Foreword to the Special Issue on Pai Hsien-yung

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The previous issue of the journal was dedicated to Wang Wen-hsing, an important and representative writer of Modernist Taiwan literature, so it is part of a logical sequence that this issue is dedicated to another representative writer of the Modern Literature group. In addition, since the journal began publication in 1996, putting out two issues per year, we have arrived at our twentieth anniversary, with forty issues published to date. This special issue, dedicated to Pai Hsien-yung, has a particular significance as he is celebrating his eightieth birthday this year, bringing us double cause for rejoicing.

It could be said that Pai Hsien-yung is the most renowned and broadly recognized contemporary Chinese writer, whether in Taiwan, China, Southeast Asia, or any other region of the Chinese world. His literary activities, achievements, and status as an eminent writer within the context of Taiwan literature is a phenomenon worthy of study. Therefore, we dedicate an entire issue to exploring it.

Pai Hsien-yung was born in Nanning, Guangxi, in July of 1937, the year the Second Sino-Japanese War broke out. The fifth
oldest of ten children, he was brought back to his hometown of Guilin before he was one-year old. His father, Pai Chung-hsi, was a high-ranking Nationalist general. At the age of six, he attended the Sun Yat-sen Elementary School in Guilin, fled with the family to Chongqing, and dropped out of school because of tuberculosis. In 1946, after the war, he moved to Nanking with his family, lived at Hongqiao in Shanghai to rest and recuperate from illness for two years, and attended Nanyang Normal Elementary School at Xujiahui. At the end of 1948, he left Shanghai, and after a brief sojourn in Hankou and Guangzhou, he moved to Hong Kong. There, between 1950 and 1952, he was a student at Jiulongtang Elementary School, before attending La Salle College for junior high.

In 1952, at the age of fifteen, he went to Taiwan to join his father and attend Jianguo High School in Taipei. In 1956, he graduated from high school and was admitted to the Department of Hydraulic Engineering at Cheng-kung University, the entrance examination having been waived. But in the following year, he changed his career goal from engineering to literature and passed the entrance examination to study in the Department of Foreign Languages at National Taiwan University. In 1958, his first story, “The Elder Mrs. King,” was published in Literature Magazine edited by T. A. Hsia, which marked the beginning of his career in creative writing. In September of 1959, together with classmates such as Wang Wen-hsing, Ouyang Tzu, and Chen Ruoxi, he founded the magazine Modern Literature. The first issue came out in March of 1960, introducing Western Modernist writers and publishing their creative works. In the first issue, to heighten the impression of the number and variety of contributors, Pai Hsien-yung used the penname “Yujin” to publish his story “The Moon Dream,” and the penname “Baili” for another story, “Yuqing sao.” After graduating from the Department of Foreign Languages in 1962, he served in a military police unit. In December, his mother passed away, and after observing mourning, in January of 1963,
he left for the United States and joined the Writers’ Workshop at the University of Iowa. In 1965, he completed his M.F.A., which greatly influenced his writing skills and artistic style in fiction. In the same year, he started to teach Chinese language and literature at the University of California, Santa Barbara, which he continued for twenty-nine years until retiring from the Department of East Asian Languages in 1994.

From this brief biography, we can see that Pai Hsien-yung spent his high school and college years in Taiwan, living in Taipei for eleven years from 1952 to 1963. He went to Hong Kong at the age of twelve, and lived in Hong Kong for only three years (1949–1952), but his Cantonese is far better than his Taiwanese. Perhaps the difference is due to his age at the time and the daily immersion in the language and contact with the local people. While he lived in Taipei, because of power struggles and personal grudges his father had with Chiang Kai-shek, his residence was under watch by secret agents. Although his living environment was different from that in the military families’ villages, his contact with outside society probably was limited. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why his Taiwanese is not as fluent as his Cantonese, and why the characters in his stories, in comparison with the works of Huang Chun-ming, are less based on the lives of common people in Taiwan. In contrast, Pai Hsien-yung’s stories, based on his life experience, from Guilin to Hong Kong, from Hong Kong to Taiwan, and from Taiwan to North America, reflect the mentality of the rootless life of the wandering Chinese in the world of the twentieth century. This constitutes the underlying theme of his works from Taipei People to New Yorkers. It cannot be denied that his works, which reflected such life experiences, naturally represent an important and valuable part of Taiwan literature. They evoke his time, responding to the pulse of the modern history of Taiwan entangled with China. Moreover, in the later part of his career, after he emigrated from Taiwan to the United States, Pai Hsien-yung’s works became an important component of world literatures.
in Chinese, enabling Taiwan literature to secure a seat in the Sinophone literature of the world. Pai Hsien-yung’s contribution in this respect deserves particular recognition.

As we know, “The Eternal Snow Beauty” was the first story in the series of Taipei People, published in the 24th issue of the magazine Modern Literature, and “The Story of a Fallen Angel” was the first story of the New Yorkers series, published in the 25th issue of the same magazine. The fact that the first stories for both Taipei People and the New Yorkers series were published in 1965 indicates that the author planned to work along two lines simultaneously. The first collection of short stories, Taipei People, was published by Chenzhong Publishers in April 1971, and the Erya edition came out in May 1983, but the stories in the New Yorkers series were published intermittently until July 2007, when the six collected stories were published as a book (Erya edition).

After Taipei People was published in 1971, praise and positive reviews from the literary world emerged in large numbers, as well as translations into foreign languages, thus firmly establishing Pai Hsien-yung’s status as a major writer in contemporary Chinese literature. His novel Niezi (Crystal Boys), dealing with the subject of homosexuality in Taiwan, started to be serialized in Modern Literature when it resumed publication, from Issues 1 to 22, until March 1984. In 1986, Niezi was adapted into a movie. Since then, his work has appeared in spectacular profusion in various literary anthologies, films, TV series, stage performances, biographies, essay collections, on both sides of the Taiwan Strait, as well as in Hong Kong and other regions of the Chinese world. In 1999, Asia Weekly in Hong Kong published a list of the best Chinese fiction of the twentieth century, and Pai Hsien-yung’s Taipei People was ranked seventh, after Lu Xun, Shen Congwen, Lao She, Zhang Ailing, Qian Zhongshu, and Mao Dun. In 1997, the Library of the University of California at Santa Barbara established a special collection of Pai Hsien-yung’s works, a treasury of documents and manuscripts.

Taiwan Literature
After he retired from UCSB in 1994, Pai Hsien-yung devoted himself to public activities for AIDS prevention and reviving the traditional art of Kun opera. In 2004, he threw himself into the production of the youth edition of the classic *Peony Pavilion*, which was performed in Taiwan, Hong Kong, all over China, and even in the United States. At four University of California campuses there were a total of twelve performances, and the one-hundredth performance was in Beijing in 2007. These were an unprecedented success, eliciting strong reactions from young people in Chinese communities all over the world.

In 2011, Pai Hsien-yung started to delve into biographical and historical materials about his father, Pai Chung-hsi, in preparation for writing a biography. The book, *My Father and the Republic of China—Collected Images of General Pai Chung-hsi*, was published in 2012, and another book, *Stop Pain and Recuperate Wounds—General Pai Chung-hsi and the February 28th Incident*, was published in 2014, together with the DVD *The Critical 16 Days*, which recorded the aftermath of the February 28th Incident. Pai Chung-hsi, in his capacity as Minister of National Defense, was dispatched by Chiang Kai-shek to Taiwan to deal with the repercussions of the incident by expressing sympathy and solicitude for the victims. Basically, he adopted a policy of leniency and reconciliation, saving many who had been sentenced to death. Memories of the history of those crucial sixteen days from March 17 to April 2 are presented in interviews and personal oral accounts.

In 2014, Pai Hsien-yung went back to his alma mater to teach a general education course “Directed Reading in Dream of the Red Chamber” for three semesters. A DVD is available online as well as three volumes of his lectures in print, entitled *Comments on Honglou meng by Pai Hsien-yung*, published by Shibao Culture Publishers in July 2016. Based on his personal experience in creative writing, with the incisive mind of an author and a keen appreciation of the craft of writing, he provides a close reading and
sharp analysis of 120 chapters of the masterpiece.

As a fiction writer, Pai Hsien-yung’s achievements can be seen in the volume of collected research material, *Taiwan xiandangdai zuojia yanjiu ziliao huibian* (A Compendium of Research Materials on Contemporary and Modern Writers of Taiwan), published by the National Taiwan Literature Museum in 2013. This volume is 567 pages thick and includes chronological records of his life, as well as his published works, a summary of studies of his works, selected articles of critical reviews, and a bibliography of his publications and reference works. With voluminous studies already published, any additional study of his works would be a challenge, and further praise for his status in contemporary Chinese literature would amount only to gilding the lily.

In 2003, Pai Hsien-yung was the recipient of the seventh National Award in Literature and Arts in Taiwan. This included the following tribute for his achievements: “Pai Hsien-yung’s creative literary writing is full of humanistic concern for characters in a certain stratum of post-war Taiwan society. With originality and artistry, his work harmoniously blends classical fiction with the essence of modern Western literature, and serves as a model for contemporary Taiwan literature.”

Many of Pai Hsien-yung’s stories have been adapted into movies, such as “Jade Love,” “The Last Night of Taipan Chin,” “Love’s Lone Flower,” “The Story of a Fallen Angel,” and “Glory’s by Blossom Bridge,” as well as TV series and the stage play of *Crystal Boys*. His short stories have been translated into many foreign languages, including English, Japanese, Korean, German, French, Dutch, Italian, and Czech. His novel has been translated into English and French by Howard Goldblatt and André Lévy, respectively. The first collection of his fourteen stories translated into English was rendered by Pai Hsien-yung and Patia Yasin, edited by George Kao, and published by Indiana University Press in 1982, with the title: *Wandering in the Garden, Waking from a*
Dream: Tales of Taipei Characters (Bloomington: Indiana University Press). A Chinese-English bilingual edition of Taipei People was published in 2003 (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press), and is considered a modern classic.

In addition to the fourteen stories included in Taipei People, we found several other stories that have also been translated, including the following:


For this special issue, Pai Hsien-yung has provided five stories that were previously unpublished in English. Four of them were included in New Yorkers: “A Fallen Angel’s Complaint,” “Remains of the Dead,” “Danny Boy,” and “Tea for Two.” Together with the above-mentioned “Zhexian ji,” co-translated with C. T. Hsia in 1971, and “Yequ,” co-translated by Patia Isaku and Pai Hsien-yung in 1980, we now have a complete translation of the six stories included in New Yorkers. In addition, we have translated
“Silent Night,” which was recently published in the “Contemporary Fiction Special Zone” of *United Daily*, December 24–25, 2015, and it should belong to the *New Yorkers* series.

In addition to the five stories, we have selected four essays on different subjects to illustrate the variety of Pai’s critical writings: these include his reflections on the founding of *Modern Literature*; the problems of modern Chinese fiction since the May Fourth period; the relationship between fiction and film, and a review of modern poetry. Pai Hsien-yung is well aware of the different camps of poets in Taiwan and naturally avoids criticism of modern poetry, but his article, “Lament for Emperor Wang’s Amorous Heart—on reading Tu Kuo-ch’ing’s *Clouds of the Heart*,” was an exception reluctantly made on account of my literary relationship with him. The article reveals a delicate sympathy between a novelist and a poet when both write about love and the sadness of life with a similar understanding.

UCSB celebrated Pai Hsien-yung’s eightieth birthday with a special event, “Celebrating Pai Hsien-yung through Film and Discussion,” which included screenings of the following films:

1. *Chazi yanhong kaibian* (Multiflorated Splendour), DVD, a biographical documentary film;
2. *Zuihoude guizu* (The Last Aristocrats), 35mm film;
3. *Niezi* (Crystal Boys), Stage Play, DVD;
4. *Yuzanji* (Jade Hairpin), Kun Opera, DVD;
5. *Guanjian shiliutian—Bai Chongxi jianjun yu ererba shijian* (The Critical 16 Days—General Bai Chongxi and the 228 Incident), a historical documentary, DVD.

Two highlights for me were the screening of Pai Hsien-yung’s biographical documentary film, which was made in 2016, and a panel discussion I facilitated on *Modern Literature* with Pai Hsien-yung, which reminded me of my involvement with the magazine and my relationship with him as a colleague for the last
half century. Much about Pai Hsien-yung’s life achievements can be gleaned from the title of the biographical film “Chazi yanhong kaibian,” which literally means “deep purples and bright reds bloom everywhere—a blaze of bright colors in spring.” It was translated into English as “Multiflorated Splendor” by Professor John Minford, the co-translator of Honglou meng (The Story of the Stone, or The Dream of the Red Chamber). This phrase is derived from the Ming classic drama Mudan ting (Peony Pavilion) in the scene “You yuan jing meng” (“Wandering in the Garden, Waking from a Dream”) by Tang Xianzu (1550–1616). Peony Pavilion is Pai Hsien-yung’s favorite work. He adapted it not only in his collection of stories, Wandering in the Garden and Waking from a Dream, but also in his youth rendition of the classic Peony Pavilion in his recent effort to revive Kun opera. His versions of Peony Pavilion and Yuzan ji (Jade Hairpin) both evoked strong reactions among young Chinese people worldwide. The phrase “multiflorated splendor” is a vivid depiction of his splendid achievements after he retired.

This classic line also reminds me of the recurring themes of his stories. Pai Hsien-yung wrote a critical review of the works of Yu Li-hua and Nie Hua-ling entitled “The Theme of Exile in Taiwan Fiction, the Wandering Chinese” (Mingbao Monthly, No. 121, Hong Kong, 1976). Both authors published their novels in the 1960s, and their works bear testimony to the time when the Nationalists were exiled to Taiwan. By talking about these writers, Pai Hsien-yung has revealed his own feelings, as his and their characters all have the same mentality of exile: mainlanders who made Taiwan a temporary base, dreaming of their eventual return to their homeland across the Straits. Those writers, including Pai Hsien-yung, are considered “émigré writers” who wrote stories about their state of exile, and thus we have Pai Hsien-yung’s Taipei People and New Yorkers. “Exile of the Wandering Chinese” is a theme that often appears in his stories.

The second dominant theme of his stories is the pain a
human being suffers from life, for which Pai has an acute empathy and profound compassion. As he explained at the beginning of *Crystal Boys*, the thing all his characters have in common is “a body that burns with desires in irresistible pain and a crazy heart crazy insane with loneliness.” This pain also comes from uncertainty and the impermanence of life that is inevitably lost as time passes. As Ouyang Tzu, who was Pai’s classmate and an important member of the *Modern Literature* group, discussed in her article “The Fictional World of Pai Hsien-yung,” the three dominant themes in his stories are summarized as “The Comparison between Now and Then, Souls versus Lust, and The Myth of Life and Death.” For the overriding theme of time-consciousness, we can almost say that there are only two characters in the book: “Past” and “Present.” Generally speaking, the “past” of *Taipei People* represents youth, purity, sensitivity, order, tradition, spirit, love, soul, achievement, glory, hope, beauty, the ideal, and life. On the other hand, the “Present” represents old age, decay, callousness, chaos, Westernization, materialism, lust, flesh, failure, obscenity, despair, ugliness, reality, and death. Thus, we see entanglement and ambivalence over the “past” and the “present” everywhere in stories full of irony and contrast, as well as the author’s sympathy and the reader’s compassion.

In other words, this disquieting time-consciousness prevails not only in all of his stories but also echoes through his whole life, as seen in his biographical film. Now we understand the reason he chose the phrase “Multiflorated Splendor” to highlight this event. As I have mentioned, it is a quote of half a line from a classical drama. Actually, the whole line reads: 「原來姹紫嫣紅開遍，似這般都付與斷井頹垣」(The garden that used to have flowers in deep purples and bright reds everywhere, is now only deserted wells and collapsed walls). This scene of devastation—a juxtaposition between “past” and “present”—can be seen as an underlying theme in most of his stories.
Pai Hsien-yung is well known for his portrayal of women, but as a writer, his world is not limited to women. Images of intellectuals in his stories are also very striking, often expressing the tragic sentiments of a patriot and dismayed reflections on China’s traditional culture. He has a strong sense of history, which is indispensable for a great writer, as T. S. Eliot maintained. Owing to his contemplation of cultural history and human life, his characters are often endowed with his compassion. He describes all kinds of characters, which can be summed up as two types: fallen aristocrats and life’s losers. These are always woven into the themes of “the uncertainty of the world and transience of life,” and bear intricate links to Dream of the Red Chamber.

In 1994, at the age of 57, Pai Hsien-yung suddenly decided to retire from the university where he had taught for twenty-nine years. It was a turning point in his life. Before retirement, he was a writer, a professor, a scholar, but after that he became more and more preoccupied with the traditions of Chinese culture. In the biographical documentary film, he was asked, as a rootless Chinese writer wandering the world, “Where is your home?” He resolutely replied that the home of his soul is none other than traditional Chinese culture. After retirement, he devoted himself to promoting the art of Kun opera, and returned to his alma mater to give lectures on Honglou meng. That was how his beliefs came to fruition, reaffirming that he had found the place where his soul could return. In 1994, when he decided to retire, I wrote a couplet to show my admiration of his wisdom and his courageous decision:

未卜先知  人生不過如此
急流勇退  世外別有洞天

Wisdom to foretell the future without consulting an oracle,
That’s the way life was meant to be;
Courage to retire when in high office braving torrents,
Beyond this is an altogether different world.

Foreword
In hindsight, reflecting on the last twenty years, in comparison to his life as a teacher, Pai Hsien-yung did open up an altogether different world on the stage and in film, which is more colorful and splendid. Happiness is seeing his life achievements “bloom in deep purples and bright reds everywhere” with splendor. On a personal level, in appreciation of our relationship as friends and colleagues for more than half a century, I dedicate this special issue of the journal to mark its twentieth anniversary and convey my best wishes for his eightieth birthday.

Furthermore, to celebrate the journal’s twentieth anniversary, a one-day conference organized by Professor Mei-e Huang of the Graduate Institute of Taiwan Literature at National Taiwan University was held on July 1, 2017. The title of the conference was “English Translation and Publication of Taiwan Literature: in Celebration of the Twentieth Anniversary of the Journal Taiwan Literature: English Translation Series.” Twelve scholars were invited to deliver papers on the subject. There was a roundtable discussion with Terence Russell and myself, as co-editors of the journal, about how the journal can continue to bring Taiwan literature to the world by supporting the scholars and translators working in this important field.

Finally, I am thankful for the assistance of the translators, without whom I could not have published the journal for the last twenty years. And I am grateful for the cooperation of National Taiwan University Press, which continues to pave the way for introducing Taiwan literature to the world. The twentieth anniversary of the journal is a joyous occasion, and my gratitude goes to all of the translators and editors I have worked with over the decades. In particular, I must remember fondly my colleague Robert Backus, who co-edited the journal with me for eighteen years from the first issue in 1996 to the thirty-fifth issue on Chung Li-ho in 2015. My special thanks must go to my co-editor Terence Russell, who has shown great dedication since joining me in 2015, starting with our Special Issue on Lee Chiao. My translation team
and my editing assistants Angela Borda and Raelynn Moy share the same ideals and aspirations, and I hope we will continue to work hard together with one heart.