (1987) added a sense of urgency to the declining quality of American culture and brought the issues to a wider public beyond the confines of the academia. These and other documents point their fingers at the humanities, English studies in particular, for the gradual disintegration of a common culture or ideal for Americans.[1] According to this crisis discourse, changes in the curriculum and course offerings for the past 15 to 20 years have created an education program in which the classical texts have increasingly been put on the back burner while theoretical analyses and the so-called minority works, works that are considered by these crisis critics to be not of comparable quality, have come to command critical attention and pedagogical popularity. It is within this context of diminishing control over the curriculum as well as shifting emphasis in research and pedagogy that the right situates the crisis of culture/literature.[2]

From Cultural Heritage to Institutional Well-Being

Whether or not curricular reforms in the western civ course would lead to a decline in the great American cultural heritage is certainly not a question to be settled empirically. Yet even before and during the time when the cultural right was launching its attacks, members of the literary profession themselves had already been proposing interpretations that would help illuminate the seeming crisis state of confusion in which they found their own discipline. Such self-reflexive discursive efforts thus inadvertently form a line of defense, however feeble, against the assaults of the right, displacing questions of cultural heritage, which may further divide the literary community, with questions of institutional well-being, which seek to establish a sense of solidarity within the community.

William Cain, for one, zeroes in on the widespread feeling of discontent and in some places bitterness in English studies, which he thinks derives from the "confusions and inequalities at the center of the discipline" (247). In Cain's delineation, the privilege and attention that have been accorded the increasingly prosper-

ing theorists have at the same time isolated them within their own discourse, leaving little attention to the main pedagogical and critical realities of daily operations in the field. In other words, it is the duty of the new theorists to concretize their revolutionary reconceptualizations into workable and teachable pedagogies if any integrated approach to the reform of English studies is to be achieved.

While Cain characterizes this lack of communication as an unfortunate "gap . . . between pedagogy and research" (248) for which he thinks the theorists must shoulder a major portion of responsibility[3], others attribute the communication crisis in literary studies to an institutional setting in which the pressure of specialization and professionalization has nudged out any possibility of disciplinary integration. Since the mid-80s, researchers have been grappling with the institutional history of English studies, a sign that the identity and operation of the literary institution is becoming increasingly problematic. These studies illustrate that the historical development of the literary institution did not emerge from any coherent educational philosophy or cultural project, but evolved as an accidental result of various historical and material conditions, serving to fulfil the "vision of national, cultural unity" at critical historical moments (Graff, *Professing* 71; Lindenberger 153), or routinizing the flow of research grants and promotional requirements at another (Culler 29-37). Thus, whether to justify its continued importance in an academic marketplace increasingly oriented toward practicality, or to demonstrate its ameliorative function in a society riddled with problems of linguistic and cultural diversity (often times interpreted as "linguistic and cultural deficiency"), the field of English studies has found it easy to adjust to and accommodate various demands by simply creating new programs or courses. For many, herein lies the crisis of literary studies: in this gradual process of mere aggregation, "the proliferation of fields . . . has happened in a way that paralyzes conflict and community and terminates accountability to outsiders" (Graff, "The University" 65).

The seemingly haphazard developments in literary studies may be imputed to what Gerald Graff has described as "professional opportunism" (*Professing* 80), yet even as such, the opportunism is born of an institutional context, which Jonathan Culler has aptly called "the entrepreneurial structure of universities" (40). According to Culler, U.S. universities, in an effort to win visibility and intellectual respectability, has adopted the capitalistic mode of expansion of production by allocating large sums of funds to establish scholarly journals, hold symposiums and conferences, and provide visiting professorships, all of which prove receptive to "new contributions" to the field. Increases in undergraduate enrollment in the 60s and 70s also contributed to the dramatic expansion of courses and programs, thus making easy provisions to accommodate various new critical possibilities without ever engaging existent approaches. Even publishing companies bent on enlarging markets for textbook sales chipped in by funding and thus encouraging works which bring forth new

critical orientations. Consequently, a whole context is created where an emphasis on new research or publication as a major criterion for professional evaluation finds its material foundation. Furthermore, when such institutional practices constitute the very operation and identity of literary studies, even those who criticize it admit that as long as the entrepreneurial structure of universities remains in place, any attempt to move beyond it would only prove to be one more addition to that structure (Culler 40). For many, such self-perpetuating structures have brought on the real crisis in literary studies.

The encouragement of professionalization and specialization without simultaneous efforts for integration and communication may have brought on an immanent crisis within literary studies, yet it is widely acknowledged that other "real" forces are also moving in to affect the shape of literary studies, thus creating another kind of crisis. To begin with, even the most optimistic are unable to escape the growing awareness that shrinking budgets and diminishing financial resources in the weakening American economy have made it difficult for the humanities, English studies included, to maintain its momentum of growth since the 1960s.[4] In an age that prizes marketability and practicality, English studies is hard pressed to prove itself capable of providing tangible demonstrations of result, either in teaching the lucid writing styles needed in a business-dominated world, or, at least in teaching the basic reading and writing skills desperately needed by a major world power with an unbelievable percentage of the functionally illiterate (Ho, "Orality" 75-77). The burgeoning interest since the late 1970s in composition research and various kinds of innovative programs of reading/writing--carried out aggressively by departments of English rather than by the school of education--dramatizes this legitimation crisis, leaving even less room for the liberal notion of a humanistic literary education.

For many, the impact of recent budgetary crunch upon the discipline extends farther than merely diverting funds to support research projects and pedagogical developments in the more "practical" directions. As a matter of fact, even those who are not department heads have now recognized and are calling attention to the fact that economic concerns are taking their toll on the practical operations of the field. For as higher education struggles for "the most efficient use" of its financial resources, a new class of education managers have come into power since the 1970s and series of retrenchment measures have been put into place. While they are fully aware that such a "marketplace philosophy" is "more amenable to corporate than to student interests" (Lauter 179), faculty members seem powerless within an institutional setup which puts power in the hands of politicians and administrators but retains little respect for intellectual autonomy.

Furthermore, under the pressure of retrenchment, a growing sense of bitterness and disillusionment has become apparent in the humbled and shrinking employment marketplace of the English studies. For the increasing army of unemployed or occa-

sionally employed professionals in English studies has produced a large population of the euphemistically called "less-established" teachers, who are consistently locked in the "marginal" courses of mainly basic reading and writing.[5] The marginalization of their professional status as untenured faculty, along with the proletarianization of their lives as a result of instability in employment, brings little sense of achievement or hope for these professionals. Since they have to face the day-to-day reality of unfulfilling teaching assignments and ill-prepared students, it has been noticed that many are showing signs of cynicism and despair (Lauter 12). And as budget pressure deepens and an increasing proportion of the literary community suffers from this kind of low morale, such a general mood is in no way conducive to the teaching of literature.

Discursive formulations of the crisis of literary studies do not stop at disciplinary boundaries. If the crisis discourse of the cultural right has focused attention upon on-going curricular reforms in literary studies, and if the crisis discourse of some on the left has called attention to the material forces presently re-shaping the field, there are still others who would describe the crisis of literary studies in relation to a much larger crisis context. Alvin Kernan, for one, ascribes the crisis of literary studies to the wide-spread process of disintegration of all print institutions. Kernan examines the newspaper industry and libraries and schools of library sciences, institutions that have grown up around the Gutenberg revolution, and finds that all of them are suffering from reduced popularity and funding (10-12). Even the book industry is now overrun by the laws of profitability; in other words, only those books that promise a sizable profit margin get published (Kernan 13). As information is increasingly made readily available mainly through visual images or voices of television, radio, and computer monitors--means that are favored by the younger generation--the once sacred and revered skill of reading seems less and less valued. And as reading recedes into the background of everyday life, literary studies programs find themselves gradually losing hold of the foundation of their existence, the one important justification that has kept the programs at the center of education. Some of these programs are now under process to be restructured to teach mainly basic writing and reading skills or technical or business writing, skills that are deemed more practical and useful for purposes of employment. Other programs have ventured into cultural studies or communication studies to acquire their justification for existence, a move that for Kernan has meant the further marginalization of literary concerns. Thus, in Kernan's somewhat bleak picture, what began as innovative technological advances have unwittingly created a survival crisis for literary studies, which no limited renovation in curriculum could reverse.

If the crisis of literary studies can be seen as making up part of the crisis of all print institutions, then there is no reason why it cannot be located within even larger pictures. Both Patrick Brantlinger and Herbert Lindenberger believe that the state of

the discipline is homologous to that of the sociopolitical context in which it is embedded. For, as Brantlinger echoes Terry Eagleton, if the humanities embody the profoundest expression of a society's ideals, then "The crisis in education only reflects the larger crises of American and European world-hegemony" (7). Or, to put it more precisely, "Stanford's recent move toward a more globally oriented course recognizes at once the increasingly heterogeneous make-up of the country's college-student population and America's entanglement in a world economy over which it can no longer exercise the control it once enjoyed" (Lindenberger 162). In other words, the crisis state of the discipline rises out of the crisis of the American society as a whole, and as such, the recent move in English studies toward the new interdisciplinary practice of cultural studies--as "a coalescing movement, a sort of magnet gathering the various theories that now often go under the label 'theory' into a problematic and perhaps impossible synthesis"--presents a positive response to that crisis (Brantlinger 10).

Displacement & Democratization

These varied reflections upon the changing status and operation of the literary institution have inserted a number of variables into the crisis discourse of the cultural right, and may work to dilute the latter's attempt to dictate the shape and development of literary studies. After all, "The lurid rhetoric of crisis seeks to transform our situation from a hapless, even ridiculous diffusion to a decisive, focused condition of choice" (Culler 43). In other words, the rhetoric of crisis is a war cry issued forth to gather up disparate energies so that some definite action can be taken in one direction or another. While such centralizing tendencies in the discourse of crisis usually entail power maneuvers which may eventually silence differences and produce the discursive effect of perpetuating or creating unequal power relations; yet, at the same time the participation of diverse voices in the crisis discourse at least draws attention to a variety of relevant issues, thus creating opportunities for discussion and/or argumentation, which may further clarify and enrich the field and perhaps even work toward bridging the gaps of communication or confrontation that many in the field have been calling for.

To put it differently, within contexts where intellectual autonomy and open exchanges of opinion differences have been more or less built into the institutional setup as common practice, the emergence of a crisis discourse could, despite the possible danger of power manipulation, lead to some form of mobilization and thus the possible initiation of a democratized process in which the future of an academic field may be debated and new visions may be formulated. Within other cultural contexts, however, a discourse of crisis, especially when it is solely generated by

forces outside the academic circles and propagated through channels outside the discipline, may be working only to create conditions in which decision-making processes would be monopolized and the proliferation and discussion of other possible alternatives discouraged.

The case in Taiwan's English studies programs may prove to be a good example. If the discourse of crisis in English studies has become the contested field for a cultural-political reconfiguration of the U.S. on various levels, and members of the literary profession have been to various degrees mobilized to reconceptualize the field, then it is all the more interesting to observe the somewhat nonchalant attitude with which English studies in Taiwan faces recent changes in the government's educational policies, policies that govern the shape and function of the discipline. To a large extent, English studies programs remain quite composed even as a set of national concerns steps up its demands for adjustments in the nature and future of the literary institution--adjustments that may very well lead to a further marginalization of the study of "literature," whether narrowly or broadly conceived. In fact, along with recent developments in national education policy, the limited "crisis talk" initiated from outside the academic circles is hoping to create an atmosphere of public opinion which would sooner or later force the English studies programs to re-examine their orientations.

Education Policy & Public Opinion

Policy changes have been frequent and dramatic in the rapidly evolving society of Taiwan. Yet, significantly, recent announcements of policy initiatives concerning Taiwan's higher education have been conspicuously (coincidentally?) in tune with sensational reports released by the popular press. Or, to put it differently, much like the heated debate over the humanities in the United States in the early 1990s, the popular media in Taiwan have recently demonstrated great interest in the quality and function of higher education and its curriculum, and have even taken it upon themselves to prescribe possible reforms, thus contributing to the creation of an atmosphere in which reform measures in certain directions would find favorable reception.

The most important show of such concerns over the state of higher education was organized by Taiwan's leading business magazine *Tian-Hsia* (*Commonwealth*) in the cover story of its August 1993 issue, which describes an emerging "crisis of white-collar unemployment" in Taiwan. In this special report on what the magazine terms "the misplacement of labor resources," complaints issued forth from various sectors of the business world, all charging that rapid expansion in higher education for the past ten years[6] has only created an over-abundance of graduates who are in fact unfit for the needs of businesses. In the eyes of the business world, these gradu-

ates are over-educated in the sense that an increasing number of students are entering the job market only after they have gotten advanced degrees, which usually mean better positions and higher salaries and thus more cost for the employer. Yet, these job-seekers are seen as under-educated in the sense that their college training has not in any way prepared them to meet the demands of business positions. Consequently, business owners claim that they have resorted to hiring for their white-collar positions those applicants with moderate formal education, who would not only be more susceptible to re-training but also be more receptive to demanding work and moderate pay. Such measures have created a serious crisis in employment patterns: college (and above) graduates hang in unemployment limbo or grudgingly settle for under-employment, while would-be blue-collar workers desperately needed by the business world in its manufacturing sectors prefer to go to college than enter the job market. Describing the "crisis" as that of a growing unemployment rate for the well-educated, thus a serious "mismatch" between labor resources and the needs of economic development, the *Tian-Hsia* report urges education officials to reexamine the situation and make adjustments in the curriculum and orientation of higher education so as to better serve the needs of the business world.[7]

The Ministry of Education was not unaware of the over-expansion problem in higher education. Over the summer of 1993 it had already initiated serious cuts in subsidies for the budgets of many colleges and universities, and decisions had been announced that even national universities would be required to raise as much as twenty percent of their own budgets by 1996. In the meantime, research projects were being slashed and visiting professorships scrapped. Rigidity measures were installed across the board in government-related institutions, including all national universities (Ho, "A Hard Rain"). Nevertheless, as the opportune appearance of the *Tian-Hsia* report demonstrates, further and more dramatic changes, changes that cement the close collaboration between education and economic development, are needed if the demands of the business world are to be met. And as the sensationalism of unemployment for the highly educated hit hard on a culture that has always put great faith in the power of education to improve chances of employment, numerous popular media jumped in with follow-up reports, and the reality of "white-collar unemployment" reached crisis status overnight. Under these circumstances, the Ministry of Education formally announced in December of 1993 that it was going to seriously curtail the expansion of higher education: not only will plans for new colleges and universities be frozen but existing departments or programs will be consolidated or simply eliminated in order to promote "flexible and integrated curricula" that would better suit "the overall needs of economic recovery and national construction" (Ho, "A Hard Rain").

Recent full-scale reforms in Taiwan's education policy initiated by the Ministry of Education since the lifting of Martial Law in 1987 have consistently attracted a

lot of attention and created a number of heated debates. Yet never had an announcement of reform policy arrived so timely in a context where public opinion had been so well ripened to receive it. The collaboration between the state, the media, and the agents of capital was carried out so perfectly that colleges and universities proved to be totally defenseless in the face of such a maneuver.

As the institutions of higher education dutifully braced themselves for the hard times, another frontal attack was issued by the business world, aiming this time at none other than English studies. This is especially unusual because concern over higher education has always been spread more or less evenly across the curriculum. No individual discipline--much less a highly favored discipline such as that of English language and literature[8]--has evoked concentrated discussion, which makes the following phenomenon all the more significant: for the first time in Taiwan's history of higher education, one academic field has been singled out by the popular press as significantly responsible for creating the crisis in Taiwan's slowing rate of national development.

English Studies & National Development

The frontal assault came in the form of a full-page investigative report in one of the leading newspapers in Taiwan, *China Times*, on October 5, 1994. The headline reads: "Without adequate language training, the so-called Asian-Pacific Communication-Transportation Center will go nowhere." Such a headline carries immense weight for the local context because developing Taiwan into a communication-transportation center for the whole Asian-Pacific rim is now being promoted by the government as a priority policy for Taiwan's future, a policy that promises to solve Taiwan's economic problems as its once proud labor-intensive manufacturing industries move to the more profitable labor market of Mainland China and as the upgrading to technology- and capital-intensive industries has been slow in the making. While such a vision holds out a wonderful picture for the future, the transformation of Taiwan into a communication-transportation oriented economy is not without its problems, as the report is quick to point out. For one thing, Singapore and Hong Kong, two areas equally equipped to play the role, will be tough competitors. The disadvantage of Taiwan, as the report goes on to state, is not a lack of capital, nor a weakness in will, but a shortage of qualified personnel to operate such a complicated internationally-oriented machine.

As the report zeroes in on this shortage of qualified personnel, English studies is picked out to shoulder the blame. For if such qualified personnel must first demonstrate mastery of the languages of international trade, then, the report asks the crucial question: where can the government turn to recruit the large number of

foreign language specialists who would make the international communication-transportation center possible? Within the Taiwan context, one would naturally assume that the foreign language departments--of which the English departments make up the majority--in Taiwan's universities and colleges could fulfill such a demand. Yet the investigative report flatly states that such expectations are doomed to be frustrated. Two facts are mentioned to support this harsh judgement. First of all, the business world in general has been having serious doubts about the capabilities of English graduates, who usually enter employment with little practical knowledge that would help them make sensible decisions in business dealings. Secondly, even in the limited aspect of language mastery, few graduates from the language departments have proven that their language capabilities are necessarily better than non-majors. As a result, business owners have turned to private language training institutes for prospective employees, or resort to sending their present employees overseas for on-the-job language training, both measures leading to extra costs for the business owners who believe that such costs could have been avoided if the language departments had "done their job right" in the first place. Venting such dissatisfaction felt by the business world, the investigative report then insinuates that it is the foreign language (English) departments which are to be blamed for failing to provide the desperately needed manpower for the future development of the country.

Interestingly, as the report goes on to portray the teaching practices of language departments, it becomes clear that the accusations are aimed mainly at the literary nature of English departments, for the latter's failure is described as resulting from "an exclusive concentration on the study of literature and too little effort to promote the desperately needed language training." In fact, the report alleges that many students who had originally been interested in the English(!) language before entering college gradually lose interest because the required literature courses are either unchallenging or too distant from real life to stimulate student interest or effort. In short, in choosing literary studies as their main orientation in teaching as well as research, the English departments have not only failed to fulfil the needs of a national policy, but also operated to frustrate prospective youths. The report thus concludes that thorough changes need to be made to remedy the situation.

One may wonder what these thorough changes may be. Well, two successful cases of desirable reform carried out by English departments at two marginal universities were cited in the report as exemplar. Significantly, both departments made it a point to turn away from literary studies in their new curricular orientation. Instead, they moved toward a renewed emphasis on intensive language training, plus ardent attention to practical courses geared toward the needs of the business world, such as "Techniques for Negotiation" or "Situational English." To add to the weight of such curricular reorientations, the report cites a well-known professor, Tsai Yuan-huang, from the most prestigious English department in Taiwan, who also happens to

support such a change of direction. According to this professor, the most urgent function of English departments at the present time is none other than the cultivation of foreign language specialists who could handle trade negotiations in this highly complex and competitive world. Three practical courses are proposed by him: one course on the actual operations at international negotiations, another on the behind-the-scene preparation of information and documents for the negotiation process, and a third one on problems that arise with cross-cultural contacts during negotiation. Only with such a dramatic change in orientation and curriculum, Professor Tsai insists, will we be able to gradually alleviate "the waste of educational resources and the apparent gap between foreign language education and the needs of our society." With the blessing from a renowned scholar and two success stories of localized reforms, the investigative report presents a clear message: English studies has to change with the times and the needs of the nation.[9]

The portrayal in the investigative report may present the English studies programs as hard-headed institutions that refuse to face the reality of a changing world picture. Yet as a matter of fact, the English departments, situated within a context in which government policy in education dictates the scope and direction of any academic discipline, had already begun, though in a very under-handed way, to sort out their options--even before the investigative report appeared. As the Ministry of Education had already made it a policy to move toward a more or less pluralistic approach to curriculum[10] and had informed the English departments to begin reconceptualizing themselves, the English departments had no other resort than to start seriously thinking about how to comply. Thus, consigned by the Ministry of Education and under the leadership of National Taiwan University, department heads and representatives have begun a series of close-door meetings and workshops in the summer of 1994 in an effort to discuss possible curriculum changes. The National Science Council has also entrusted other leading departments to conduct research projects in an effort to find out how teachers and students feel about their existent curriculum arrangements and graduation requirements. As the poll and the curriculum workshop are already forging the mood of change, however limited, within the academic circles, the practical effect of the investigative report in the popular media is thus a public announcement of the initiative of the business world to increase the momentum and dictate the direction for the reorientation of English studies programs.

Institutional Resilience

As much as the investigative report aims to provoke change in the function and operation of English departments, to its dismay, the English departments have not made any apparent move in that desired direction. In fact, no sense of crisis has

been noticed; nor has there been any discussion within the literary field in relation to the report. If there has been some talk of curricular reform, the momentum has come from within highly localized concerns, instead of the national and business-oriented concerns described in the investigative report. Such a cool response poses an interesting question for students of institutional history: if the academic circles in Taiwan have constantly complained about a lack of intellectual autonomy, which means political or other concerns have often tainted the operations of the intellectual community, then how is one to explain the resilience shown by the English departments in response to the demands from outside forces? The inherent strength of humanistic ideals would not suffice, for these ideals have been compromised on many previous occasions. So, is there something in the present institutional status of the English departments in Taiwan that enables them to withstand assaults from the business world and the popular media, without ever having to actively make an effort to deflect the crisis discourse, as their American counterparts have been obliged to do?

The answer, I believe, may have much to do with the historical moment and the function of the literary institution in it. To be more precise, for the past two decades the Taiwan government has made it a prime objective to promote academic professionalism through the allocation of huge funds for research grants, research awards, new graduate programs, overseas research projects, etc.--such promotions themselves make up part of Taiwan's efforts to upgrade itself to the rank of developed nations. Within such a context of growing competition to win recognition of intellectual excellence, the English departments are putting increasing emphasis on academic research, not only encouraging their long-standing faculty members to venture into scholarly work, but also adopting recruiting policies that put intellectual sophistication and research potentials along side teaching capabilities. The influx of new Ph.D.'s from advanced nations caught up in the latter's employment crunch has certainly accelerated such transformations for the past five years. As the new blood usually bring with them the most up-to-date scholarly trends as well as a full line of new professional training, the English departments have shown immense progress in demonstrating their competency either within the realm of traditional literary studies or in the new areas of theoretical studies. In contrast, research related to language teaching has not been considered as useful for promoting the status of English departments on the international or intellectual level. After all, areas such as TESOL are not deemed as the peak of academic research in the advanced countries, either. This difference in concentration has further tilted the English departments toward more research in literary studies.

As serious academic research in literature, whether narrowly or broadly conceived, is now considered the prime objective of any aspiring English department, and as these research efforts have been richly rewarded and highly valued by state institutions of education; any proposal by the business world, which might entail the

severe curtailment of literary studies--and in their place substitute language training as the main project for English departments--would not win much audience.[11] After all, the research efforts of the English departments are on another level quite in tune with the government's desperate desire to promote an image of intellectual sophistication abreast with the advanced countries. In fact, a fairly large portion of funding for higher education has been devoted to exchange programs for world-class scholars, large-scale international conferences, etc., all in an effort to boost the image of Taiwan. In other words, what the English departments are doing professionally in literary studies is just as significant for the state's objective of upgrading national image as further developments in the industrial and business sectors.

Discursive Self-Defense

Tenacious as the English departments are in holding unto literary research as their main interest while resisting demands of reform issued by the business world, two other sources of pressure still demand our serious attention. The first one has to do with the problem of funding. As the Ministry of Education has made it a policy for universities to start looking into funding themselves partially instead of relying on government funding, the universities have few places to turn to besides the usually well-financed businesses. As it happens, in order to get pledges of funding from the well-to-do class, the universities find themselves suddenly at the mercy of the business world, at the mercy of the very people whose influence the universities have been trying to resist. Such a difficult and at times embarrassing situation calls for the highest degree of operational intelligence and political sensitivity if the universities hope to achieve any kind of balance between intellectual well-being and financial security.

Then there is the second problem of public opinion in the making. For the special report in the popular media functions to create an atmosphere in which a sense of crisis permeates popular concerns over individual employment and national development to such an extent that popular opinion may become quite critical of the professional practices of the English departments. If such public opinion is strong enough and clear enough in its demands, the Ministry of Education would be forced to take heed if it hopes to maintain credibility and authority in a politically volatile context such as Taiwan. As a matter of fact, students on various campuses have already been discussing among themselves in their own channels the possibility of a "practical turn" in curricular concerns so as to improve their own chances of employment in an increasingly competitive job market. Such public and practical demands could join hands with the concerns of the business world and force the English departments into making changes in their goals and orientations, changes which may

be better suited to the operation of capital than the study of literature, however narrowly or broadly conceived.

Before such pressures reach the point of explosion, the Taiwan literary community may want to learn from its U.S. counterpart and devise some strategies for self-preservation. That is, a line of defense might be put up by members of the profession to discursively deflect assaults launched by the business world. After all, the close collaboration between education and economic development has only been assumed or demanded, not discussed nor disputed. If the academic community hopes to forestall or at least withstand such assaults on its autonomy, it may have to initiate some serious discussions over the nature and goal of college education and its complex relationship to the state or state policies of development. It may also want to explore the precarious relationship between English education and training for business negotiations. Such democratized discussions may mobilize more members to actively engage in reconceptualizing or invigorating the discipline itself.

In the meantime, discursive self-defense will also have to dispel the accusation that English departments have "created the crisis" in foreign language training. If the English departments hope to continue providing training in the sophisticated understanding of other cultures as they have always claimed to be doing, then they should turn around and ask the business world to examine the real sites where basic language training should be taking place. After all, students have been given at least six years of English before they reach the English departments; they should have been well prepared for advanced work instead of still struggling with the most basic language skills and making it hard for the English departments to carry on their intended course of training and cultivation. In fact, it is widely agreed that the teaching of English in the junior and senior high schools is notorious for concentrating upon paper and pencil examinations to such an extent that students have acquired little mastery of the English language except associating it with the anxiety over exams and possible penalties following the exams. In that case, college-level English departments should not be required to shoulder full responsibility for problems having to do with the whole education system and its practices. If the business world expects the universities and colleges to really "do their job right," then it will have to begin actively promoting dramatic changes in the lower levels of education first, not only getting rid of the exam-based education practices but also adopting communication-based language teaching programs. When better-prepared students reach the English departments, the latter would be better able to achieve the kind of truly sophisticated cultural and communicative results that are desperately needed by the business world as well as by other sectors of the society. In fact, such profound results have always been what the English departments aim to bring into existence despite all the difficulties associated with poor student preparation.

The cynically-minded may question the effectiveness of such discursive efforts.

After all, the crisis discourse initiated by the business world is issuing forth a serious challenge to the complacency of English studies in Taiwan. Yet, while the institutional setup may provide some kind of temporary buffer for the discipline, the irony is that within the disempowered context in which Taiwan's English departments find themselves, the afore-mentioned discursive maneuvers of displacement and deflection are probably the only viable forms of self-defense.

Endnotes

1. Both Bloom and Hirsch advocate a generalisst program in which all students should acquire a minimum familiarity with select elements of the American culture, and in that sense, the tendency of over-specialization and over-professiionalization in literary studies is quite undesirable. Yet, for others, such as Gerald Graff and Michael Warner, such comparmentalization in literary studies is nothing unique. In fact, "the professionalization of literary studies . . was part of a broader social transformation," one in which all sectors of social life came to be increasingly dominated by similar organizational patterns. As Graff and Warner see it,

> Both the left and the right view such homologies as ominous, but for different reasons. The right sees in them the encroachment of scientific and technological organization into the citadel of numane values; the left sees in them the complicity of high culture with the ideology of industrial and postindustrial capitalism. Much of the attack on professional literary studies, in sum, is really an attack on the nature of modern society as much as on any given program for criticism. (11)

2. One way to dissuade the right's warning of crisis is provided by theorist Paul De Man, who understands the crisis in literary studies as "the sense of urgency, the impatient competitiveness with which the various [social sciences] disciplines vie for leadership [within the literary discipline]" (5), thus creating a threat to once for all "do away with literature" (18). This sense of crisis may coincide with that of many traditionalists who feel literature is about to be crowded out of the English curriculum. However, instead of lamenting the possible "death of literature," De Man's response to the seeming crisis is the triumphant deconstructionist announcement that "literature is everywhere; what they call anthropology, linguistics, psychoanalysis is nothing but literature reappearing, like the Hydra's head, in the very spot where it had supposedly been suppressed" (18)--which the right will undoubtedly dismiss as nothing but sophistry.

3. Such a gap between pedagogy and research is nothing new, according to Gerald

Graff and Michael Warner's research of the institutionalization of the literary discipline. As early as Harvard University in the 1870s, the teaching of composition as an important function of English departments has posed serious challenges to the majority of the faculty whose scholarly interests and expertise usually lie somewhere else (See Graff & Warner 66-67).

4. The sense of crisis in this aspect is so strong that discussions of administrative strategies to deal with the financial crunch have become a constant presence in the Bulletin of the Association of Departments of English, the professional organization mostly directly reflecting the institutional well-being of literary studies.

5. Fluctuations in the population and employment patterns are also contributing to changing the operation of the field of literary studies. As government funding poured into language programs in universities and colleges in the 1960's under the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) and student grants and loans were provided to encourage admission--most likely spurred on by worries over the Soviet Union's ventures in space as well as in other parts of the globe--the literary departments experienced a phenomenal period of growth. In fact, before "area studies" emerged in the 1970s to share the task of providing foreign language training, it was widely believed that the literature departments could provide the best training in the languages and literatures of other cultures. The expansion of the language and literature departments at that time was so dramatic that Culler later concludes that such "over-expansion. . . led to the job crisis of the 1970s and 1980s" (27). As the humanities gradually loses its footing in undergraduate enrollment, and as the baby boom comes to a lull, an overstock of faculty members or prospective faculty members faces the difficult situation of cutting out positions in a dwindling market.

6. The total number of colleges and universities has reached 50, almost doubling that of ten years ago. On top of that, the Ministry of Education has already approved the establishment of 31 new colleges and universities before the year 2000 (Zhuang 28).

7. The Ministry of Education has since the second half of 1993 reversed its policy to expand higher education: no new universities would be established in the near future and plans of adding departments or graduate programs to existing universities and colleges would encounter more rigid screening before being approved by the Ministry. In fact, the Ministry is even studying possibilities of slashing or at least combining departments that are considered to be not in compliance with the needs of national policies.

8. For the past 30 years, departments of English Language and Literature have consistently been ranked the most favorite among all humanities departments, requiring the

highest entrance exam scores from incoming freshmen.

9. It needs to be pointed out that the investigative report on white-collar unemployment and the subsequent investigative report on the failure of foreign language (English) departments are both oriented toward the needs of the business world and the policies of national economic development. In that sense, they could very likely be seen as successive efforts initiated by the business world to shape higher education as well as the language and literature departments and their curriculums so as to better suit the needs of capital flow.

10. The initiative to promote pluralistic curricula, a liberalization on all levels of education, parallels Taiwan's efforts toward liberalization in its political and economic structures for the past seven years.

11. Whether facing tension within or pressure from the outside, not all members of the foreign language (English) departments are equally alarmed by such developments. For a large percentage of faculty members in Taiwan's foreign language departments come from backgrounds varying from linguistics to language teaching. As the departments struggle to upgrade themselves professionally and academically, the language-oriented faculty members, who have always shown more interest in teaching than researching, have felt the crunch. Their sense of crisis and marginalization has now found relief because popular opinion, in the noble cause of national development, is now demanding a program of reform that would greatly increase the importance of their line of work. As a result, these teachers have suddenly found new strength to struggle for legitimation and respectability. The demands of students, who are more concerned about the practical outcome of their education than the state of health of their discipline, coincide with the thrust of the investigative report, thus further complicating the reforms being promoted by theory-minded faculties.

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