Among the four major ethnic groups that constitute Taiwanese society, the non-Chinese aborigines are the groups that most strikingly manifest the cultural characteristics of Taiwan. With its particular cultural content, aboriginal literature not only increases the historical depth of Taiwan's culture, but also enhances the breadth of ethnic components of Taiwan's society. Not only does this literature demonstrate the cultural diversity of Taiwan, but by using the natural environment as a background for its creative product, it can reflect more realistically the unique features of Taiwan literature. In the Issue No. 3 of this journal (June 1998), we focused on the theme “Aboriginal Literature in Taiwan” and presented a preliminary exploration of the subject. In recent years, studies and publications on aboriginal literature have increased considerably and warrant our further attention to this topic with translations of additional representative works into English.

Although Taiwan is a mountainous island surrounded by the ocean, Taiwan literature apparently lacks works that express mountain and ocean experiences. The main reason for this, as stated in the foreword of Taiwan Literature, No. 3, is that the accumulation of cultural traditions seems to have removed the living environment of the dominant Han Chinese from nature, and Taiwan writers, most of whom are ethnically Chinese, have concerned themselves...
primarily with the humanities of society, politics, and human relations, rather than with the natural environment of animate creation. Therefore the hunter culture of the Bunun Tribe and the ocean culture of the Tao Tribe provide what has been missing in Taiwan literature, and thus Zuihou de lieren [The Last Hunter] by Topas Tamaoima and Lenghai qingshen—haiyang chaoshengzhe [Cold Sea, Deep Feeling—An Ocean Pilgrim] by Syman Rapongan are particularly rare and worth cherishing in the context of Taiwan literature. In this and the next issues, we introduce and explore the themes of ocean and mountain forests in Taiwan literature so as to stress the well-deserved importance of aboriginal writers in the development of Taiwan literature.

In recent years, in the world of academia and education, there has been an appeal to focus on the fact that Taiwan is an island and that, based on its geographical position and natural environment, it should be developed as a “maritime country,” with the expectation that its citizens will cherish the surrounding beautiful scenery, possess an adventurous spirit as children of the ocean, and further, make full effort to develop a Taiwanese “ocean literature.” With this assumption, let us first give a brief historical review of the ocean experience in Taiwanese culture.

Geographically, Taiwan is an island to the southeast of mainland China, separated by a strait from the continent. Historically, the pioneering forefathers of Taiwan, be they aboriginal or Chinese, must have crossed the ocean to reach Taiwan. The ocean, then, is the only route that links Taiwan to the rest of the world. Therefore, the ocean was implicit in the cultural development of Taiwan in the early period. Historical evidence of this is that the ancestors of the aborigines have generally been considered to belong to the people of the Austronesian language family, known to be skilled navigators and to have arrived in Taiwan about six or seven thousand years ago. They had maintained a primitive society through the centuries until the encroachment by foreign powers in the seventeenth century.

The aborigines of Taiwan consist of twelve tribes, among which the Tao Tribe of Lanyu, or Orchid Island, is the only maritime people who have preserved their ocean culture intact until today. Before the Pingpu Tribes were sinicized as a result of living among
Chinese immigrants, fishing had been one of their daily activities, as they lived in the plain close to the ocean. The Shisanhang culture relics recently unearthed at Pali village in Taipei County included an iron refining workshop—an important discovery of the ironware culture in Taiwan. Moreover, unearthed objects also included deep-sea fish bones, suggesting that 1,800 years ago the local people already knew how to fish with an iron spear and how to build boats, and that they possessed the skill of navigation. In addition, the recovery of objects made of non-local gold and silver indicated that trade routes might have existed with other tribes across the ocean. Since the Song and Yuan Dynasties, Chinese immigrants started gradually to migrate to Taiwan. They were adventurers and pioneers with a maritime spirit, crossing the dangerous “Black Ditch” in the Taiwan Strait, facing death six times out of ten; hence the lament “Du Tai beige” [A Sad Song of Crossing the Sea to Taiwan], which warns “I urge you never go to Taiwan/Taiwan is very like the gate that leads to hell.”

In the history of the world, Europe entered its great age of exploration and began to strive for domination of the seas for commercial profit in the sixteenth century. In 1544 a Portuguese ship passed by Taiwan on the way to Japan and discovered the distant island, which looked so green and luxuriant; from the masthead, the lookout exclaimed, “Ilha Formosa” [Beautiful Island]. This was the first record of Taiwan in world history and is evidence that Taiwan and the ocean made their debut on the world’s stage together. An accurate depiction of Taiwan appeared for the first time in 1625 on a navigation map published in the Netherlands. In the first half of the seventeenth century, Taiwan was subject to commercial and colonial contacts with the Spanish and Dutch and, at the end of the Ming Dynasty, Zheng Zhilong (1604–1661) commanded a fleet for trade and war from Taiwan for control of the East and South Asia Seas, suggesting an active and dominant position for Taiwan in seafaring trade at that time.

As an island detached in the sea, Taiwan has been a society of seagoing immigrants. These immigrants, whether the early Austro-nesian speakers or the later Chinese, who moved from Fujian and Guangdong to Taiwan after the seventeenth century, must have been adept at sailing, hence maritime culture should be considered
the source and course of Taiwanese culture in its historical development. Furthermore, the occupation of Taiwan by the Dutch and Spanish, resulting from the expansion of Western commercialism and overseas trade, also has helped Taiwan develop a commercial tradition. During the Yongzheng Period (1723–1735) of the Qing Dynasty, “hangjiao” [business suburbs] began to appear mainly in the outer ports along the west coast. These were organizations of allied trading firms, functioning much like a trade council or guild with the purpose of uniting traders and merchants in a common enterprise and promoting the further development of business in Taiwan. Trade at ports with the West and the Mainland, as far as the coastal provinces in the north and south in the Qing Dynasty, was so prosperous that there was a saying “First Tainan, second Lukang, and third Banka (today Taipei),” which described the flourishing commercial activities of the time. In view of this, maritime culture and commercialism can be considered two traditions of Taiwanese culture that have run a long course. The fact that in recent years Taiwanese businessmen have been active and successful in mainland China may be due to this heritage and its continuation.

On the other hand, geographically, China faces the ocean to the southeast, and there has been a tradition of looking toward the ocean for a livelihood because the coastal areas in that part of China are mountainous with little arable land. People in Fujian and Guangdong Provinces, driven by poverty, had been moving overseas to Southeast Asia. In the beginning of the fifteenth century, Zheng He (1371–1433 or 1375–1435) of the Ming Dynasty was known as a great mariner; he set out on oceangoing voyages seven times, traveling altogether for twenty-eight years and reaching as far as the east coast of Africa. At least half a century before the discovery of America, the size of his ships (accommodating a thousand people) and the scale of his fleet (sixty-four ships carrying a crew of 28,000 people) far exceeded the shipping available to Christopher Columbus (1451–1506) and Vasco da Gama (1465–1524), revealing evidence of the advanced technology in shipbuilding and navigation as well as the supremacy of China in maritime power at the time. However, the history of China betrays a strong continental character in that the land serves as its main stage of activities. During
the Ming and Qing Dynasties, for political and security concerns, a ban on maritime trade was implemented, forbidding private commercial ships from going abroad for overseas trade and restricting the movement of people from Fujian and Guangdong to Southeast Asia. After the Manchus conquered China and established the Qing Dynasty in 1644, high-handed measures were adopted domestically to ensure the stability of the regime, and the closed-door policy that had been implemented in the middle of the Ming continued to block out foreign influence. China's traditional emphasis on agriculture and its suppression of commerce, together with its seclusionism in the modern period, ran counter to the Western commercialism of the sixteenth century and after. At a time when Western countries moved toward the ocean, looked forward to the broadening world, and made every effort to expand colonization and overseas trade, China closed its door to foreigners and kept itself in seclusion. As a result, China lost the opportunity of the seventeenth century to emulate the West for supremacy in East Asia.

With the conquest of the Zheng regime in 1683, Taiwan passed under the dominion of the Manchu Empire, where it remained until 1895, when it was ceded to Japan following the defeat of the Manchu government in the first Sino-Japanese War. After the Meiji Restoration of 1868, Japan became a rising maritime empire and ruled Taiwan as its colony for fifty years (1895–1945). In the 1930s, the colonial government established the Taiwan Colonization Company under the national policy for the advancement to the South Sea Islands. Modern Japan's maritime development and its expansion of colonization overseas must have affected Taiwan and further enhanced the maritime culture in its historical development.

With the defeat of Japan in 1945, Taiwan was taken over and ruled by China's Nationalist Government. Four years later, after losing the civil war with the Communists, the Nationalist Government of China moved to Taiwan and immediately imposed martial law, which lasted almost forty years (1949–1987). The surrounding coast became a strictly restricted area of national defense, with troops stationed and patrolling from outposts to guard against enemy infiltration and other illicit entry. The coast generally became a forbidden zone, similar to the ban on maritime trade during
the Ming and Qing Dynasties. The government put into practice a policy focused on the land rather than the sea, as had been carried on in China since the Ming and Qing Dynasties. Thus Taiwan became more and more isolated and the people on the island tended to shy away from the coast and scarcely had the opportunity to come become familiar with the ocean.

Although the coastline of Taiwan and its offshore islands comprises approximately 1,500 kilometers and is scattered with well-populated coastal villages and fishermen’s settlements, fishery and fishing village culture was marginalized after World War II and has not been developed much. Failing to absorb the ocean experience and wisdom from the common life of the fisherman, people in general lack a knowledge and understanding of the ocean. This has been a great drawback in the postwar development of Taiwanese culture. Since daily life has generally been cut off from the ocean and its environment, there hasn’t been much creative work in literature and art with the ocean as subject matter.

Because Taiwan is surrounded by the sea, its ecology, history, culture, politics, and economy cannot help but be influenced by the ocean; in short, the survival and future development of Taiwan certainly will depend on the sea. Thus, in the course of establishing a new identity after the lifting of martial law, the government has taken vigorous action in cultural reconstruction and education to initiate ocean-related activities in an attempt to remold Taiwan’s maritime cultural features. In January 2004—to awaken public awareness, promote the protection of the ocean ecology and environment, and construct a historical view of ocean culture—the Executive Yuan established the Maritime Affairs Promotion Committee and stipulated the “Principles of National Maritime Strategy,” confirming that Taiwan is an ocean-oriented country so as to make the image of the ocean an important component of Taiwanese culture. The Ministry of Education has clearly indicated that a littoral education will be the future direction to take in Taiwan as an ocean country, and firmly believes that the Taiwanese philosophy of education should claim not only the land but also the sea.

With such a historical and cultural background, it is no surprise that there have not been many works of literary imagination about the ocean in Taiwan literature. Therefore, the aboriginal writer
Syman Rapongan and the Han-ethnic writer Liao Hung-chi are particularly exceptional with their writings about ocean experience. This issue of the journal focuses on these two writers to demonstrate their distinct achievements and characteristics in the development of Taiwan literature.

Syman Rapongan was born in 1957 at Hongtou village in Lanyu [Orchid Isle], Taitung County. The aboriginal tribe in Lanyu has been called Yami, named by the Japanese anthropologist Torii Ryūzō (1870–1953) in 1897, but has recently been renamed Tao, which means “man.” Among the aboriginal peoples, the Tao Tribe is the only maritime people to have had a close contact with the Batan Islands in the Northern Philippines, active in the Bashi Channel since ancient times, and their languages and customs are very similar. The Tao Tribe adopts teknonymy for naming, such that parents are renamed after their children; thus the writer’s name means “father of Rapongan.” After graduating from Lanyu Junior High School in 1973, he left Lanyu despite his parents’ objection and went to study at Taitung Senior High School in Taiwan. After graduation, he renounced the aboriginal privilege of admission to a college and entered the French Department at Tamkang University by passing the entrance examination on his own merit. He entered graduate school for a Master’s Degree in anthropology at Tsing Hua University in 1998. While he was in Taipei in the 1980s, he participated in the aboriginal peoples’ movement and the opposition movement against Lanyu Island being used as the dump site for nuclear waste. Reflecting on his ignorance of the Tao culture, he was determined to end his wandering life in Taipei and returned to Lanyu in 1989 to learn again the Tao people’s way of life and the traditional survival skills from the practice of diving, spearfishing, and boat building. Through his productive labor, he experienced and appreciated the traditional ceremonies, and rediscovered his mother culture as well as himself. In the process of understanding the Tao culture and searching for his own identity, he began to write and publish works about what he had learned from the traditional culture and his quest for the Tao spirit. For more than a decade, he threw himself into learning, understanding, and writing about his mother culture, and published four books about the Tao traditional culture and
the ocean: Badaiwan de shenhua [The Myths of Badaian], Lenghai qingshen [Cold Sea, Deep Feeling], Heise de chibang [Black Wings], and Hailang de jiyi [Memory of Waves]. Cold Sea, Deep Feeling is not only an outstanding book in aboriginal literature; it has been selected as one of the hundred classics of Taiwan literature. A self-proclaimed ocean pilgrim, Syman writes about his ocean experience and has expanded our understanding of the ocean and aboriginal culture. His works narrating the ocean through his own life stand out with their own particular flare and are a treasure of Taiwan literature.

Liao Hung-chi, born in 1957, is worthy of the name of an ocean writer. He grew up in Hualien and worked as a fisherman after high school. At the age of thirty-four, he began to write on the subject of fishermen and fishing villages, and has published many books, including Tāohairen [Fishermen], Jingsheng jingshi [Whales’ Life, Whales’ World], Piaoliu jianyu [Drifting Jail], Laizi shenhai [Coming from a Deep Sea], Xunzhao yizuo daoyu [In Search of an Island], and Shanhai xiaocheng [A Small Town with Mountains and Seas]. He has received many literary awards, including the China Times Literary Award (Jury Award for Prose), Wu Cho-liu Literary Award (First Prize in Fiction), Taipei City Award in Literature, and Readers’ Best Books Award of the United Daily for his Fishermen and Whales’ Life, Whales’ World in 1996 and 1997, respectively. He is concerned about the natural environment and devotes his life to ecology and cultural work. He organized a whale-searching team to the eastern seawaters to conduct an investigation of cetaceans, particularly of whales, and in 1998 he established the Black Current Maritime Culture and Education Foundation with the purpose of “attending to Taiwan’s ocean environment, ecology and resources, and promoting Taiwan’s maritime culture.” These activists pride themselves as the roaming fish, whales, or dolphins in the Black Current, concerned not only about whales and the like but also about the entire ocean environment, ocean ecology, and ocean culture. His works are mainly essays and reportage. The practice and experience of life at sea and his close relationship to and understanding of the ocean serve as the fountain of his inspiration for writing and, with his particular sensibility, he reveals the pulse of human life with the ocean tide. As most
writers in Taiwan literature describe their experiences of the land, Liao Hung-chi and Syman Rapongan are the two eminent ocean writers. Their understanding and feeling of the ocean and their experiences at sea, the ocean imagery in their works, the ocean landscape in their vision, as well as the love and hatred involving their lives with the sea, are all intriguing subjects that warrant a comparative study and exploration.

As far as poetry is concerned, although the ocean and poetry can easily be associated in one’s imagination, it seems that no poets can be mentioned in the same breath with Liao Hung-chi and Syman Rapongan in terms of works about the ocean expressing personal experiences at sea. Nevertheless, Wang Ch’i-chiang may be a poet with a remarkable distinction in this respect. He graduated from a navy academy, served as an officer and captain in the navy, and has a great deal of experience at sea. He established the Great Ocean Poetry Society with friends and was the editor of *Dahaiyang* [Great Ocean] poetry magazine. Most of his works are related with the ocean, including *Haiyang xingshi* [Ocean Genealogy] (1990), *Haishang de shoulie jijie* [Hunting Season at Sea] (1995), and *Lanse shuishou* [Blue Sailors] (1996). Although his ocean experience does not smell of the fishy water, dripping wet and salty after immersion in the cold sea with deep feeling, like Syman Rapongan and Liao Hung-chi, his poetry shows a realistic and calm attitude of “observation” on shore or on shipboard with an aesthetic distance and intellectual objectivity. Although Hsü Hui-chih and Chan Ch’e may not be called ocean poets, their poems selected for this issue are related with the ocean, expressive with a reflective and keen observation and profound poetical interest.

Both Syman Rapongan and Liao Hung-chi basically write in prose with a mixture of narrative description, poetical images, and subjective confessions or comments. Generally speaking, the way they write is based on their personal experiences at sea, more like reportage than imaginary fiction, and it is difficult to draw a clear line between a familiar essay and a story of fiction. Therefore, in this issue, instead of the category we used in the past to make a distinction between essays and fiction, their works are only separated by the names of the authors. For other works in critiques,
poetry, and studies, the category used in the past for classification remains the same. Incidentally, as a reference for our readers, we published Syman Rapongan’s “The Call of the Flying Fish” in Issue No. 3 (June 1998) and his “The Wanderer Shen-fish,” and Liao Hung-chi’s “March Madness” in Issue No. 8 (December 2000).

We are very thankful to Professor Terence Russell, who has been translating for this journal since its eighth issue (December 2000). He has a special research interest in Syman Rapongan, and his translations of those representative works by the author exhibit striking literary merit, especially his painstaking rendition of various fish names into proper English equivalents, which deserves definite appreciation. The excellent translations of Professors Howard Goldblatt and Sylvia Li-chun Lin have been well recognized, and have greatly helped this journal establish a high standard of English translation of Taiwan literature. Professors John Balcom and Yingtsih Huang have given us unfailing support with their translations of selected articles, long or short, with all their heart, and deserve our special appreciation. The theme for the next issue will be “Taiwan Literature and Mountain Forests,” which, corresponding to the island culture and ocean experience of this issue, will explore the hunting culture and experience with wooded and hilly lands, a special issue for all of us to look forward to.

We have prepared another list of English translations of Taiwan literature for reference as an appendix, which comprises the recent publications that have come out after our last listing in Issue No. 12 (January 2003). Moreover, we would like to correct a misattribution for Issue No. 15 (July 2004) on Lai Ho and Wu Cho-liu. We selected an article, “Returning from a Spring Banquet” under the name of Lai Ho. Precisely because its style is quite different from other works by Lai Ho, it was selected to display the variety of Lai Ho's works, and as the foreword has explained, “The last piece was selected to show that Lai Ho, as a cultural hero, also had some of his own decadent experiences or observations, beyond his Confucian image.” As it turns out, this piece with a different style has been verified to be the work of Lai Ho’s contemporary, Yang Shou-yü (1905–1959). We thank Professor Hsü Chun-ya (National Taiwan Normal University) for the correction and apologize to our readers for the negligence.