Foreword
Taiwan Literature and Folklore
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Folklore denotes the traditional beliefs, customs, habits, festivals, and rites of a people carried on from generation to generation, including oral transmission of folktales, ballads, children’s stories, legends, myths, and so forth. In our ninth issue we developed the theme of “Taiwan Folk Literature” and presented folktales, legends, myths, and folksongs. In this issue the focus is placed on literary works of folklore having to do with festivals, folk customs, and religious rites. Folklore reveals certain features of the geographical, ethnic, and religious attributes of a people; it reflects cosmic and religious beliefs based on observation of the evolution and seasonal changes of nature, it records people’s ways, and moral principles in their interactions, and it reveals the personal outlook on life for an individual and the family to establish themselves and follow their pursuits. When we take Taiwan as the object and observe its folklore, naturally we will see the multi-ethnic, multi-religious nature of the people of Taiwan in its particular geographical position. As observed by the folklore expert Liu Huan-yüeh,

Taiwan, an island-nation situated at the edge of the western Pacific, possesses a short history of only a few centuries. This short history is comprised of many different rulers, rendering the residential composition of the island a complex
one. Adding the uniqueness of the climate and environment to this historical complexity not only makes the Taiwanese culture complex and varied, it also enables it to possess the main characteristics of a marine culture—strong absorbability and creativity. Therefore Taiwan exhibits many distinctive and original cultures.” [Seasonal Observances in Taiwan] (See p. 3).

The development of folklore as an academic subject of the social sciences began in 1846 with British archaeologist William John Thomas (1803–1885). In view of the fact that folklore reflects the traditional customs and habits of a people, as well as the spiritual world of the commoners, the seasonal observances and festivals in Taiwan inevitably demonstrate different characteristics of the three major ethnic groups in Taiwan: Fulao (southern Min), Hakka, and aborigines. Aboriginal peoples comprise two percent of the total population, and among the 98 percent of Han people, 15 percent are mainlanders, who emigrated from China after the war (1945) or retreated to Taiwan in 1949 with the Nationalist government; the ratio between Fulao and Hakka is 3 to 1. Although the ancestors of Fulao and Hakka were Han emigrants, for the past several hundred years, separated only by a strip of water and by the congruent differences in natural environment and climate, the traditional practices of Fulao and Hakka in Taiwan reflect great geographical differences from those of Han in the Central Plains of China. On the other hand, among the nine tribes of aborigines, the customs and ways of life have continued for thousands of years without influences from outside cultures, and needless to say, differ from those of the Han people.

Taiwan folklore is composed of four interrelated elements: year, season, festival, and custom. “Year” refers to the calendar year, with a renewal of each year that rings out the old and rings in the new in celebration of the New Year, which in the traditional society started from the Year-End Dinner on the sixteenth of the twelfth moon of the past year and ended with the Lantern Festival on the fifteenth of the first moon of the new. “Season” refers to seasonal changes—spring, summer, autumn, and winter with their attendant transformations of the natural landscape. For example, Spring
Prayer is the day to offer a sacrifice to the Lord of Land, praying for the harvest of crops, and Autumn Thanksgiving Reward is the day to worship the King of Trees and the Lord of Land, to offer thanks to the gods for crops and generous bestowals. “Festival” refers to the climate and other natural phenomena pertaining to the season, namely the festival activities related to the twenty-four divisions of the solar year in the traditional Chinese calendar. For example, Spring Prayer to pray for harvest rains, Double Fifth (the fifth day of the fifth lunar month) to avoid evil influences, Mid-Autumn for family reunions, and Year-End Dinner for employee appreciation. “Custom” refers to the practices related to particular sacrificial offerings and rites in some areas, which in most cases are associated with the above-mentioned “year,” “season,” and “festival.” For example, the Ghost Festival of the seventh lunar month is held to save lost souls, the Winter Solstice is for ancestral worship, the Harbor Washing Buddhist ritual at Yehliu in Taipei County on the first fifteenth day of the new year, is to provide for the safety of the boats putting out to sea, and for the King Boat Festival in the middle and southern parts of Taiwan in the third and fourth lunar months, the people prepare abundant offerings and burn a huge boat to dispatch the god of pestilence.

In summary, folklore is closely bound to the natural environment and local climate and is deeply influenced by seasonal alternation and natural changes. This reveals the relationship between the common folk’s knowledge and observation of nature, and their attempts to ward off ill luck and evil spirits and call in good fortune, as well as their wisdom in adapting to the local environment. It perpetuates ethnic traditions and regional cultural characteristics. In the folklore of the Han Taiwanese, festivals in celebration of deities’ birthdays appear to be the most conspicuous year-round, such as the Lord of Heaven, the Lord of Land, Supreme Lord of Mystic Heaven, Great Lord of Life Protection, Sacred Mother of Heaven, Mother of Seven Maidens, King of Three Mountains, Lord of Walls and Moats of Xiahai, Forefather Clearwater, etc. Most Han people are polytheists, and the gods they worship include gods of the kitchen, fire, mountains, rivers, paddy fields, snake gods, as well as gods of objects, such as wells, bridges, and so on. Although those beliefs are the customs handed down from a rela-
tively superstitious agricultural society, they reveal the pious nature of the people who worship nature and respect objects, in addition to praying for good luck, safety and protection, and expressing gratitude for peace and for answering one’s prayers by performing religious acts to reward the gods. Such folklore not only is a manifestation of the common people’s culture but also serves the important function of consolidating community spirit and maintaining ethnic identity.

As a common belief in Taiwan, gods are supposed to return to their ancestral temples on their birthdays to call upon the ancestors by offering incense. Mazu of the Zhenlan Temple in Tachia sets out in a sedan chair in the third month every year and goes to Peikang to offer incense as a great festival event. Her worshippers will follow her on foot for seven nights and eight days over three hundred li to Peikang, reflecting the great power religion holds among the people. Mazu, in the mind of Taiwanese people, is a symbol of helping the needy and relieving the distressed, because her divine presence has been made evident more than once in the past to rescue people in peril at sea. According to legend, before the spring planting season Mazu at Tachia used to return to the ancestral temple at Meizhou in Fujian, China to offer incense. This was forbidden during the Japanese rule, and so Mazu at Tachia could only go to the Mazu Temple at Peikang to share the incense fire, which originally had been lit from the fire at Meizhou. Stories of Mazu and her historical development are the focus of our selections for translation in this issue; since Mazu is a deity of Fulao, we purposely selected an article by the expert on Hakka culture Huang Jung-jo, entitled “How the Hakka Welcome Mazu,” as a reference.

The most distinctive feature of Hakka beliefs is their construction of temples dedicated to the Three-Mountain King, their patron deity. When the ancestors of the Hakka crossed the Straits to Taiwan, they brought with them from their homeland Chaozhou the burning incense of their mountain god, Three-Mountain King, and established him as the patron of pioneers in Taiwan, to protect them from the “barbarous calamity” of becoming victims of the indigenous people’s headhunting. Wherever the Hakka settled, they built Three-Mountain temples, as many as one hundred and fifty, twenty-six of which are in Yilan County—evidence of the
footprints left by the Hakka there. In addition, there are Martyrs' temples in Hakka villages, where the souls of those who died in armed conflict between Hakka and Fulao groups are worshipped. Thus the belief in the Lord of Martyrs, who protects their homes and villages, is also a characteristic of Hakka culture. A future issue on “Taiwan Literature and Hakka Culture” is planned, where we will explore the theme in greater detail.

With regard to the aboriginal peoples’ common beliefs and traditional customs, we selected an excerpt from the article “Yuanzhumin de zongjiao xinyang yu tuteng chongbai” [Indigenous Peoples’ Religious Beliefs and Totem Worship] by the Bunun scholar, T’ien Che-1 (Daxiwulawan Bima), which provides a general description of the spirits and sacrificial offerings of indigenous peoples. Among the indigenous sacrificial rites, perhaps the best known is the Saisiat Pastaay Festival, for which we selected a brief article by cultural anthropologist Hu Tai-li of the Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica. For publications on common religions and festivals in Taiwan, Taiwan minsu daguan [A Grand Survey of Taiwanese Folklore] by Ling Chih-ssu and Tso Chih-wen (editors-in-chief), and Taiwan minsu miaohui [Taiwan Folkways and Temples] by Huang Ting-sheng (editor and photographer), both rich in content and visual representation, are particularly commendable. With the distinctive features of reading interest and local color in mind, we selected the two articles often paired together in the celebration of the Lantern Festival: “Pinghsi fang tiandeng” [Releasing Sky Lanterns at Pinghsi] and “Yanshui fengpao” [Bee-Swarm Rockets at Yanshui]. Also with reading interest in mind, we selected an account of the Mazu legend by the playwright Chen Wen-ch’uan and an article on the myth of Mazu by the internationally renowned scholar of Daoist culture, Li Fong-mao: “Qiannian shi cheng Mazu, Mazu yi xiang qiannian” [It Took a Millennium to be Mazu and Mazu Deserves to be Worshipped for a Millennium], which explains the profound in simple terms.

The stories we selected focus on festivals, including Chung Chao-cheng’s “Zhongyuan de goucheng” [A Picture of the Ghost Festival], Shih Shu-ch’ing’s “Guandiye chuxun” [The Procession of Lord Guan Di], and Nishikawa Mitsuru’s “Kamigami no saiten” [The Festival of the Gods]. The story by Chung Chao-cheng fits
the theme of this issue well and the reader is recommended to read it together with the article, “Fu guhun qi pingan” [Placating Lost Souls and Praying for Them to be at Peace] for a better understanding of this festival. The work by Shih Shu-ch’ing is a section from her fiction *Liuliwa* [Glazed Tile] written in the 1970s. In a letter to the editor the author confessed, “I don’t remember ever having written such a thing.” Nevertheless, in the book’s preface dated January 1976, the author said, “Liuliwa was written under a dismayed feeling when I was looking for antique objects in the countryside and seeing with my own eyes how people ruined those remaining treasures.” She also mentioned,

> In the last one or two years, Taiwanese folkways that had been neglected have gradually received attention from intellectuals . . . I hope those intellectuals will, with their influence, summon action to rescue those old houses and temples threatened by destruction.

“Kamigami no saiten” was the first work in *Taiwan shõsetsushû* [A Collection of Short Stories of Taiwan], (1984) by the Japanese writer Nishikawa Mitsuru. It was constructed from his childhood memories of Taiping Town, at Tataocheng, Taipei, where he used to watch the Festival of the Grandsire of Wall and Moat with the tall General Xie and the short General Fan parading through the streets. This story demonstrates the author’s exoticism and esthetic fantasies in the arts derived from his interest in and study of Taiwanese folklore and religion, displayed in his works and cultural activities, such as his early collection of poems entitled, *Maso matsuri* [Mazu Festival] (1935), *Kareitô minwa* [Splendid Island’s Folktales] (1942), collected poems entitled, *Tenjô seibo* [Heavenly Sacred Mother] (1962), as well as his establishment of the Maso Shôbô [Mazu Bookstore] to publish the magazine, *Maso* [Mazu], (1934–1938). As the critic Yeh Shih-t’ao has observed,

> Nishikawa Mitsuru established Tengôkai [Empress of Heaven Society] and made himself the spiritual head of the Mazu religion . . . as he pursued divination by the method used in Taiwan for telling fortune, he worshiped Mazu like a madonna.
Interestingly, Nishikawa’s interest in Taiwanese folk culture and history made him an unintended forerunner of Taiwanese consciousness that gradually developed after the war during the 1950s.

We would like to express our thanks for the contributions made by all our translators. We welcome Professors John Balcom and Yingtsih Hwang to our translation team, with their distinctive contributions to the field of translating Taiwan literature into English. In addition, Ashley Esarey, a Ph.D. candidate at Columbia University, has contributed two translations for this issue. His upcoming book, co-authored with Annette Hsiu-lien Lü, entitled *From Prison to Power: A First-person Account of the Transition from Disidence to Democracy in Taiwan* is worthy of mention to the readers who are interested in the subject. Our thanks also go to Mr. Huang Yan for lending us his book, *Nishikawa Mitsuru Taiwan shōsetsu shū—Kamigami no saiten* [The Festival of the Gods—A Collection of Short Stories of Taiwan by Nishikawa Mitsuru].

As the journal is entering its eighth year, we are thankful for the support and assistance of all our authors and translators. The continued support from the Council for Cultural Affairs in Taiwan and the College of Letters and Science at UCSB, has proved to be the driving force for this academic journal to keep publishing regularly, and they are particularly appreciated.