1. Origins

Professor Kuo-ch’ing Tu of the Department of East Asian Languages and Cultural Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB), and Director of the Center for Taiwan Studies, has for many years, and with remarkable success, devoted himself to promoting literary exchange between the United States and Taiwan. The great mission that he has shouldered is not only the establishment of a definitive position and theoretical foundation for “Taiwan literature” within the context of “World Chinese literature,” he has gone further by bringing Taiwan literature into the purview of world literature. Therefore, since initiating the publication of Taiwan Literature: English Translation Series in 1996, he has worked tirelessly to introduce Taiwan’s writers and their work to the world. In recent
years he has collaborated with National Taiwan University Press to broaden the avenues of publication, and has succeeded in producing forty-four issues of the series to date. In September of 2018, because I was on sabbatical, I applied to be a visiting scholar at UCSB. During my time there, I discussed with Professor Tu how the younger generation of writers in Taiwan has emerged to create a brand new presence in the new century with its new climate and features. The quality of their work is excellent, especially with the New Generation of writers born after 1970, many of whom have been recognized in scholarly and literary circles as both central and cutting edge. I therefore suggested compiling a “special issue on Taiwan’s New Generation fiction writers,” and was pleasantly surprised when Professor Tu asked me to accept the important responsibility of compiling such a volume. In consideration of the limitations placed on this Special Issue on New Generation Fiction Writers of Taiwan by publication guidelines and the maximum number of works that could be included, I decided to focus on short stories. After exchanging many messages discussing the matter, I decided to recommend the works of nine writers to Professor Tu to be translated and included in the issue. In this way these writers can become more widely known in the Western world, and the development of Taiwan’s new literary forms and multiculturalism can be showcased.

2. The New Generation

In discussing the writing of the “New Generation” of Taiwan’s writers, we can roughly identify three main new tendencies: the first is that the 1990s, when these writers were just coming of age, corresponded with the great changes that took place because of Taiwan’s political indigenization, the first democratic presidential election, and other related political and social events. Not only did cultural discourse and the literary ecology take on uncanny forms because of the continuous turbulence, changes were also indirectly
induced in the mechanisms of production and standards of aesthetics in contemporary Taiwan literature. The extent of these influences is also the reason why, when scholars establish temporal parameters for their observations, they often focus on the new phenomena that have emerged in writing since the nineties.

Secondly, in setting the temporal markers that delimit the New Generation of writers, we for the most part mean those born after 1965 (with deceased Yuan Zhesheng as head of that class), and especially those authors born after 1970 who presently are the most productive in terms of literary output. There are also the writers of the “Seventh-Grade” (meaning those born in the 1980s and afterwards) who are actively making their presence felt in literary circles and who refer to themselves as “Internet Indigenes.” These are the so-called “reordering generation” of Taiwan literature (in Chu Yu-hsun’s words).

Thirdly, due to new literary phenomena in the era of media and the globalized world, these writers are almost all intelligentsia and young literati from academic backgrounds. Moreover, most have won some sort of major or minor literary prize. The three above-mentioned characteristics demonstrate that the background before which this new generation of writers grew up, and their creative paths, are situated within the context of the intersection of the old world and the new. It is natural that these new era authors, who have been deeply influenced by the mediated environment of the information age, highlight a special, transfigurative stage in writing and aesthetics.

3. Criteria for Selecting the Authors and Their Work

This issue presents the nine authors most closely identified with the New Generation discussed above. They come primarily from the age group born after 1970. The works chosen are predominantly short stories, and the selections were made after
bilateral discussions between the editor and the author. Aside from wishing to present works that exhibit the characteristic style of the New Generation authors, consideration was given to choosing works that would be understandable and appreciated by readers in the United States. Our hope was to draw foreign readers quickly into the literary world of Taiwan’s New Generation. Accordingly, we have chosen stories from nine writers, including Chen Shu Yao’s “Nü'er jing” [The Daughter’s Well], Wu Ming-yi’s “Hu Ye” [Tiger God], Kan Yao-ming’s “Shenmi lieche” [Mystery Train], Wang Tsung Wei’s “Danji” [Low Season], Hsu Jung-che’s “Micang” [Hiding], Tong Wei-ger’s “Wang kao” [My Late Grandpa], Egoyan Zheng’s “Guiweng” [Turtle Jar], Yang Fu-min’s “Hua Jia” [Hua Jia], and Chu Yu-hsun’s “Eguan” [Limestone Temple].

These New Generation writers all have impressive academic training and the acclaim of winning awards. With reference to their modernity, they each possess “contemporary consciousness,” and are inclined toward an unconventional “cultural spirit.” They also have a completely new aesthetic style. Yet, they were all nurtured within Taiwan’s unique life, thought and cultural ambit, the experience of its realities and subjective concerns, and they still take “Taiwan nativism” as their central axis. For example, in choosing material for their stories and in their literary expression they incorporate local color or rural backgrounds, or make use of diverse dialects, slang, and liberal amounts of popular belief and custom combined with magic realism, metanarrative, and deconstruction as devices to move forward the art of narration and the expression of subject matter in fiction. It is perhaps unnecessary to classify or identify these writings as “localist,” but it seems that

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1 The “Jia” in Hua Jia’s name alludes to the sixtieth year in the sexagenary cycle traditionally used in China to represent the passage of years. “Hua” literally means “flower/blossom,” suggesting “glory” or “splendor.” The implication is that the boy seems in some ways to be sixty years old, much older and more experienced than he is in actual fact.
we can view their literary content as indicative of Taiwanese “local color” or “spatial sense.” And these elements are the wellspring and the vehicle that set the narratives in motion. What they imply in fact finds much common purpose with the ideas of “background,” “place,” “space,” and “land.” Furthermore, they indicate the significance of “home” and “identity,” the emotional progress of individual, group and nation. In what follows the authors and their works will be discussed briefly.

4. The Special Character of the Nine Authors and their Works

“The Daughter’s Well” (1997), is Chen Shu Yao’s first short story. It achieved the rare honor of being awarded literary prizes by two of Taiwan’s major newspapers. Despite being a minor fledgling work, “The Daughter’s Well” sets the tone for a poetics of nostalgia for the outlying islands. Thus it may be viewed as an important preliminary text for the later novel Liushui zhang [Daily Account]. The patterns of a particular social group’s life are always fused with the vistas of a specific place and produce a relationship of affinity in which the people and the land share an affinity for their origins and their structures. The author uses the well as her central image, then embeds the seasons, characters, story, and village slang in the landscape of the realities of place and rural life in her hometown. Using the “spirit of the land” formed by things and places, human joys and tragedies, and the minutiae of everyday life, she employs an ethnographic writing style to reveal that life in the outer islands, cursed with a drought-stricken geography, is a unique living environment. The entire piece creates a meticulous sense of hidden turmoil and delicate sentiment, as suggested by the title “The Daughter’s Well.”

Wu Ming-yi’s “Tiger God” (2001), was awarded the United
Daily prize for fiction. This is a story about the Tiger God taking possession of a medium. The text introduces a wealth of detailed observation and information about the folk traditional of lion dancing. Dialogue between the narrator “I” (the witness to the spirit possession), and the interviewer “you” (an ethnographer), as well as certain mutually restrictive conditions, such as the cultural position assumed in relation to mystical power, the investigative analysis of ethnographic phenomena, and differing aesthetic tastes, all make identifying with, or becoming familiar with, the mysterious/sacred folk ritual, full of transformation, motion and differences during the observation of the process. In this way, the process of observation, or the identification of the reader with the spiritual experience of the folk religious practice of possession by the Tiger God, can escape the need to accept the observational position of either the narrator, “I,” or the interlocutor, “you,” and achieve the right to observe freely. Thus it indirectly completes the transcendence and conquest of the observational situation. In the well-known novels that Wu wrote later, *Tiangiaoshang de moshushi* [Magician on the Skywalk], and *Fuyan ren* [The Man with the Compound Eyes], he demonstrated a more accomplished treatment of the dialectic and the deconstruction of the idea that observing and contemplating the world are forms of symbolization or representation as opposed to the observation of reality.

Kan Yao-ming’s “Mystery Train” (2003), adopts “family memory” as its main plot line. The story revolves around various things like old-fashioned trains, railroad construction, and train schedules in order to infuse a historical atmosphere. The story’s “railway buff” writing style makes it seem just like a historical poem about *Le système des objets* of transportation. However, we actually find that the important plot line and contextual center transcends the idea of “train” as an actual mode of transportation. Not only does it symbolize the connection between two worlds: the peaceful years of youth and the era of Grandpa and the White Terror, it also unMASKS the chaotic absurdity and deliberate sham of the progress.

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of history. The story of the mystery train is thus not only about the simple dreams and quests of youth, rather it summons forth a spiritual coming of age story through dark memories of family and nation. Two later towering novels, Shagui [Killing Ghosts] and Pangcah nūhai [The Girl and the Woodcutter], also encircle the recounting of the ruptures in Taiwan’s history and are intimately involved in a retelling of “shared memory.” They possess a creative consciousness replete with strategies of recounting history and family stories. The style of narrative fashioned in these works is somewhere between that of a historical poem and novel.

Wang Tsung Wei’s Fudao [Home Island] (2008) is a family story constructed of four themed topics. “Danji” [Low Season] is one of those topics. The story depicts Ah Jie’s memories and deep-seated feelings towards Young Grandma (a concubine grandmother) who has absolutely no blood relationship with him. The Low Season that constantly appears in the text refers to a chilling estrangement among a group of people, however, for an oceanside beach that is a sightseeing destination, it is just a transitional scenario. Only when it becomes “a low season type of personal beach for Young Grandma” does it become a central site worthy of attention. In the story, the “sand horses” (crabs) that dig long tunnels on the beach enter directly into the imagery of the narrator—“I’s”—dreams. What they skillfully extract are inescapable childhood memories of Young Grandma on the island. The writing takes family circumstance as its foundation to illustrate the intimate connections between people, place, and time, but it bases itself in the dreamlike homeland. It also constructs and reveals the joys and sorrows of the lived experience of the father and son generation using “subjective imagination and memories.”

Hsu Jung-che’s “Hiding” (2002) won the China Times Literary Prize. The story is formed by the intersection and linkages between the recounted time of “childhood hide-and-seek” played invertebrately by the narrator and the unrestrained trio, Xiao Guohui, and his sidekicks Chen Pi and Lin Wang, and

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a plot time of “memories of hide-and-seek” after they have grown to adulthood. Hide-and-seek is a common children’s game. The rules are that the one who loses has to be the ghost, or “it,” so it is also called “the ghost catches people.” The “hide-and-seek” in the story is a metaphor that symbolizes the enormous and complex forms that life can take, including becoming invisible and disappearing, memory and forgetting, and even secrets and death. In the story, childhood also comes to an end in the midst of a game of “hide-and-seek” as someone who has been forced to be the ghost tragically becomes a “ghost” more literally. The coming-of-age narrative that the author conveys is clearly not one of maturation after breaking from a cocoon, or enlightenment after escaping ignorance. Instead, it unfolds as a farce of coming of age. Many of the names in the story were extended and used for several important characters in the novel Yu yan [Fable], for which “Hiding” is a prequel but with its own unique meaning.

Tong Wei-ger’s “Wang kao” [My Late Grandpa] (2002) was a winner of the Unitas prize for best short story. True to the English title, “My Late Grandpa,” which the author supplies, the story adopts a child’s point of view to describe his compulsively pedantic grandfather. Originally a small town scholar who follows the principles of textual empiricism, he undertakes a series of “skeptical” and “deconstructionist” critiques of the worship of the sacred god king. For his trouble he is deemed an “idiot savant and a freak” in the eyes of the villagers. The tragedy of the life of this grandfather, who retreats to his library in that benighted, parochial village, and who perpetually lives “somewhere else,” is that he has no ability to truly sense reality. Therefore, he can only assume the position of a hopeless wanderer, living apart from others. If we look at Tong Wei-ger’s later series of novels, such as Xi bei yu [Northwest Rain], and Wu shang shidai [Harmless Times], with “My Late Grandpa” in mind, we see that these works also revolve around the themes of a consciousness of “loneliness” and “time,” and especially of a subjectivity that has no means of establishing
relations with others, and a temporal consciousness of uncertainty and dejection.

Egoyan Zheng’s “Turtle Jar” (2001), was the recipient of the Unitas New Author Prize. It constitutes part of a trilogy, along with “Guiweng” [Ghost Jar] and “Weng zhong ren” [Man in the Jar], which deals with the imagery of eulogies and corpses. Almost presenting an overview of folk rituals, the text details three kinds of popular rites of marriage and mourning: the relocation of a grandmother’s tomb so that the remains may be collected; the funeral of a departed grandfather, and the marriage ceremony of the grandfather and grandmother. The story makes excellent use of exquisite and obscure dialect language, chilly, yet bewitching imagery, and a plot based around lust and death, all of which are exhibited in a masterful portrayal of folk religious rites. The final appeal of the story emerges in the encryption and decryption of the historical information about the reasons for the relocation of the tomb. Only then do we realize that the main concern of the story is body, desire, fate and the private affairs of a family woven together in custom and ritual. Aside from constructing the legends and intellectual landscape of local customs as a compositional strategy, the interface before the lens and the material for the images, like the scene of maggots coming out and going into the bottom of the coffin in the jar and other details, all reveal the author’s persistent use of techniques from film, photography, and their transformations.

Amid the contemporary turn towards image culture, Yang Fu-min’s short story collection, Hua Jia nanhai [A Boy Named Hua Jia] follows the popular trend of cross-media textual regeneration, for there is also a script for a television adaptation, Hua Jia nanhai zhuang daren [Hua Jia Boy Turns into an Adult], and a movie script, Hua Jia daren zhuang nanhai [Hua Jia Adult Turns into a Boy]. Providing a prototype for the stories/characters/plot, the last piece in the collection, “Hua Jia” (2010), seems to particularly warrant our investigation. The story begins with Hua
Jia, a twenty-two-year-old boy who wants nothing more than to build an “ideal home” beside the family graveyard in which his grand aunt and his old father can enjoy familial life together. In the end, the story draws to a close with Hua Jia’s resentment at not ever being able to fulfill his dream: “When is the house going to be built?” From the loss of family love to the family drama of union and division, this is the kind of material that the writer often confronts. But the solidarity and mutual support of grand aunt and grandnephew provide the most moving and vivid storyline. It is worth noting the manner in which city and countryside represent yearning and rootedness, as well as the feeling of discrepancy between a foreign place and home. From this, the local consciousness that serves as manifest memory, aside from being a kind of micro-perceived emotional structure, reflects the desire of the author to show people the “countryside” of intimate experience in his life.

Chu Yu-hsun’s “Limestone Temple” (2012), can at first glance be recognized as a work in which the title is the key to its explication, but in its application of imagination and metanarrative, it is in fact a discursive composition, test, and theory. We could say that it tests or manufactures the “new reader’s” experience of a new text. The “Egwan” in the story, aside from being the name of an unpublished manuscript, is also a place name. It implies a dreamscape/washout that swallows all words and memories. Yet, since the author intends to make use of it for other purposes, the connotations of “Egwan” ultimately follow the indistinctiveness and displacements in the development of the story’s plot so that it is tantamount to being absent. The trick of the story’s narration is “disappearance” and “seeking.” It appears to have a normal structure, but since the main text directly reveals, or employs annotation and fake quotations to invoke Huang Chinshu, a writer of the older generation and other famous authors from literary history, this is a simply a pretext for initiating dialogue. These devices allow the author to dispense
with considerations of influence or acts of veneration, and besides strengthening the main plot line, they also highlight the author’s probing analysis of the compositional experiment. Through the continued refinement of this short story, the author constructs the alternative world of the later novel, *Limestone Temple*.

5. Conclusion

At present, this period is referred to as the period of “revolution and transmutation.” Its most obvious characteristic is that all processes are in the midst of rapid transformation. The arrival of the age of globalization has not only produced new techniques in literary production and the structures of everyday life, it has also provided modern people with a new basis for experience. Modern implies “most recent” and “newest.” In vernacular terms, this implies the social state of the internet and the digitized environment. As far as the tethering of literature and society are concerned, “different spirit, different imagination.” The new climate of the new generation means the writing styles of the post-modern/post-information age that explore the new sensations of the new century will take a multitude of literary forms.

Each of the nine works discussed above has its own compositional charms and each has its own identifiable stylistic qualities. This issue is directed towards observing and analyzing the writing of the New Generation, and as such, it naturally must also confront the difficult task of describing the “common features” of this work and their “incommensurably diverse” possibilities. Despite the difficulties, it is still possible to roughly summarize the thematic concerns of New Generation writing as being largely stories about family, nostalgia for the countryside, people of the underclass, folk rituals, chronicles of local color, and mock historical narratives. Perhaps some of these compositional
tendencies still follow the forms of the previous generation of writers, however, in their use of form and imaginative construction they already display transitional divergences and variations in writerly aesthetics. For example, although they continue to develop themes of family comedy and drama, the New Generation writers make use of extravagant or recherché language in order to thoroughly dispense with the imposing specter of the traditionalism or copybook style of their forefathers. In addition, elements of “localism” or “folkways” appear liberally throughout these texts, and they all have different systems of rhetoric and imagery, which they employ to convey the uniqueness and marginalism of places. Or perhaps they may highlight geographic features, or summon up historical times as constructed in communal narratives large and small. And those things that emerge in local annals might be the wanderings of an urchin, or the image of home in a dreamscape. Where the New Generation and the previous generation differ vastly is in their sense of country, especially so in their use of “intellectual landscapes” and “aesthetic strategies.” Perhaps this, in turn, is found in various conflicts between traditional and modern thinking regarding “dialectics” and “academics.” In other words, the writing of the New Generation proudly displays their x-ray lens, which they employ to explain the contemporary realities of their imaginings and experience. By extension they use it to construct a completely “Modernist” native Taiwan. This is the literary meaning of their quest for self in the times and generation they belong to, and the existence of the age.

Due to the restrictions in the size of this compilation, many excellent works are missing, and this makes us feel much regret for the literary jewels that we have missed. We can only leave that for a later day when we can again attempt to make up for our deficiencies and present a fuller picture of the New Generation literature. A selection is a different thing from the full presentation of a complete collection of works. If we expect that from the limited view afforded by the work of these nine writers we can
observe the entire scope of styles of the New Generation writers, this is clearly not possible. Yet, in the end, a selection pertains to the editor’s subjectivity, aesthetic principles, spiritual tendency, and consciousness. It represents an observational orientation. This issue gathers outstanding examples of early short fiction from a group of nine authors. For the most part, these works gesture towards, and ingeniously link to, the central consciousness manifested in later novels by these writers, creating tension within their cycle of meaning. Therefore, these short stories are an exceptional avenue that follows, excavates and traces the sources of exquisite masterpieces later composed by the authors.

The New Generation of Taiwan writers, born after 1970, has unquestionably established a distinguished presence in today’s literary circles, and they continue to scale the creative peaks. This issue is entitled, “Special Issue on the New Generation Writers,” and is intended to locate these works within the context of the development of Taiwan literature so that we may observe the special qualities they have brought to literary modulation and generational change. We have also attempted to summarize in stages the imagination/composition that this new generation has projected on a period of history and on their generation. Thanks go to Professor Kuo-ch’ing Tu for giving me this opportunity to select manuscripts and compose this introduction. It has been an honor to participate in the work of editing the English Translation Special Issue. I want also to thank Professor Terence Russell for his efforts in translating this introduction, and also Hsiao Yi-hsiang of the Taiwan Literature Institute at Tsinghua University for her assistance in compiling material for the Table of Contents. I am sincerely grateful to all.