As a novelist, a literary critic, a historian of Taiwan literature, and a framer of the theory and subjectivity of Taiwan literature, Yeh Shih-t’ao had occupied an unparalleled position in the development and study of Taiwan literature. Unfortunately he passed away last year on December 11th, and herewith we publish this special issue on Yeh Shih-t’ao to pay our respects to him and to commemorate him.

Taiwan’s new literature started to develop in the 1920’s, and Yeh Shih-t’ao’s life grew with the historical development of Taiwan literature since his birth in 1925. In 1940, at the age of sixteen, he began to write stories in Japanese. He experienced the war period under Japanese rule, the postwar period under martial law, and the period of a pluralistic society after martial law was lifted. His literary career developed in response to the major historical events in Taiwan, including the imperial subject movement at the end of war, the postwar transitional stage under the Nationalist government, the February 28th Incident of 1947, the White Terror period (1949–1987) under martial law, the Regional Literature Debate of the 1970’s, and the free and open multicultural society after martial law was repealed. Meanwhile in September 1951, on a charge of “failing to report a communist suspect to the authorities,” he was sentenced to five years’ imprisonment, reduced to three years, and was released in July 1953. This experience had consequences that affected his entire life, leaving a vacant period in his literary career that lasted as long as fourteen years (1951–1965).

Yeh Shih-t’ao’s literary career can be divided into the following stages:

(1) Prewar literary début (1940–1945). Yeh Shih-t’ao graduated from Tannan Second Junior High School and at sixteen when he was in the third year of junior high school, he began to write stories in Japanese. The first two pieces, “Masomatsuri” [The Mazu Festival] and “Sei Tai dan” [A Tale of an Expedition to Taiwan] were contributed to the journals Taiwan bungaku [Taiwan Literature] and Bungei Taiwan [Literary Art Taiwan], but they were not published and the original manuscripts have been lost. His first published story “Hayashi kara no tegami” [A Letter from Hayashi] appeared in Literary Art Taiwan when he was nineteen, and gave him the opportunity to make the acquaintance of the established writers in literary circles: Nishikawa Mitsuru, Chang Wen-huan, and Lung Ying-tsung. Later on he became an editing assistant to Nishikawa, who was in charge of Literary Art Taiwan. It is undeniable that Yeh Shih-t’ao was influenced by Nishikawa’s aestheticism and romantic taste in literature. His stories “Hulu xiang chunmeng” [Spring Dream at Gourd Alley], published in 1968, and “Hudie xiang chunmeng” [Spring Dreams at Butterfly Alley], published in his later years (2004), both betray the taste of such a lingering style of romanticism.
(2) Postwar period (1945–1950). Yeh Shih-t’ao belonged to the “language-barrier transcending generation” of Taiwan writers and started to learn Chinese and teach at an elementary school only after the war. In 1946 he continued writing in Japanese and got published in the Japanese section of Zhonghua ribao [China Daily] directed by Lung Ying-tsung, and published not a few stories, essays, and critiques in the “Qiao” [Bridge] literary supplement to Xinheng bao [New Life News] launched after the February 28th Incident of 1947, including the article “Yijiu siyi nian yihou de Taiwan wenxue” [Taiwan Literature after 1941], in which he started to show concern about the problem of the history of Taiwan literature.

(2) Silent period (1951–1965). After the political incident that led to his being charged as a communist suspect, he became a bird that shies at the sight of a bow, and remained silent under the White Terror rule for fourteen years.

(4) Literary career at its peak (1965–1969). During these five years, like a phoenix arising from the ashes, he devoted himself to both creative writing and literary criticism and published five books of collected stories, thirty-nine pieces in total, and the first volume of critiques, Ye Shitao pinglun ji [Collected Critiques of Yeh Shih-t’ao] (1968), in which “Taiwan de xiangtu wenxue” [Taiwan’s Regional Literature], published in November 1965, was the corner stone of his theory of Taiwan literature.

(5) Literary criticism period (1970–1987). In October 1971, the Republic of China in Taiwan withdrew from the United Nations, and internationally represented China no more. In February 1972, President Nixon officially visited mainland China and in September the Republic of China severed diplomatic relations with Japan. Inter-nationally major political incidents happened one after another and forced writers in Taiwan to face squarely the reality that confronted Taiwan; realism was gaining ground in the literary world and caused the debate on regional literature to break out in August 1977. In 1973 Yeh Shih-t’ao began to publish his critiques on writers and their works, including Ye Shitao zuojia lunji [Collected Critiques on Writers by Yeh Shih-t’ao] (1973), “Taiwan xiangtu wenxueshi daolun” [An Introduction to the History of Taiwan’s Regional Literature] (1977), Taiwan xiangtu zuojia lunji [A Collection of Essays on Taiwan’s Regional Writers] (1979), Meiyou tu, nayou wenxue [If There Is no Land, Where Is There Literature?] (1985), as well as Taiwan wenxue shigang [An Outline History of Taiwan Literature] (February 1987), the first literary history by a single author, which was completed in three years. The article “An Introduction to the History of Taiwan’s Regional Literature,” published in May 1977 touched off the Debate on Regional Literature three months later. This important critique carried on the assertion made in “Taiwan’s Regional Literature,” published in 1965, that the spirit of realism continued from generation to generation by the writers of Taiwan’s new literature entailed a firm belief in Taiwanese consciousness that penetrates the history of Taiwan’s regional literature and caused the conflict between “Taiwanese consciousness” and “Chinese consciousness” in the 1980’s. By the publication of An Outline History of Taiwan Literature, the historical viewpoint that Taiwan literature is inseparable from the people, the land, and the social reality has been firmly established.
Another upsurge in creative writing of fiction (1988–1990’s). After the historical mission of completing An Outline History of Taiwan Literature, the unfulfilled task for Yeh Shih-t’ao remained to be creative writing and aroused his passion once again for writing fiction. Previously he was engaged in fiction in the 1940’s and 1960’s. At the end of the 1980’s, the society entered a pluralistic and multiethnic generation with a diversity of voices and clamorous public opinions; all kinds of heretical beliefs and unconventional ideas emerged thick and fast without any prohibition or taboo. As he strove to keep pace with the trend of the times, his creative works had entirely different interests. In other words, his subject matter was not found from the past: Breaking away from political concerns, his biographical stories describe the experience of the White Terror with black humor, such as “Hong xiezi” [Red Shoes] and “Taiwan nanzi Jian Atao” [Jian Atao, A Taiwanese Man]; he expresses common human nature in the harmony of marriage relations between different ethnic groups, such as “Xilayazu de moyi” [The Last of the Siraya], “Yizu de hunli” [A Mixed Marriage Wedding], and “Guoshou” [Decapitation]; and in his later years, he published erotic stories dealing with human desires, such as “Spring Dreams at Butterfly Alley.” Although his earliest works were lost, the titles remain, such as “Mazu Festival,” “A Tale of an Expedition to Taiwan,” and the novel Zeiranj -j kanraku-ki [A Tale of the Fall of Fort Zeelandia] From such titles and the stories he wrote in 1960’s, such as “Cai liu ji” [A Story of Collecting Sulphur], “Meigui xiangquan” [A Rose Necklace], “Zhanbai ji” [A Story of Defeat], we can infer that their subject matter concerns the history, society, and culture of Taiwan in different periods under the occupation either by the Dutch, Cheng Ch’eng-kung of the Ming Dynasty, the Manchu government, or the Japanese. Taking his writings as a whole, we can see the broad vision of Yeh shih-t’ao as a writer and his aspiration to take the people and the social reality as the subjectivity of Taiwan literature.

Fame follows his real achievements with distinguished honors continuously accruing (after the 1990’s). In 1987 after the publication of An Outline History of Taiwan Literature, he immediately received a Culture Contribution Award from the China Times. Since 1991 after he retired from teaching at the age of sixty-five, he received all kinds of recognition and honors. In 1997 National Cheng Kung University conferred an honorary doctorate on him and he started to teach in the Graduate Institute of Taiwan Literature at the same university. In 2008, Ye Shitao quanji [The Complete Works of Yeh Shih-t’ao], including fiction, essays, critiques and reference materials in twenty volumes, was jointly published by the National Museum of Taiwan Literature and the Cultural Bureau of the Kaohsiung Municipal Government consummating over sixty years of achievements in and contributions to Taiwan literature.

Last December when I was in Taipei, I learned that Yeh Shih-t’ao had passed away and felt extremely regretful that we could not have published the English translation of An Outline History of Taiwan Literature in time to present it to him in person before his death. Later on Professor P’eng Jui-chin told me that there will be an anniversary memorial next year and I immediately promised that by then Taiwan Literature: English Translation Series will have published a special issue on Yeh Shih-t’ao and the history book will have come out to be presented to him. I knew that Professor Jenn-Shann Lin at the University of Alberta,
Canada, has a research project to translate Yeh Shih-t’ao’s works into English. I contacted him about my idea after I returned to the States and entrusted him and his colleague Professor Lois Stanford with the special issue. Their timely assistance out of mutual affection is very much appreciated.

Therefore, for this particular issue, Professors Jenn-Shann Lin and Lois Stanford work together again as guest editors. They worked together in 2005 to translate Tzeng Ching-wen’s works, Yülan hua—Taiwan nüxing xiaoshuo ji [Magnolia: Stories of Taiwanese Women], published by the Center for Taiwan Studies at UC Santa Barbara. Their close cooperation this time has greatly improved the quality of the journal, for which we are very thankful. The articles for translation selected by Professor Lin’s discerning eye as an expert in Taiwan literature are representative of the various styles and features of the author at different periods. His introduction will help the reader understand Yeh shih-t’ao’s literary characteristics as well as his humanistic spirit as a public intellectual. As for the studies, “Shimengshou de wenxue lücheng” [The Literary Journey of a Creature that Feeds on Dreams] by P’eng Jui-chin and “Ye Shitao Taiwan wenxuelun de yanbian jincheng yantan” [An Inquiry into the Course and Development of the Literary Theory of Yeh Shih-t’ao] by Hsü Chün-ya, both are comprehensive, showing the experts’ profound insight into Yeh Shih-t’ao’s distinctive features as a writer and his ideas and belief respecting the construction of a theory of Taiwan literature. These two pieces deserve our special recommendation to the reader as well as students of Taiwan literature. For the critique, we selected the preface to The Complete Works of Yeh Shih-t’ao written by Cheng Pang-chen, Director of the National Museum of Taiwan Literature, to pay our respects to the publishers of such a monumental project. Finally, Raelynn Moy and Anna Lin as the editing assistants have worked hard to make the continuing publication of this journal move forward into its thirteenth year, and deserve again our special appreciation.