Foreword to the Special Issue on New Generation Fiction Writers of Taiwan

Kuo-ch’ing Tu

Taiwan Literature: English Translation Series started its publication in 1996, and over the course of twenty-three years it has published forty-five issues. Each issue deals with a selected theme, and seeks to present various features of Taiwan literature with the intention of illuminating aspects of its historical development. The works to be translated are chosen with the aim of shedding light on the social background of the writers and their times, as well as on the special qualities of their works, and their historical position. For your reference, the themes that have been covered in previous issues can be found as an appendix at the end of this issue.

In looking back, we found that many of our themes in the past took the colonial period as a focus, including Lai Ho and his contemporaries who were writing in Chinese, Taiwanese writers who were writing in Japanese, the Imperial subject literature, and down through Wu Cho-liu and writers representing the transitional period from the Japanese to Chinese regime. The line extends to the postwar period, including February 28th fiction, regional literature, Modernist writers, the nativist view, and fin

Foreword
de siècle trends in the arts and literature. From these works we observe the source fountain of modern Taiwan literature and its developmental tendencies. After dealing with Modernist writers in several recent issues, our attention was directed to the new generation writers who appeared in the 1990s to become a conspicuous phenomenon in literary circles. Taking note of this new development, we resolved that in this special issue we would introduce the new voices of the younger generation writers of Taiwan, and the new directions in the development of Taiwan literature that they represent.

For this special issue, we invited Professor Chen Wei-lin of the Graduate Institute of Taiwan Literature, National Tsing Hua University, to serve as the guest editor. Professor Chen is an eminent scholar specializing in the modern fiction of Taiwan. We have availed ourselves of her expertise in the field for assistance in recommending important writers and their representative works. After careful consultation with Prof. Chen, and with the limited space available for each issue in mind, we could only select nine authors for inclusion in this issue. This means that many excellent and noteworthy works have been left out. In fact, a large number of talented young writers are constantly coming to the fore, and we hope to have an opportunity to come out with another issue on a similar theme in the future.

Regarding the definition and basic categorization of the new generation writers, and the characteristic styles found in their works, Professor Chen has provided a concise explanation in her introduction. This is especially so with regard to the characteristics of each of the nine selected authors. The introduction provides very helpful information for the readers, and there is no need to reiterate here. It is just unfortunate that our selection of works to be translated is limited to short stories. The characteristic themes employed by the new generation fiction writers, such as local subject matter, family stories, characters from marginalized social classes, folk rituals, chronicles of physical terrain, metaphorical

_Taiwan Literature_
rhetoric, etc., as well as their narrative modes and techniques of expression, are quite different from the writing styles of their predecessors. As pointed out in the introduction, “in their use of form and imaginative construction they already display transitional divergences and variations in writerly aesthetics.” In other words, in their modes of writing, “the New Generation and the previous generation differ vastly… in their sense of country, especially… in their use of ‘intellectual landscapes’ and ‘aesthetic strategies.’” These emerging writers have an encyclopedic knowledge, represented through their literary techniques. Thus, the new generation writers interpret and explain the contemporary realities of their imaginings and experience in their attempt to construct a modern form of Taiwan nativism.

However, from the perspective of translation into a foreign language, such characteristics can present special difficulties. Thus, we owe special admiration and appreciation to our translators for the challenges that they have faced, and their skill in overcoming those challenges. It is unavoidable that some passages may appear obscure and difficult to understand. All that we can say is that our translators and editors have tried their best to find creative compromises, and the reader’s understanding is much appreciated.

For this special issue, I am above all deeply grateful for the whole-hearted assistance of Professor Chen for discussing the theme, recommending the stories, providing the introduction, and contacting the authors about related information in detail. Her contributions to the conceptualization, editing and ultimate realization of this issue have been invaluable. The translators of this issue, in addition to their well respected reputations in the field, are long-time supporters of the journal. At the same time, we welcome Professor Brian Skerratt, National Chung Hsing University in Taiwan, who joined our translation team and instilled new vitality into the journal. Their effort and cooperation in the laborious, challenging work of translating these nine stories has resulted in an impressive achievement, and is deserving of my
highest admiration and appreciation. As for the editing work, I am grateful that my co-editor, Terence Russell, and I share a like mind as we work together with the common cause of promoting the English translation of Taiwan literature.

In addition, with the sponsorship of the Graduate Students Study Abroad Program supported by the Ministry of Education in Taiwan, a Ph.D. candidate at the Graduate Institute of Taiwan Literature, National Taiwan University, Tu Shu Wei, has joined us to carry out further research. He also participated in the editing work of the manuscripts, as did our East Asian Language Studies student, Zachary Belgum. Zachary is a diligent student and worker, and he helped with the final proof-reading. The editorial assistance from the Center for Taiwan Studies, in particular the help of Angela Borda and Raelynn Moy, as well as the assistance from our long-time copy editor Fred Edwards, all have my sincere appreciation. Last but not the least, my thanks go to Yen Chia-yun of the National Taiwan University Press for the professional assistance that she has rendered in the printing, cover design, and production of the issue. Her cooperation and efficiency were key factors in ensuring that this issue appeared as scheduled and as expected.