Foreword to the Special Issue on Yang K’uei

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Biographical Sketch

Yang K’uei (1906-1985), the first Taiwanese writer recognized in the literary circles of Japan during the period of Japanese rule, referred to himself as a “humanitarian socialist.” He was a pragmatic author who used his literary works to pursue the realization of his ideals, while throwing himself into the farmers and laborers movement as well as promotion of social, political and cultural reforms. He was born in Hsinhua, Tainan Prefecture. His original name was Yang Kuei, which is associated with Yang Kuei-fei, a favorite concubine of Emperor Xuanzong (685-762) of the Tang Dynasty, which led to him often being laughed at when he was in junior high school. In 1932, when he started to publish his creative works, the senior writer Lai Ho (1894-1943) suggested “Yang K’uei” for him as a penname. This would associate him with the hero Li K’uei, a brave and chivalrous character in Shuihu zhuan [Outlaws of the Marsh], who had a strong sense of justice and was ready to help the weak. This would imply that Yang cherished a life-long ideal of speaking out, upholding justice, and fighting for the weak and poor in society. Thus, most of his works
were published under the penname Yang K’uei.

Yang K’uei was born to a poor family of workers. In 1915, at the age of ten, when he was studying at a public elementary school, the Jiaobanian Incident, also called the Xilaian Japanese Resistance Incident, occurred. It was an armed riot of unprecedented scale by the Han Chinese in Taiwan, and it caused the Japanese Governor General to dispatch military troops and police to search the mountain areas and arrest the perpetrators. Yang saw with his own eyes the gun carriages of Japanese soldiers passing in front of his house, and heard that the Taiwanese were considered “bandits” and slaughtered. When he later saw a book in a bookstore entitled Taiwan feizhi [Annals of Taiwanese Bandits], in which armed rebels against the Japanese were treated as bandits, it shocked him deeply and profoundly influenced his thoughts about resisting Japanese colonial rule later in his life. The reason he took the road of literature was to correct this fabricated “history” through his writing.

In 1922, after graduating from Hsinhua public elementary school, he entered the Tainan Prefecture Second Middle School. As a sixth grader, his class teacher was Numagawa Sadao, who introduced him to literature. During his three years at junior high, most of his time was spent reading extracurricular books on literature and philosophy found in the city library or purchased second-hand. He gravitated toward famous works by Russian and French writers, perhaps because resistance and rebellion were themes in those works. Among works of a philosophical nature he mostly read books on socialism. He was also particularly impressed by the anarchist ōsugi Sakae (1885-1923), and was greatly influenced by this forerunner of workers literature of the Taisho Period and the proletarian literature of the Showa Period.

In 1923, the Japanese Communist Party was established and quickly denounced as illegal by the Imperial Government. During Yang K’uei’s sojourn in Tokyo (1925–1927), in response to the newly established Communist Party, the labor movement.
and farmers movement were spreading, and this sowed the seeds of socialism in his mind. As he was influenced by left-wing ideology, he actively participated in labor movements and political movements.

In 1924, at the age of nineteen, he refused a traditional arranged marriage with a girl adopted by his family. Instead, he dropped out of high school and went to study in Japan. It was his intensive reading that convinced him to go study in Japan. This turned out to be the most crucial decision of his life. In the following year, he passed the exam and was admitted to night school in the Department of Literature and Arts, Special Division, Nihon University. He was a work-study student, and worked during the day as a newspaper carrier, cement worker, and jack-of-all-trades to support himself. This life experience served as the subject matter of his “Newspaper Carrier,” the story that made him famous.

In March 1927, Yang K’uei joined the “Social Science Study Division,” which was newly established by the Taiwanese Youth Association, a political organization of Taiwanese students studying in Japan. In the same year, he attended and supported the Korean anti-Japan public lecture, and was arrested for the first time. In September, in response to the formation of the Taiwanese farmers union, he returned to Taiwan to take part in social movements. He was elected Central Committee member and Standing Committee member of the union, and made the acquaintance of his lifelong companion, Yeh T’ao. At the same time, he joined the public lecture tour organized by the Taiwan Cultural Association. In October, he joined the Taiwan Cultural Association. Because he drafted the First All-Island Assembly Declaration, he was arrested again. Subsequently he was arrested more than ten times, and all together imprisoned for forty-five days. His experience of being arrested more than ten times for dissidence provided an inspirational source for his creative project, and the backbone of his thought as expressed in his literary works.

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In 1928, he was elected to be a member of the “Special Activities Team” of the Farmers Union, holding three top positions in charge of politics, organization, and education. He was also elected to be a member of the Central Committee of the Taiwan Culture Association.

On February 11, 1929, at the age of twenty-four, Yang K’uei and Yeh T’ao both attended the general membership meeting of the All-Taiwan Labor Union and delivered speeches. He planned to return to Hsinhua with Yeh T’ao to get married, but both were arrested the next day. More than forty-thousand people were also implicated in what was called the “February 12 Incident.” Later on, as Yang K’uei jokingly said, he and Yeh T’ao, bound together in chains, had a free honeymoon as newlyweds at the state’s expense. His actual wedding ceremony took place at Hsinhua one month after they got out of prison. In the same year, Yang K’uei met Lai Ho by chance in Changhua, and started his literary career with Lai Ho’s encouragement.

In 1932 at the age of twenty-seven, his novella “Newspaper Carrier” was recommended by Lai Ho and published in *Taiwan xinmin bao* [New Taiwan People’s Daily]. But only the first part went to press, because the second half was banned. In the following year, the story was selected and awarded the second prize (no first prize awarded) by *Bungaku hyōron* [Literature Review], a socialist periodical supported by Tokyo proletarian writers. It was the first time a Taiwanese writer was admitted to the central literary world of Japan, and his position as a novelist was thus established.

In November 1934, the Taiwan Literature and Arts League was established. Yang K’uei joined the camp and became a member of the Japanese editorial committee for its bulletin, *Taiwan bungei* [Taiwan Literature and Arts]. In November of the following year, the differences he had with another main editor of the bulletin, Chang Hsing-chien, caused factional strife. Yang K’uei established his own New Taiwan Literature Society (Taiwan xin
wenxue she) and declared the new organization’s plan to publish the journal *Taiwan xin wenxue* [New Taiwan Literature]. The first issue came out in December, with Lai Ho as the Chinese editor and Yang K’uei leading the Japanese section. From its inception at the end of 1935 to June of 1937, it was in publication for more than one and a half years before the Japanese authorities issued an order to abolish all magazines in Chinese. With fifteen issues published, plus two volumes of *Taiwan xinwenxue bao* [Taiwan New Literature Bulletin], Yang K’uei was forced to discontinue the magazine. With that, the activities of Taiwan’s new literature movement during the pre-war period of the 1930s came to an end.

In June 1935, the Chinese translation of “Songbao-fu” [Newspaper Carrier] by the well-known writer Hu Feng was published in *Shijie zhishi* [World Knowledge], Vol. 2, No. 6. In the following year, it was included in *Shanling—Chaoxian Taiwan duanpian ji* [Mountain Spirits—Short Stories from Korea and Taiwan] and in *Ruoxiao minzu xiaoshuoxuan* [Selected Stories of Small and Weak Nations], compiled by the World Knowledge Book Series, and published by Shanghai Culture Life Publishers. It was well received by readers in the Chinese mainland.


In 1937, the Imperial Subject (Kominka) Policy was launched, and Japan entered wartime mode, enforcing rigorous ideological control at home and in the colonies. Yang expanded his short story “Snapshots of the Field and Garden—from My Sketchbook,” and retitled it as “Mohanson” [Model Village]. He sent it to *Bungei* [Literary Art] magazine published by Kaizōsha (The Reform Society), but it was rejected. In June, he went to Tokyo, and on July 7th when the war with China broke out, he was arrested at a hotel in Hongo, Tokyo. After he was released on bail, he returned to Taiwan in September only to face poverty

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and illness. He was brought to court for a debt of twenty yen he owed to a rice seller, but fortunately he was helped by a Japanese policeman, Nyuta Haruhiko, who admired Yang K’uei’s work. With Nyuta’s aid, he was able to pay off his debt and rent a piece of land to cultivate. He named it “Shouyang Farm” after the mountain where the legendary Shang Dynasty loyalists, Po-yi and Shu-ch’i, retired to farm and died of hunger rather than eat the food of the Zhou Dynasty—suggesting his unyielding spirit of resistance to Japanese rule. In the following year, Nyuta Haruhiko was accused of left-leaning thought and committed suicide by taking poison before he could be deported.

In April of 1943, the Taiwan Literature Public Service Society was established, and Yang K’uei became a member. In November, he participated in the Conference of Taiwan Decisive Battle Literature, and his story “Doro ninggyo” [Clay Dolls] was included in Taiwan shosetsu shū [A Collection of Taiwanese Short Stories] published by Ōgi Shobō. In 1944, his collection of short stories Hōga [Sprout] was discovered and seized during printing. In August, at the invitation of the Information Division of the Japanese Governor-General’s office, he was dispatched to inspect the coal mine at Shih-ti and wrote the story “Zōsan no okage ni—nonkina jiji no monogatari” [Behind the Increases in Production—The Story of an Easy-going Old Man], which was published in Taiwan bungei [Taiwan Literature], Vol. 1, No. 4, under the auspices of the Taiwan Literature Public Service Society.

In January, 1945, “Behind the Increases in Production—The story of an Easy-going Old Man” was included in Kessen Taiwan shosetsu shū (konken) [Taiwan Short Stories at the Decisive Battle, Second Volume], published by Taiwan shupan bunka kabushiki kaisha (Taiwan Publishing Culture Corporation). On August 15, Japan surrendered unconditionally. In September, “Shouyang Farm” was renamed “Yiyang (One Sun) Farm” (implying “a new sun has returned,” or “Taiwan under a new Sun”), and Yiyang zhoubao [Yiyang Weekly] was published. Its
first issue was dedicated to introducing Sun Yat-sen’s thought and the *Three People’s Principles*. It reprinted modern Chinese literature written in colloquial Chinese since the May Fourth Movement.

In the early period after the war, Yang K’uei enthusiastically introduced the literary works of Chinese writers of the 1930s, and at the same time translated his own works into Chinese to be published in various periodicals and newspapers. He was a key figure who worked together with Taiwanese writers and those from China, to reconstruct the new postwar literature of Taiwan. However, his status as an activist in the socialist movement and his left-leaning background made it inevitable that he would be involved in the political storms of the White Terror period after the war. In 1947, the February 28th Incident occurred. The Taiwan Provincial Governor’s Office declared temporary martial law in Taipei and imposed a night curfew. In April, Yang K’uei and Yeh T’ao were both arrested for being involved with the riot and sentenced to death. The day before their execution, their lives were spared by an order that dictated that, “non-military personnel must be judged according to civil law.” In August, both were released from prison.

In January 1949, *Ta Kung Pao Daily* in Shanghai reported that Yang K’uei had drafted a “Peace Declaration,” which they published under the headline, “ Taiwanese are concerned with the overall situation and hope not to be involved with the war turmoil: a declaration of the Cultural Circles Association in the Central Taiwan.” It infuriated the Provincial Governor, Chen Cheng, and Yang K’uei was arrested on April 6. In the following year, he was court-martialed for the crime of “Propaganda for the Communist Bandits” and sentenced to twelve years in prison. In 1951, at the age of forty-six, he was sent to the prison at Green Isle. Commenting on this event, Yang K’uei said, “I got the highest author’s remuneration in the world; for a few hundred words I wrote, I was served free meals for more than ten years.” During ten years in the prison at Green Isle, he continued his writing, and

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a volume of *Lüdao jiashu* [Letters to Home from Green Isle] was written during this time.

On April 6, 1961, at the age of fifty-six, he finished his term and returned to the main island of Taiwan. In the following year, he used a loan to purchase a piece of wasteland near Tunghai University in the outskirts of Taichung to live a secluded life by running Tunghai Nursery Garden. In August 1970, his wife, Yeh T’ao, passed away. In January 1976, at the age of seventy-one, his essay “Chunguang guanbuzhu” [Spring Sunlight Can’t be Shuttered] was reprinted with a new title “Yabubian de meiguihua” [The Uncrushable Rose], which was included in the junior high school textbook. This was the first time a Chinese Literature textbook for junior high school was to include a literary work written by a Taiwanese writer of the Japanese occupation period.

In August 1982, he visited the United States at the invitation of the International Writers Workshop of Iowa University. On the way home, he revisited Japan and was invited to attend several symposiums organized by friends in his honor. On the morning of March 12, 1985, at 5:40, he passed away at the age of eighty. On March 29, he was buried at Tunghai Nursery Garden next to the tomb of Yeh T’ao.

In 1999, a project was begun to establish a museum of Yang K’uei literature in his hometown of Hsinhua. In 2005, the Yang K’uei Museum was completed and opened to the public.

**Yang K’uei’s Major Works**

As a Taiwanese author, Yang K’uei was primarily a writer of fiction, although he also wrote plays, essays, poems, critiques, and translations. His early works were written in Japanese, and translated into Chinese after the war, and he revised or even rewrote some himself.

His major works are as follows:
The first half of his novella *Shinbun haitatsu-o* [Newspaper Carrier] was first published in *Taiwan Shimbun hō* [Taiwan New People Daily] in 1932. In 1935, Hu Feng translated it into Chinese as *Songbao-fū*, which had two single-volume versions with different publishers in Taipei: one by Taiwan pinglun-she (July 1947), and the other by Donghua shuju (October 1947).

*Sangokushi monogatari* [Stories of the Three Kingdoms], 4 volumes, was published by Seikō shoten, Taipei, in 1943. This is an adaption of the Chinese traditional *zhanghui* (episodic) style novel, *Sangoku yengi* [The Romance of the Three Kingdoms].

*Gachō no yomeiri* [An Arranged Marriage for Mother Goos], published by Sanseidō, Taipei (March 1946), which contains four stories: “Gachō no yomeiri,” “Imozukuri,” “Kinō no hi,” and “Miison.” The Chinese versions published by five publishers since 1975 include “E-mama chujia” [An Arranged Marriage for Mother Goose], “Zhong digua” [Planting Sweet Potato], “Wuyi cun” [A Village without a Doctor], “Mengya” [Sprouting], “Songbao-fu” [Newspaper Carrier], and “Chunguang guanbuzhu” [Spring Sunlight Cannot be Shuttered]. Other versions include seven to nine stories, with “Mofan cun” [Model Village], “Niwawa” [Clay Dolls], and “Cai bashiwu sui de nūren” [A Woman Who is Only Eighty-five-years Old] added.


With respect to essays, we have *Yabubian de meigui* [The Uncrushable Rose], published by Qianwei Publishers, March 1985, which contains thirty-four essays in five sections, including “Shouyangyuan zaji” [Miscellaneous Notes on Shouyang Garden] and “Yang Kui huiyilu” [Yang K’uei’s Memoirs], etc.

For stage plays, we have *Zhengyan de xiazi* [A Blind Man with His Eyes Open], 1990, and *Letian pai* [The Optimistic], written between 1954 and 1956.

*Lüdao jiashu—chenmai ershinian de Yang Kui xinshi* [Letters

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to Home from Green Isle—Yang K’uei’s Thoughts Buried for Twenty-Years] was published by Chenxing Publishers, March 1987, and contains the author’s letters home from 1957–1960, while he was imprisoned at Green Isle. It also includes some posthumous works.

For anthologies, we have Yangtou ji [The Goat-head Collection], published by Huihuang Publishers in Taipei, October 1976, which put together twenty-five pieces of miscellaneous writings, letters home, and revised stage plays. In addition there are several versions of anthologies with the title Yang Kui zuopin xuanji [Collections of Yang K’uei’s Works].

Yang Kui quanji [Complete Works of Yang K’uei], edited by Peng Hsiao-yan, was published by the National Culture Heritage Preservation Study Center Preparatory Office, Tainan, 1998–2001, 14 volumes, and divided into eight parts: drama (two volumes), translation (one volume), fiction (five volumes), poems and folk adages (one volume), correspondence (one volume), drafts (one volume), and research data (one volume).

Characteristics of Yang K’uei’s Fiction and His Literary Thought

As explained above, Yang K’uei was not a prolific writer, and most of his short stories are included in Yang Kui ji, comprising only fourteen stories. Although his complete works contain five volumes, they include all the different versions of the same stories in both Japanese and Chinese. The work that established his reputation was “Newspaper Carrier,” which was first published in May 1932 and received recognition from the central literary circles in Japan, making a name for him as a Taiwanese novelist. The story deals with a Taiwanese student named Yang studying in Tokyo and working as a newspaper carrier, and how he is exploited and cheated by his employer. It describes the profoundly dark side
of real life, until finally the exploited newspaper boys unite to fight against the boss, forcing the capitalist to yield and compromise. The story stresses the sharp conflict in class ideologies between the working people and the capitalists, and it contains fervent socialistic and proletarian sentiments.

Generally speaking, Yang K’uei’s fiction is a reflection and extension of his experience in social movements, and he carried on the protest spirit of realism established by Lai Ho, the father of new Taiwan literature. He was a person of action who actively participated in protests, and an idealist who was constantly in pursuit of social justice and fairness. His character can also be seen from the way he named his children. His first daughter, born in 1930, was named “Xiu E,” implying admiration of the Soviet Union, established after the October Revolution of 1917. His first son, born in 1932, was named “Zi Beng,” meaning “Capitalism is bound to collapse.” His second son, born in 1936, was named “Jian,” which means “Build-up,” suggesting establishing something, perhaps an ideal new society, after the collapse of capitalism, although what kind of ideal society to be build up is not explicitly indicated.

Yang K’uei’s fiction is appreciated for its implied themes and ideas, rather than its artistic quality, such as dramatic plots or vivid characterization. His language is plain, the narration is realistic, and the descriptions seldom possess much detail. He always stands with the farmers and workers, and expresses the protest spirit of anti-oppression and anti-exploitation, based on class ideology and critical realism. His famous work, “Newspaper Carrier,” portrays resistance against the class exploitation of capitalists, and transcends nations and nationality in pursuit of an ideal socialist world. As pointed out by Yeh Shih-t’ao in his article, “Riju shiqi de Yang Kui—tade Riben jingyan yu yingxiang” [Yang K’uei at the time of Japanese occupation—His Japanese Experience and Influence], Yang K’uei’s mode of action throughout his entire life was very close to that of populist Russian writers at the end
of the nineteenth century, who aspired “to go to the people.” He insisted on his ideals like a rose that defies being crushed flat, and his creative writings were a practical expression of his proletarian literary views, making him truly unique among the writers of new Taiwan literature. Although the quantity of his work is limited, he always stands firmly with farmers and working people, realistically and critically reflecting his time and society. Thus he occupies a unique historical position in the development of the new literature in Taiwan.

A Survey of Yang K’uei Studies

According to *Taiwan xiandangdai zuojia yanjiu ziliao huibian 4, Yang Kui juan* [A Collection of Research Materials on Taiwan Modern and Contemporary Writers, No. 4, Yang Kui Volume], and *Yang Kui wenwu shuwei bowuguan yanjiu ziliao* [Research Material of the Digital Museum of Yang Kui Literature], both compiled by the National Taiwan Literature Museum, the research material concerning Yang K’uei can be divided into four categories: that concerning the author, his works, his literary activities, and publications-related data. Among these, the most important would be the author and his works. Articles about the author include his biography, memoirs, interviews, photographs, and the author’s thought and ideology, etc. Studies of his works include various genres, mainly in fiction, in addition to plays, essays, critiques, and the characteristics of his works and styles of his writings.

Topics related to Taiwan literature and writers of the period of Japanese rule were a forbidden area under the Nationalist government, and few people would mention or dare to research it openly. According to the article “Yang Kui yanjiu pingshu” [Appraisal of Yang K’uei Studies] by Huang Hui-chen, the study of Yang K’uei in academic circles in Taiwan started in 1973, when
Yan Yuan-shu published his article, “Taiwan xiaoshuoli de Riben jingyan” [The Japanese Experience in Taiwanese Fiction] in Chung-wai wenxue [Chung-wai Literature], Vol. 2, No. 2, July 1973. This article explores Yang K’uei and his contemporary writers, and maintains that Yang K’uei’s “Newspaper Carrier” was “the first story that portrayed the truth of Taiwan’s society.”

Yabubian de meiguihua—Yang Kui de ren yu zuopin [The Uncrushable Rose—Yang K’uei, the Man and His Works] compiled by Yang Su-chuan (Yang K’uei’s second daughter) was published in October 1976. It contains important articles on Yang K’uei published up until that time, such as “Taiwan wenxue de liangzhong jingshen—Yang Kui yu Zhong Lihe zhi bijiao” [Two Spirits of Taiwan Literature—a Comparison of Yang K’uei and Chung Li-ho] by Lin Tsai-chueh and “Buqu de wenxuehun—lun Yang Kui jiantan Riju shidai de Taiwan wenyi” [Unyielding Spirit of Literature—On Yang K’uei and Taiwan Literature of the Japanese Occupation Period] by Chang Liang-tse.

The Japanese scholar Ozaki Hotsuki, born in Taiwan in 1928, was the first to take up Yang K’uei and Taiwan literature under Japanese rule. He published “Taiwan bungaku ni tsuite no oboegaki—Taiwanjin sakka no mitsu no sakuhin” [A Note on Taiwan Literature: Three Works by Taiwanese Writers]. The article comments on Yang K’uei’s “Newspaper Carrier,” Lü Ho-jo’s “Oxcart,” and Lung Ying-tsung’s “The Town with the Papaya Trees,” pointing out the process of Taiwan writers’ consciousness shying away from resistance and tending toward resignation and even submissiveness.

Ozaki Hotsuki’s second article, “Kessenka no Taiwan bungaku” [Taiwan Literature During the Decisive War Era], explores the literary world of Taiwan after 1940 until the end of the war, and introduces the relationship that Yang K’uei had with Japanese writers in Taiwan and Japanese left-wing literary circles. He affirms that Yang K’uei’s play “Dengu taiji” [Routing of the Tengu] cooperates with the national policy of “Eliminating
Dengue Fever,” but an arrow of criticism is aimed at Japanese colonial rule. Another treatise by Ozaki, “Taiwan shusshin sakka no bungakuteki teikō—Yō Ki no koto” [The Literary Resistance of Taiwanese Writers—Regarding Yang K’uei], expounds the tortuous and complex spirit of resistance in his works.

In addition, Japanese scholar Kawahara Isao published his article, “Yō Ki—sono bungaku teki katsudō” [Yang K’uei—His Literary Activities] in April 1978, which contains materials on Yang K’uei studies, including a bibliography and reference materials. His M.A. thesis (1978), Taiwan shin bungaku yundō no tenkai [The Development of Taiwan New Literature Movement], deals with the details of Yang K’uei’s leaving Taiwan bungei to launch another publication of Taiwan shin bungaku [Taiwan New Literature] magazine, as well as his close relationships with Japanese left-wing writers and proletarian literary circles. In September 1978, Lin Fan (Lin Jui-ming) published his Yang K’uei huaxiang [A Portrait of Yang K’uei], which was the first biography of Yang K’uei with detailed historical documents providing an important foundation for Yang K’uei studies after the 1980s. More details of related research and publications may be found in the article “Yang Kui yanjiu pingshu” [A Critical Survey of Yang K’uei Studies] by Huang Hui-chen, included in the book, A Collection of Research Materials on Taiwan Modern and Contemporary Writers, No. 4, Yang Kui Volume, published by National Taiwan Literature Museum, 2013.

However, it is worthwhile to mention a special phenomenon in Yang K’uei studies. Published works of Yang K’uei have various versions, as the author often tried to revise or even rewrite them. Professor Tsukamoto Terukazu of Tenri University carried out an investigation into the various versions and manuscripts of “Newspaper Carrier” and initiated the bibliographical study of Yang K’uei’s works. For example, Yang’s short story written in Japanese in June of 1936, “Ten-en shōkei—Suketchi-bukku yori” [Snapshots of the Field and Garden—from My Sketchbook],

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was expanded and retitled, “Mohanson” [Model Village] in 1937 while he was hiding from the police at the Tsurumi hot springs in Kanagawa. By comparing manuscript copies, Professor Tsukamoto and Professor Kiyomizu Kinichiro have uncovered evidence of how Yang K’uei revised his writings in order to respond to different circumstances. Huang Hui-chen’s article, “A Survey of Yang Kui Studies,” is a textual analysis of six of Yang’s stories not including “Newspaper Carrier,” those being, “E-mama chujia” [Mother Goose Gets Married], “Wuyi cun” [A Village without a Doctor], “Ni wawa” [Clay Dolls], “Mengya” [Sprouts], “Mofan cun” [Model Village], and “Quanhou linju” [Monkeys and Dogs for Neighbors]. With reference to his revisions, Yang K’uei has explained that, 1) so long as I live, I have the right to revise my own writing because my thoughts are constantly maturing; 2) as far as publishing my work, if I had been too aggressive in certain instances, I would not have been able to publish in the first place; 3) in order to make it possible for contemporary readers to better understand the spirit of my work, it is necessary to constantly revise. (See Huang Hui-chen quoting Wang Li-hua’s “Concerning Yang K’uei’s Memoirs” in Yang K’uei de wenxue shengya [Yang K’uei’s Literary Life].)

Whatever reasons he may have had, but the fundamental idea is that creative works are an instrument to achieve a purpose: to convey thought. Yang K’uei’s literary thoughts, as explained above, stand with the downtrodden and demonstrate the spirit of resistance and justice. In the article “Yang K’uei’s Literary Career,” Yeh Shih-t’ao emphasizes that, based on the important literary activities Yang K’uei engaged in and all the events he survived, Yang K’uei’s literature is “a literature of engagement” based in the ideological system of socialism and grassroots activism. As explained in the article “Yang K’uei in the Japanese Occupation Period—His Japanese Experience and Influence,” Yeh Shih-t’ao maintains that Yang K’uei’s experience with the Japanese was basically a “good and beautiful Japanese experience with more warm tenderness than harsh devastation.” Such a warm and tender
attitude and non-violent recognition, “not only prompted Yang K’uei to be engaged in the farmers movement in a rational and peaceful manner, but also proved that his socialist world-view was a philosophy that can be endorsed.” (Quoted by Huang Hui-chen in the article, “A Survey of Yang Kui Studies.”)

Yang K’uei’s Works in English Translation

When considering Taiwan literature during the period of Japanese rule, or proletarian literature in Taiwan, Yang K’uei certainly is an important writer, but English translations of his works are actually very limited:


This journal so far has published three pieces by Yang K’uei:

“Rai Wa sensei o omou” [Remembering Dr. Lai Ho], translated by Mary Treadway, No. 2, December 1997.


For this special issue on Yang K’uei, we thank Professor Yang Tsui (Yang K’uei’s granddaughter) for her recommendation of works, from which we selected eight stories with particular consideration to both the theme and the literary quality of the works, as well as to which works are most representative of Yang K’uei’s fiction. Among them, “Behind the Increases of Production” and “Clay Dolls” are translated from the Japanese texts into English for the first time. The translation of “Mother Goose Gets Married,” published earlier in Journal No. 20, January 2007, was
based on the Chinese texts, and in this issue we have purposely provided a new version based on the Japanese texts. Since Yang K’uei’s works have often been revised by the author, we have responded to the critic Chang Heng-hao’s appeal to “keep its true features,” as stated in his article, “Cun qi zhenmao—tan ‘Songbaofu’ yiben jiqi yanshen wenti.” [Keep Its True Features—On Translations of ‘Newspaper Carrier’ and the Issues Derived.] For reference convenience, we have reprinted the translation of “The Newspaper Carrier” published in the journal, which was carefully translated from the original text by Robert Backus. This version is hopefully close to the original features and will provide a reference point for a comparative study of the different versions of Yang K’uei’s works in Japanese, Chinese, and English. To our translators, Jon Reed, Christopher Ahn, John Balcom, Yingtsih Hwang, Bert Scruggs, and to our translation team comprised of Terence Russell, Fred Edwards, Angela Borda, and Raelynn Moy, as well as Yen Chia-yun at National Taiwan University Press, for their close cooperation during the editing process, we herewith express our sincere appreciation and thankfulness.