Folk literature is a literature that presents and reflects folk customs, comprising such forms as myth, folktales, legends, historical tales, songs, ballads, proverbs, and jokes. Folklore comes from the people: it is passed on from person to person and spread down from age to age in people’s customs and habits, their beliefs and traditions; it is a cultural phenomenon of a nation passed down through generations to the present, possessing a rich national character and an enduring historical nature. Thus folk literature is the cultural legacy accumulated by generations of propagation, displaying the original style and features in the lives of its people, as well as their sense of history and emotional identification with the land and natural surroundings. Taiwan folk literature can well portray the unique character of Taiwanese customs, geography and history, and at the same time is able to display its universal character in common with other folk literatures of the world. Accordingly, for this issue we have selected some works of Taiwan folk literature that are of a representative nature.

The English “folklore” was established in 1846 by the British scholar of antiquities W. J. Thomas, who proposed it as a substitute for “popular antiquities.” Since then it has been borrowed into French, German, Italian, and Russian and translated into Japanese as minzoku (folk customs) or minkan denshō (transmission by the people), which has been adopted in Chinese as minsu. Minsu, used as an academic term, emerged and became prevalent in China in the twentieth century,
around the new cultural movement of May Fourth, 1919. Under the influence of the new cultural trends, Peking University established in 1918 an office to collect folk songs, which were printed in the university publication. In 1920 the office was converted into the Society for the Study of Folk Songs and started to publish *Geyao zhoukan* [Folksongs Weekly]; it took the lead in the nation for the process of seeking and collecting works of folk literature. In January of 1927, the National Sun Yat-sen University in Guangzhou started to publish *Minjian wenyi* [Folk Literature and Art] weekly, which was converted into *Minsu* [Folklore] weekly, and continued until April, 1930, 110 issues in total. It published more than 300 pieces of research material in folk literature, customs, and common beliefs, as well as studies and critiques. Its contribution to the establishment of modern folklore study in China is indelible.

In the fifties some folklore scholars moved to Taiwan with the Nationalist government and continued their folk studies. The most important of these was Lou Tsu-k’uang, who, in collaboration with Professor Wolfram Eberhard, published *Dongfang wencong* [Oriental Culture] weekly, a journal of monographs on folklore, and launched the reprinted publication of the Folklore and Folk Literature Series of National Peking University and the Chinese Association for Folklore in 1970, introducing to Taiwan the achievements of folklore studies from the mainland. This series has published many hundreds of books on folklore in about ten years, including Lou Tsu-k’uang’s *Taiwan minjian gushi* [Folktales from Formosa], *Taiwan suwenxue congghua* [Essays on Taiwanese Folk Literature], *Taiwan minsu yuanliu* [The Source of Taiwanese Folklore], as well as *Bei-Taiwan fengwu* [Folklore of Northern Taiwan] by Lin Han-tao, et al., *Nan-Taiwan minsu* [Folklore of Southern Taiwan] by Chu Feng, and *Kejia suwenxue* [Folk Literature of the Hakka] by Chou Ch’ing-hwa, ed..

Definitions of folklore vary among scholars: some take it to be a cultural presentation of the common people in the society while others emphasize that it represents the tradition of an old culture. Due to regional and ethnic differences, folkloric content is not identical; but there is both a broad and narrow sense to the term. In its larger usage, relative to the high culture of the intelligentsia, the term refers to folk wisdom and practical folk knowledge, the lifestyle and culture of common people. According to the interpretation in *The Encyclopedia Americana* (1999), “Folklore, in its broadest sense, is the part of the culture, customs, and beliefs of a society that is based on popular tradition.” In its more narrow sense it refers simply to the sphere of folk literature and art; for example, *The American Heritage Dictionary*
refers to “folklore” as “traditional stories and legends, transmitted orally (rather than in writing) from generation to generation.”

The ways to reflect folk lifestyles are many. They consist principally of myths, folktales, legends, fairy tales, humorous tales, folksongs, proverbs, riddles, folk dance, children’s games, festivals, superstitions and ritual practices, which can be classified into three categories: folk literature, folk beliefs, and folk customs. Among them myths, legends, and folktales are most closely related to literature, and quite a few scholars have made their special characteristics topics of discussion. The primary differences among these forms are: myths concern themselves with interpretations and beliefs about the origin of the universe and life and death of human beings; the backdrop for legends is the real world, usually concerned with the formation and origins of places (locales and natural conditions), history (the beginnings of states, the rise and fall of dynasties, and other significant events), as well as the description of behaviors and affairs of people (heroes, great talents, sages, and eccentrics); folktales take events from the real, vulgar world and transform them into fictive accounts, and often they incorporate in these accounts fantasies, phenomena, nature, behavior and events of animals and human beings with no definite time, place, or setting. The most common folktales are fables, the märchen, and jokes, and they often express idealistic wishes and hopes, moral teachings, criticisms of the real world, and derision of human nature. Myths, folktales, and legends often become subject matters and sources of inspiration for literature, painting, music, sculpture and other artistic pursuits. Folk songs and daily life are closely related; the singing of songs expresses the sorrows and joys, the sadness and the happiness of the common people. Festival celebrations largely take folkloric activities to be their primary content; many consist of superstitious beliefs and habits. The origination of folklore among primitive societies is facilitated through oral transmission, not in the form of literature that is written down in books. Since histories were recorded, scholars began to record and collect folk materials; on the one hand this is a search for a source of inspiration, but at the same time it is a preservation of the national cultural heritage.

From this, we take “folk literature” to be “a literature that displays folkways.” Generally, the particular features of folk literature are its oral nature (relying on oral transmission for its creation and propagation), its collective authorship (being created collectively by the masses), its modular variability (varying in its structure, form, and theme because of different times, places, and persons involved), and its manner of transmission (passed on from generation to generation, from mouth to mouth). Therefore its content, its language expression and its
method of dissemination are very different from authorial works and written literature (although in the final analysis they often influence each other). Within a country with many distinct ethnic groups, exchange and influence often happen among the folk literatures of different ethnic groups and folk cultures. Such is the situation within the Han people’s culture, where there are different dialect groups, as well as between the Han and other minor ethnic groups, where the differences are even sharper. Therefore between the folk literature of Taiwan and the other folk literatures of mainland China, inevitably there are many similarities in character due to similar cultures and cultural backgrounds; while, because of differences in social development and historical precedents, Taiwan produced a folk literature that is unique and disseminated only in Taiwan. On the other hand, among folk literatures of different regions and different cultures in the world, there are many similarities between concepts and methods of portrayal; so much so that fundamental characters and plots have largely the same form. This could perhaps be due to direct or indirect influence of propagation in the course of history, or possibly it is because of the universal nature of folk literature as a creative work of common human thinking, feelings and imagination. The influence and exchange of folk literature among regions and ethnic groups around the world can provide a very interesting subject for comparative literature and comparative culture studies.

The residents of Taiwan, aside from the aboriginal peoples, are all immigrants from the mainland, having come over during the Ming and Qing dynasties, primarily the Minnan (southerners from Fujian, especially from Zhangzhou and Quanzhou) and the Hakka from Guangdong; these three constitute Taiwan’s population of ethno-cultural groups, and hence the origins of Taiwan folk literature. Of the aboriginal peoples, there are nine tribes, and their folk literature is particularly concerned with myths about the origins of human beings and the perception of the world. Their characteristic features have already been presented in quite a few prominent studies by scholars. The folktales of the Minnan and Hakka people in Taiwan have a link of blood and culture with the Chinese mainlanders, and this was what, during the sixties, Lou Tsu-k’uang’s efforts to compile, organize, and translate a collection of data and research on Taiwan folk literature tried to emphasize. (See his “Foreword” to Taiwan suwenxue conghua [Series in Taiwan Folk Literature].) Professor Shih Ts’ui-feng has also maintained, “Folktales in Taiwan and those of southern China both come from the same source . . . . mostly from the Tang and Song dynasties, due to the moving of ethnic groups and their immigration to the south from central China, so that the language of these southern
Han peoples, their customs, practices, and so on are all richly preserved from their ancestral regions in central China; that this is true is without a doubt” (“Introduction” to Taiwan mintan tanyuan [A Study of the Source of Taiwanese Folktales]).

However, Taiwan is surrounded on all four sides by the ocean, and has three hundred years of historical experience, and in the final analysis this enabled Taiwan folk literature to portray its own time, place, and social reality, its own environment, types of lifestyle, and humanistic colors and to develop its own special texts with different settings of time and space. With the texts selected for this issue, we hope to be able to represent these unique characteristics. As for aboriginal folktales, we have selected myths and legends of the Bunun, Saisiat, Paiwan and Yami peoples. For the works of the Minnan, we have chosen the most common folktales, “Auntie Tiger” and “Seven Strange Brothers”; for legends, we have selected “Anecdotes of Liar Seven,” “Ku Bonsia’s Pranks,” and “The Silver Coin Tree”; and for historical tales we have “Koxinga Marches North,” “The Duck King,” and “Seventh Lord and Eighth Lord.” Besides these, we have carefully selected one piece of the Hakka people’s folklore, the common tale “Nine-Generations-Poor.” “Auntie Tiger” may be heard at the door of every home at dusk. According to Lou’s surveys, tales resembling “Auntie Tiger” are also popular in the mainland provinces, and they can in fact be heard in many parts of the world, although the elements of the tale are not exactly alike, even if the plots are basically similar. (See Taiwan suwenxue de yanjiu [A Study of Taiwan Folk Literature], included in Minsu congshu [Folklore and Folk Literature Series], no. 52, 1971.) Sociologist Wolfram Eberhard of The University of California at Berkeley has published a book on these common tales and their variants. (See Studies in Taiwanese Folktales, Asian Folklore and Social Life Monographs, vol. 1, March 1970.) Lin Chen-mei of Ts’ing Hua University also has published “A Study of ‘Auntie Tiger.”’ (See Proceedings of the First Conference on Taiwan Folk Literature, June 1997.) “Anecdotes of Liar Seven” was popular in the Tainan area, and Lin P’ei-ya of Ts’ing Hua University, in addition to his M.A. thesis, “Taiwan diqu Qiu Wangshe gushi yanjiu” [A Study of the Story of Ku Bonsia in Taiwan],” had conducted a survey of field research on the changes and variations of this tale in Tainan city, published in the above Proceedings. Because most of the available data of common folktales come in different written versions depending on the writers, we have selected those stories that are most complete, in order to have better readability in translation.

As for poetry, in order to coordinate it with our theme and the two essays on Taiwan native folksongs, we have selected four such
songs that have enjoyed great popularity. Due to these pieces being originally sung, their artistic merit lies primarily in their tune, where the literal meaning of the lyrics is secondary; we hope that the selected four songs still show their originality as creative works after translation, although their literary quality has been much weakened.

Regarding studies in Taiwan folk literature, we have selected three pieces: Professor Hu Wan-ch’uan’s article “Taiwan minjian wenxue de guoqu yu xianzai” [The Past and Present of Taiwanese Folk Literature] (1993), although not the most recent, has provided some very excellent background data including research materials published during the Japanese rule and after the war. Based on it, Peng Yan-lun’s “Qianlun Taiwan minjian gushi fazhan gaikuang” [A Survey of the Development of Taiwanese Folktales], Guoli Zhongyang Tushuguan Taiwan fenguan guankan [Bulletin of National Central Library Taiwan Branch], vol. 5, no. 2 (December 31, 1998) has some new information added as a useful reference. Liu Shu-ch’in’s article “Ri-zhi moqi Chang Wen-huan xiaoshuo zhongde minsu-feng” [Ethnographic Style in the Short Stories of Chang Wen-huan During the Latter Period of Japanese Rule], translated by Professor Douglas Fix, has substantially enriched the content of this issue. Professor Boris Riftin, a Corresponding Member of the Division of Literature and Language, the Russian Academy of Sciences, is a well-known sinologist, whose research emphases are Chinese folk literature and classical fiction; in recent years, his research has been devoted to the folklore of aboriginal peoples in Taiwan. His book Cong shenhua dao guihua—Taiwan yuanzhumin shenhua gushi yanjiu [From Myths to Ghost Stories—Comparative Studies on Taiwan Aboriginal Tales] has provided analyses and interpretations of the myths from historical and geographical comparative perspectives, and has attracted great attention from scholars in the field. The appendix, “Bibliography of Studies of Taiwan Myths, Legends and Common Tales,” consists of 159 titles altogether as the most exhaustive source for the subject. In recent years, Taiwan has convened many folk literature conferences, such as the “International Conference on Folk Literatures” and the “Conference on Chinese Mythology and Tradition,” sponsored by the Center for Chinese Studies in 1989 and 1995, and “The First Conference on Taiwan Folk Literature,” sponsored by the Huangxi Cultural Society in 1997, all with proceedings published.

For the successful printing of this issue, we have to thank the dedication and cooperation of many translators, among whom we have several who contribute so regularly that it would seem they are our special contributors; their willingness to apply such a large amount of effort and assistance in the act of translating Taiwan literature gives us
much encouragement in this enterprise. Finally, a note regarding romanization of Chinese characters. Certain readers have presented to us their opinions on the matter, inducing us to reconsider the issue. Due to the Taiwan government’s hesitancy on the matter of which romanization system they will eventually adopt, those of us who work to translate Taiwan literature into English are faced with a problem that is puzzling to resolve. In the summer of 1999 it was said that Taiwan would officially switch from Wade-Giles romanization to Hanyu pinyin, and because of this, in the sixth issue of this journal (December, 1999) we began to use Hanyu pinyin to transcribe Chinese characters. Last year the same issue was brought up again in the newspapers, and apparently the Executive Yuan and the Education Ministry had not reached an agreement and the issue is still pending. Because the U.S. Library of Congress, in October of 2000, officially adopted Hanyu pinyin as the standard system of romanization for their catalogue, this will necessarily accelerate the tendency to replace Wade-Giles with Hanyu pinyin among English translations from Chinese in the academic world. Generally speaking, in the articles of this issue, we have opted to use Hanyu pinyin for proper names, book titles, and names of characters in a story. However, before the Taiwan government has made a definite decision on which system to use, if we hurriedly use Hanyu pinyin to transcribe all the personal and place names originating in Taiwan, it could seem like a presumptuous disregard of Taiwanese practice in their own affairs. Therefore, for the names of people from Taiwan, we will try to respect their own choices of spelling (if we know them), and otherwise retain the Wade-Giles romanization. For geographical names in Taiwan, we will also use Wade-Giles and, following the common practice, omit the markers of aspirates (‘) and hyphens (-) in the case of well-known place names.