

Winning Entries in the 2022 Taiwan Literature Awards
SELECTED EXCERPTS in ENGLISH

PEAK

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National Museum of Taiwan Literature

The National Museum of Taiwan Literature (NMTL), founded on October 17th, 2003, is the first national museum dedicated to the literary arts. The NMTL records, organizes and explains Taiwan's literary heritage. Archives and displays include examples from indigenous Malayo-Polynesian cultures as well as from key periods in Taiwan history – from the Dutch, Ming/Koxinga, Qing and Japanese periods through modern times. Educational activities promote awareness of Taiwan literary traditions. The museum includes library as well as Literary Wonderland designed to both educate and excite. In helping spread literary knowledge and appreciation, the museum hopes to make reading and the literary arts a "friend" for "life".

<https://www.nmtl.gov.tw/en>



Taiwan Literature Awards

The Taiwan Literature Awards organized by the National Museum of Taiwan Literature is an indicative literary award of Taiwan emphasizing the artistry and creativity of literature. The Awards recognize outstanding works in all literary genres, including fiction, nonfiction, prose, and poetry. There are two competition categories: Taiwan Literature Awards for Books, and the Taiwan Literature Awards for Original Works includes Taiwanese, Hakka, and indigenous groups, and opened up to novel, prose, and poetry. The Dramatic Script category, meanwhile, is recognized every year. It is universally recognized as one of Taiwan's most influential literary honors.

<https://award.nmtl.gov.tw>



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Bring Taiwan's Culture and Literature to the World

Translated by Scott Faul

Literature is so much more than words on a page. It encapsulates ideas and thoughts and reflects the era in which it was written. Nowhere are these qualities epitomized more than the literature of Taiwan.

As both cradle of the Austronesian language and culture and target of exploration and exploitation in the Age of Discovery and beyond, Taiwan has long played a central role in economics, geopolitics, and the trade in both goods and knowledge. During the Japanese Colonial Period, Taiwan expanded its links with East Asia and is today a linchpin in cross-Strait geopolitics and critical player in global trade, finance, and technology. When surveying the evolution of Taiwan literature, Taiwan's intimate involvement in world developments becomes readily apparent – to the point that the country may be seen as an integral part of social movements. As such, it is no exaggeration to say that the best way to get to know Taiwan is through its literature.

In recent years, the National Museum of Taiwan Literature has worked to bring Taiwan's culture and literature to the world by expanding literary translation efforts, promoting author and translator-in-residence programs, and organizing joint Taiwan-World Literature exhibitions. It is our great desire through these efforts both to generate a deeper understanding within Taiwan of the culture and literature of other nations and to earn Taiwan's place in the pantheon of World Literature through the telling of its stories.

The 203 works submitted to the 2022 Taiwan Literature Awards cover a variety of genres, from novels and poetry to prose and reportage.



Thirty of the entries made it into the finalist round, with seven earning Golden Book awards and three earning New Bud awards. In today's extremely competitive global publishing industry, Taiwan's literary creations have proven their worth in terms of both number of works published and expressive vitality. It is our sincere desire to share with the world the meaningful threads of social equity, historical justice, realist imagery, naturalistic explorations, writing in native language, popular religion, transgender rights, and life reflections woven through these works to spark further, meaningful discourse around these and other important issues.

Nicky Lin

Director

National Museum of Taiwan Literature

CROSSING BORDERS AND BOUNDARIES: Towards a More Capacious Literature

Translated by Mike Fu

What defines a good work of literature? Good literature should stir a reader's spirit, memory, and emotions by offering fresh inspirations and insights that infuse life with renewed vigor. In the jury's view, the diversity of this year's shortlisted books of poetry, essays, fiction, nonfiction, reportage, and other genres attests to the increasing capaciousness of Taiwan literature. The poetry genre has been the most impressive of all this year, with young writers staking out new linguistic frontiers and established poets reaching greater heights of lyrical sophistication. Also, writers of nonfiction have deployed new literary techniques to marvelous effect, while novelists of popular fiction have produced an abundance of narratives of a quality richer than ever before.

Among the awardees, novels centered on the socially disadvantaged demonstrate how writers have returned to the milieux of their protagonists to investigate and excavate their worlds. Innovative and heartfelt works of poetry use unassuming language to capture the quotidian and leave a lasting impression on the reader. Perhaps most notable are the nonfiction essays, treatises, and reviews that expand the intellectual horizons of their readers. The authors explore countless topics with beautiful prose, conveying their thoughts, emotions, and insights with admirable cohesion and nuance.

2022 TLA JUDGES' BIO

Hsiao Yeh 小野 became one of the bestselling authors of the 1970s with the publication of his novel *Life of a Chrysalis*. He has penned over a hundred novels, essays, and children's books. An influential contributor to the Taiwanese New Wave Cinema movement, he has written thirty screenplays, including *The Terrorizers* (dir. Edward Yang), *Reunion* (dir. Ko I-chen), and *The Story of a Gangster* (dir. Yeh Hung-Wei). He is a recipient of best screenplay awards from the British Film Institute Awards, Asia-Pacific Film Festival, and Golden Horse Film Festival.

Shu Ming Dong 董恕明 is Curator of the Taitung Poetry Festival. She holds a PhD from the Department of Chinese Literature at Tunghai University, where she focused on contemporary indigenous literature from Taiwan, modern literature, and creative writing. She is currently an associate professor and chair of the Department of Chinese Language and Literature at National Taitung University.

Pei-Chen Wu 吳佩珍 is a professor and Director of the Graduate Institute of Taiwanese Literature at National Chengchi University. She specializes in modern Japanese literature, Taiwan literature of the Japanese Colonial Period, and comparative cultural studies.

Hsing Chieh Ling 凌性傑 received his master's from the Department of Chinese Literature at National Chung Cheng University. The author of numerous essays and works of poetry, he has received many prestigious awards in Taiwan and currently teaches at Taipei Municipal Chien Kuo High School.

Yi-Chien Lee 李依倩 holds a Doctorate in Communication from Purdue University. She is a former Chair of the Department of Communication Arts at Fu Jen Catholic University. She currently works as an associate professor in the Department of Sinophone Literatures at National Dong Hwa University, where her research interests include literature and film criticism, postmodernism and postcolonialism, and new communication technologies.

Wei Hsiung Chan 詹偉雄 received his master's degree from the Graduate Institute of Journalism at National Taiwan University. He helped to establish Books.com.tw and several magazines such as *Business Next*, *Soul*, *Gigs*, and *Short Fiction*. His notable works include *The Economy of Aesthetic* and *The Aesthetic of Sportsman*. He has frequently served on award panels for the TIBE Book Prize and is currently a full-time researcher of cultural sociology.

Sherry Hsueh-Li Lee 李雪莉 is the Chief Operating Officer and former Editor-in Chief (2018–2023) of *The Reporter*, Taiwan's first non-profit media organization. She is also a faculty of practice at the graduate school of journalism of National Taiwan University. Sherry authored two award-winning books, *Far Sea Fishery And Slavery At Sea* (2017) and *In Their Teens, In Their Ruin* (2018). She won the Best Editor of the Year Award of Taipei International Book Exhibition for her co-authored and edited book *Fiery Tides* (2020), a book on Hong Kong's anti-extradition movement. She also edited a book on the Russian invasion in Ukrainian, *War in Ukraine* (2022) and *The Many Faces of Addiction: Taiwan's Eternal War on Drugs* (2023).

PORTRAITS IN WHITE

白色畫像

賴香吟

Kaori Lai



BIOGRAPHY

Before engaging in writing full-time, Kaori Lai pursued graduate studies in Japan, and worked in universities, bookstores, and museums. She is the recipient of numerous domestic honors including the Wu Zhuoliu Literary Prize and the Taiwan Literature Awards. Now a resident of Berlin, her previous works include non-fiction such as *Love Before Daybreak: Taiwanese Literary Landscapes Under Japanese Rule*; the novel *Afterwards*; the short story collections *Island*, *The Death of a Literary Youth*, and *Landscapes in the Mist*; and *Prehistoric Life*, a collection of essays.

賴香吟

白色畫像



INK



TLA Annual Golden Grand Laurel Award

Portraits in White

Fiction

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INTRODUCTION

The declaration of martial law in 1949 initiates the White Terror in Taiwan – nearly four decades of intense surveillance, disappearances, and political oppression. This collection of novellas stands out from other literary treatments of the period by foregoing the heart-wrenching cruelties and injustices in favor of unsentimental sketches of the struggle to maintain normalcy in times of political repression.

JUDGE'S COMMENTARY

by Pei-Chen Wu | Translated by Mike Fu

The author carefully deploys a variety of languages to construct the multilingual atmosphere of Taiwan and to evoke historical memories spanning the Japanese colonial and postwar periods up to our present time. Switching linguistic contexts to convey individual identities and relationship dynamics makes the characters vivid and dimensional and the time periods and settings they inhabit almost tangible.

Miss Casey

1

Translated by
Howard Goldblatt, Sylvia Li-chun Lin

Autumn sunbeams are always slanted, and because of the angle, they seem longer, very much longer.

At her age, Casey had seen plenty of sunlight, but to her it was most alluring in autumn, especially so the more she saw of it.

She'd been sitting in the waiting room for quite a while. Yellow and green leaves on a linden tree beyond the milky white window frame sparkled like gold in the autumn light, casting a picturesque outline onto the wall across the way. Shielding her eyes from the light with her hand, she squinted, wanting to feast on the sight, though the light shone painfully into her eyes, turning everything dark.

She removed her eyeglasses and rubbed her aching nose bridge. People tend to mock impressionist painters as being nearsighted, but if that were true, then their eyesight could not have been so bad. For someone with her poor eyesight, the outlines of everything were unclear, so blurry she saw only blotches of color. If she were to paint, she likely would not even be able to see what she put on the canvas.

"Ms. Yan." Casey's eyes snapped open at the voice of a nurse calling her name.

"Look up." The nurse shook a small bottle and put two drops in each eye.

The stinging sensation from the dilating drops slowly spread. She kept her eyes shut for the pain to lessen as she savored the golden sunshine of autumn from memory. Her thoughts wandered, and she puzzled over why the long, slanting sunbeams of spring were a soft pink, not as fiery as in autumn.

When she opened her eyes again, something was different about her

vision; what she couldn't see clearly remained blurry, but everything expanded like a cake in the oven. She walked slowly into the examination room, hand on the wall, her eyes barely open. The doctor turned on a light and shone it into her eyes to check the backs.

"Look into the light, please," the doctor said. "Bear with me a moment." Both she and the doctor were aging, and bearing up was getting harder for her. Tears kept oozing from her eyes.

"Be still," the doctor said.

Casey forced herself to not move and to look into the bright light, on task and fully focused. In response to a sharp pain from either her eyes or maybe someplace else on her body, she braced herself to look into the end of the brightness, until, out of fatigue or a real loss of vision, she seemed to have passed through something to arrive at an unusual space that was neither bright nor dark. She felt she could see everything as an expanse opened up before her, but then she reminded herself that it could not be so, that she really hadn't seen a thing.

Is this what it means to be blind? she wondered. Sort of like being flung into an unknown universe, thrown down the torrent of time?

"You really need to deal with your cataracts," the doctor said as she turned off the light, as if referring to ripening fruit.

"The crystalline lenses you mentioned last time?" she dried her tears.

The parts that adjust light coming into her eyes should have been crystal-clear, but they had become clouded, keeping light from entering and making everything blurry and dull-colored. "Like a fading photograph." The doctor was good at describing symptoms in terms of daily life, comparing clouded lenses, for instance, to window panes that resist cleaning and give the impression of fog.

The doctor went on about the vitreous body, the retina and macula, imparting much knowledge about the eyes that Casey needed to know, whether she wanted to or not; yet despite that knowledge, treatment was illusive—whenever that came up, the doctor said, people always ask

for too much. The aging of the organ was the cause, not an infection or a virus, so how could medicine possibly restore her vision? Except for one method—surgically replacing the old, natural lenses with new, artificial ones. But not everything could be replaced—and that was what depressed her. She came to the clinic once a year either to be told her condition had worsened or to await the worst pronouncement of all. If she could use her eyes for only a limited time, should she look at everything and commit it to memory or settle for a blurred, mundane, but longer sighted period by looking at nothing she did not need to see?

Still under the effects of dilation, her vision was unstable on the way home, but she could vaguely see the sun dipping down and a rosy sunset that made the sky seem as if on fire. A long, long time ago in the lane where they lived, when something similar occurred, an old woman in the covered walkway would point to the sky and shout to children playing in the lane, “Look, fire clouds.”

Worldly affairs are inextricably entangled, but the world is always beautiful. Not to see it would be such a pity. Thinking about that made Casey wistful:

The sun at dusk will soon set behind a hill, autumn winds can sometimes bring a chill.

She began humming a tune that had often played at home a long, long time ago. It was “Sunset Hills,” her mother’s favorite song about dusk. Casey had such a fine singing voice she’d captured the heart of whomever she was seeing with soft, velvety lyrics. She had sung English and French songs, but this Taiwanese oldie was hard, with its mixture of literary and colloquial expressions. In her recollection, Chi Lu-hsia sang it like a Taiwanese opera:

Eyes gazing toward my hometown, I sit under a banyan tree—

Her voice cracked at the words banyan tree—the pitch too high for her. Chi Lu-hsia was still the best, so Casey stopped singing, no longer in the mood. Why was she thinking about home at her age? Besides, banyan trees were only found there; where she was now, homesick people would be thinking about lindens.

October was nearly over and the lindens were shedding their yellowed leaves; the trees would be denuded with more winds.

Autumn winds. Ah, autumn winds, they blow cold not just some of the time, but are shivering cold year in and year out.

She tightened her scarf. The sun sets in the west, her mother would say, the sun sets in the west. It wouldn't be completely dark before the moon was up, the time of wolf and dog. It was the moment when you could not tell a wolf from a dog, but with Casey's bad eyes, she could not tell that anything was coming at her, wolf or dog.

She listened to music as she did the dishes. The dishwasher she'd once used had broken down a few years earlier; it was beyond repair, and she didn't feel like replacing it. Living alone, she had only a pot, a few plates, and a couple of glasses to wash. What really bothered her was the frigid water on cold days, when her fingers were so stiff she sometimes chipped the edge of a plate or dropped a glass and broke it.

On the other hand, she had a full china cabinet, enough to use till the day she died, she reflected, unconcerned.

"You're really old if you think like that," her younger sister had chided her on the phone a few days before.

"Old, you think I'm not old?" She chuckled. Nothing wrong with being old. In fact, she'd been quite happy in recent years, looking and living just the way she liked. She'd done the things that people did when they were young. Over the years she'd spent in Paris, she'd worn thick bangs, heavy eye shadow and long false lashes. Everyone

was copying Brigitte Bardot. Rebellng against the conservative culture, they turned the national flag into bath towels and wore high chalice-shaped boots. Ai-ya—an epiphany: that must have been what men considered sexy.

How long ago was that? Why dredge up the past?

Wie einst Lili Marleen

Wie einst Lili Marleen

The song's last line. Why bring that up?

After doing the dishes, Casey picked up a drying towel for the final step: the water was so hard the dishes wouldn't look washed if not dried thoroughly. She started the music again. Mark had left plenty of Marlene Dietrich music behind, enough for her to listen to for the rest of her life.

Clearly not old, Mark had been a big fan of Dietrich. Back when they lived on Rote Insel, whenever they had friends over, he'd point to the window kitty-corner across the way and tell them that was where Dietrich was born. When they were alone, he'd dance her to the music from one room to the next. The old recording was crudely produced, scratchy, but the song writer and the singer seemed so self-assured. In a primordial time, all around the world, lights went on at the same time, a golden age, when innovation was authentic, so new it was full of light.

Golden Age, a term they'd learned from a teacher, Professor Ts'ao, who must have known about Dietrich. They'd learned everything Western during the Showa Modern period, so he could not have missed Dietrich. People of his generation grew up breathing the air of Showa Modern. Especially since he was in Tokyo. But he never talked about the past, nor had Professor Yang of the history department. There was so much the people of their generation would not

talk about. Mark said it was the same with his father, who refused to mention the past. But he'd often played Lili Marleen on the harmonica in the backyard, playing and playing, and then letting his head drop when the melody ended.

If he were still alive, Mark would be seventy. What would they be doing together in their seventies? They'd dance if they still could; if not, they'd take walks in the forest. And if they couldn't walk, they'd sit and look at flowers. What about Professor Ts'ao, who had been dead all the years she'd been away from Taiwan?

Casey didn't think about age. Not much, at least, but when reminded of others' ages, she was made aware that she'd lived longer than Mark, Professor Ts'ao, and her father. In her current life, there was nothing to refer to, but she had gained some understanding of what they had not understood or had found objectionable—could that be what people called life's lessons? Having reached this stage in her life, the days were increasingly tranquil as their number dwindled. What would she do with life's lessons? Classmates and relatives had died off, one after another. Her classmate Ch'ien-hui had mentioned in a postcard that young Mr. Ku had died of a stroke in New York.

She was recalling men who had died before their time. Why was that?

After putting the washed and dried dishes back where they belonged, she wiped down the sink. Now, finally, she could sit down and pour herself a bed-time drink and listen to the music with no distractions.

*Die Seligkeiten vergangener Zeiten
Sind alle noch in meinem kleinen Koffer drin
Ich hab noch einen Koffer in Berlin*

Dietrich, like a witch, drew out every last note in such a magical way it immediately transformed the ambience of every colorless room. Mark took her hand, twirled her over and over, from one room to the next.

On a chanté, on a dansé. Et l'on n'a meme pas pensé a s'em-brasser—ai-ya, that's not right. This was West Berlin, not the Champs Elysee—RIAS Berlin was about to start, Mark's radio station, ready to play Dietrich's recording in Berlin.

"Eine Freie Stimme der Freien Welt."

Mark imitated the station call sign and whispered in her ear, "A Free Voice of the Free World, and I still haven't visited Free China."

Free China, it sounded like lover's talk when he said it, but it made her sad, the two words seemingly unrelated to her.

"Ich hab noch einen Koffer in Berlin," Mark sang as he said, "Do you know we're that suitcase?"

She looked up at him blankly, unsure if she was really seeing him.

"We're here, left behind."

Resting her chin in her hand, she finished the song before turning off the kitchen light and walking into the bathroom to remove her makeup and wash her face.

"Ich hab noch einen Koffer in Taipeh," her young sister, who lived in Paris, loved to sing a changed version.

Why do that? Casey said to herself. They had wanted to leave all along, and that was why'd they ended up where they were now.

"Leave. Leave while you're young," said Professor Ts'ao, who taught English poetry, waving impatiently.

She left and went far away. A ticket for an ocean liner took her half way around the globe, boarding in Hongkong and disembarking in Marseille, where she took a train to Paris.

Casey was from Mang-kah, where the Long-shan Temple enjoyed a long history of worship. Snacks and all sorts of goods vied for visitors' attention in front of the Temple. In their conversations, family elders would say, this here was Pak-phe-liao or Hako-cho, but when addressing letters or filling out forms, they would have to be K'ang-ting Road, Kuang-chou Road, Kun-ming Road. When she reached the age that she could read a map, it dawned on her that those were all cities in South-west China.

Walking down Kawabata-cho, past Roosevelt Road, she arrived at the south end of Taipei, where baffling place names were matched with drastically different scenery—farm fields, ponds, and dusty plant nurseries. The university campus was quite bleak, the newly built classrooms and dorm buildings a forlorn sight, the only exception being the former College of Literature and Politics, a lively place fronted by a row of pencil-straight coconut palms extending into the distance, bracketed by undulating hills on one end and the flag—blue sky, white sun, red all over—flapping atop the fortress-like guard house entrance on the other.

Casey and Ch'ien-hui went to ask Professor Ts'ao to serve as their advisor. Ch'ien-hui's family had known him from way back, so that seemed natural, but not Casey. Professor Ts'ao stared at the form silently for so long she thought he'd say no, but he lowered his voice and said, "I heard your father was a student of Mr. Tu's."

Her father's reputation? No, Mr. Tu's reputation, was not unknown to her. He was the first Taiwanese to receive a doctoral degree in medicine. Her father often talked about what the man had done. He served as an example for her father in how he conducted himself and how he cared for his health, even citing Tu's daughter as a well-raised child. But only Casey's eldest brother and sister managed to complete their education; her second sister failed to master either of the National Languages, thanks to war and regime change. Casey became a model student who spoke ㄅㄆㄇㄏ Mandarin, even made her way into the girl's high school

Mr. Tu's daughter had attended. Dressed in a new green blouse over a black skirt, she received high scores in English. Her father then told her that Mr Tu's daughter had attended Taipei Imperial University as its first Taiwanese female student, majoring in English literature.

Casey did well enough to get into Taipei Imperial University—no, now it should be called Taiwan University—but her father had died of a heart attack from the fatigue of travel.

Rulers and ministers, fathers and son, all should act in accordance with their position. With the loss of the pillar figure, Casey's family now had more women than men, as if they had all become the widows of the time. Hoping for your early return. But Father would never be back; he hadn't had the good fortune to live a long time, after avoiding being drafted by the Japanese and surviving the February 28th Incident. The light went out at his clinic, though the plaque, "Generous, Benevolent Cure" remained. Few matchmakers came around now. In that large house, her lonely mother and second sister drew dressmaking patterns, a radio on all day for them to listen to storytelling and songs about heartache and disappointment in love, uncertain futures, and the sorrow of betrayal. Some were in Japanese, others in Taiwanese, but all were similar in melody and singing style.

"Ai," her mother would sigh when she'd had too much of the songs, "Japanese and Taiwanese songs used to be separate, now the two languages are mixed in one song."

Casey knew which Japanese and Taiwanese records her mother was referring to. Since the age of five or six, she'd enjoyed staring at the black, pancake like disc as it turned and turned to produce sounds. So magical.

*A lonely night I spent alone by a lamp
 A cool breeze blowing in my face
 Waiting for the gentleman to come pick
 The flower of youth in full bloom*

*A heartless rain, a heartless rain, no regard for my future
A flower falling, a flower falling, but no one cares*

One song on each side. When it was about to play out, little Casey would fight to change sides. Columbia, on the disk, was likely the first English word she'd known how to read. As a little girl, she'd sing in her childish voice songs she'd learned from the records, earning smiling compliments from the adults, however she sang them. She was a better singer in her late teens, but had lost interest in such songs as "Mending a Tattered Fishing Net," "Hot Zongzi," "Zero Hour in Taipei," and "When the Gong Sounds." When at a young, uncomprehending age, she could already sense the hints of bitterness and lament in the songs and in daily life, anything but uplifting. The dead were gone, and those left behind were barely living, shut up in houses, getting old as time passed, their private thoughts buried deep inside, like pickled vegetables stashed under the bed. Casey did not want to live like that. The elders kept telling her to focus on her studies, keep quiet and you'll be trouble-free, and never get involved in politics.

What did she know about politics at her age anyhow? At most, she puzzled over the terror she'd witnessed as a child, over Nishi-honganji turning into a multi-family compound, over the mournful look on someone's face on a morning when the dew was refreshing. Don't ask, for there'd be no answers, and even if there were, you might not be able to mention them, and if you did—

—terror, that's all, sheer terror. A bright white light swept over, blinding anyone who looked into it.

Listen to the songs, sing a few of them. But Taiwanese or Mandarin, she didn't like the lyrics. So she looked up words in her dictionary, memorized the English lyrics, and danced to the melodies:

*Seven lonely days make one lonely week
Seven lonely nights make one lonely me*

THE GOOD PEOPLE UPSTAIRS

樓上的好人

陳思宏

Kevin Chen



Profile image: © Mirror Fiction

BIOGRAPHY

Kevin Chen (Chen Si-hung), born in 1976

in Yongjing Township, Changhua County, is the ninth child of a farming family. He majored in English at Fu Jen Catholic University and studied at the Graduate Institute of Drama and Theatre at National Taiwan University. Chen received the inaugural prize in the Lin Rong-san Short Story Contest and the Annual Chiuko Fiction Prize. His novel *Ghost Town* won the Taiwan Literature Awards Annual Golden Grand Laurel and the Golden Tripod Award, and translation rights for this work have been sold around the world. In addition to writing, Chen occasionally acts and translates. He currently lives in Berlin.



*Die
guten
Menschen
von
oben*

樓上的好人

*Kevin
Chen*

陳思宏



TLA Golden Book Award

The Good People Upstairs

Fiction

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INTRODUCTION

Being threatened in Taiwan by gangsters, a woman living in Yun Lin has to go to Berlin to find her younger brother whom she hadn't contacted for a long time.

JUDGE'S COMMENTARY

by Wei Hsiung Chan

Like Chen's own multifaceted personality, the multiple oppositional worlds reflected in this story facilitate the recounting of a bizarre tale, free of the constraints of pure realism. The surface of the story, dusted in gold and powder, creates an atmosphere of irony and bewilderment. But something else also lurks there in the darkness, waiting to ambush the reader - the sorrow that all humans desperately and invariably attempt to forget.

The Lobster and the Seahorse

Translated by Mike Fu

The day she arrived in Berlin, she got lost.

I. Am. Screwed. Calm down, she told herself. Flare your nostrils, open your mouth. Take a deep breath. You'll definitely smell it.

Was she misremembering? Or had she misheard? She couldn't smell any coffee at all, nor cigars for that matter. Her youngest brother had mentioned cigars, hadn't he? And coffee too, no? The lobster?

It was scorching hot that day. Berlin at the height of summer was a sinister place. It felt as if the city had grabbed a hair dryer and cranked it to the hottest and highest setting, blowing air into her nostrils, ears, and mouth. Her flat body swelled up like a hot air balloon leaving the earth. She wiped beads of sweat from her forehead with her hand; her fingers poked at her flushed skin. Air leaked out of holes in her body and she was pulled back to the hot earth by the force of gravity. She crumpled onto her suitcase, out of breath and in shambles.

What was this place? A lost cat or dog? What was the date or the day of the week? What was the time difference between Germany and Taiwan? Was the time difference between Berlin and Yuanlin? Why had she come to Berlin? Why had she left Yuanlin in such a rush? Where was her youngest brother's house? Why had she left Taiwan in such a rush? What happened yesterday? Had it been yesterday, or several days earlier? Who were those people dressed in black? Why had her brother agreed to let her come? Where was her other brother? Why had she wanted to come? The lobster? Where was Germany anyway? Where was Berlin? The seahorse? Why hadn't her other brother picked up the phone? Coffee? Cigars?

She felt as though she knew the answer to every question she asked herself. If only she could clear her head, she'd easily be able to solve the

problem. As a high school teacher, she was used to forcing her students to solve problems every single day. This should be a piece of cake by comparison. But for the moment, a warm mist filled her mind. A tropical rain fell on her scalp and white-hot mosquito lamps were under her armpits. Summer was ferocious mosquitoes seeking the light, dashing against her armpits, her armpit hairs catching fire, the burnt stench of her body. She hadn't slept throughout the nearly full day of air travel. Every time she closed her eyes, those hands would appear before her.

She pressed her back against the campus wall. Afraid to look directly at those two hands, she had no choice but to lift her gaze toward the sky. It was a stuffy afternoon and an overcast day, the sun nowhere to be seen. The campus wall appeared harmless, the sun hidden inside and napping all this while. The cement wall was scorching hot against her back, searing her skin like sliced meat on a stoked grill. The hands of the person in black started probing upward from her abdomen, rough pebbles in their palms, their calloused fingertips coarse like rocky earth. Sharp fingernails sinisterly grazed her flat chest, and when they reached her throat, the palms suddenly became a rabid dog, those ten fingernails transforming into sharp awls pressing against her neck, her screams buried alive. Those two hands were sopping wet, reeking of tobacco and betel nut. The nails were neatly manicured, except for the long nails on both little fingers, stretching beyond the ring fingers, like Guest 44. Wait, was it 44? Those hands cut off her breathing. Her instinctive response was not to beg and plead, but to ask, "Are you Number 44? Guest 44 from Yuanlin? No, you're too young. You couldn't be him. Sir, please let go of me. Sir, let me take another look at my notebook."

"Miss Lin," the man in black said, "I have a question for you. Where is your brother? If I let you go, you have to tell me right away. Let me tell you now, Miss Lin, that my hands are disobedient. I can't control them, especially when they encounter dishonest people who refuse to speak

the truth. That really drives them crazy. Last time, I accidentally blinded someone with my pinkie nails. Aiyo, it really wasn't on purpose, but I was so livid that I couldn't control my hands. Miss Lin, you know what's good for you, right? Don't scream, don't be afraid. I'll count down from five and then let go. Please, please don't disappoint me. Five. Four. Three. Are you ready?"

Being suffocated wasn't a completely new experience. She'd been choked like this before. When she was just a girl. That summer night, the air conditioner roaring. She opened her eyes. That person made her open her eyes. Number 399. "Close your eyes," Number 399 said, "and this time won't count." Her youngest brother was so calm. Her other little brother wasn't at home. She wanted to beg and plead. Her mother covered her mouth and nose so that she couldn't scream. Her mother was screaming soundlessly. Had all the summer mosquitoes landed on her face to suck her blood? Because her mother kept striking her face. Thank you, Mother, for swatting away the mosquitoes on my face. Her mother slapped her so many times. "You're not allowed to cry," she hissed, her voice quavering. "Open your eyes." But Mother was crying herself. Another slap. "I told you to open your eyes. You don't get it, huh? I told you guys to smile and you didn't get that either, huh." Did it hurt? She forgot. She couldn't remember now if it had hurt at the time. But she remembered her little brother's face, how big his eyes had been, how she looked into his eyes, how he smiled as he reached his hand out to her. Her brother's eyes were beautiful, so big and full of feeling, his eyelashes palm fronds, his pupils a universe, his nose a rugged mountain. How could they have the same mother when their eyes and facial structures were nothing alike? No one believed them when they said they were brother and sister. Her brother must have had a different father. She got her flat nose, small eyes, and thin lips from her biological father. She looked sorrowful even when she smiled. Her brother must have gotten his nice eyes and nice nose from a handsome man. Her brother bared

his teeth when he smiled, eyebrows crinkling slightly, every fine hair in his eyebrows standing erect, his dimples screaming, the universe in his pupils gently collapsing. Outside the windows, a torrential storm was raging in Yuanlin.

She dragged her large suitcase across a serene Berlin street. The wheels on her suitcase struggled against the stone pavement. The stones here, long-trampled and full of resentment, obstructed her with their craggy surface. The suitcase broke free from her grip several times. It truly was serene, this unfamiliar street in the afternoon, completely still and not a soul in sight. How could it be? How could this be the capital of Germany? Didn't a few million people live here? Why was it so quiet? Where were all the people? She rubbed her eyes and looked to either side, but she still couldn't find the lobster or the seahorse. The battery on her phone was dead. She had saved her little brother's address on that phone. She was screwed, really screwed. She must have taken a wrong turn somewhere.

Stumbling forward in a panic, she kicked a stone that protruded from the pavement. She lost her balance and collapsed onto the street. The four-wheel suitcase broke free from her and glided smoothly away on the uneven road, speeding toward the opposite side of the street. It was too hot. Finally broke free from the old hag again and got into the shade. The suitcase stared out at her from its cool haven. With both hands stuck to the pavement, the stones were burning hot, her body pouring sweat. She hurriedly took off her down jacket. She'd imagined Berlin as a cold European city where you needed a jacket even in August. She'd heard that air conditioning was rare in Europe. The summers were cool, so it was a great place to escape the heat, this center of the Cold War. She was shocked to discover how hot it was, now that she was here. Cold War my ass. It was even hotter than Taiwan here. Was this really Berlin? Was she really in Berlin? Did Berlin really exist? Was her youngest brother really living

here? Had she gotten on the wrong plane?

“Sure,” her brother had said on the phone. “Just come.” But because her visit was so sudden, he couldn’t take off from work and come to the airport to get her. She should take a taxi. Taxis in Germany must be so expensive, she said. She could just take a bus or the subway. At any rate, she could look at the map on her phone. All she had to do was get directions and follow along, simple as that. Her brother had explained in detail about the subways and landmarks near his home. He gave her heaps of information. She had absolutely no desire to take notes. As long as I have your address, it’s fine, she wanted to tell him. I’ll just enter your address in my phone and follow directions. She didn’t work out the details beforehand, for whatever reason. When she got off the plane, she found that the SIM card in her Taiwanese phone had no roaming allowance. She couldn’t connect to the airport’s wireless network, either. It took forever to connect to the free wireless in the airport café. And then, right when she was about to input her brother’s address, her phone battery died. She rifled through her luggage and backpack, but could find neither her charger nor her portable power bank. She struggled to recall what her brother had told her. A blue seahorse and red lobster, or was it a red seahorse and blue lobster? Or were they both blue and red? And why was he talking about a lobster to begin with? What about the key? Ah, wait. She seemed to remember that the lobster would help her find her brother’s house key. And also, and also, there was something about a bulletin. A street near his house had missing person bulletins posted all over the utility poles and transformer boxes. Hold on. Were they missing person bulletins? They might have been for a missing cat? Or a dog? She remembered that the subway station’s name began with an F. She’d looked it up on her computer before the trip and found that it was in southwest Berlin. F—how did the rest of it go? Ah, that’s right. Oak. They’d talked about oak trees, but it didn’t feel like just last night. She’d lost touch with her brother these past years. Talking on the phone was a

rare occasion. When the conversation dried up and they were looking for things to talk about, their pleasantries eventually led to her little brother telling her about oak trees. But what was it about oak trees? Had he said something yesterday about a piano, as well? There was an artisanal piano store by his house, and the owner looked pretty scary, always sitting out front with an unlit Cuban cigar between his fingers. Every time his ex-wife visited the store, he'd smoke the cigar inside after she left and play piano the whole day, even late into the night, until the neighbors couldn't take it anymore and called the police. She remembered that her brother had spoken of a smell. Was it the smell of a cigar? No, it was the smell of coffee. Yes, coffee. Her brother said that right outside of the F subway station was a cozy little coffee shop. The owner roasted the beans himself, an aroma so rich that it could wake the entire city of Berlin. It'd been so long since she'd spoken to her brother. How she adored talking to him. She wanted that conversation to last forever. It'd been so very long since she'd spoken to anyone at all.

Since her phone was dead, she had no choice but to look up directions the old-fashioned way. She asked for a guide to the Berlin U-Bahn and a simple city map. She fixed her gaze on the southwest corner of town, searching for a subway station that started with the letter F. The U-Bahn map was extremely complicated, practically a spiderweb. Her eyes entangled themselves in the details like little critters, unable to move. It took an incredible effort for her to find a promising name. She wasn't confident, but she'd just have to try it. She bought a ticket, boarded the bus, got off at the wrong stop, transferred three times, subway to bus, bus to subway. She couldn't figure out north from south, steeled herself to ask for help but failed. God, she'd completely forgotten her German, she couldn't even manage to get anything out in English. She dragged her suitcase along as she got on random buses and subways. There were so many stations without an elevator, and the suitcase threatened to break her wrist. After tortuous hours, she finally got to the

station that started with an F.

When she got out of the station, she found that there really was a café in front of her, a small one that wasn't open. She took a deep breath. She didn't smell the aroma of coffee. On this hot afternoon, Berlin was dead asleep. The station was completely empty, inside and outside, except for her. She peered into the café. No owner roasting beans, just scattered chairs that looked exhausted, upside down atop tables. The sunlight was melting iron on the stone pavement, a spray of tangerine sparks. The lobster, the lobster, the lobster, the lobster. She dragged her suitcase along, repeating those words over and over to herself. If she could find the lobster, then she'd find the keys. It was already past the appointed hour. Her brother must be worried sick. He was probably waiting for her on his doorstep already.

With both hands, she struggled off the scorching-hot pavement and gradually got up. Her down jacket was on the road, lifeless and miserable. She'd washed this cheap outerwear too many times and the fabric was damaged in many places, the down feathers making a break for it. One time when she was rushing around on campus, she heard a student snicker as she passed by. She turned around to find that feathers were spewing from her jacket, the path she'd walked covered in snowy down. She could immediately guess what new nickname the students would give her. Sure enough, from that day on, they called her the Balding Old Maid. It wasn't that bad, really, considering that she was usually known as Old Maid, or simply Need to Get Laid. With the extra word in there, the nickname was much catchier. The nickname must have eaten something extra nutritious, because it kept growing in the days that followed until it became the Last Balding Old Maid in Yuanlin. She didn't know how to sew, so she just put band-aids on the ripped parts so the feathers would stop spewing out. It would be a shame to throw it away. Yuanlin was warm year-round, so she had few occasions to wear the jacket. If she slapped on a few more band-aids, the jacket might keep this Balding Old

Maid company for a few more winters.

The Old Maid of Yuanlin was in Berlin now. While bending over to pick up the scarred jacket, she saw an acorn.

Yes. No mistake about it. Even though she'd never encountered the real thing before, she was certain that what she picked up from the pavement was the fruit of an oak tree. She remembered seeing pictures of it online. Nice and round, with an exterior that was shiny as an egg. When she looked closer at the trees on this serene streetscape, she noticed there weren't any acorns in the branches and thus inferred that these weren't oak trees. Dragging her suitcase along, she gazed at the ground and looked for more acorns. Oak tree, oak tree, oak tree. If she could find the oak tree, then she'd find her little brother's home. That's right. Her brother had said there was a centennial oak in the courtyard in front of his building.

The sporadic acorns on the road seemed to be leading her on. She followed the acorns and turned onto a small road, an even quieter environment. Had she been abandoned by the whole world? Or had she accidentally barged into a parallel universe? No one seemed to be here. At the end of the street was a park filled with greenery, the trees rustling as they swayed, inviting her to enter.

She walked into the park and sat on a bench, a tree towering majestically behind her. There were a few scattered acorns on the bench. She was so, so tired. Holding the collected acorns in her palm, she couldn't be bothered to look up. She knew she had found the oak tree, but there was still no trace of her brother, nor the lobster. This was a public park, and not her brother's courtyard.

No sign of anyone in the park. Time was moving so slowly. Tree branches cast feathery shadows on her skin that tickled her. Finally, a cool breeze picked up. She lay down on the bench. Summer immediately pressed down on her body. She was so, so tired. She wanted to go to sleep so badly.

THAT DAY, WE SEARCHED OUR WAYS BEHIND A CHICKEN BUTT

那一天我們跟在雞屁股後面尋路

何玟玟

Wun-Jin He

BIOGRAPHY

Wun-Jin He was born in Taichung in 1998 and is now based in Tainan. She graduated from National Cheng Kung University with dual degrees in Taiwanese Literature and History. Her résumé of awards includes the Flame Tree Literary Prize, Tainan Literary Award, and Ministry of Education's Creative Art Award, among others. She is currently involved in organizing various literary awards, competitions, and Comic World Taiwan.



Profile image: © H. Y. LINN Photography

Wun-Jin began her extremely accomplished literary career at a very young age, earning over a short span of time dozens of literary awards and honors. Her first short story collection *That Day, We Searched Our Ways Behind a Chicken Butt* brings together writings from across her career that create a space for tales and conversations about gender diversity.

何玟瑋
著

那一天

我們跟在

雞屁股後面

多巧路





TLA Golden Book Award

That Day, We Searched Our Ways Behind a Chicken Butt

Fiction

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INTRODUCTION

Each of the nine suspensefully engaging short dark-humor stories by Wun-jin included in this compilation deliver polished narratives, animated language, engaging characters, and readability. The stories, centered on the bitter spawn of a broken society, will keep you on the edge of your seat and aching for more. The dark heart of humankind trumps a good ghost story every time in a world where physical and sexual assault and abuse are rampant.

JUDGE'S COMMENTARY

by Pei-Chen Wu

Wun-Jin weaves folktales, local beliefs, feminism, gender queerness, and LGBTQIA+ topics through her stories in this book. These nine short stories, all centered on countryside settings in southern Taiwan, while conveying an aesthetic typical of Taiwanese "Village Literature" are nevertheless rendered and portrayed in ways that surpass traditional literary frameworks.

That Day, We Searched Our Ways Behind a Chicken Butt

Translated by Jenna Tang

The asphalt roads in Tainan were steaming hot, the street view swaying with the heat under the exposure of the sun. Zayne took her scooter on the road, her helmet smothered her hair, a hot wind intermingled with the salty taste of the sea blew right through our skin. I placed one arm on Zayne's waist, the other one holding tight to my bag--the one with a red envelope inside.

We circled around the area a few times without finding a good spot. Zayne began to murmur, and I remained in a trance, responding to her with a brief *Yeah Ah Oh*. Every syllable she blurted out became blurred in the blowing wind and never entered my ears. My mind was full of Mehme.

Zayne suddenly braked her scooter and my head clashed against her helmet. *Fuck that shit*, Zayne cursed out loud.

"What's going on?"

"Fuck, there's a chick!" Zayne pointed to the front of the scooter with her chin.

I pushed my crooked glasses and saw a white little chick trotting across the road, flapping its wings, as though it were about to fly; its little feet speedily tipping against the asphalt all the way to the bush by the edge of the road. As though to catch its breath, the chick stretched its head and looked left and right, then stood there staring straight at us.

"Is Tainan this rural? Even little chicks like this run around the road like they own it?" Zayne examined that plump chick head to toe, "Hey, want to catch it? We could add it to our dish."

"That's a *white phoenix*, a chicken that's used in consecration ceremonies at the temple. We can't catch it."

“How do you know?”

“I used to perform those ceremonies with Grandpa and Mehmeh, and we used exactly this type of chicken.”

Different from Zayne’s Catholic upbringing, Mehmeh and I grew up in a Taoist family. For a long time, we had been immersed in all kinds of temple ceremonies and worship rituals, following our grandparents’ generation visiting big and small temples in Tainan. While the adults performed religious ceremonies, we kids played around in the temple courtyard. Since I was little, I had seen these religious instruments often enough, and even though I didn’t know every detail about the ceremonies, I understood how they were generally run. Mehmeh probably knew better than I did. After all, our family was hoping that Mehmeh would become the successor.

The consecration ceremony requires extracting blood from the crest of a chicken, mixing it with cinnabar, and then using it to dot the eyes, ears, mouths, and noses of the deities. Afterwards, we would refract the light onto the deities using a bagua mirror. When the ceremony ended, the sculptures of the deities would then be deemed spiritual, capable of being worshiped and having the power to melt away any challenges and difficulties vexing their believers.

Mehmeh had taken part in the ceremony once, and was assigned to hold onto the white phoenix whose crest would be cut open. She was reluctant to do it, and I remembered what I saw: with their golden faces wrapped with pieces of red cloth, the sculptures were welcomed all the way to the temple’s shrine. Our father tied a red headkerchief around his head, murmuring mantras, ringing bells in front of the shrine. Then he gripped the chicken, gesturing in front of the deity, chanting: *I am the master with the white phoenix, and you, the earthly chicken, have become part of this sacred consecration of the vast sky and wide of land. For the people, once dotted, you revive the gods, slow the phantoms, and never let them stop...*

The chicken's feet were tied together with a rope. Its wings were gripped tight by our father and it was forced to stretch its neck like a watering can. That white phoenix rolled its eyes, not giving a single cry. Our father took a sword and handed it to Mehmeh. Mehmeh tried to control her facial expressions as she took control over the chicken. It dropped its head without struggling. That is, until our father sliced open its crest with a sword, after which it began to cry desperately, flapping its wings, attempting to break free from its corporeal shackle of pain. Mehmeh was so close to letting go of the white phoenix, and our father swiftly locked its neck, letting the blood drip into a small plate. Once finished, he eyed Mehmeh, telling her to take the chicken away. After the ceremony, Mehmeh sobbed and untied the rope around the chicken's neck. *Go! Just go! No more. You're free,* she said.

"So what's to be done with these chickens with their crests sliced open?"

"Chickens that have been used for religious reasons cannot be fed or eaten, so we can only let them go. Let them wander around."

Some chickens wandered around and around until they became truly lost. I thought about it quietly, Just like Mehmeh.

The white chick crooked its head and stared at us for a while until it lost interest. It twisted its chubby body and bumped away. Zayne expressed that it was rare to be able to encounter a sacred white phoenix. Its appearance, she said, was extremely spiritual. She asked if I also wanted to follow it to see where the chicken might lead us. I said yes.

Zayne drove the scooter slowly as she and I followed behind this white chicken butt. Thinking back on it now, the scene must have looked pretty ridiculous. But I wasn't in the mood to laugh. The culprit that prevented me from smiling was now in my bag.

"Yang Chen-Gang has always been real trouble, even in death. I'm surprised you have put up with him for so long."

"Mehmeh is my ... I'm his sister. What choice do I have other than to

help him?”

Yang Chen-Gang was Mehmehe. He used to be my brother, then became my sister. Sometimes, it was hard for me to explain to older generations or to the people around me the twists and turns we had gone through. From the start, I wasn't used to suddenly calling him my sister when I had called him my brother all these years. That's why I came to calling him "Mehmehe" instead, like a sheep, or that long, dragging tone of "Meh---". Even though I sounded like a sheep every time I called him, we settled down with this new name.

"Oh shit! Yeah, I mean Mehmehe. I keep forgetting." Zayne tucked, "Even this is a lot of trouble."

"As long as you get used to it."

It was all about getting used to it. However, in my family, besides me, other members weren't used to Mehmehe's transformation. The fact that Mehmehe turned from male to female meant there was now no son to carry our family name forward or to continue our ancestral Taoist legacy. But, they had forgotten (or deliberately avoided mentioning) one thing, one thing that I remembered very clearly--about how Mehmehe should've been a girl from the start.

I took part in Mehmehe's personal history, his prehistory overlapped with my childhood years. It had all begun in the underground world of Chinatown--in its extravagant hustle and bustle. At the time, that Chinatown had yet to begin its decline, and many young couples still frequented the area to eat, shop, and fall in love. The latest hits flowed free and easy from the speakers; store display windows featured the latest trendy fashions; walls were covered with posters of pop stars from Taiwan, Hong Kong, Japan, Europe, and America; mixtures of smells would linger in the strip mall; fragrances of food and sweat wrung together, turning into a veritable "Ganges River" experience. Shadows moving back and forth like boats. As one moved along the underground street, one was immersed in a sense of earthliness. While in the sea of humans

crowded into those underground streets, my mother held my hand tight, turned out of the crowd of shoppers and entered a fortune-telling shop.

The air in the fortune-telling shop was infused with a strange incense smell. Their display window facing the hallway was covered with the fortune-teller's poster, stating "*Fortune-telling and Name Changing Sails Our Future.*" A sofa, a bookshelf, and a desk nearly fully occupied this tiny shop. The fortune-teller, chubby and middle-aged, his extra-high hairline revealing a shiny, half-naked forehead, greeted us with a face piled up with friendly smiles: "Welcome, welcome, what would you like to know?"

"I'd like to know if I'm having a boy or a girl. I've already asked someone else before..." My mother smoothed my hair and handed him a sheet of paper with a birthday horoscope. "He said my daughter here will attract a little brother, is this true?"

The fortune-teller took a glance at my mother's still fairly flat belly and said: "Oh... let me see... *Nah.* This horoscope you have... According to astrology, it says you're destined to have two daughters, and for a boy... you'll have to see... it seems like there's one but not really..."

"So do I have a boy or not?"

"It's hard to say... This one you have, ... this one, is very strange. Oh, it's the first time I've ever seen something like this!"

"Huh? Then what should I do? My family in-law would like to have someone to take over the family business, and it's better to be a son."

"Oh my, what to do then? How about you request Madame Linshui and do a star-changing ceremony? To change your girl into a boy? I know an *Âng-thâu-á.* He's pretty powerful..."

"No need," my mother interrupted him, retrieving the piece of paper with the birth horoscope, "my father-in-law runs that kind of business."

I sat on a kiddie ride, licking an egg-shaped popsicle, watching my mother chatting with a friend over her cellphone. "My father in-law does

this kind of ceremony.” she said, “I’m just concerned about what if I do the star-changing ceremony and still give birth to a girl?”

After returning home, my mother consulted my grandfather and father. The air was sweltering that night, and little mosquitoes clustered around the light at our gate. My grandfather sat under the dim yellow light, fanning off mosquitoes as he said in Hokkien: “Alright! If Madame Linshui agrees, then we should do it. You all must prepare everything we need.”

Before the official ceremony, my father took the entire family to Madame Linshui’s temple, asking her if she would help us out. My father represented our family and tossed the jiaobei in front of Madame Linshui. He kneeled for a long time at the shrine, but was answered only by dozens of laughing jiaobei. Sweat began to drip from his forehead, and my mother’s grip on my hand grew ever tighter. In the end, my father said in Taiwanese Hokkien: “Madame Linshui, if this baby is a boy, he will be at your service.” As if in response to this remark, the next toss of the jiaobei landed on the floor upside down, indicating Madame Linshui’s reluctant agreement. My father told my mother how the baby in her belly was especially blessed by the gods and deities.

My mother asked me to put the canna flower aside. Grandfather tied a headkerchief on his forehead, put on a Taoist robe, and began chanting a series of long, dizzying mantras. I was very young back then, watching Grandfather swaying and dancing in front of the Twelve Pojie Troupe. I couldn’t resist laughing. People from the temple brought a long bench over and lit up a seven-star light. Those candles reminded me of the birthday cake my mother had bought for me just days ago.

We were performing the three ups-and-downs from the hundred-flower bridge. My mother brought me over to a long bench covered with black cloth. My parents followed me and stepped onto the bench. All three of us and the fetus in my mother’s belly crossed from one “shore” to the other, with Pojie laughing along the side. A bouquet of

flowers represented my mother's womb, with white flowers representing boys and red flowers girls. She had to pluck the red flowers off from the blood pool, leaving only the white flowers without a single, remaining drop of menstrual blood. Menstrual blood in the womb is composed of petals and flowers with a lush, extravagant luster.

After the end of the ceremony, my mother took all the blessed canna flowers back home with us and looked carefully after them. After a few months, Mehmech was born as a boy, becoming my little brother.

He had to be my brother first before becoming my sister. This process was like a long capillarity experiment ... like the tampons I was using at the time. Menstrual blood seeped slowly into my tampon. Until it was really time to change it and pull it out, nobody knew when all the white would be replaced by bloody red.

I remember when Mehmech was still in junior high school. He looked exactly like any other boy in class. He loved watching *One Piece*, *Naruto*, *HunterxHunter*, and NBA basketball games; he loved wearing a loose hoodie, sweatpants, and sneakers; he was into the girl in his class with the best grades. It wasn't long before I realized his preferences were nonbinary. Whatever he loved, I loved as a girl too. However, I couldn't take this as evidence that Mehmech had been a *boy* all along. Perhaps he was a girl who liked all those things from the start.

However, I was able to pinpoint that very moment--the moment Mehmech became a stranger to me before my eyes. At the time, I had just graduated from college and was preparing to take exams to get into graduate school. My mother, as though through a miracle, was pregnant with her third child. She was at an advanced maternal age, and the fetus wasn't stable. Her doctor reminded her to pay close attention to her health. To take care of our mother, I returned home every weekend. Despite doing so, on the seventeenth week of my mother's pregnancy, she was unable to keep the fetus in her belly. At midnight, I heard my mother crying and screaming. I jumped up to check on her in the bathroom. She

was sitting on the tiles, blood trickling ... flowing out of her. Looking at the floor stained with blood, my mother and I were both pale with panic. She cried over and over saying she was in a lot of pain.

And then here came Mehme. That was an extremely strange, indescribable moment, as though the air around us was stifled. Even my mother had stopped wailing. Although still a young junior high kid, Mehme now appeared solemn and sympathetic. He blurted out compassion-filled words in a very feminized voice, which, during his puberty, should definitely be incapable of producing. "This baby isn't fated to be with you. You shouldn't dwell on it", he said.

He squatted down to smooth my mother's sweaty, sticky hair, gently consoling her as her tears streamed down and she slowly passed out. Mehme helped her clean up clumps of blood from her lower half, and among a handful of blood clumps he discovered something that looked like the fetus--something curled up like a ball on the floor. Mehme wrapped it in a bath towel and held it in his arms like an affectionate mother god. I called the ambulance, and, after a while, the ambulance crew dashed into the bathroom, placed my mother on a stretcher, and took her away to the hospital. Mehme and I went to the hospital together and spent the night there after taking care of admission procedures.

After a night of sleep, Mehme was unable to recall anything from the night before. He checked in on our mother to make sure she was fine before dragging off to catch up with sleep back home. When our mother woke up that day, the first thing she said was: "I seem to have seen Madame Linshui last night."

I was reminded of what that fake fortune-teller had told us. That series of predictions about how my mother seemed to have or not have a boy. In the end, Mehme handed over the towel-wrapped fetus to the hospital staff, and I was never able to confirm whether the sibling I had lost was a brother or sister.

SUBWAY STATION

地鐵站

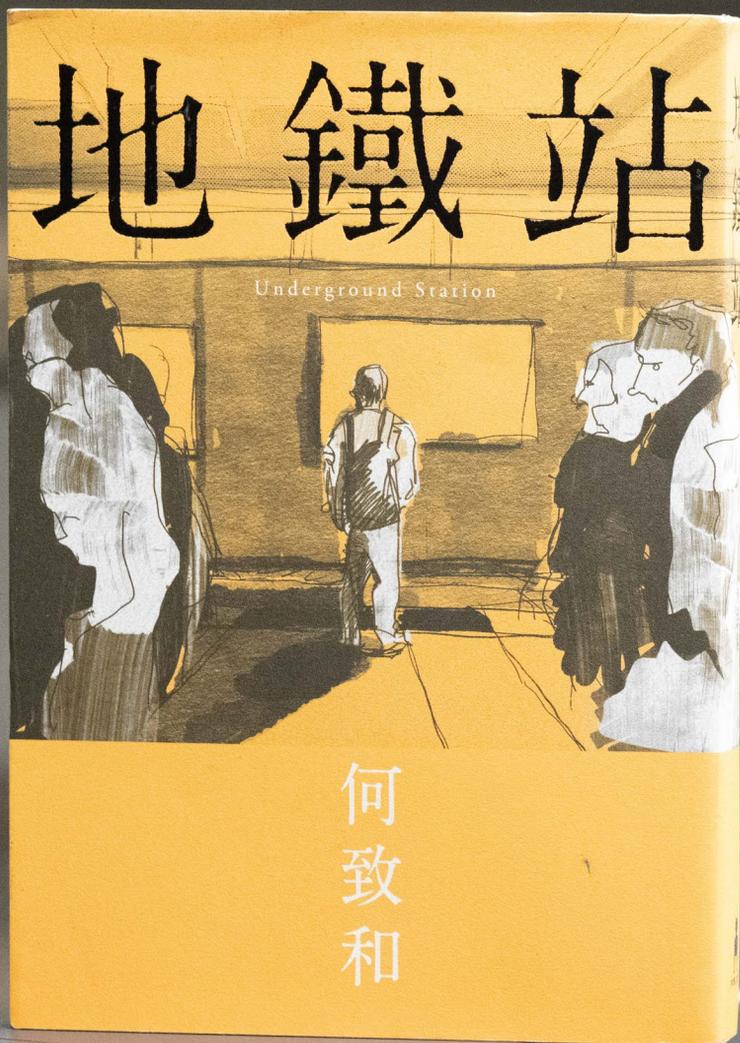
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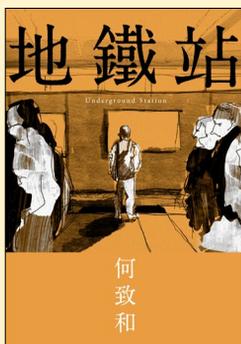
Chih-Ho Ho



BIOGRAPHY

Dr. Horace Chih-Ho Ho holds a Master's degree in Creative Writing from National Dong Hwa University and a Ph.D. in Comparative Literature from Fu Jen Catholic University. He is currently a full-time assistant professor in the Department of Chinese Language and Literature at Chinese Culture University and specializes in creative writing. He has published a collection of short stories titled *The Night the Night Was Lost* as well as three novels: *White City Depression*, *Outlying Island G.I.*, and *The Tree Fort on Carnation Lane*. He has also authored Chinese translations of a number of English-language novels, including *The Dogs of Babel*, *Time's Arrow*, and *White Noise*.





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INTRODUCTION

Opening with a commuter who jumps to his death in front of an oncoming subway train, the narrator then introduces us to a subway company executive who is responsible for cleaning up the mess. But while he is a man who can “get things done” at work, he finds himself frustratingly unable to get his life together after he clocks out. The author sums up his exploration of contemporary issues such as chronic stress, long-term care, interpersonal communication, depression, and bullying as follows: “I wrote about death not to be morbid, but in order to reflect on modern life, and on how to live.”

JUDGE'S COMMENTARY

by Hsing Chieh Ling

In his latest novel, Dr. Ho portrays the inner worlds of middle-aged men with great delicacy, putting his finger on the pulse of our times with a probing tale about social problems and lives intersecting in the subway.

Sneakers on the Subway Tracks

Translated by Darryl Sterk

A young man sprinted down the escalator to the sound of the subway-door bell. He leaped the last few steps, slipping when he landed, almost falling, but still barreling at undiminished speed towards the nearest carriage. The

doors closed faster than he had expected, slamming shut when he was only a nose's breadth away. He had to hit the brakes, causing his body to straighten and his heels to lift. He and his embarrassed expression had missed the train! Trying to act as if nothing had happened, he retreated behind the yellow line, took out his phone, and shared the humiliating moment over social media. He had five minutes to wait.

A middle-aged man sitting on a platform bench had taken everything in without batting an eye.

He had been sitting there for a long time. Many trains had come and gone. Batches of passengers had been dropped off and taken away. Crowds that had taken minutes to gather had dispersed in no time flat. No one had stayed as long as him.

The place really is like a sieve, he thought.

Raising his hands to his face with his fingers together, he peered through the gaps.

This place doesn't retain anything or anyone, just like the gaps in my fingers.

The floor and wall tiles gleamed under the bright platform lights as if they had been waxed and buffed. By contrast, the deep, apparently bottomless tunnel at the end of the platform was preternaturally dark, as if it would swallow everything. The man stood up from the bench, walked to the edge of the platform, which lacked a safety barrier, and looked into that black hole. Besides the darkness, he couldn't see a thing.

He took out a handkerchief, shook it out, and wiped his forehead.

Although it had not been washed for a long time, and was rank with his sweat, he carefully folded it into a small square and put it in his pocket before returning to his seat.

Several new batches of passengers were transported down the escalator. Two hours from now, during rush hour, the trains would be packed. But right now there was no need for anyone to line up. Instead people stood silently in small, desultory groups. Yet they all seemed to share an unspoken understanding: to stay away from the edge of the platform, and from the middle-aged man.

Wearing a gray and white striped shirt and dark gray suit pants, he looked like a typical office worker. That is ... as long as you ignored his head and feet. His scruffy beard and scuffed sneakers gave him away, for he was unemployed. They were brand-name sneakers, probably the most valuable thing on him now that he had pawned his watch. He would have pawned his old sneakers too, but the pawn shop wouldn't take them.

He had lost everything valuable to him – his car, his house, his job, all his friends and family... even his wife and his adorable daughter. He had thrown it all away in one night.

Even strangers are starting to avoid me.

It was said that such large gaps meant that money would slip through your fingers. Now he believed it. His sieve-like hands were letting good luck slip away. He didn't have any other hobbies besides gambling after work. His wife had advised him and chastised him, and had even left with their daughter to live with her parents several times; but he couldn't stop. Gambling was like that: sometimes you win, other times you lose; like people getting on and off the train at a subway station. Over time, he assumed, a natural balance would be achieved, without detriment to the family finances. But one night of bad luck had fractured his long-held faith; he had lost his life savings. If that was all that had happened, he could have started over. He would probably still be sitting

in his company's finance office, doing the books, checking reports, and occasionally hollering at his subordinates. What had really caused his world to collapse was the disappearance of several million dollars from a company account. If only he hadn't kept upping the ante, placing one insane bet after another in a vain attempt to recover his lost savings!

Another train whooshed in, and a new wave of passengers soon spilled across the platform. He realized that he no longer needed to check the running text of the platform display. He could now predict the arrival of the next train based on air flow. The subway train sped through the long bore of the tunnel like air or water through the toy rifle he had bought for his daughter. At the beach last summer, they had competed to see who could shoot water the farthest by pulling the trigger the hardest. Of course, he won every time – it was a test of strength that he could never lose. It was like the test of strength he now faced, the gale-force wind that poured into the station with every approaching train. No matter how he struggled against the gigantic air gun, he had no chance of winning.

Let it be the next train.

He took a deep breath, filled his lungs with cool, conditioned air, and walked back to the edge. A light breeze was blowing, gradually gathering force until it was like the wind that gusted in from the mountains, heralding a heavy rain. The round lights on the waiting line began to flash. He looked to his right into the depth of the tunnel and saw a small blob of flickering light, like a tiny sun. The sun got closer and closer, and larger and larger, until it filled the tunnel, swallowing the darkness. Then, it split in two, suddenly shrinking into the headlights of the train.

It's time.

But when he looked down at the gleaming tracks, he noticed that his left shoelace was a little loose. He closed his eyes. The train fired off a sharp warning whistle and angrily brushed past him, only coming to a halt when the first carriage had reached the other end of the platform.

“Hey Mister!”

He opened his eyes and saw a young woman standing behind a pram with a frown on her face. He realized he was standing right in front of the door, allowing adequate space for passengers but not a baby carriage. Sorry, he thought and took a hasty step back. The woman pushed the pram onto the platform and snapped, “Don’t you know you’re supposed to let people off first?”

I didn’t mean to do it. I’m sorry, I really had no idea it would come to this.

How many times had he mumbled this apology? He’d lost count. The train left and the passengers hastened towards the stairs, escalators, and elevators. Everyone was in a hurry, as if refusing to stay a moment longer – as if a subway station was the last place they’d want to linger. He didn’t want to linger too long either, but his shoelace had come undone, and he needed to re-tie it first.

His knees felt stiff when he slowly squatted down. He wondered if it was due to deterioration or excessive walking. Although only one shoelace had come loose, he re-tied both as gently as he could, just like he used to tie his daughter’s hair to get her ready for kindergarten. He hadn’t seen her in months. All this time he’d been on the run in these sneakers from loan sharks and cops. He didn’t know what impression he would leave his daughter with, but it certainly wouldn’t be a good one. A deadbeat dad, an inveterate gambler, an irresponsible good-for-nothing, a thief who stole company funds. At the sight of these accusations in his wife’s cold and resentful eyes, he had had no choice but to flee ... in this pair of sneakers.

I didn’t mean to do it. I’m sorry. I’ll make amends soon.

The station manager’s announcement echoed through the subway hall, reminding passengers not to cut in line. The tone was calm and methodical, as if everything was under control. But the man felt just as anxious. He took out his kerchief again, wiped his face, and carefully

folded and pocketed it. His heart was racing. The next train was about to arrive. He stepped over the yellow line, feeling a gentle breeze on his cheek, like a lover's whisper, full of temptation and provocation. Alas, the breeze soon rose to gale force, like an angry lover's slap. He looked down at the platform. Better not look too early this time, or the bright light might melt away the courage that he had just mustered. Perhaps it was the flashing warning lights, perhaps it was the tears in his eyes, but he felt the earth move to the accompaniment of a series of sounds: air flowing in the tunnel, wheels rolling down the track, the Muzak-accompanied announcement of the train's impending arrival, and his own labored breathing. The tracks were gleaming brightly again when he heard the piercing whistle, which must mean that the train was almost there. So he looked up and turned to face it. In the moment he jumped, he saw the driver looking right back at him.

1

The exiting passengers filed out in an orderly fashion, as usual. Most people on the escalator stood to the right, their eyes fixed on the back of the person in front of them or on the glowing screens in their hands. They rose slowly, like products on an automated assembly line. Occasionally, a young person or two would pass them on the left, but just as expressionlessly. You would never have guessed these people were leaving a station in which a fatal accident had just occurred.

Ye Yu-an waded against the flow. The exit at which his taxi had stopped was not very wide. In conformity to the fire code, there was only space for one escalator, going up. To enter the station, you had to take the stairs. He should have been shouting for people to make way so he could get to the platform as quickly as possible, but he stayed silent. He wanted to run but could only plod. He put one hand in his pant pocket, trying to cover up his fear with an appearance of calm, or indifference.

He was afraid of seeing the corpse. At the age of forty-five, he was less than a year into his position as Director of the Operations Management Department at the subway company. But had already seen over a dozen mutilated, squished, or crushed corpses. He would not use the words “cold” or “stiff” to describe them because he always arrived while the bodies were still soft and warm.

These bodies belonged to men and women of all ages – in one instance, to an elderly man who had to pay a deposit to stay in a nursing home and, in another, to a girl in middle school whose uniform had been washed only a few times. On a certain day in their lives, all had chosen to walk into a subway station under Ye Yu-an’s jurisdiction and jump off the platform, blocking the incoming train with their bodies and causing a delay of ten minutes for over two thousand passengers. No matter where he was, Ye Yu-an would be forced to put down the work at hand and rush to the site of the accident to oversee the cleanup.

“After a while you just go numb.”

That’s what his superior Wei Shao-da had said. Funeral home personnel with an inside scoop, who often arrived at the scene at the same time as the first responders, had said much the same thing. Even his subordinate, Deputy Director Liu Shih-chao, who had been on the job for three years had expressed the same sentiment. It was as if everyone could see the shadows of the bodies piling up in his heart.

Just like an allergy, there are some things that you can never become accustomed or inured to. He was familiar with every little detail of the procedure for dealing with a subway suicide. He knew how to report the incident to the control center, the prosecutor, and the first responders and what to say to comfort the emotionally distressed driver. But these were all things he could do only after arriving at the scene. He still couldn’t ease the anxious dread he felt on the way there.

The only way he knew to prevent fear from undermining his professional image was to disguise it. So, he would march into the station, past

the gates, and down to the platform where the incident had occurred. The scene would have been cordoned off to prevent waiting passengers from getting close. This was the first thing that had to be done according to the standard operating procedure. Ye Yu-an would never understand that part. What normal passenger would want to take a closer look? He would have thought that everyone would want to flee. But that was not the case. Many people would stand outside the cordon, taking pictures and videos of the gory carriage with their phones.

“We have to move the train back a little,” Liu Shih-chao said as soon as he saw Ye Yu-an arrive. “The decedent is trapped under the right front wheel of the first carriage and cannot be dragged out from the side. We need to move the train.”

On the way to the station, Ye Yu-an had received the news that the decedent had died instantly. He had hoped for a better ending; that they’d find the poor soul in front of the cab or in the shelter space beside the rails, so that they would only need to cover the body with a white cloth and wait for the prosecutor to investigate before carrying it away without needing to mobilize manpower to pick up severed body parts. But that was clearly not the kind of situation he was dealing with today.

PORT OF LIES

八尺門的辯護人

唐福睿

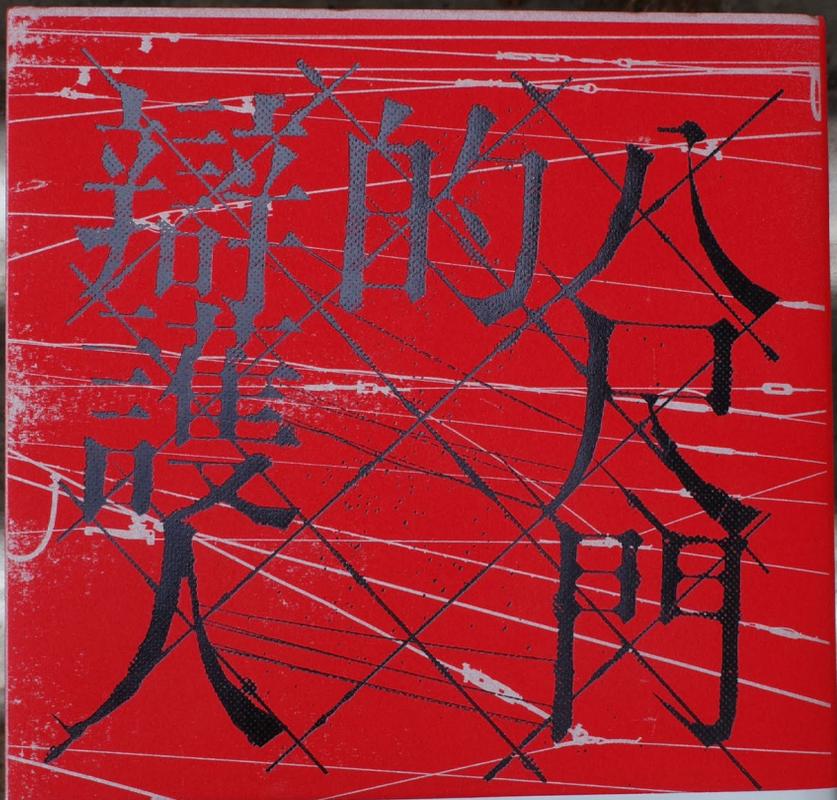
Freddy Fu-Jui Tang



Profile image: © Mirror Fiction

BIOGRAPHY

Freddy Fu-Jui Tang was a lawyer for five years before he moved overseas to study screenwriting and directing at CalArts. Within his distinctly social realist and humanist writing, the legal system becomes a device that frames the human dilemmas of his characters. *Port of Lies* is his first novel. A television adaptation of the novel, directed by the author himself, is now available on streaming platforms.



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二〇一三年最受矚目律政影集
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PORT OF LIES



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2023 TIBEA Fiction Award - Winner

Port of Lies

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INTRODUCTION

A young indigenous Taiwanese escapes the hard life of his fishing port hometown by becoming a public defense lawyer, but when an immigrant fisherman kills a boat captain from his tribe, he is forced to reevaluate his vision of justice.

JUDGE'S COMMENTARY

by Yi-Chien Lee | Translated by Mike Fu

A deep-sea boat captain of the Amis tribe and his family are murdered by an Indonesian fisherman. An Amis public defender from Bachimen Village in Keelung City, a person appointed by the court to represent the deceased victims, and an Indonesian interpreter who had cut her studies short to work as a caregiver join forces to unravel the fog of mystery surrounding this case. Many social issues come to the fore as the story unfolds, including the abolition of the death penalty, migrant labor, workers' rights, ethnicity, language, culture, the judiciary, offshore fisheries, political and business interests, political struggles, and the manipulation of public opinion.

Chapter 1.

1

Murder by the Sea

Translated by Tim Smith

September 18th, 1982. Midnight. Ten-year-old Tung Pao-Chu watched his father Shou-Chung appear from the shadows and step back into their shack,

covered from head to toe in spattered blood. He was carrying a machete in one hand. A few rivulets of blood made their way to the blade point, the accumulated drops falling off the tip and edge. His father held onto the frame of their front door, which was made from the flotsam remnants of a fishing boat. He was breathing hard, almost panting. In Amis, he ordered his son to get the hell away.

A commotion came from outside the door. Presumably, Shou-Chung had come all the way back from the fishing port at Zhengbin, and he had startled quite a few of their neighbors.

Pao-Chu's family of three lived in a home built of wood scrapped from derelict fishing sampans and trawlers. It was about 750 square feet in size and had four rooms. About fourteen people were living under one roof. Most were Amis friends and relatives who had made the long trek north from Hualien. They were all awake now, and they all got up one by one to make their way to the front door to see what the fuss was about.

Pao-Chu looked at this demonic avatar that was his father and felt scared out of his wits. He didn't dare move an inch. He heard his mother, Ma-Chieh, call out from behind him in a tone of mourning: "Looh....What in God's name did you do!?"*¹

The color had drained from her face. She snatched the machete from her husband's grip and threw it to the ground. A police whistle screamed in the distance. Pao-Chu stared at the fresh, shining blood as it gradually dried and lost its luster. His mind turned blank.

¹ Dialogues marked with * are in Amis.

A great gust of wind rocked the entire house, and the electricity cut out. In this pitch-dark world, there was nothing save for Shou-Chung's piteous gasping for breath.

Pao-Chu held tightly to his mother's waist and began bawling. This was the first time thoughts of running away arose in his innocent, juvenile mind; though time passed, they never disappeared.

This is Bachimen.

2

In the 1960s, Keelung's fishing fleets were prospering and developing at breakneck speed, drastically increasing the demand for deckhands and other labor at Zhengbin Fishing Port. There were several head-hunter middlemen who went down to Hualien and Taitung to search for workers, where they found plenty of Amis who were willing to work on the water or off in far-flung seas.

Tung Shou-Chung was one of the new hires. In the prime of his youth, he had originally come up from his hometown in Yuli, over in Hualien, famous now for its delicious short-grain rice. He moved his wife, Ma-Chieh, and their then-infant son to Keelung, and once there, they never left.

Some of the Amis tribespeople, venturing far from their native lands in the southeast of Taiwan, moved to the Longmu Well area on the north side of Heping Island, where they built a series of ramshackle buildings behind the military retiree's housing complex. These internal migrants called the area "a-la-bau'an", meaning "easily forgotten place" in the Amis tongue.

Another Amis group settled on the slopes near the entrance to the far side of the Bachimen tunnel. Once they got there, these internal migrants scavenged for flotsam and scrap wood, and built not-so-legal shanties from the water's edge all the way to the top of the slopes of

the hill. In its heyday, there were about 200 homes here, all connected in continuous rows of asphalt roof shingle patches and stretching eastwards along the single seaside road into a valley. What this would later be called – Bachimen settlement – was where Pao-Chu's family would set down roots.

But where did this name come from? Tung Pao-Chu didn't have a clue. He still remembered when he was younger, each time his father had thrown back a few drinks, he would tell his son the same stale joke about how it was called Bachimen ("Eight-foot-gate") because Amis men all carried eight-foot members, and he ought to pant his son to check if he was actually a member of the tribe.

There had been a party going on the night the incident happened, attended by Amis friends and family from the cramped, decrepit Bachimen neighborhood. Shou-Chung talked about when his younger cousin had accidentally fallen overboard and drowned. His emotional state had changed, and he was upset. Every drink made him more and more agitated and mean. His anger grew especially fierce when he thought about how the fishing boat company wasn't even insured. What's more was when the fishing company hired people on, they'd give out an advanced payment but when all things were said and done and the principal and interest was calculated, the survivor's compensation was a mere pittance. As a fishing boat captain, it filled Shou-Chung with rage.

Shou-Chung kneaded the fingers in his right hand, cracking his knuckles and massaging them. He was missing half his right index finger. He slammed his fist down on the table: "I lost half my finger just last year. They never gave me a damned cent for it."*

The party died off after a bit and everyone made their way back to their hovels. Every drop of alcohol had been lapped up, and the lamp lights extinguished. Most everyone had taken their fill of liquor and beer and passed out to dream of better places and better times. Yet Shou-Chung didn't immediately come home; he sat in front of the table until

everyone around had nodded off. Then he walked out the door, spinning a machete in one hand, and followed the snaking path towards Zheng-bin Fishing Port.

The sea breeze that evening carried a chill. After tossing back half his drink, Shou-Chung felt half-frozen. The adrenaline rush from the murderous ideas swirling in his head only made him quake harder. Despite nearly ten years of experience making a living from the ocean, and the strength to lift a 120-kilogram big-eye tuna without breaking a sweat, the hand holding the machete couldn't stop shaking.

The roll-up gate to the fishing fleet company compound stood half-open. The noise of bottles clinking and arguments hovered in the night air. Shou-Chung felt his body calming down. A strong gust of wind blew from the direction of Heping Island, and he thought he could hear the slight creaking of shanty doors and rooftops up on the hill slopes. Though he looked back in the direction of his house, he couldn't recognize at night which of the glowing lanterns was the one from his own hovel.

A male shadow came forward, a freshly lit cigarette hanging from the corner of his mouth. He made eye contact with Shou-Chung; it was the head of the company's accounting department.

"Ah-ya." The man said in a dry, hoarse voice.

Shou-Chung lunged and slashed through the man's chest and neck twice. Blood sprayed into Shou-Chung's eyes. He couldn't see who the second person who'd come out to attack him was. It didn't matter. Shou-Chung brought the knife down twice more.

Another fountain of blood.

Shou-Chung returned home by the same path. He wiped at the blood spattered across his face, and his body starting shivering once more. He walked in through the door, shouting for Pao-Chu. He dug around in his pants pocket, fishing out a couple copper coins, and called out for Ma-Chieh to go fetch a couple fresh bottles of beer from the convenience

store down the road.

After Pao-Chu had grown up, criminality was far from something fresh and novel. He'd seen all manner of depraved and brutal acts, but this was far different from what he'd see later. This was the only time he was close enough to smell the pungent, ferrous odor of someone else's blood.

From then on, Pao-Chu would recall that night as if it had been broad daylight, clear for all to see. He remembered before his father Shou-Chung had carried out his deed, his father had sat stooped over at the edge of the kitchen table looking at all the emptied beer and liquor bottles scattered about the tabletop, muttering to himself.

"Are we just not humans to them?"*

3

Maybe it was a blessing in disguise. Neither of the two men died from their injuries. Tung Shou-Chung was charged with attempted multiple homicide, and in the end, the court sentenced him to just ten years in prison.

This was how the verdict was written: "...Before the incident had occurred, the defendant had drunk several bottles of kaoliang sorghum liquor and millet wine with his friends and relatives, which led to the defendant losing his capacity for sound judgment. Such actions led to the defendant becoming mentally feeble. The intoxication report in the medical evaluation from the Tri-Service General Hospital is available on record for review. Furthermore, the defendant has almost no level of education. Since his youth, he had grown up in a Mountain Brethren community in Hualien, where he was long accustomed to imbibing alcohol from a young age. He is maladapted to living in a metropolitan environment. In addition to the above, the defendant was also severely impacted by the accidental death of a relative, and was not of sound

emotional stability....”

The night before Shou-Chung was taken into prison, several of his friends and family had carried out a ritual for him. They had lit a bonfire and cooked a meal on the wet, algae-covered rocks on the shore next to Bachimen. Ma-Chieh went out earlier in the day, scavenging around for seaweed and sea snails. She tossed it all into simmering cooking pots full of soup, the flavor becoming nice and mellow, but Shou-Chung didn't have a single spoonful.

He remained mired in silence. Another member of the tribe suddenly muttered that another fishing boat would be heading out to sea the next month. He hadn't been interrupted, but perhaps he was hoping Shou-Chung would make an allowance for it. Some of the others started to chime in too. They owed the company too much money, and it would be difficult to get away with not paying them back the advance.

“Other than running the boats, what else could we do?”

Everyone knew everyone around the harbor. An uncomfortable situation would negatively affect everyone.

One had to make money somehow.

“The verdict had already shown some sympathy for our plight. Letting themselves get carried away by impassioned emotions wouldn't do anyone any good.”

Tung Shou-Chung looked off into the black, churning surf. He was still silent.

Pao-Chu was absentmindedly staring into the bonfire, their conversations fermenting in his head. His love and compassion for his uncles had gradually turned into a deep hatred of some of their vices like alcoholism, physical abuse, and self-pity. He got especially irritated when he realized some of the Amis community would slack off around the harbor as they were trying to make it. They would even stand in front of the fishing company and question and blame his parents for all their troubles. This kind of resentment just kept growing and spreading

throughout him, turning into something he just couldn't forgive them for, and even led to some self-hatred of his indigenous roots.

While Shou-Chung wasted away in a prison cell, Ma-Chieh worked part-time at a shrimp-processing factory. She'd often get bitten by the still-live shrimp as she dipped her hands into the filthy water. Since she often worked overtime, her body weakened. To make matters worse, she wasn't willing to spend any of her hard-earned money to go see a doctor, and eventually, it led to cellulitis and sepsis, which ultimately took her life.

Pao-Chu refused to have any compassion and love for himself. He never shed a tear for his own plight. He just kept to himself, studying his textbooks in the janitor's closet in the local Catholic church. The year Bachimen settlement was demolished, Pao-Chu strove hard to make it into a university. Once he did though, he never looked back and left that eternally rain-enshrouded, dismal slope by the sea.

4

In 1988, President Lee Teng-Hui paid an official visit to Keelung. He decided to improve Bachimen's living environment, and three years later, Keelung's city government demolished the slum at Bachimen and built cheap housing units in its stead. A government-subsidized housing complex called the Hai-pin Housing Complex was constructed. The state-owned land had been concurrently defined as a protected area set aside for Indigenous Taiwanese, becoming the first instance in all of Taiwan where the government had resettled an illegal settlement of urbanized Indigenous peoples.

The time-consuming construction took no less than three years to finish. After the Hai-pin Housing Complex was built, the scattered tribesmen returned to their home here in Keelung, and renamed it "Kihaw", meaning "bay". The name "Bachimen" died away slowly with the

memories of each person that passed away.

In any case, no matter how the name changed and the landscape transformed, to Pao-Chu this place was not worth remembering. He'd been away from his "home" for over thirty years, and only went back when absolutely necessary to see his father. Perhaps that's not entirely true – half the time, he had a hankering for fish cakes grilled over charcoal.

Apart from that, the only other time he went down was on Saturday afternoons to visit with the book club at the Catholic church on Heping Island. That was the deal he had made with the priest: once he began studying at university, he made sure to come back every weekend to this church. He always brought books with him for the kids in the parish, regardless of their age or reading level, and would answer their questions and help them. Though he didn't know everything, the questions the indigenous kids asked weren't all that complicated. What they really wanted was just a strong role model and volunteer mentor.

This time though, Pao-Chu came back to Keelung for a very different reason.

The lighting in the Keelung District Court is pretty awful. By the end of the year when it's already cloudy and gray out, it has an oppressively depressing atmosphere to it.

The family court isn't open to the public, so there weren't any spectators in the gallery or guests seating to listen in. Shou-Chung was there as a petitioner. Time and salt water had left scars and valleys all along his face. Moving his catch in and out of cold storage for years on end had left him with a crooked spine and permanently collapsed shoulders.

The young, female family court judge watched as Tung Pao-Chu sat across from his father. She was trying to amicably soften the situation by calmly and clearly stating out the facts: "The petitioner, Tung Shou-Chung, namely, your father, has requested that from this day forward until the day of his passing, that you provide a monthly stipend in the

amount of NT\$30,000 for the purpose of caretaking. Do you have any opinions or thoughts on the petition at hand, sir?"

"Are you fucking demented?"* Ignoring the judge's question, Tung Pao-Chu posed this question directly to his father in an angry outburst. "Isn't what I already give you more than enough?"*

"That little pittance is a fucking joke."*

"Both of you...please use Chinese to communicate," The judge said, made uncomfortable by the raw emotions on display. "The stenographer can't make a record for the court otherwise."

"Did you start drinking again? Or are you just losing big at Mah-jong?"* Pao-Chu had hardly given his father any time to respond before resuming his offense. "Are you still losing massive wads of cash to that group of losers? You're an embarrassment."*

"You're so immature. All you ever do is bitch and moan at the slightest request for just a tiny amount of money. What's the damned difference between you and that damned *Paylang* (Han) over there?"*

"Hey. The both of you. If you have something to say, please talk it out, but can you use Chinese, please?"

"Why don't you just fucking drink yourself to death already?" Pao-Chu finally switched over to speaking in Chinese.

"Who's to say you won't kick the bucket first?" Shou-Chung was frothing at the corners of his mouth like a rabid dog.

"OK. Stop it, now! I don't want you using Chinese in this court to abuse each other either. Starting from this moment, I'm going to ask questions of you one at a time, and you will answer me in turn." The judge shook her head in disappointment. "To the defendant before me, Tung Pao-Chu: what kind of work are you engaged in professionally? About how much would you say you earn in monthly income?"

"He's a lawyer. He certainly has enough money." Shou-Chung butted in.

"Why don't you shut up? The judge wasn't asking you...."

“OK! Stop!” The judge stared at Pao-Chu. With discerning eyes, she looked at this man wearing a beige polo shirt, with tousled salt-and-pepper hair, and a five o’clock shadow on his face. “The defendant is a lawyer?”

Pao-Chu gave a reluctant reply, almost embarrassed at his having been outed. “I’m a public defender.”

“For which court?”

“The High Court.”

“And how long have you been working there?”

“Over twenty years.”

After she put Pao-Chu’s professional record together in her mind, she then asked him directly, “What’s your opinion on the petitioner’s claim?”

“According to Article 1118-1 of the Civil Code, I request an exemption from the obligation to provide support.” Pao-Chu said this coldly and emotionlessly as he pointed to his father, continuing, “This asshole here was sitting in a prison cell nearly the whole time I was a young kid. He used any money he earned on booze, and never took care of his family.”

Shou-Chung didn’t show any sign of shame or remorse at his son’s statement. Instead, he wore an expression of indifference, and looked off in another direction, avoiding direct eye contact with either his son or the judge.

The judge let out a loud sigh. After gathering the basic facts, she requested both parties try to resolve things peacefully through mediation, set a further court date, then banged her gavel and sent them home.

As Tung Pao-Chu stepped outside the Keelung District Courthouse doors, a light rain was gently floating down, and the temperature had dropped a bit. He was thinking about the nearby night market that was about to open for the evening. The hordes of people wouldn’t be out just yet. He thought about how he ought to go eat something to warm up his belly before heading back to Taipei. The “Li-Yeh’s Spicy Stinky Tofu”

stand across from the local Changhua Bank branch would be a good starting point if he wanted to peruse the market stalls.

"Did you drive here?"* Shou-Chung appeared behind his son. His tone, though not as sharp as it was in the courtroom, still had a tinge of condescension and an expectation of filial obedience.

Pao-Chu let out a small sigh. "Where are you trying to go?"*

"Back home. Are you still driving around in that beat-up piece of junk? For all that learning you did, it doesn't seem to have done you any good, car-wise."*

Pao-Chu just wasn't willing to continue sparring with his father and swallowed his retort.

Pao-Chu set off along the Tai-2 Provincial Highway, the two-lane road snaking along the coastline and moving onwards toward and beyond Heping Island. The old apartments with their grimy tile walls that dotted the roadside had taken a constant beating from the ocean winds and awful weather. The buildings hadn't seemed to have changed in the thirty-plus years since he had picked up and left. It all seemed like it would stay this way forever, with the narrow coastal highway that wormed its way around like a centipede adding to the depression of the misty atmosphere.

Right as he turned in towards Zhengbin Fishing Port, buildings painted in a rainbow of different colors burst into his line of sight. Rubbernecking at this eyesore, Pao-Chu nearly hit a group of tourists who were in the middle a crosswalk attempting to take photos of this "tourist site."

"Holy Matsu!" Pao-Chu shouted out in surprise.

"They ought to paint the other side with some colors used in those houses over in the Mediterranean. Maybe they can throw in a couple coffee shops for good measure."* Shou-Chung said coldly.

HOO LIGAN WANG XIN-FU

流氓王信福

張娟芬

Chuan-Fen Chang

BIOGRAPHY

Chang holds a bachelor's degree in Sociology from National Taiwan University, a joint master's degree in Journalism from Aarhus University in Denmark and the University of Hamburg in Germany, as well as a PhD in criminology from a joint PhD program organized by Hamburg University and Eötvös Loránd University in Hungary. She currently serves as Director of the Taiwan Alliance to Abolish the Death Penalty.

Chang's other works include *Against the Wall: An Analysis of Lesbians' Oppression in Taiwan*; *An Unhealthy Coming of Age: The Case of the Hsi-chih Trio, 1991 to Date*; *Lesbians Like This and That: The Eroticism of Lesbianism and Its Cultural Meaning*; *Clean for Two Months: My Trip to Nepal*; *The Difficulties in Killing: Essays on the death penalty*; and *The Murder Case in "Auntie 13" Karaoke*.



Profile image: © Chuan-Fen Chang

流氓 王信福

張娟芬·著



對我們而言，戒嚴已經結束。對他而言，戒嚴是一輩子的負擔。

臺灣最高齡死刑犯的故事，
一段被戒嚴強制寫入，難以脫困的人生。

流氓王信福

張娟芬·著



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TLA Golden Book Award

Hooligan Wang Xin-Fu

Non-Fiction

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INTRODUCTION

The real judicial case of “Hooligan Wang Xin-Fu” recalls a buried and forgotten chapter in the history of modern Taiwan. Behind this doubt-riddled death penalty case lies not only the life story of Wang but also the history of harsh military discipline and forced labor meted out for civil and political offenses throughout Taiwan’s many years under martial law. Chuan-Fen Chang dispels the noise to write a story that both tells the story of one man’s struggle against a callously unfair system and gives a better understanding of the period and social context, showing us the absurd cruelty woven throughout Taiwan’s Martial Law Era.

JUDGE'S COMMENTARY

by Sherry Hsueh-Li Lee

Chuan-Fen Chang’s nonfiction writings create a kind of “amplified state of mind” in her readers. *Hooligan Wang Xin-Fu* not only cuts straight to the heart of the framing of an innocent man but also conveys readers back to Taiwan’s legal system during the Martial Law Era, educating them on the perils of the time. Early postwar Taiwan was a time when people at the bottom rungs of society could easily be scapegoated and thrown into enforced vagrancy and exile. To this day, this historical inequality remains unrectified.

A Need to Leave: Saving One's Left Eye

1

Translated by Tim Smith

Wang Xin-fu put his luggage together and stuffed his passport with its green cover into his coat pocket. The name on the passport wasn't Wang Xin-fu, but one "Du

Chun-chieh." Regardless of the name change, the person pictured was Wang though, with his squarish head, big ears, and close crew cut. He had an uneasy sense of premonition about this trip. Even though Taiwan was a place he had lived for nearly forty years, he'd been gone for several decades. He missed Taiwan but couldn't return because Taiwan hadn't forgotten him – his name was still on wanted posters. The wanted posters described him as: "Height: 173 cm; mole on lower left section of his jaw." The police had even made a note of his mole, which underlined their determination to catch him.

His hometown in Taiwan and his left eye were the same: concave and a void. His mother and father used to live there. Now they were long gone. All they had left was their grave in a local cemetery plot. There were once prospects for love and the building of a family, but now there was nothing. When he left, his eldest daughter was only a one-year-old infant. As for his younger daughter, she was only just conceived.

Now though, his eldest daughter was sixteen and the younger was fourteen. Or at least that's what he had reckoned based on the time he had flown the coop.

Even if they met face to face, they probably wouldn't recognize him. That is, unless they went by the descriptions of him like in the wanted posters: "Height: 173 cm; mole on lower left section of his jaw."

Taiwan had already transformed from a warm home into an unfamiliar and perilous land. But he had to leave for the sake of saving his left

eye.

He boarded an Eternal East coach bus from the Sha Tau Kok bus stop in Shenzhen, China and sat for the two-hour ride all the way to Hong Kong Airport. He then went through security and boarded an EVA Air flight. It was afternoon on October 10th, 2006, the founding day of the Republic of China. He had arrived back home. He didn't have any strong feelings of patriotic fervor or even a sense of familial warmth. There were only police officers awaiting him at customs and border control to arrest him and whisk him away.

Wang Xinfu didn't bother resisting his arrest. The starting point of his trip was already a harbinger of things to come; it was called Sha Tau Kok (lit. "Cape of Decapitation" in Cantonese)! It seemed as if he was flying back to Taiwan for his own execution.

"Can you please contact my family for me? I have forgotten their phone number." He asked the police, slightly exhausted from travel.

The person on the other end of the phone was Xin-fu's second eldest brother, but the one who actually visited Xin-fu in person was his younger sister, Ah-Yu. She saw her brother sitting there in a striped floral shirt. He had a set of Buddhist prayer beads wrapped around his right wrist and was wearing a watch on his left. In the misty haze of her field of vision, trance-like, she seemed to feel as if Xin-fu, her Sann-hiann (third eldest brother), was adorned in prison bars and police handcuffs.

2

Ah-Yu couldn't tell whether her brother had been crying or not. He wore brown-colored sunglasses. His sunken left eye and bleak thoughts were hidden away in some far-off place ... somewhere Ah-Yu couldn't get to.

Ah-Yu was the youngest child in their family. Like all youngest children everywhere, by the time she had joined the Wang family, its

hierarchy had already long been set in place. The family already had its history, its mythos. She never experienced the family's deep poverty or the need to wear threadbare hand-me-downs. All she had were second-hand sentiments. Ah-Yu was like other youngest children everywhere in another aspect. She was always the outsider, obediently accepting others' memories as fact and adopting them her own history.

It's said of residents of Chiayi during the 1950s that all of their hassles could be traced back to planting and farming. It was a major annoyance to farmers that people would often steal their sugarcane to munch on. Rice farmers were plagued with dealing with the hassle of rice weevils and borers getting into rice stalks and eating up the grain. Ah-Yu's family never suffered these grievances, though. Her father ran an herbal medicine apothecary. Sometimes he'd travel into the mountains to collect medicinal herbs. Her mother earned a little money by helping other families with their laundry and housekeeping. She remembered that a short distance away from the Chiayi train station was a narrow and beautifully idyllic river with willow trees along its banks - their leafy tendrils drooping down, providing some shade. The locals had nicknamed the path along this river Weeping Willow Road. This straight and flat stretch of road wasn't too far from the train tracks and branched off into many narrow alleys. One of them was "Pingdeng" or "Equality" Street. That's where their old home used to be.

Pingdeng Street was fronted by a single row of identical, squat houses. The front-facing walls were sunk in by about a meter, creating a cool, overhanging arcade to walk or sit under to escape the heat and chitchat with the neighbors. There was a main door directly at the center, with a window on each side. The walls were decorated with washing stones that formed abstract geometric images. These images over the windows are what we now call "*chuanghua*" or "window flowers." They were ordinarily used as decoration back in those days, but thieves would not infrequently use them as hand and footholds to scale up to the rooftop.

Their home was narrow but deep. Only the front and back received any sunlight. The middle was comprised of three rooms with a single hallway on the right side connecting the entire house. Pingdeng Street was low-lying, so, whenever a typhoon came barreling through, the entire street would flood. Ah-Yu would regularly stick her head out the window to gauge whether the water had reached a level that threatened to flood the house.

When Ah-Yu had been brought home, she was already two. She had been adopted. Most people had lots of kids back in those days - baby boomers. Oftentimes, mothers back then had an average of seven kids. The Wang family had three boys in a row, and they had waited for a long while after to try again. In light of the standards back in those days, they were "yearning for a youthful presence tripping about their ankles." Mrs. Wang wanted a daughter.

"I wasn't the youngest in the family. Why did you want to give me away to someone else?" Ah-Yu would later ask her biological mother.

"You were already two back then. You were quite heavy to carry."

Ah-Yu was a part of this family now because they had already had too many boys. But to her mind, there was only her and their mother. The throughway behind their house would later become the town's old street. The oddly named, post-war Chiayi Street was created by a local benefactor Tsan Nóo-kip. At that time, he owned all of the sprawling rice paddies to the west of Chui-yang Elementary School. The rice paddy embankments were soft. Ah-Yu was petite though, and she held onto a stack of clothes, bringing them home for their mother to wash. Once they were washed, they were air dried in the sunshine, folded, and then delivered back to their owners. It was little Ah-Yu who would walk along these soft, muddied rice paddy embankments with the deliveries.

Where had their father gone? Mother said that he went into the mountains once, searching for medicinal herbs for the apothecary shop, but fell severely ill halfway into his journey. He tried to endure it

for a while, but just couldn't bear it any longer. He had begun heading back home, but it was too late for him. Ah-Yu was too young to remember. She was only five at the time. But her mother told her, "Your father adored you. So much so that he would give you piggy-back rides or put you up on his shoulders all the time." Ah-Yu then reflexively remembered that she was beloved by her father.

She attended elementary school after turning six. The Wang family had planned to register her as part of the family household, but because her father had already passed away, Ah-Yu couldn't legally use the Wang surname. This was the first time Ah-Yu had felt fatherless.

Ah-Yu and her older brothers were alike. They had all attended Chuiyang Elementary, the closest school to their home. She would join the queue of students walking to school in the early morning every day. Sometimes when she was running late and couldn't make it to class in time, she'd try to insert herself into other people's groups. But she would invariably still be marked as tardy. After graduating from elementary school, she felt no drive to continue her studies. "My older brothers didn't," she would say. But she was born at the right time to do so. Nine years of compulsory education had been implemented and if one wanted to move on to middle school, they didn't need to pass a test to do so. "You must study! Little girls absolutely must study. Otherwise, other people will always look down on you," Her mother scolded. Ah-Yu then patiently and obediently finished her schooling. Although the youngest child and the only one not born into the Wang family name, she received the highest level of education in her family. This became her most stable pillar.

"Where did my older brothers go off to?" Her brothers were all much older than she. The youngest of them, Wang Xin-fu, was older than her by nine years. The second eldest son was eleven years older and the eldest was much older ... although she'd forgotten exactly by how much. Ah-Yu's memory was a bit fragmented. It reflected her reality, which was

likewise just as fragmented.

Mother told her that her eldest brother was a house painter, the second eldest was a plasterer, and the third eldest, Xin-fu, was a carpenter. Xin-fu had originally gone off to school to study how to make molds. But the industry was neither sanitary nor healthy. It was terrible for one's lungs, and mother frowned whenever she thought of it. Ultimately, *Sann-hiann* chose to pick up carpentry.

Lumber and carpentry were the industries that had put Chiayi on the map. In 1912, a railroad was built, running all the way up into the heights of Mt. Ali. Felled trees would be loaded on steam locomotives whose whistles would blow all the way down until they reached the station at Beimen. There, the logs would be dumped into ponds to keep the wood soaked and fresh, preventing them from drying out and cracking or splitting. At the time, five log storage ponds were opened at the intersection of Zhongxiao and Linsen West roads. They were called the "Cedar Pools." Oftentimes, the high-grade cypresses there would fill the air around these ponds with a strong and pleasant fragrance. Many people also went to the ponds to fish, creating a little vista the locals came to call the "Hinoki Fishponds."

The lumber industry might have propped up Chiayi, but could it also support a widowed mother and her four children? In a town where wood industry jobs were abundant, it seemed like once could make a good living and a good career as a master carpenter. The jobs of the three Wang brothers seemed perfectly chosen to make a first-rate interior design team. The concrete pouring and construction work came first, followed by the woodwork. Finally, after all the cement, ashes, and wood shavings had been cleared away, paint could be added and a new life begun! The entire process was often accompanied by the brothers yelling and griping at each other until the project was fully finished.

However, the team never fully gelled, and the Wang family men soon went their separate ways. The eldest brother never became a

professional painter, the second eldest never became a plasterer, and Xin fu never became a carpenter. Ah-Yu remembered little about her two eldest brothers. The space in her mind dedicated to holding memories of home life was just about as empty and vacant as the space assigned to memories of their deceased father. She only recalled that her eldest brother was addicted to drugs and that her second eldest brother loathed coming home and was later kicked out by their mother. *Sann-hiann* wasn't the same as the two eldest though. Mother loved him dearly. Maybe it was because he was the youngest son; maybe it was because he was so filial. He was the only son who would bring his earnings home to share and helped keep the household up and running.

He never back sassed their mother. "Come back home early!" Their mother would often remind him. "Okay!" He'd respond, even though he'd never come back home early.

During those years, Ah-Yu constantly held onto her mother's hand, and went everywhere with her, travelling all over. Her mother had scrubbed clothes, dishes, and houses for so long that the caustic soaps had eroded her skin, cracking her once-smooth hands and forming jagged edges all around. Ah-Yu and her mother walked very far for long stretches of time. They shuttled between police stations and court-houses, back and forth, again and again and again. They tried to bring *Sann-hiann* back home.

Now, Ah-Yu looked on with deep trepidation as her third eldest brother was in handcuffs, taking a drag on his cigarette with his right hand while his left hand rose in unison. He looked as if he were surrendering. He cut a very sorry figure, smoking that cigarette. "*Sann-hiann* is no longer a young man," Ah-Yu thought as she wept. "Would I be able to bail him out and take him home this time?"

“The water ghost is calling out to Hobbling Suī!” Mother always used to cry out bitterly.

In Chiayi County’s Tōa-nâ District, which used to be called Tōa-phō-nâ, there was a lake where people occasionally drowned. Legend has it that a water ghost resided in the pond and would catch a passerby in order to switch places with their soul and escape the lake’s watery bonds.

To make its escape and earn reincarnation, the water ghost needed to kill a person. Moreover, if it tried three times to kill and failed, it would have no hope of ever reincarnating. However, if it willingly refused to kill anyone in three years’ time, it would have a chance to become a local protector god.

“Hobbling Suī” had a lame right leg, and always walked with limp. Because of his blunt fearlessness, while tilling his field next to the lake, he came to befriend the water ghost. The water ghost told Hobbling Sui one day: “A girl woman carrying a child will come by tomorrow. They’re going to sit down for a rest by the lake. I want to create a windstorm that will cause her scarf to blow into the lake. She’ll never be able to fish it out, and, when the time is right, I’ll snatch her and switch places so I can once again roam on land.” Hobbling Suī couldn’t accept this, and so he warned the water ghost in a booming voice that he would foil his plot.

Hobbling Suī tried to urge the water ghost to abandon his plans and to not harm anyone. “You have only to bear your burden for three full years, and then you can become a city protector god, right?” In his distress and dejection, the water ghost hissed back, “You don’t know what it’s like. When the months grow cold and the water icy, the frost forms and the snow freezes in place. The drowned spirits go silent and the stagnating spirits have nothing to rely upon. Being a water ghost is truly too horrible an experience. I can’t do anything at all.” Hobbling Suī

ignored the water ghost's pitiful outbursts. He would save that mother and her child. Hobbling Suī ultimately foiled all three of the ghost's chances to snatch somebody else's body. Both fell into a deep enmity for one another. In the end, Hobbling Suī drowned during a flood trying to save someone else. It's said that this was the water ghost's revenge. So, whenever you have bad friends who come by looking for you, you can say, "The water ghost is calling out to Hobbling Suī."

Like mothers everywhere, Mrs. Wang thought Xin-fu had turned rotten due to running with a bad crowd. Her own child was a Hobbling Suī. Somebody else's child had to be the inveigling water ghost.

As a young adult, Xin-fu had a lot of similarly aged friends. When they weren't heading off to the lumber mill for work, they hung around Chiayi Train Station soliciting customers to take taxis. Every five people they corralled was counted as one person. This work allowed them to earn more money than even an apprentice worker. Moreover, apprentices always had to keep a watch on their boss' mood by paying careful attention to his words and actions to avoid being scolded or beaten. These other guys, however, had tons of fun with their friends even when they were on the clock. They would crack jokes to break the boredom. Truly, it didn't feel like work at all.

Ah-Yu, the small child that she was, didn't understand her older brother's predicament... All of his stories were relayed to her through their mother. "We were living under martial law back in those days. It wasn't acceptable for anyone to be jobless. You'd be whisked away to the political prison on Green Island. You'd be put through thought and behavioral reform training." Or at least that's how Ah-Yu reasoned it away. At any rate, she was in her queue with her classmate by the road next to Chui-yang Elementary one day when Xin-fu suddenly disappeared into thin air. Then, after not seeing him for a while, mother received a letter posted from a so-called "vocational training corps" (under the control of the Taiwan Garrison Command). Xin-fu wrote that he had been locked up at such-and-such a prison.

Ah-Yu read the letter out loud to her mother, who was illiterate. When she finished reading, she asked her mother, "What's the 'vocational training corps'?" Her mother couldn't say. The postmark on the envelope had the characters for "Liou-Chiou." What was "Liou-Chiou?" Her mother didn't know the answer to that, either. Since it was part of the postmark, it had to be a place, right? So where was "Liou-Chiou"? Mother began weeping. She still had no idea. *Sann-hiann* had by that time been sent to even further places. Mother took Ah-Yu by the arm and walked as far as they could, but it didn't help.

Similarly, Ah-Yu was lining up on the road to her school one day when her brother suddenly appeared out of the blue. Ah-Yu was hunched over with her bookbag filled with books when she entered through the door. Just as she took her hat off, she saw her brother and jumped up in shock. What a nice surprise! But mother wasn't amused at all. There was no excitement on her face. Ah-Yu took a closer look. *Sann-hiann* had bruises all over his body. Mother dressed his wounds and bruises with medicinal ointments and salves. In their squat, narrow dwelling with its poor lighting, their silhouettes reminded Ah-Yu of a scene from her school textbook where soldiers got the words "serving the country with allegiance" tattooed on them. Mother seemed to be weeping again.

Xin-fu had returned home, having run away from something. "Where is 'Liou-Chiou'?" Ah-Yu asked him.

"It's Hsiao Liou-Chiou." Her brother corrected her.

"But 'Liou-Chiou' is written on the envelope."

Xin-fu, whose hair had been shaved clean off, laughed. "That's 'Hsiao Liou-Chiou.' You don't understand still."

She watched as her brother quickly wrapped up the conversation, and very tersely pulled on a corner of his shirt. "Is 'Hsiao Liou-Chiou' far from here?"

"It's pretty far away."

"What were you doing there?"

"Moving stones."

"How big?"

"Massive!" Xin-fu stretched his arms out as far as he could to show

her.

"Wow, such huge stones! So how could you move them?" "Even the ones that couldn't be moved had to be moved." "What did you need to move them for? Were they blocking a road? We were taught in school that if rocks are blocking a road, you need to move them out of the way. It's our public duty."

"They weren't blocking the road. It wasn't really for anything. They told us to pick up the stones and walk around in a circle."

"But why?"

"As punishment. They didn't think of us as humans. They did it to us on purpose." Xin-fu's face darkened and soured as the words left his mouth. Ah-Yu couldn't bear the pall of depression and stopped peppering him with annoying questions.

Not long after, Xin-fu was taken away again. After a while, another letter arrived; this time postmarked "Li-Gang" instead of Liou-Chiou.

One day, when Ah-Yu, with hair trimmed in a fresh bowl-cut, was heading to school, *Sann-hiann* lightly made another appearance. This time, his head was shaved completely bald. He disappeared again not long after. His presence was transformed into letter after letter, stuffed and crumpled into the mailbox at the Wang family home. Nobody had a clue just how tortuous of a trek he had made or what ill fate had befallen him. Sometimes the postmarks would be from "Orchid Island" and sometimes "Green Island."

In his last letter, Xin-fu wrote said his reform was complete and that he was returning home. Mother decided to go herself to bring him back home. She just couldn't bear the thought of another water ghost dragging him away again.

Mother and daughter weren't told the exact day Xin-fu would be released. Ah-Yu was already sixteen, and she and her mother were well practiced at caring for one another. The two arrived in Taitung, on Taiwan's East Coast. They searched for a place to stay while they waited for Xin-fu.

They waited for many days but didn't know exactly for what they were waiting. Of course, they knew they were waiting for Xin-fu. But

his actual release date remained a mystery. Maybe he was delayed by something. Or, maybe, the prison guards leading the “vocational training corps” didn’t actually want to release him. Or, perhaps, the small boat used to shuttle released prisoners to Taiwan can’t handle strong ocean swells and winds and so was delayed until the seas were calm enough to make the crossing to Taiwan.

They stayed at that dilapidated inn waiting for him for half a month. In the end, Xin-fu did arrive safely onshore. His head was one giant cue ball. Little Ah-Yu sighed. This time she didn’t ask him any questions that would dampen the mood. “*Sann-hiann*, you’re back...This time you need to stay put!” she joked. Mother’s unconcealable delight shone through. Her “Hobbling Suī” had finally broken free from the water ghosts’ grasp! But they couldn’t yet say they were a family of three. They’d have to wait and see what the future had in store.

Not long after, a new letter arrived that absolutely tore their mother to pieces. Xin-fu’s draft letter for compulsory military service had arrived. There was no time even for his hair to grow out before he left again.

HOW THE NIGHT CHRYSANTHEMUMS BEGAN TO MARCH

菊花如何夜行軍

鍾永豐

Yung-Feng Chung

BIOGRAPHY

Yung-Feng Chung was born in Meinong into a family of tobacco farmers. He is a poet, lyricist, music producer, and cultural worker. He has served as Director-General of the Meinong People's Association, Director of the Kaohsiung County Water Conservancy Bureau, Director of the Chiayi County Cultural Bureau, Chairman of the Taipei City Hakka Affairs Commission, and Director of the Taipei Department of Cultural Affairs. He currently serves as Chief Secretary of the Taipei National University of the Arts. He won the Golden Melody Award for Best Album Producer in 2000 and the Golden Melody Award for Best Lyricist in 2005 and 2007. In 2014, he was a finalist for the Golden Melody Award for Best Lyricist. In 2017, his album *Village Besieged* won both the Golden Indie Music and Golden Melody Jury Awards.

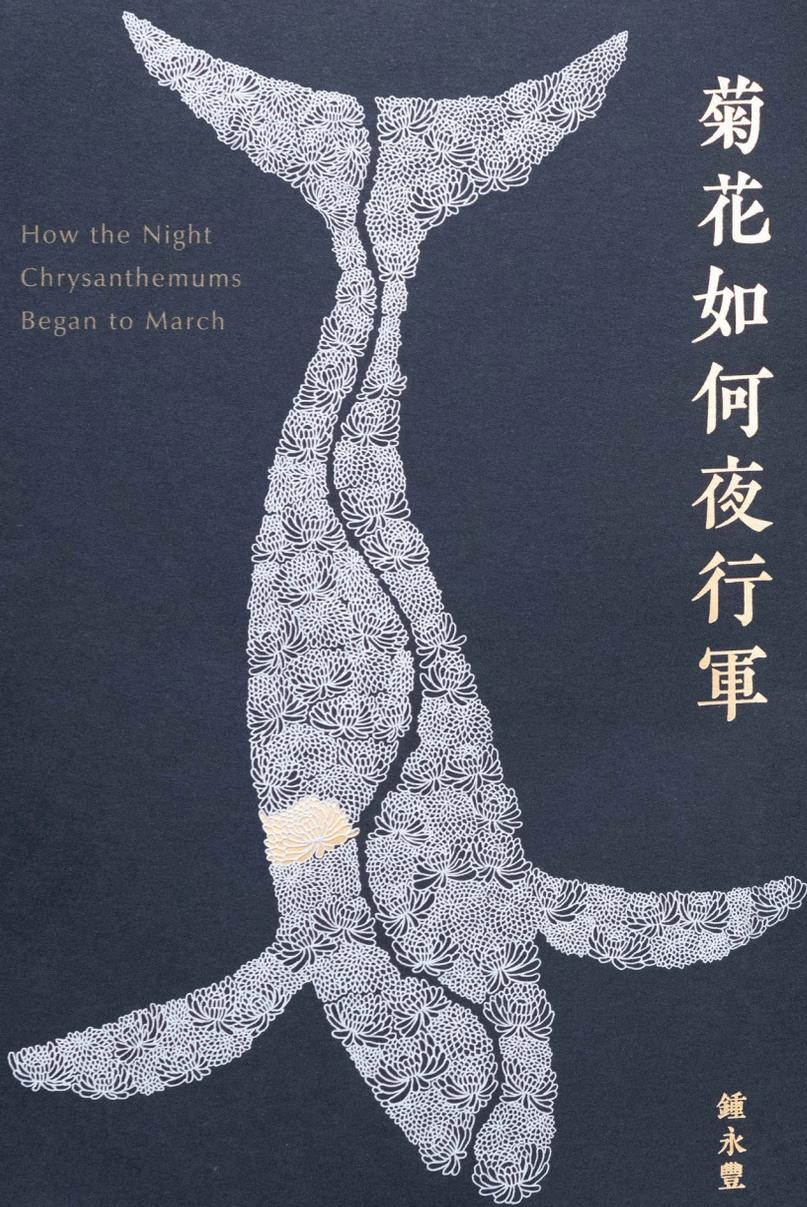


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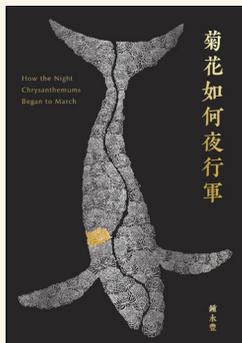
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INTRODUCTION

The essays in this book encourage readers to reflect on the land, the self, and globalization. Yung-Feng Chung shares how he and his orchestral friends sang songs lamenting the floodlights that had turned night into day in sleepy rural villages in the race to profit from the demand for fresh-cut chrysanthemum flowers. He also relates in powerful prose his experience singing mountain songs with elder farmers in front of the Legislative Yuan to protest construction of a new reservoir. In his essays, we too hear song after song about the changes overtaking rural Taiwan.

JUDGE'S COMMENTARY

by Sherry Hsueh-Li Lee

This book is a rare, personal record of a life centred on creativity. The reader is taken through Yung-Feng Chung's childhood in a Hakka village, his years of learning and exploring, as well as his time as a public servant. The author narrates in detail his philosophical perspective on creativity and the inspiration behind his major works. Yung-Feng Chung's writing passionately explores the clash between humans and the life of the land. In addition to rich storytelling, there are also in-depth investigations and multi-layered analyses of important issues. His words are full of flavour and rhythm, providing the reader enormous pleasure.

Revisiting My Village

Translated by Amanda Ruiqing Flynn

“Have you had a good life since marrying into this Hakka village?” my mother was asked many years later.

“It’s backbreaking work! Hakka people are too poor. They are burdened by the effort needed just to make ends meet,” she nobly told the resident anthropologist conducting research at the village. In that one breath, she had summarised the findings of over fifty years of participatory fieldwork.

My hometown is a village named Longdu, on the eastern side of Meining District.

If a vulture ascended into the sky from the top of the tea hills at the north of the village, it would see that Longdu Village is actually thin and long like a Dutch bean pod. The Shishan Hills on the east and the Longshan Hills on the west, both rising less than 100 metres high, together sandwich a long and narrow valley. This valley is just one kilometre wide at its widest point, shrinking to about 600 or 700 metres wide in both the north and south. Through the middle runs Highway 51, a village highway about five kilometres long. Highway 51 wriggles slightly here and there, with the only sharp turns encountered when entering and leaving the village and when the road reaches the Shishan water ditch in the south.

Technically speaking, Longdu Village has never had a fresh produce market. In the 1970s, when its population was at its peak and the country’s economy was booming, the busiest street in the village had only one convenience store, one Chinese medicine store, one hairdresser, one shaved ice shop, one noodle shop, and two stalls selling pork. This was a pretty accurate reflection of the scale of the market economy in my village back then. These shops were all concentrated in the western part of the village, which was known as the “Western Corner”. If we

compare it to modern day life, that area was our equivalent of a city's Central Business District. Back then, nearly 6,000 people lived in and around Longdu Village, although the market economy simply did not reflect that. The real cause of this was because of the unique cultural and societal norms of the villagers in those days.

The ancestors of my village were lucky to find their Promised Land—Longdu. After starting to work the land in the middle of the Qing Dynasty, Longdu's early settlers turned the area into the most fertile land in Taiwan's southern Hakka districts for rice cultivation. The fields to the south and north of the village provided over a thousand square metres of fertile soil. The villagers dug irrigation ditches to connect these fields to the Laonong River in the south, providing a constant flow of water year-round. Each year provided two harvests, which made the dry-crop farmers in the north incredibly envious.

Hakka small-scale farmers strive for self-sufficiency in grain production. Once there is ample grain to go around, each home in the village is then able to have the surplus energy necessary to raise livestock, vegetables, and fruit. Vegetables, varying according to season, were grown in front of and behind houses, by the roadside, even on fractional pockets of empty land near the water. Unused bits of land suitable for growing vegetables rarely escaped the beady eyes and quick limbs of village women. Of even greater importance was cultivating animals and plants to provide residents with much-needed protein. Each homestead allotted space for chicken coops, duck canopies, and pig pens. As chicks liked to dig for worms and food in the soil, chicken coops were almost always built under shade trees in the backyard. Ducks, fond of water and with a taste for algae, insects, and little fish, were housed in our duck canopy built astride our half-moon pond, in which we bred grass carp, crucian carp, and bighead carp.

The pigsty and the toilets were grouped together in the southwestern part of our home. The southern winds of spring and summer and the

northern winds of autumn and winter would always help blow away bad odours. Fruit trees filled the yard around village houses, producing seasonal abundances of mango, longan, wax-apple, banana, papaya, guava, custard apple, lychee, and star fruit. In addition, these trees protected villagers from evil spirits, gave shade from the sun, and added beauty to homesteads. In addition, the trees were a positive symbol of luck and abundance, which pleased the Earth God.

This ideal of self-sufficiency in food production, and the way in which it had come about, had a great impact on my village. The most obvious impact being that it suppressed the need for a produce market. However, if you wanted to butcher a pig you had to pay taxes to the government. Slaughtering a pig privately would be breaking the law. This was why the pork trade had survived. When the economy improved in the seventies, two fish sellers on motorcycles began frequenting the village. They would regularly come in the morning to hawk fresh fish they had purchased from a wholesale market in the neighbouring Hokkien town of Qishan. They would stop for a while near the meat stalls in our village. Only after the number of people buying meat had dwindled would they then motor on to the outskirts of the village to auction off the remainder of the day's stock. My home was situated in the outermost part of the village. It would already be close to noon when the motorbikes rolled in. My paternal grandfather liked the taste of seafood, but would also be cross that the fish was already starting to go stale by that time of day. Even while handing over his money to the fish sellers, he would scold them for being wicked.

An even deeper and more lasting impression I have is that the home grew into a place for sharing food and cultivating human relationships. Surplus fruit and vegetables, including crops that the cultivator had simply grown tired of, were given to neighbours, relatives, and friends both to repay favours and strengthen relationships. The women were the catalyst of this engine of human interactivity. There was always a

notebook that was constantly being updated in their minds. Ah Long's wife came over for a chat the day before yesterday, she gave me a few towel gourds, today I can drop in to gift her a basket of eggplants... The old aunty next door gave me a bag of guavas last week. Today we are harvesting the bananas in our yard. I must remember to give her two bunches... Third auntie's daughter-in-law has given birth and is recovering. There are two chickens in the coop, each around 4 kg. When I visit, I will bring them as a congratulatory present.

The definition of "can't consume anymore of" or "tired of this food" is not measured in a child's mind the same way as it is in an adult's. The logic that governs the notebook in an adult's mind in terms of the order of priority and sense of urgency often does not make sense to a child. Fish that has just been caught from the pond, a new season's fresh fruit, a duck fattened up by frogs caught over the entire summer. Obviously, I had not had my fill of this food, or there simply wasn't enough of it to go around, yet it was being gifted to others!

The mothers themselves sometimes could not figure out why this practice of food exchange was so important, and often felt guilty over it. During those times, families were large, and young women did not have any economic power. The head of the family would only disburse a limited amount of money, and as soon as the kids begged to buy something, their mothers' hearts would wrench. What recourse did those wanting to save some money to buy a few books or a new outfit for their children have? Of course, it had crossed their minds to sell the abundance of vegetables growing in their yards. But they were also scared of bumping into someone they knew. Thus, a diligent older sister or younger sister was invariably dispatched to make such sales in their place.

And what was the outcome? No different! The sisters didn't dare make their presence known, returning home dejected without selling a single bundle of vegetables.

Therefore, my village didn't produce business traders. The only way

available for me to get a leg up on life was to study hard, do well in exams, and become a public servant or hold a post in a reliable company. This was pretty much how every family learned to survive economically in Meinong. Even the descendants of the handful of very wealthy and politically distinguished families in the town who had made their modest fortunes during the Japanese Colonial Period had little choice but to struggle through the multiple levels of the government public servant examinations, unwilling to risk relying on old wealth. People say that we were “experts at juggling farming and studies.” However, the reality that had led to this was the strict system of food exchange in Hakka villages. It had suppressed the utilitarian function of human relationships, which in turn made it difficult for the development of commerce, thus leading to the dogged pursuit of academic achievement.

Let’s go back to the Western Corner, my village’s only marketplace, where there is still some fun to be had.

Every day at dusk, the arrival of two old Mercedes-Benz trucks in the small village square brought the village to life. These old trucks were filled with sweet-potato and sugarcane leaves that would soon make a high-quality dinner for the village’s pigs and water buffalo. The workers in the trucks would toss their loads onto the ground in bundles, with the driver on the ground in charge of collecting money. Only the married women ever bought sweet potato leaves, and it was mostly the young people who bought sugarcane leaves. This showed the division of labour in the family. The former were responsible for tending to the pigs and the latter took care of the water buffalo. In a flurry that lasted just twenty minutes, everything in the truck would be totally sold out. As soon as the trucks left, the children would all swarm in, picking up any stray sweet potato leaves off the floor of the square. These children were not necessarily poor. The scene simply represented the village ethos of those times, everyone using human and material resources to their best advantage!

The only two sexy women in my village could be found in the east and west side of the square, in shops facing one another. On the east side was a shaved ice shop selling banana-essence shaved ice. I don't actually like that flavour of shaved ice. After a few mouthfuls, I always start to feel kind of dizzy. Because I was so shy at that age, the ice shop was the only outlet for my fantasies. I can't actually remember how beautiful the daughter of the shop owner was ... only that her appearance was memorable enough to have a place in the history books of my village.

She was tall and slim, didn't say much, and always had her hair tied up with a coloured ribbon. She wore a plain white t-shirt with a simple but elegant flowered skirt. She would lean her body to scoop the shaved ice, then turn her body, and her skirt would rise a little. Then, she would walk towards me with lithe steps, put down the dish of ice, show me a smile with the corners of her mouth, and turn to walk away. I don't know how many times she was the star of the sexual fantasies of the ambitious youths in my village.

Facing west was the hairdresser's shop. Here, the main focus was not on the female hairdressers, but on the wife of the boss and barber. She was the mediator for our village, especially as a go-between for the pig sellers who only spoke Hokkien, overseeing the buying and selling of pigs. She was the only woman in the village who could be described as being able to elegantly hold multiple postures. Her hair was shiny and combed in a side-part and always adorned with a plastic flower. She wore a flowery blouse, with black trousers becomingly covering her slender figure. She walked with tiny steps; her feet covered in embroidered flower slippers. She would side-saddle the pig seller's motorbike, her right leg crossed over her left knee, her right hand holding onto the pig seller's right shoulder, her left hand on her right knee. She sat so proudly and arrogantly that women from respectable families rolled their eyes as she passed them by on the roadside.

I don't know how much money those Hokkien pig sellers earned

through her. Pig farmers were like horny boars as soon as they saw her, unable to think clearly, foolishly appointing her to negotiate the prices. It's no surprise that every time she came to buy pigs, my mother would send my father away and go into battle herself. Her own father was a Hokkien pig seller, so my mother thoroughly understood their tricks. Mother would directly haggle with them in Hokkien, and provoke them until that seductive and bewitching mediator was totally helpless.

At the end of last century, I left Meinong again. When I returned to my village in a fatigued state in the middle of the night, I looked back at myself, and slowly realised that my village had grown like a plant at the core of my body. It sometimes even sits on my forehead, influencing the path my life takes. It is also the first edition of the book from which I began to make sense of the world. The countless number of edits I've made since then have all sprung from this first edition.

Cement flooring

After I turned nineteen, every time I set eyes on the long, straight, and rigid slab of concrete pushing and shoving back the river of long grass, I thought it looked like two rows of riot control policemen blockading the unfortunate

people on the periphery, standing tall with arms held high. I would often absent-mindedly think back to the toothless grin of my paternal grandfather, with his stomach bare and round as a balloon, rolling around on the newly poured cool concrete floor and falling into an afternoon slumber in summer. Before we had the concrete floor, we had an earthen floor that I despised. Every year during the rainy season or the typhoon season, the earthen floor in the living room would absorb all the moisture in the air. This moisture would then awaken some type of worm inside the house that would attack the soles of our feet. The worms would skip and jump about waiting for the whole family to step on them

barefoot. After dinner and before bed time was when everyone in the family would raise their legs and wait for red ointment from a small bottle to be applied to the itchy, infected soles of their worm-predated feet.

In 1969, I was still a little boy who couldn't say much. The sphere of my life gradually expanded as my paternal grandfather brought me along to herd the cows. My five-year-old self started to draw a map of a world with no axis of time. Especially on those misty and foggy winter days, when the sun looked as if it was covered in frosting, I would awaken after my afternoon nap, and not be able to tell what time of day it was. I would sit alone in the threshold of the main door, looking south, expressionless, immersed.

When my father decided to cement the floor, it totally wiped out the worms. From the morning of the second day after the new floor had been laid, my memories suddenly became very vivid and peppered with distinct forms. I woke up on an empty wooden bed and discovered that all of the furniture in the house had been moved to the grain store. I went into the living room to take a look. What I saw had me more shocked than if I had been struck by lightning. The big mango tree in the backyard had invaded the back door and windows. Its silhouette was reflected upon the still damp and soft cement floor.

Respectful of the drying process and full of anticipation, the whole family ate under the eaves of the house for two days. My grandfather went through the motions of rubbing and pressing the cement floor with his calloused hands over and over again. Later on, he asked Ah Ding granduncle, who he respected as being more literate, and great granduncle, who he thought was knowledgeable and insightful, for their considered opinions as to whether the cement was dry. Only after they had nodded their assent did my family dare move the furniture back to their original places.

"Oh! It was so cool! So flat! So amazing!" Suddenly, the pores in my whole body opened up. I shivered, and was so aware of it. I wanted to

remember that feeling. I imagined that the newly cemented floor had grown long, red hairs downwards, killing the worms hidden in the earthen floor and leaving no trace of their remains.

Grandfather's comical but happy figure had painted a new commemorative tablet for our farm and cleaned up our property to mark the important step of our family moving forwards into modernity. That old, earthen floor, bumpy during good weather, sticky and slippery during rainy weather, had been covered over by this brand-new cement floor!

The impact of my happiness and my wanting to hold on to the expansive and colourful feeling of hope experienced with the new floor as long as possible gave me my first real sense of time. I knew that after another two rice harvests, the cement flooring extended from the living room to the rest of the house. According to the layout of our home, the cement floor was first extended to my grandparents' bedroom and then to the bedroom that my little sister and I shared with our parents. This definitively sealed us off from the breeding ground of those grunting worms under our bed. I remember well the series of events related to having a cement floor, and have placed a mark on the axis of time to commemorate it.

It was the kind of happiness that made you smile widely. Laying cement flooring in the bedrooms had changed the mood of the rooms too. Free of the hauntingly grunting noises of the worms, the link between night time and monsters lessened. Even when the adults worked nights in the smokehouse, I could now sleep in the bedroom by myself.

After starting primary school, friendships with other students gave me the chance to play at other people's houses. Having mastered the skill of gauging the surface of the cement floor, I now started learning to compare.

"Ha! Ah Deng's house doesn't even have cement flooring in the living room!"

"Oh, Ah Fu's house is pretty swish. The soles of my feet are still clean

after walking from the grain store to the smokehouse!”

“If we had cement flooring in front of the gateway, then I wouldn’t have to step on any soil at all on my walk between home and school!”

Each time I stepped back from this game, I would piece together my latest observations. My facial expression may have remained blank, but a lot was going on in my mind.

With the help of these comparisons, I was able to establish my earliest understandings of the neighbourhood. My core understanding of society was comprehended through an emotional lens of scorn and envy. However, my methodology was flawed due to a blind spot of mine. The cost of cement flooring meant that most farming families were, sooner or later, able to afford it. So more and more houses eventually had similar cement floors. My initial way of gauging each family’s status very quickly became redundant. But, no worries! I very quickly created another way to measure and compare each family’s status ... by judging how smooth and slippery their cement floor surfaces were.

The best time to examine this was during rainy weather. After rainwater had covered the grain store, the smoother the surface of the cement floor was, the more it was able to reflect the surrounding scenery. My putting this basic methodology into practice also led to my discovery of asphalt, which inspired in me a penchant for walking outside after rains.

“Ahhh! So cool and so smooth!”

As my attention became distracted by more novel things, I soon forgot about the joy of comparing cement and asphalt. Two years before elementary school graduation, the things that grabbed my attention were first, television, then Western-style houses, then refrigerators, and then tiles. It had become increasingly evident that the quality and amount of flooring materials was not enough to distinguish our home from those of our neighbours. Nevertheless, every time I saw a grain store having its cement flooring redone or walked barefoot on an asphalt road after a rain and saw the sky reflected around my feet, a

primitive joy would rise again from within the depths of my heart.

I remember the farmers in our village suddenly becoming idle the year I turned nineteen. The cacophony of tractors, water buffalo, ox carts, hybrid vehicles, farmers, and farming tools that had normally filled the countryside had been replaced by the sounds of over a dozen excavators and mechanical shovels ferociously at work. In a panic, I asked my father what on earth was happening. He smiled and replied coldly that it was the reformation of the farmland! There was nothing more to discuss, nothing about which to be concerned.

One day at dusk that year, someone I had never seen before appeared at the nearby secondary school's basketball courts. He looked about thirty or so, with an earnest demeanour. He said he had graduated from the industrial college. He threw the ball over as a way of saying hello. I jumped up to take the shot and asked him what had brought him to our village. He said he was the head of the building site, responsible for "reforming" the farmland in this area. My face hardened, and I asked him heatedly, "Why is this happening here? The natural landscape was so beautiful ... wavy like an electrocardiogram. Now that you've graded it, the village's heartbeat has flatlined!"

"Stop it! Can't you understand?" Every word I uttered filled me with more grief.

INTO THE BUNUN MOUNTAINS

走進布農的山

郭彥仁

Yen-Jen Kuo

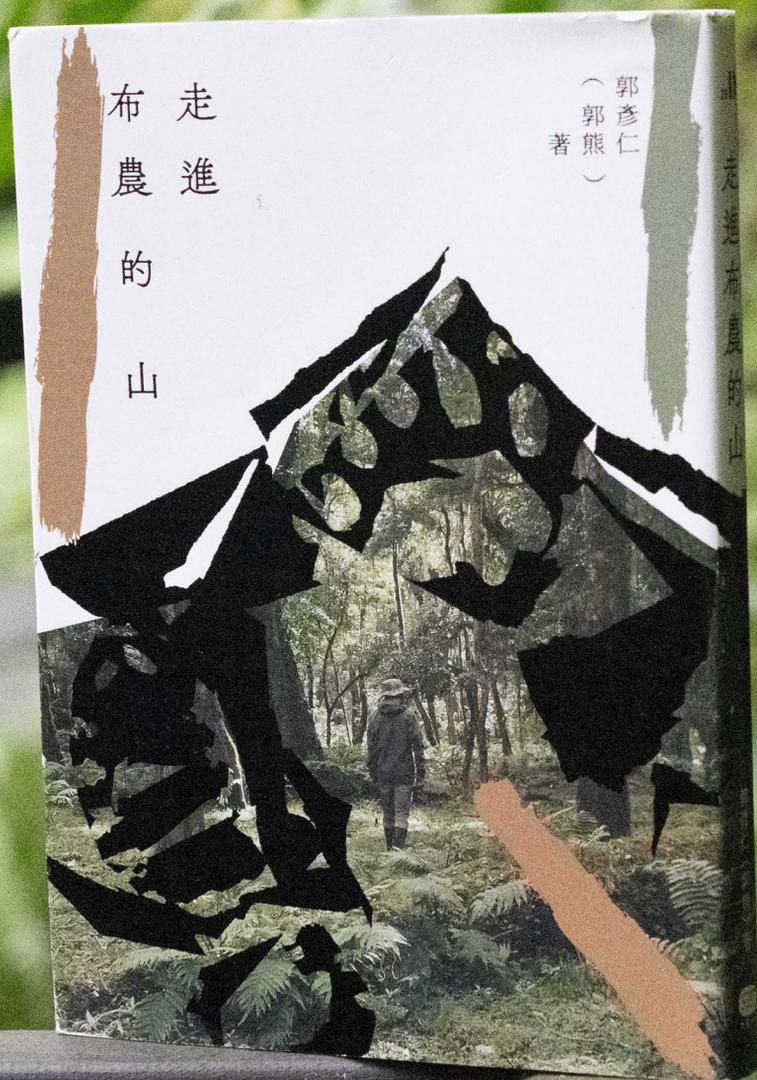
BIOGRAPHY

A graduate of National Pingtung University of Science and Technology's Wildlife Rescue Center, Kuo Yen-Jen has followed in the tracks of "Black Bear Mama" (Asst. Professor Huang Mei-Hsiou) in carrying out ecological field studies on Taiwan's Formosan black bears.

Thrilled by mountains and adventure, after many years of animal research, Kuo reflects a unique self-confidence with regard to Taiwan's mountain wilderness and wild animals. He hopes to use his physical experiences and methods of pursuit and waiting to see wild animals and to capture a glimpse of their real lives.

To build up his confidence, he has extended his experience seeking out tracks and trails to other parts of the world. He made a month-long journey through Sanjiangyuan National Preserve in a luckless attempt to catch a rare glimpse of a snow leopard. He also traveled to Alaska to capture images of grizzly bears and North American black bears, wanting to follow in the footsteps of Japanese nature photographer Hoshino Michio.





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TLA New Bud Award

Into The Bunun Mountains

Non-Fiction

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INTRODUCTION

This book narrates the adventures of a nature lover as he follows a group of indigenous Bunun elders deep into Taiwan's mountain forests in 2008. The author-protagonist, an enthusiastic member of his university's hiking club, had become a research conservationist and nature interpreter after graduation. His mission on this particular trip was to translate the natural historical wisdom in Bunun hunting taboos, mythology, and place names into knowledge relatable to modern society. The narrative leads us to an understanding of the forest in its entirety and to see how, in the 21st century, one can achieve self-construction by becoming truly 'present' within the forest.

JUDGE'S COMMENTARY

by Shu Ming Dong

As a researcher of wild animals, the author's professional knowledge takes his readers along on his tactile, immersive experiences in the great outdoors and shares the wisdom of the forests passed down through generations of Bunun. His work deeply reminds us that humans are interconnected with everything: harmony, respect, tolerance, and benevolence. These are the intangible lessons – gifts – given to man by nature. People aren't oblivious to it. It's just that they forget that they are a part of the "spirit of all things."

Chapter 1.
A Leap
into the Forest
of the Bears

Translated by Tim Smith

Slight slivers of light began to shine through the cabin's transom window. I just couldn't wait to open the door to my cabin up here on Dashuiku Mountain. A short, frigid gust blasted its way into the cabin, threatening to blow

out the stove fire. After my eyes adjusted to the painfully bright sunlight seeping in from outside, I saw the arrow bamboo grove covered in a light dusting of frost. Azure crescents were revealed with each swirl of a cloud above this section of slope.

I'm in luck! The weather's good today!

I quickly stashed my equipment into my hiking pack and headed out the cabin door. I started walking east in the direction of a slope carpeted in arrow bamboo and grass. After each stride, the resilient bamboo stalks would spring back immediately as I pressed my way forward through them. Along the entirety of my route, they kept trying to push me back down into the forest of fir trees below. The mountain slope gradually narrowed until it clearly formed a path. It was interwoven with animal trails that followed the topography, slowly falling in line with the main path. I kept my eyes ahead of me, and spotted an obvious hiking trail.

There were tracks and scat traces from small sambar deer. There were antler markings left by one of them on a nearby fir tree over to one side of the path.

There were also ruts in the ground between the barberries and Taiwanese Andromeda bushes made by wild boars digging around for grub with their snouts.

Jade mountain junipers(*Juniperus squamata*), Formosan junipers(*Juniperus formosana*), Taiwan white firs... Hmmm...What kind of

rhododendrons were these?

My mood brightened up a bit. Having found a way through the woods, I began mumbling to myself all the scientific names I knew of the things around me. I'm not exactly sure when it began, but I've always called out the names of the plants and animals around me while hiking, shouting each and every name as soon as I saw them on the trail, as if subconsciously compelled by some sort of mania.

The animal path went straight through a grove of Taiwanese white fir trees. The tracks made by a herd of sambar deer were left frozen in place on the frosty mud path. Looking closer, there were also tracks left by muntjacs as well as quite a few wild boar and Taiwanese macaques. This mountain path had been in use for several hundred years. A few Taiwanese red pines were peppered amongst the firs. Lush junipers and Formosan raspberry bushes crowded around the trunks, forming an underbrush. I gazed around me as I trekked on, studying the gaits and patterns of the animals who had passed this way before me, weaving left and right through the junipers, cleverly avoiding the constant jabbing of the needles on the hedge-like shrubs.

Up on a high spot along the ridge, I suddenly came upon a Jade Mountain cypress. It was rooted placidly next to a thicket of Taiwan junipers. Its bark was whitened and silvery, and, even though stout and short in stature, the beauty of its meandering branches were eye-catching. You didn't need any special knowledge about floral ecology to know that this was one very ancient tree. Jade Mountain cypresses grow their needles in the same direction as the prevailing winds; their branches stretching out like yogis on their exercise mats. Quiet in their tranquility with a supple, graceful beauty, practicing their own style of Zen meditation. The form of the tree followed along and extended as far as it could with the mountain topography surrounding it. The trunk was nearly completely pale white with only a few spots of fleshy color, as if straddling the fine line between life and death. Time seems to have stood still

for this cypress. Had it been anchored in this pose for more than a century?

I stopped in my tracks and it suddenly hit me that I was surrounded by all these wondrous cypresses in a grove. I closely counted the number of trees that had formed in this harsh, uninviting environment. Tree upon tree hunkered close together, remaining distinctly separate from the arrow bamboo thickets. The strong winds roared at each cypress with the determination of a strict ballet teacher intent on molding them into flawless dancers. These trees were left no room for error. They bore silently the quenching and straining, like fire-hot metal to water. They melded with wind, which sculpted them into lithe, graceful dancers.

I still found myself needing to throw myself into the juniper bushes to make any headway.

I looked at the abundant group of junipers before me, vibrant as they were, and felt an indescribable feeling. These high-altitude shrubs have an advantage over Jade Mountain cypresses. They commonly grow on the tops of ridges facing towards the sun. Each time I go trekking through mountainous areas devoid of human-made trails, if I need to pierce through a thicket of Taiwanese junipers, I'll first look for gaps that show where animals have made their paths, take a deep breath, and then do everything I can to push forward through the undergrowth. In those moments, the junipers, as sharp and stabbing as their name implies, stab through anything you're wearing, causing you to feel pain akin to a steel wire brush scrubbed incessantly across your skin.

As I was trying to calculate how long it would take to trek along this path, I noticed there were sticky sap fruits hanging from the juniper boughs in clusters like grapes. They're an enticing snack for Taiwanese macaques who sit in cliques around the trunks and carefully pick their harvest. I picked a berry that seemed to have already ripened and cautiously popped it into my mouth. The moment I bit down on the fruit, the briny salt flavor burned the inside of my mouth. Without even thinking,

I spat out the half-chewed berry as far as I could. Fine ... the macaques and boars can keep them all!

The elevation continued to drop. I made my way out of the juniper thickets before I knew it and gradually hiked my way into a grove of Taiwanese red pines. Compared to the abundance of life found in broadleaf forests, pine forests are sparse and simple. The pines were arranged into different shapes, with Japanese Andromeda and Oldham's azaleas crowding around in full bloom at the bases of trees. Pine needles covered the earth, forming a soft layer of decomposing mulch. One glance was sufficient to discern the huge difference between coniferous trees such as pines and broad-leaved deciduous trees. The thick bark of red pines feels like a layer of coarse tortoise shells split into large chunks. It reflects the adaptations needed to survive in this harsh environment. Its leaves had evolved into needles, which are better equipped to hold moisture. After maturation of the unlightened cones hanging up from the boughs and branches, the seeds, heliophilic and fast-growing, come loose to be carried away on the winds to far-off barren soils. All these factors come together to allow these red pines to rapidly form a stretch of pine forest.

As the mountain gusts blew by, the sound of wave upon wave of rustling Taiwanese red pine boughs filled my ears. I stood amidst the strong winds and reached out to touch a creeping false staghorn fern. I felt the mottled, coarse trunk of the red pine once more. I needed to start from the side of the massive tree and tried to listen in on the disparate voices from places near and far. Right then, the wind lorded over all the things in its path. The rushing sound of its gusts was like hearing incessantly cresting ocean waves crash onto a shore. The forest was fully at its mercy, and tree boughs were being dragged and torn chaotically.

I wove my way across yet more grassy knobs and wooded slopes one after another. Ash-colored mosses hung from tree boughs and golden pine needles covered the ground. Wild grasses had sprouted up

everywhere. I was careful to try to wind my way around the Kawakami barberries and Oldham's rhododendrons. I paid careful attention to any possible traces of anything manmade as the wild animal trails crisscrossed through the pine needle bedding. After a while, I stopped to rest beneath a red pine tree and put my bag down. I then pulled out my compass and map and checked my heading, making sure that I hadn't wandered off of the ridgeline. I was surrounded by alpine peaks towering above three thousand meters in elevation. To my north was Mount Maqudas, to my south was Mount Sinkang, and behind that was the main ridgeline of Taiwan's Central Mountain Range. The mountain valleys cut downward as they made their way east towards the ocean.

I stared out at the clear mountain ridge extending southeast from Maqudas. I looked downward from the summit, squinting at the grassy slopes covered in arrow bamboos. I wanted to see if there were any dark dots or shadows moving along that distant landscape ahead of me.

There was a clear delineation between the worlds of the grasslands and woods, and several depressions filled with mud and water were interspersed amongst the arrow bamboo thickets. I continued to descend in elevation. The forest transformed into the deeper greens of deciduous, broadleaf trees. A broad plateau came into view. It was the summit of Mount Gung, a mid-altitude mountain tucked away in an area traversed by the Lakulaku or Mahoras River that seldom saw any human visitors. The ridgeline behind it continued to drop off precipitously, lost into the sea of clouds below. It was home to the long defunct and crumbling Japanese-era Tarunas police dispatch station on the Batongguan Historic Trail.

Although the ancient human footpath had disappeared, paths blazed by wild animals continued to show the way forward.

The mud beneath the trees was imprinted with animal footprints, and new prints were freshly cut into older, dried tracks. A herd of wild boar had created a giant pile of the stinking mud. The pine trees next to

the mud puddles were marked with thick white plasters on their trunks, a record of the sambar deer and boars that had rubbed their backs here as they passed by.

Of my impressions of all the animals that had taken this path, the sambar deer were very light on their feet when leaving. They'd shake their bodies, and the drips and drops of mud that came off were transformed into tiny gray raindrops splashed everywhere. I studied all the various tracks and thought of a seamless painting. I started to look forward to encountering animals soon, even if they were only sambar deer.



I thought back to the tracks, all the way at the beginning. I was just a hiker with a heart for the Hundred Peaks. I accidentally followed a black bear's path and, slowly, I tripped and stumbled into the world of the Bunun.

The first memory I have that is distinctly linked with the mountains dates back to when I was about twelve or thirteen. The pressure to keep advancing to the next grade in school had consumed every aspect of my schoolwork. During those depressing middle-school years, I happened to peruse the shelves of the school library one day and see a complete set of the published diaries of naturalists from Taiwan's Japanese Colonial Period. Each book's name strongly piqued my curiosity, so I pulled one down off the shelf. There was Mori Ushinosuke's entire recollections described in *Seihan Gyōkō* (Walking Among the Uncooked Savages); *Torii Ryuzō*, an anthropological biography named after the author about the time he first set foot on Orchid Island; and the fascinating, great work of Kano Tadao, "Yama to Kumo to Hanjin" (Mountains, Clouds and Savages)...I didn't know who these men were, but I immediately fell under their spell, dreaming of pursuing similar adventures in their magical world of mountaineering. From that point on, it was like these

explorers were standing outside my classroom window, constantly calling me to join them to survey uncharted mountain ranges.

I read the note that Kano had made before reaching the eastern peak of Jade Mountain. "After I reached Shinkō Police Station, both my eyes and mind were immediately enraptured by the majesty and heroic visage of the Eastern Peak...People always change but where in this world can you find anyone as everlasting as a mountain?" I couldn't help trying to imagine the imagery that had prompted Kano to write "majesty and heroic visage."

Why did Kano Tadao attempt to hike mountains alone when he was still just a senior high school student?

Had he really eaten raw meat like a caveman?

Were the indigenous peoples of the areas he had explored truly savage and brutal?

How could these explorers and naturalists communicate with the indigenous inhabitants if they had no common language?

At night in the foggy rains of the high mountains, did they sleep shoulder to shoulder to stay warm?

If Kano and the others had hit an impasse in their travels and were left with no choice but to go hungry, wouldn't they have starved to death?

In order to make an escape from my deathly boring classes, I would rush over to the library during the short breaks in between to pull a book from the shelves. I'd flip it open to a chapter and begin my daydreaming.

"The savages diced the venison into large chunks, placing them directly onto the charcoal. I chewed on a large chunk for what seemed a lifetime ... I also tried a bite of deer brain, fresh. ... Since I was devouring the raw meat and fowl in front of me, I was confident that I had become one of them."

I was just twenty-three at the time and was reading books about larger-than-life experiences. The plots were so vivid and realistic ...

seemingly too fantastical to be true. I was enamored by these notes and memoirs, unable to help myself from turning to the next page. My eyes savored every written morsel about these treks through the mountains.

It seemed as if Taiwan had experienced its own Indiana Jones adventure saga only a hundred years ago. I felt fully energized and enraptured by these stories. I wanted to be like these naturalists and go off into the mountains to explore!

That's what I told myself deep down.

I carried this sentimental whimsy for the mountains with me through college and into my occasional hikes along Batongguan Historic Trail, where I accidentally made contact with the Bunun tribe I had read about in that book a decade earlier.

That chance meeting occurred while I was part of a team doing an ecological survey of Formosan black bears. My everyday life at the time was still distant from the mountains and indigenous cultures. Back then, my interest in actually ascending these peaks was tepid at best. But as I trekked along that old historic trail for the first time, my eyes were drawn in by the history of it all. Apart from standing and then standing some more over at the derelict ruins of Japanese police dispatch stations, there were plenty of ancient Bunun settlements scattered throughout these mountains to wonder at.

At Sinkan Village in Hualien County's Zhuoxi Township, an older local leader, a mai-asangg (elder), lives on the north bank of the Lakulaku River. This lies within the homeland of the Takbanuaz Bunun. It is rare for college students to visit (at least that's what my friend told younger outsiders). After a couple of rounds of drinks hit our stomachs, the village tama (uncles, fatherly figures) opened up and began to regale me, their guest, with stories of the tribe.

"We are the Take Banuad community. We're not the same as the Bunun on the other side of the river. There's five greater groupings of the Bunun in these parts...The earliest to migrate to this valley came over

from up in Nantou County and then began to split off and form their own families and tribes. So their language began to change. My name is pronounced 'Tiang' over here. But those in Haitutuan Township call me 'Ciang.' Our culture isn't exactly the same either."

I thought back to about an hour before. I had just stepped off the train and hopped onto a blue delivery truck heading towards the village. After a short journey on mountain roads, it felt like I was somewhere abroad ... in an alien land. A blend of three languages, Bunun, Mandarin, and Hokkien, could be heard. There were particular intonations as well as indigenous inversions of Sinitic sentences. I could listen but sometimes couldn't understand all that was being said. The situation often leaving me just nodding my head in agreement. After a few bottles of rice wine, my mind gradually weakened, and someone blurted out, "I'm going to help choose a mountain name for you." I was suddenly startled awake. I didn't know how to respond. After we sat for some time in silence, he spoke up again. "Well, maybe since you're tall, we can call you... ... 'Long.' Our village name is called 'Long,' and it's also high up."

The *cina* (Bunun: mother) sitting to his side had heard him and set down her drink. She looked at him hard and shook her head. "Long isn't a good name..... Now, 'Wulang'... that's a bit better. His tribe has a lot of hard-working men. They all head off to work before the sun's even up."

I stood back and watched as the conversation heated up. After a lot of back and forth and others jumping in to give their opinions, it seemed everyone had finally come to an agreement. "Your name is going to be...."

Although I received my Bunun name on my first night in the village, everyone woke up and went about their business the following morning as if that late-night conversation had never happened. Now, this episode of being given a Bunun name regularly replays whenever we have a couple rounds of drinks. But ... funnily enough ... nobody ever remembers what my Bunun name was.

Many years later, my older Bunun friend seemed to suddenly have an important thought and then asked me out of the blue ... “Kuo Hsiung, why don’t you have a Bunun name?”

By that point, I was no longer an inexperienced young man. I neatly drained my cup of rice wine and told my friend, “Everyone just calls me Bear (Hsiung) Kuo. It’s better that people just use the same name. There’s no need to give me a special Bunun name. Everyone knows who I am. So, just call me ‘Bear Kuo.’”

My passion for Formosan black bear research made me an increasingly frequent visitor to Batongguan Historic Trail. Teachers and senior students often gave their sincere advice. Whenever you do survey work in these mountains, you have to poke your head in when you reach the village. Without really realizing, this had become a long-standing habit for me. Each time I entered the mountains, I’d go over to Brother Lin Yu-an-yuan’s home and tell him how many days I planned to be in the area and ask him about the path and hiking conditions.

Brother Lin was a local Bunun man living in Zhuoxi District. He used to be a ranger in Yushan National Park and, as a child, regularly hiked with his father into the mountains along the Lakulaku River. He knew where all the ruins of ancient Bunun settlements were located, and could talk for days about the area’s wild animals at a level of detail known only to keenly skilled hunters. My friend brought many researchers and scientists into the Lakulaku river basin. After downing several cups of rice wine, he’d talk about Formosan black bears, muntjacs, sambars, and wild boars. But he didn’t stop there. He relished any opportunity afforded to talk about the past ... about the time when the famous mountaineer and writer Yang Nan-gun had come to study the ancient settlements along both banks of the river. And so, I would always go to visit him the night before I set out on my research hike and let him regale me with his old stories.

Staying overnight at Brother Lin’s was the starting point for my

understanding of Bunun culture and my ability to hold down a drink. Sometimes during months jam-packed with surveys and studies, I'd run into him or other "elders". They'd pull out low plastic stools and invite me to stake out in front of their houses for a steak-out with barbecue and side dishes. Around the small charcoal grills, they'd switch fluidly among various languages, creating a melodic mélange of Bunun and Mandarin. As their faces reddened with each downed cup, they'd begin telling stories of the mountains: tales about great hunting feats, recollections from childhood, Bunun legends, hilarious anecdotes from their lives, and so on. There was nothing they didn't talk about.

As the alcohol was working its way through me, I cradled my head in one hand, wanting to fall asleep. In my half-drunken stupor, I strained hard to hear what they had to say. The forested world of the Bunun had begun laying an invisible foundation within my heart. When I was younger, my impressions of these silhouettes of these hunters gradually formed an image of these Bunun elders hiking up in the hills above us.

After gulping down a cup of rice wine, Brother Lin Yuan-yuan raised his head and spoke with affection towards me. "You're Mei-Hsiou's student, so you are both the same. Just as I did with her, I will make sure to take good care of you."

TORRENT AND REFLECTIONS

激流與倒影

林懷民

LIN Hwai-Min

BIOGRAPHY

Known as one of the world's preeminent contemporary choreographers, few outside of Taiwan know that LIN Hwai-Min started out as a novelist. His 1969 novel *Cicada* was reissued as a commemorative 50-year edition in 2019. Lin didn't start to study dance until 1970 as a graduate student in the University of Iowa's Writers' Workshop. By 1973, he had already founded his own dance troupe: Cloud Gate Dance Theatre of Taiwan. He set up the Department of Dance at the National Institute of the Arts (today's Taipei National University of the Arts) in 1983 and established Cloud Gate 2 in 1999.

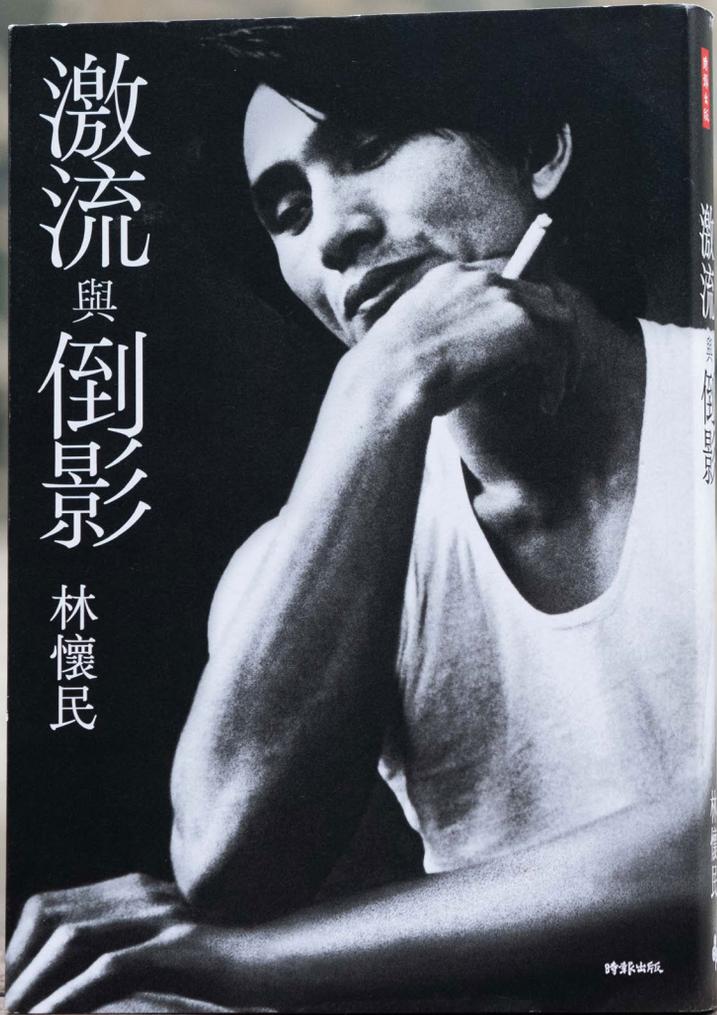
Among the honors Mr. Lin has received are Samuel H. Scripps / American Dance Festival Award for Lifetime Achievement, also known as the "Nobel Prize of Modern Dance", and the Chevalier of the Order of Arts and Letters, France. He has also been celebrated by *Time* magazine as one of "Asia's Heroes".

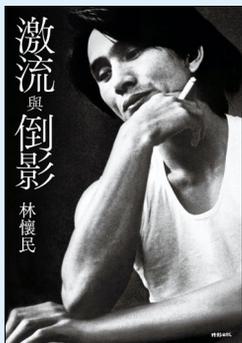
Lin often derives inspiration from Asian aesthetics, and his choreography exhibits a keen sense of modern consciousness. Many of his works have garnered best-of-the-year awards from the international media.

Lin's literary works include *Cicada* (INK), *Wandering with Cloud Gate* (Locus Publishing), and a translation of *The Mahabharata: A Play* (Unitas).



Profile image: © Berry Lam





TLA Golden Book Award

Torrent and Reflections

Non-Fiction

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INTRODUCTION

LIN Hwai-Min, internationally renowned choreographer and a famous writer, founded the Cloud Gate Dance Theatre of Taiwan at the age of 26. *Torrent and Reflections* is a masterpiece with 25 selected essays, reflecting Lin's enthusiastic spirit and creation of the magnificent era on "hipster Lin junior's" becoming of "choreographer Lin senior."

JUDGE'S COMMENTARY

by Wei Hsiung Chan

Cloud Gate founder LIN Hwai-Min's *Torrent and Reflections* is a collection of 25 stories recounting his 46 years of life in Cloud Gate compiled after his retirement. His pen is authentic and touching, to the point of tears. The attraction of Lin's stories may be said to originate both in what Gabriel Garcia Marquez would attribute to the memories themselves and in the way in which he has chosen to recall them.

Missteps and First Steps

A Confession Outside the Gate

Translated by Scott Faul

200 West 58th Street Midtown Manhattan, floor thirteen. Carola Trier Studio. It's March, the month of big snows. Through the window, white snowflakes fill the sky, which soon blacken with the slush of passing cars after landing. Along the sidewalk, a year's worth of litter and daily doses of dog shit poke up through the white sheen, a tribute to American democracy. Continuing south along the trail of refuse, the next street down hosts Carnegie Hall, tonight featuring the French flutist Jean-Pierre Rampal. If you go north instead, Central Park is just a two-minute walk away, where fierce trees in dress whites stand sentry over its safest season. Farther north, 65th Street boasts the Lincoln Center. Inside, after dark and past the snow-lit steps, dancers from the New York City Ballet leap across the stage like butterflies chasing flowers, sweating their youth away ...

But the visitors to Carola Trier Studio have no mood watching the falling snow. The white-haired Ms Trier, with a full makeup of eyeliners and lipstick, flashes a dentured smile: "How are you feeling today, dear?" Ms. Trier strictly forbids loitering in the hall, preferring her visitors to wait seated in the dressing room because, as she says, "I don't want this place looking like a hospital!" Her efforts are well-intentioned, but every visitor soon comes to realize that this "studio" is really a rehabilitation center. Everyone knows they are here to recuperate. The words "To live is to DANCE!" are scrawled across the bathroom wall.

With another "Dear", the former dance invites you onto her bed. A bed of machinery, with rows of springs beneath the plank and a metal bar at the head. Ms. Trier guides you through exercises chosen to coincide with the condition of your injury, targeting the appropriate muscle group with the appropriate force in the appropriate position, and

leaving nothing to chance. Do six reps instead of the instructed five, and you'll earn the wrath of Ms. Trier's thunderous alter-ego: "Add a rep and add a day. You're piling injury onto injury. Don't be foolish!" No matter the seriousness of the offence, the reply is always the same: "Go home and don't come back, you'll be the death of me!"

Take a breath, stretch your spine, step on the pedals, do some sit-ups, strap on some ankle weights, and shackle up. Complete the routine of postures and reps, and Ms. Trier will compliment your improvement with a satisfied, "See you tomorrow, dear." You can then seek solace in the changing room. Inside, it's a little clubhouse with representatives from all the major dance troupes. Prodigy to prima donna, we've all been members, suffering from similar injuries and pushing each other to recover.

The New York Times reports that nine out of ten professional dancers now suffer from some kind of bodily malady. Back injuries are the norm at the American Ballet Theater, the result of long poses as a swan or fairy. Modern dance's Graham technique brings on spinal and knee injuries, owing to arcing pelvic contortions and tortuous floor movements. For the New York City Ballet, leg injuries reign supreme - a side effect of Balanchine's fast-paced regimen. Strictly speaking, all the twists and turns onstage mean dancers need time off-stage to rest and recuperate at home.

The reporter, however, writes without equivocation that at-home rest is anathema to a dancer. If a dancer is to be a dancer, they must first accede to "deprivation", tolerating this tenet to the point of conceding an eventual fondness for "deprivation". In this vein they give their bodies over to movement training day in and day out. A disciplined regiment can free your dancing, but the cost is dear: you must give up all the liberties of a normal life. Skip classes for two or three days and the tension felt in your muscles will be nothing compared to the guilt and angst weighing on your mind. On average, professional dancers

in New York City tend to participate in more than 200 performances a year. Undoubtedly, they all long for a few days away from the demands of a schedule packed with dance classes, rehearsals, and performances. But, when a vacation does come, nearly everyone's aim is to find a good instructor to fill the holiday with classes. A dancer has only two real chances for time off: retirement and injury.

The painter wields a brush, the musician an instrument. But, for the dancer, the tool of expression is the body. To be effective, this tool demands constant honing. However, the risk of injury is heightened by performing high-intensity, complex movements combined with random attempts at impossible feats. For a male dancer, being a high-velocity performer is not enough. He must also be an accomplished weight-lifter. A partner of less than 100 pounds can amount to over 2,000 pounds of lifts in a single dance, adding to the possibilities for harm. Good conditioning is the best preventative, and for this, daily attendance in class is a must. Physical ailments, no matter how small, must also be attended to tout de suite. Left unnoticed or untreated, minor irritations in time can conspire to sideline a dancer with an unplanned hiatus. One of the principal dancers of NYCB, Edward Villella, once discovered 19 fractures in various parts of his body during an injury check-up. Each were old traumas, but he had danced for years unaware they were there.

Under such circumstances, New York's dancers require three professionals to care for them behind-the-scenes: a doctor, a physiotherapist, and a massage specialist.

Thus, if you are a "vacationing" dancer and happen to be in New York, ask around and, in no time, like everyone else there, you will find your caregivers.

Dr. Rosemi, also located on 58th Street, has a clinic filled with signed pictures from grateful notables. When rotating your foot he remarks, "Hmm, that's a good turn out!" Then pulling and straightening it he adds, "Hmm, good flexibility, you must leap high, eh?" After feeling the

muscles, he continues, “You started dance late? 22? Maybe 23?” A few X-rays later and he gives some reassurance: “No problem! You still perform on stage? You have a minor spinal misalignment; can you see it? The third vertebra up is slightly off and missing a corner. Nothing to worry about, all of you have it. Also, your thigh muscles are over-developed. The left quad has a strain, and your right calf has a tear. How did this all happen?”

How did it all happen?

September 9th, 7pm sharp backstage at Sun Yat-Sen Memorial Hall. Make-up done. Warm-up finished. A soft buzz can be heard from the auditorium. In 30 minutes, the curtain will go up for the opening of “Red String”, but the costumes still haven’t arrived.

This is the premiere. Props and masks have the performers in the mood, but they can’t don their costumes. How can they go on stage? They’re anxious and so are you. While urging your costumier over the phone to hurry, you soothe your dancers backstage with reassurances, telling them their costumes are on the way. After all, when has Mr. Lee ever let us down?

Mr. Lee is indispensable to the world of Taiwan dance. He knows the measurements of each Cloud Gate dancer by heart: “Didn’t I make so-and-so’s first dance shoes and outfit? I’ve watched them all grow up!” Twenty years passed like a day. Lee started out as an apprentice maker of ballet shoes, which he mastered and sold for low prices. From that he moved on to research and make ethnic costumes. Now, eighty to ninety percent of all outfits seen on Taiwan’s stages, as well as those abroad hosting visiting Taiwan dance troupes, come from his Blue Dragon Company of Theatrical Costumes.

Lee’s feelings for Cloud Gate are complicated, “You are always throwing new cards into the deck and coming up with ways to confound me. On any given day I make more than 100 folk costumes, but for you it

takes three days to make just one. What's more, Cloud Gate doesn't even have any money, so I lose both time and coin on your costumes!" But, on the other hand, Mr. Lee loves a challenge. He says some outfits are commercial and others are art. If we aren't satisfied, he tells us to send them back to him for a do-over.

For "Han Shih", Mr. Lee waited three agonizing weeks for a sunny day, when he could spread out newspapers in the alleyway in front of his workshop to cut out the ten-meter long fabric that served as the tail of my robe. On the eve of "The Peacock Flies Southeastward", Liu Lanchih's outfit proved less than ideal. So, in the middle of the night, Mr. Lee dragged himself over to the Hong Xiang Silk Shop to pick out new fabric and stayed up all night working with you. For "Red String", the design and materials had been delayed by half a month because of a rush order for several thousand ethnic dance competition outfits. There hadn't been any time to start in on the fantastical patterns of the "old man under the moon" matchmaker deity costume. After three sleepless nights, he threw his hands up in apology ... and you did the same in a plead for help. He won't fail you now. But still ... the audience has arrived with no costumes in sight.

Twenty minutes before the show, Lee rushes in out of breath with two fitters. What a scene! Rushed work makes for errors, and now design measurements aren't matching up. Dancers are on the verge of tears. You pick up a needle and call out encouraging words: "Take it easy. Don't worry. A few adjustments will fix it." The stage manager calls out: "Ten minutes to showtime."

That was the first time in Cloud Gate history that the curtain rose five minutes late on a show. The dancers had everything they had into keeping calm and finishing their performances. You warm up offstage, but your eyes, in spite of yourself, keep staring out toward it. Applause erupts snapping you out of your reverie. Times up, you need to get out there.

Stay calm. Stay calm. You manage to relax your nerves. You listen to the swoosh of the rising curtain. And then silence. You take a deep breath. The familiar flute score signaling the start of “Blind” starts, and you rush out into the black. The lights come up. You flip around vigorously and land. As expected, the audience gasps. You crawl forward, slapping the floor, and then kneel-turn into a squatting leap. Both feet should come down together, but your right foot hits first, and then you feel it. What every dancer fears has happened. You felt it, a soundless fracture. The show goes on, five thousand eyes transfixed in rapt silence. Under the cold blue of the overhead lights, you break a cold sweat. Your foot gives out, your calf swells, your legs leaden, and your whole body collapses. The music plays on, so you grit your teeth and dance along The tune to “Blind” trails out and everyone stands center stage, hands raised toward the sky, extended. And the lights dim slowly down . . .

Probably best to substitute “Tale of the White Serpent” for “No Cha” in the second half of the show. Dancers change costume and go back on stage accordingly. After all the backstage hustle and bustle, now you are alone in the dressing room; full of remorse for a lower leg swollen to twice its size. In the middle of the night you call on your physician who gives you acupuncture. The next day more acupuncture and crutches for both sides. It’s torture but, when the time comes, you drop your crutches, put on a brave face and step out on stage. The show must go on, and there are three more yet to go.

How could this happen? How? Dr. Rosemi asks in earnest. But, Dr. Rosemi, who can’t even locate Taiwan on a map, hasn’t the foggiest about the climate of dance in Taiwan. About how getting by as a professional dancer means taking on a few side jobs; about how, between training, teaching, and choreographing, you have to hustle up artistic and musical talent; about how you must exert pen and voice to tell everyone that dance is serious business; about how, outside of Cloud Gate, you also need to teach, or risk not being able to pay next month’s

rent; about how you have to go to the Chinese Culture College where you teach dance because, without it, dance in Taiwan hasn't a future. Hwa Kang winters are bitter and cold, but still you teach. You can't stop yourself, even over the protestations of your spine, from getting up to demonstrate a movement. How could this happen? All you can say is that, when the curtain goes up, the show commences, and you can do nothing but bravely soldier on. When your body goes on strike against you, then your spirit must step in to bring it back online. Not until you can no longer go on do you stop to ask yourself what happened, ... but by then it's finished. And all of this is so far removed from a snowy March day at the heated clinic on 58th Street. You can only summon a couple of words in reply: "By accident." The doctor gives a knowing smile: "Don't worry, I'll give you a brand-new body." In that moment, the price of your body spikes. The bill for the first session is more than US\$125. Of course, the doctor has no way of knowing that dancers in Taiwan have neither a professional dance theater nor agency ... much less medical insurance.

Dr. Rosemi referred you to Ms. Trier who sent you to Mr. Ligenan, your new massage specialist.

As a young man Mr. Ligenan had aspired to be a dancer and, at 65, he still takes three ballet classes every week. This has added to the understanding he has of his patients. He strongly believes the mind is key to unlocking all maladies and that a good knowledge of musculoskeletal medicine just isn't enough. So, he takes the time to get to know you, and then, voila, you have a complimentary psycho-analyst too.

Perhaps having lived many years in Japan is the reason behind Mr. Ligenan's curious manner of talking and his oriental-curio filled apartment. As his hands knead your muscles, his mouth plies your ears: "Youth is full of ambition and vanity. Always tempting fate and not taking care. American kids can't tell the difference between what's good and what's bad. They throw their youth away and waste their lives. What can you learn from them? What is it that your Chuang-tze used to say? Yikes,

what's this? Why doesn't this muscle react?

He purses his lips and focuses on the spot, finding two knots in a muscle you hadn't known were there. He keeps working them until sensing a reaction; and, in the meantime, tears have been making tracks down your face.

"You know pain is good," Mr. Ligenan takes the opportunity to educate you, "Being driven comes with a price. Your body isn't made of wood you know. You have to listen to what it tries to tell you."

Although a stranger at first, he's now feeling more comfortable and starts in on the more personal. Lying there, you haven't anything better to do, so you go along. And so, it goes on, "The problem is in your head. You've got too much going on up there! See here how hard and stiff your neck is? I need a hammer! Relax! ... Why don't you just write a book? How did you end up on this path?" You're dumbstruck. Then, you feel a slap land solidly on your butt: "You're at it again! Thinking too much? Relax, relax!"

How did I go down this road?

DAUGHTERS

女兒

零雨

Ling Yu

BIOGRAPHY

Ling Yu was born in Taipei. She received her BA in Chinese from National Taiwan University and her MA in East Asian Languages and Literatures from the University of Wisconsin at Madison. She was the chief editor of *Modern Poetry* from 1986 to 1992. She co-founded the Poetry Now Club in 2001. She was a visiting scholar at the Department of English, Harvard University, 1991. She won the National Poet of the Year Award in 1993 for her poem 'An Acrobat Family'. In 2004, she was invited to the Rotterdam International Poetry Festival. From 1992-2021 she taught at National Yilan University. Ling Yu has published several books of poems, including *Series on a City* (1990), *Names Lost on a Map* (1992), *An Acrobat Family* (1996), *Collected Songs of Winter Trees* (1999), *Recountings of the Hometown* (2006), *I Am Heading for You* (2010). Ling Yu is deeply inspired by Chinese history, philosophy and mythology, from which she freely draws her material. Her poetry both describes and reflects the complexity of human existence.



Profile image: © Noell



女兒

零雨 著

INK

我生活在海浪上，在浪尖，在浪裡。
細軟銀河，薄骨，黎明，
細軟離別，情與愛，夢想，
我只是靜靜躺著。
就有晴天白日，就有濤涌來到，就有風雨作出。



TLA Golden Book Award

Daughters

Poetry

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INTRODUCTION

Poet Ling Yu describes in pithy and temperate verse the trials and tribulations of life as a woman. The singular potential of women to bring new life into the world gives exploring and extending the meaning of motherhood a central importance in Yu Ling’s creative efforts. With the passing of her own mother, Yu Ling has stepped into the role of mother to herself while continuing to be a daughter always in search of Mom. *Daughters* reflects the dichotomic trajectory of seeking escape and looking for the way home as well as a will to sustain the light of filial remembrance always.

JUDGE'S COMMENTARY by Hsing Chieh Ling | Translated by Jeff Miller

I am grateful to author Ling Yu for giving us this work of ‘spiritual order’ that deftly explores the relationship between innocence and expertise. In this collection of poems, the word “daughter” may be read either as a noun or as a verb, in the sense of carrying the tears of loss and cherishment. I have always felt the most complicated emotions should be expressed using the clearest vernacular and that our deepest grief should be described in the simplest, most unadorned words. Its effective use of minimalism and ‘blank space’ is for me the most moving aspect of *Daughters*.

I'm A and Z, the Start and the End On "Z and I"

by LIU WAITONG | Translated by Jenna Tang

Even though I've known Ling Yu for a long time and have gone on a trip with her twice, she seems foreign to me whenever I start talking about her. A part of it

perhaps comes from her escapist way of life. Another part is probably due to the expansive and unpredictable realm embraced by her poetry. I have recently been on a trip with her to Nanjing, and the poets there told me that they found Ling Yu to be the least Taiwanese poet among us all, and so I answered: "That's because you've read too little from Taiwanese poets." But then, in my mind, a voice came up: "Of course, she's the Ling Yu that sounds the least Ling Yu."

Ling Yu's works of poetry span an extensive range, especially in terms of time and aesthetics. Thoughtful readers can find a new her in each of her poetry collections and series. At the same time, there is a running undercurrent that attests to the perfection of this same Ling Yu. In "Z and I", for example, the aesthetic pursuit of rhetoric stands in such contrast to her earlier collections, *Stunt Family* and *Odes of Winter Trees*. In "Z and I," her language is bold and straightforward. It would be hard to find another poet in Taiwan as "daring" as she because it's hard for the literary world to jettison the established idea that poetry must demonstrate *rhetoric skills* and *winding meanings*. Therefore, Yu's "Daring, artful voice" is embodied in the "clumsiness" of her works.

Such clumsiness and straightforwardness comes from a deep, emotional space.

"Z and I" is a conversation covering the span of thirty years. There is no way or need to presume who this Z is, or who it might be for the poet. If the "I" in the poem can be fictional, surely the speaker can too! In Ling Yu's inscription, she quoted Borges, the master of fiction, in this line

without a clear meaning: “From faraway exists Z.” This is a sign that Ling Yu’s language merges with Borges’s cunning. I went back to Borges’s *History of Eternity* to find this line and found that, while Ling Yu had *extracted meanings* from it, exactly which meanings had been extracted remained unclear. I’m here to tell the story.

If Ling Yu were attempting to converse with an imagined person, it would surely remind me of one of her pieces: “In a snowy night with Mio and bald pine--for AC” (Preface from *I’m Heading Towards You*). Here, the ideal of poetry is key to interpreting this poem--poetry is a prayer from our deep interiority.

The imagined Japanese friend Mio discusses with Ling Yu about Ling Yu’s own poems. In one of these conversations, Ling Yu responds to Mio: “Poetry is about inhabiting. When it comes to poetry, in your words, it’s about ‘language’ and ‘shrines’ (the basic elements of the character “詩” into 言 and 寺). It refers to a space filled with rituals and religious spirits and to how the idea embodies human compassion. Such a spiritual shrine is established by language itself. However, I prefer breaking down the shrine character 寺 into its own constituent elements, ‘inch 寸’ and ‘soil 土’, to make it more abstract; to make it a deep, internal space as big as a heart.”

This definition relates to the poet Ling Yu’s style, about how there is a sense of repeated escapism in the language. Her poems, never tense or forceful, are full of a foundational strength that is hard to overlook; that reveals the transformative energy concealed in deep interior space. “Z and I” reflects such a style. The poetry begins with “In the middle of the journey of our life” ... which is exactly the same as the first line of Dante’s *The Divine Comedy*. The remainder of the poem seems to be an attempt at re-establishing the tiny bone structure of the masterpiece. In *The Divine Comedy*, there is desperation for the lead from cross-generation soulmate Virgil and the young, deceased lover Beatrice. As for “Z and I,” the Z embraces both ... actually three ... individuals, if we are to consider

the conversations between the multitude of "I"s and their mirror structures.

The Divine Comedy is a process of elevation, and "Z and I" contains the sincerity to descend back to a specific moment and place. The journey of "I" looking for Z is also a journey of looking for the self, which comes in the shock of awakening from a dream. It reminds me of the epic, romantic, and poeticized He Fei Town love story (especially its last chapter) by Southern Song Dynasty Zhi poet Jiang Kwei. On the day of the Lantern Festival in 1197, Jiang Kwei felt his longing and had dreamt about an old lover that he hadn't seen for at least seven years. It inspired him to write the five-part poem "Partridge Sky", which gave a voice to his emotions. In one stanza in "My dream on the Night of Lantern Festival" he wrote: "The wide river flows eastward without end / I would not have planted the seeds of love if we were destined to part / Encounters in dreams so obscure, so unlike portraits / in the deep of the night, dreams awakened by the screeches of mountain birds / Grass ungreen, hair ashen / A prolonged farewell untangles sorrow / year upon year of nightly reunions / only you and I understand."

In Ling Yu's story, "Z and I have not seen each other for over three decades." Reunion in the dream still isn't the same as the intricacy of a portrait, and "I didn't disturb my fair company" indicates the separation after the thought of "Shall not have planted seeds of love." As for "years and years of nightly reunions" and "only you and I understand", both lines were completed by poet Ling Yu independently, and the following paragraph with memories was thus reinvigorated. The poem starts from an unbelievable dream that suddenly commenced with a Genesis flashback. Looking closely, it aligns perfectly with the spirit at the end of *The Divine Comedy* by the love that moves the sun and the other stars."

The interrogative tone of "that very planet" lingers throughout the poem, as though indicating how Z and I once were a sublime pair, forever connected and traversing a senseless world; persistently searching

the skies and the world beneath our feet. But, I lightly ponder on another early work of Ling Yu "A Living Room With Fruits" and about its reference to Li Qingzhao and Zhao Mingcheng's romantic relationship. It asks whether "Taking out new spring wine, drink up / After this sip, unable to decipher your poem / or mine" or "But I'm good at sleep talking, in the dream / I walked far, far away, too far to see you / or for you to see me" reveals the truth that underpins love.

But then, back to Z and its naming, we can find indications in Borges's text: "B predicted or presumed that Z existed very far away, although B didn't know Z at all." Ling Yu certainly extracted meaning from this line ... that of the distance between B and Z. Li Qingzhao's consciousness regarding her distance with Zhao Mingcheng is what defined her. It was the same with "I".

"I" didn't forget her identity as a poet. To me, in the chapter titled "Language," the poet really struck me with the shock she expressed regarding the myriad of ways people use language "How can they be / nonchalant about its rich meanings / its dark shadows.....how can they go / across the streets, hustling and bustling / using those familiar clichés / and live out their good days?" The dislocation between people's needs and poets' efforts is the origin of the realistic existence of a language in history. Although she may not be wholly satisfied by it, the poet has already performed her magic for such a change.

It is just like a dream that intersperses and reappears. "I" have already realized the meanings of distinguishing, or of arguing, with the past and present, and those calculations are bound not to provide an answer, just like the indication from the chapter entitled "Fissure": Is it true that youth exists without fissure? Has "the fair one" ever truly existed?

Over and over, Ling Yu wrote about "the other one," "from the other one," "the other other," and "life from the other side." How would she manage to forsake rhetoric, hidden metaphors, and lyrical language, and walk into another parallel world, reconnect a language already cracked,

a destiny already broken? From the chapter entitled "Rooftop," we can sense Ling Yu's waking acknowledgment of the idea of fissure: "I" is divided into she and I "--It was she who made me stand at the rooftop/ pointing my fingers toward those constantly changing/ paths." The "she" here may be divided as well, interpreted as a classic reference to writer Eileen Chang, as olive trees have often been used to refer to the author Sanmao. Even her "Father's Orchard" reminds me of the Hong Kong novelist Wu Shu-Bin.... For readers, this is liberal, as all of these literary figures could take part in the changes and incorporation of "the other Ling Yu."

"Eternity", as subtext for a simple love story, finally appears in the last chapter, entitled "Olive Tree": "--I will rest over here / three days, three years, or three decades / it all depends on this tree / and whether it will be shrouded for eternity." Here, once again, we see the presence of Borges, "Eternity's shattering duplication is time," which he concluded with a supporting quotation from Schopenhauer: "It is the life and fate of lions to seek lion-ness which, considered in time, is an immortal lion that maintains itself by the infinite replacement of individuals, whose engendering and death form the pulse of this undying figure. ... An infinite time has run its course before my birth; what was I throughout all that time? Metaphysically, I could perhaps answer myself: "I was always I"; that is, all who throughout that time said "I" were none other than I" (excerpted from *History of Eternity*).

Whether or not the dialectic between time and eternity has been established, in the latter half of the poem, the becoming of "I" and the means of reflection about Z are keys to establishing the foundational meanings of "I." Many years ago, in Ling Yu's poem "Genesis Rehearsal: First Act," there is a similar reflection on such relations:

*Is it time to rehearse again?
I walked to the other side of the alley*

*and met someone. And knew that
I would never ever encounter
another one.
They were to be born from my body
.....
I took a turn at the alley, and saw
that very first someone
waiting at the very first place
We reunited with joy
and I let him enter me*

However, the choice that year wasn't as complicated or intricate as in the present. After persistently searching for an answer, in the most painful part (such outspoken qualities of bitterness and pain are quite rare in contemporary poetry and in Ling Yu's style itself) she suddenly realized, when even the howls of abuse had been negated: "I was told such a howl / has won over death / some don't even howl. I was told / he didn't want to win anything / not even death" Solid resolution is contained within those lines.

Following through, her poem "Old Years" slowly reveals how self is both an answer to existence and also a translucent, shelter-less existence. In "When I Was About to Get Lost", the meaning comes clear. From here through to the end, the language comes out in one breath in an extremely moving way that is full of winding, unhesitating elegance. "Rains of tears, let's just call it rains of tears" There is no need to be extra conscious about the poem being contemporary or post-contemporary; about it being connected to escapism, coolness, or wordplays. The poetry in its own perspective and moment directly expresses a visceral and raw destiny. Having written all of these poems, poetry or not, Ling Yu or not, does it matter at all?

"I think, I exist because of / twilight—to continue / a kind of practice

for spelling wordplay” Even though life has come close to its twilight, the sunset remains infinitely glamorous. I was pleased to read “I took a turn at the winding path, faraway path, derivative path / but with a clear direction. Stretches of mountains breathe, waves and waves of fog / under twilight, I continue walking / at such a slow pace, without ever stopping.”--which expresses an extremely powerful perseverance and confidence. The poet has prepared a better self to welcome the past self, a better A to welcome Z. As Borges once said: “‘I Am That I Am,’ the name of God - or those heard by St. John the Theologian on Patmos, before and after the sea of glass and the scarlet beast and the fowls that eat the flesh of captains: ‘I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end.’”

LIU WAITONG is a Hong Kong poet and writer. He has won literary awards including the Hong Kong Biennial Awards for Chinese Literature, Hong Kong Arts Development Awards, and more. He currently lives in Taiwan. His publications include *Eight Meters of Snow*, *Half a Book of Ghost Talk*, *All the Glitters Will Not Be Extinguished*, and many more.





國家紀念堂

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