AMBA

WINNING ENTRIES IN THE 2024 TAIWAN LITERATURE AWARDS

PEAK

Winning Entries in the 2024 Taiwan Literature Awards
Selected Excerpts in English

國立臺灣文學館
National Museum of Taiwan Literature

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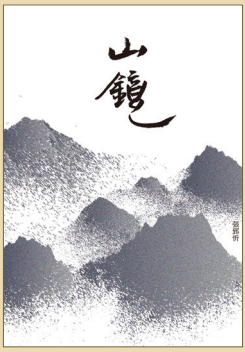

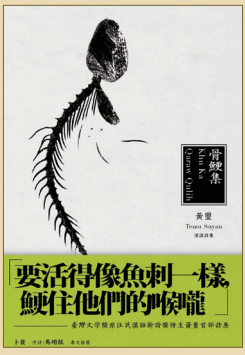

Preface

Dear readers,

This year, thirty books were shortlisted for the Taiwan Literature Awards. In the end, five novels, three poetry collections, and two non-fiction books emerged as winners.

As a literary award, strong literary quality is non-negotiable. But beyond that, the winning works are thoughtful, engaging, and deeply resonant. Here's a glimpse into them:

The Land of Dreams and Spirits, which received the grand prize, is ambitious yet accessible. Blending a spirit-speaking protagonist, Chiang Ching-kuo's life, sensational events, and even multiverse theory, the novel explores generational contrasts and shared human struggles.

The other four novels vary widely in tone and subject:
Dark Roads moves at a gentle pace, offering a quiet reflection on the inner worlds people often keep hidden. *Sugar Bun Island* is rich with tropical atmosphere and lyrical language, telling stories of movement, displacement, and memory. *Mountain Mirrors* examines identity and ethnic tension, with a thread of suspense pulling it forward. *The Becoming* revisits Taiwan's Sunflower Movement, capturing a generation trying to reshape the future.

The poetry collections are equally compelling:
Too Young to Handle, Too Old to Compose Poem subverts poetic norms with humor and unexpected turns. *Felix Culpa* draws from the mundane, sketching out the absurdity of modern life. *Khu Ka Qaraw Qulih* speaks from the perspective of young Indigenous Taiwanese, living the reality of a post-colonial society—a truth that feels stuck in the throat, impossible not to express.

Non-fiction made a strong impression this year, reflecting Taiwan's growing literary engagement with social issues. Both *The Boundary of Silence* and *Underground Lives* are extensive, well-researched works. The former blends folklore with ethnic history to foster understanding between communities. The latter offers a critical examination of migrant workers' lives, encouraging deeper consideration of the systems and policies affecting them.

Great literature has a way of drawing us in—and the authors of these winning works have done exactly that, and more. If any of these titles speak to you, they're well worth a closer look.

National Museum of Taiwan Literature

Fiction

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2024 TLA
Annual Golden Grand
Laurel Award

The Land of Dreams and Spirits

夢魂之地

The narrative captures the politics of blood and tears, father-son conflicts, a life of self-torment, and the tumult of an era emerging from trauma.

With her powers of perception waning, a medium is no longer able to satisfactorily answer her clients' pressing questions of love and money. So, when she crosses paths with an unusually gifted young man, she sees a chance to finally change her "stars" for the better. But, while transcending conscious and subconscious worlds together, they unwittingly drop into the mind of her country's now-doddering strongman. This book works as an insightful metaphor for the struggle of Taiwan's fragmented, ethnically diverse postwar generation to build individual self-identities within the confines of a society defined by authoritarian "father" figures and, in the process, come to terms with their past, present and future.

Ping Lu
平路

Ping Lu is a Taiwan-based fiction author, syndicated columnist, and National Award for Arts recipient. Her critical assessments of well-known historical figures have helped give a generation of readers new and more-nuanced perspectives on these figures' influence and impact on history. Her works have been published in translation in English, French, Japanese, Korean, and Czech.

Judge Commentary by **Egoyan Zheng**
Translated by **Jeff Miller**

Framed around the traditional folk tale of Prince Nezha, a folk deity with serious "daddy issues", this novel follows the saga of a medium invested with the spirit of Taiwan's second postwar leader, Chiang Ching-kuo. This long-departed son and successor of Chiang Kai-shek continues to be vexed by the myriad of loose ends left unresolved in his family's "Taiwan, ROC" legacy. These include his father's failed commission, the re-sinicization of Taiwan, the fight against global communism, his country's paternalistic dependency on the United States, and his own tortured feelings toward his mother, Mao Fu-mei. How, he ponders, should autocrats with blood on their hands deal with the adoration and acrimony of the common people? How can a regime built on lies be sustained? Should the son sacrifice all for his father? Also, what road should Taiwan take going forward? The energetic, sprightly flowing narrative is riddled with flashes of insight that can help us all sidestep pitfalls and build a safer, more secure future, while the cunning yet vulnerable nature of the story's characters imbue touching authenticity. This is truly an eloquent and quite meaningful work.

The Land of Dreams and Spirits

Excerpts translated from the Mandarin by **Jeremy Tiang**

Chapter Five: Destiny

That night, when I'm all alone, every sound that the old man hears comes to my ears again like a whirring turbine.

The old man is almost completely blind. He shuts his eyes and listens to the swishing of rain on the roof, rain carried on the wind from desolate places, traveling along the twisty riverways, crashing into nearby mountains, its howls echoing like a bell clanging as its rope is tugged. The old man pricks up his ears and listens carefully. The crying comes in waves. Nasal sobs and throat-shredding wails, like the mourners waiting in line to pay their respects at his father's funeral. Many collapsed to the ground, beating their chests. "No way back." Voices winding sinuously back and forth. "No way back."

Raindrops brush against the treetops, quick flurries followed by more languorous spates. The old man tosses and turns. Every part of his body aches. He groans in agony, muttering to himself. It's too late, he's been lying all along, and this is the greatest falsehood of all. He ought to tell the truth, to let the misinformed people know there's no way back, they're not going anywhere, even if they become ghosts there will be no return. Instead he watches, wide-eyed, as the lie grows bigger and bigger like a rolling ball of snow. He can't say anything. It's a secret. His father couldn't either when he was alive. Year after year, Father boosted morale by claiming a "counter-offensive," then later this became a "legal regime," and as with the ageing national representatives, this became a way for his father to maintain his grip on power. The lie has weight and perches heftily on his back.

Standing by his bed, I follow the old man's thoughts back and forth in time. A burly figure leaps in front of me. rumble of confusion, a voice in my ear.

The American security agent lunges. Palms on his belly. Tumbling to the ground.

Every diplomatic official and intelligence agent in his retinue would later claim that they were the one who'd taken a bullet for him.

I open my eyes. The old man is recalling something from many years ago. A series of images, moments on the brink of life and death, bottomless bafflement. Not just because of the panic, but also the riddle he has never been able to answer. He wants to know why. Yes, why on earth would someone point a gun at him? Why did that fine young man want to murder him?

The security department intercepted the culprit's mail. No point using a fake name, no one could evade their strict surveillance. Ripping open an envelope from the stack, he began reading late at night. Words written crisply in pencil, delicate pen strokes, a mundane life laid out on paper, many detailed passages about fishing. Catching fish and tossing them back, gently agitating the water and waiting for the fish to come back to life. Now and then English words crop up, and he checks the dictionary to make sure he's understood them. Talking about how he feels holding onto a fish, the assassin uses the phrase "tender-loving sadism."

The old man thrashes around in bed, imagining the would-be killer as another fish in the water slapping against his palm. He's heard the suspect spent many years in exile in North America. Tender-loving sadism? A gentle twisting back and forth? Or is it endless torment? To think the assassin is still at large! But then, a deeper thought: he'd rather the man stays free. After all, what would capturing him achieve? So he can have his day in court and publicly account for his actions? He doesn't want to hear the man say: *The two of you, father and son, are now in the past; everything that you were protecting has come to an end*.

Over, soon over. He sighs. A yellow leaf wafts through the French windows, landing by his bed. He remembers his life in exile when he was young. By his teens he was living in poverty up north, his father having all but abandoned him, waiting hopelessly for his return home. How many sleepless nights has he lain in bed, enumerating all the things that still hurt him? He tells himself

the suffering will soon be over and everything will be in the past, including the pain gnawing at his innards. Next to the bed is the wheelchair that has ensnared him. How funny that for so many years he's amused himself with the assassin's letter. Like a sickness, from time to time he can't help but ask for news of his attacker. All the neat notations in the surveillance records: on such-and-such a date, a stranger visited the house with a gift and bowed deeply to the assassin's father. It has become a habit to furrow his brow each time he comes such entries. He doesn't actually care about the gunshot, but rather the kudos that the assassin received as a result of pulling the trigger. Despite his resentment, he is grateful that he still has friends among the common folk. Didn't they recently present him with a fresh free-range chicken? *People love me, after all, they truly admire me.*

On second thought, this is ridiculous. Why is he comparing himself with an assassin as if this were some sort of popularity contest?

> A country woman of eighty-six, clutching a palm fan, wanted to touch my hand. A three-year-old came running over and wanted me to hug him. When I'm surrounded by a crowd, I feel their affection.
>
> The country folk presented me with clams. A touching moment. When I went up onto the pier, I was surrounded again by cheering crowds. Deeply moved, I got into the car with tears streaming from my eyes.
>
> In the hill district, people surged towards me like waves, wanting to shake my hand and take pictures with me.

He has to admit the assassin left a deep impression on him. Even after all these years, he can't forget those young eyes, the thin lips compressed into a line, the suppressed rage in his expression. What does it remind him of? He, too, once got carried away with rage and wrote a letter disowning his father. He even thought of murder. Killing his father? No, he wouldn't dare, he'd sooner kill himself!

A plethora of questions linger. If they'd managed to extradite the killer, he'd have insisted on a closed-door interrogation, ideally at a secret location, just

him and the culprit, mano a mano, asking the questions he'd already gone over thousands of times in his mind. Not to establish guilt, but to unburden himself. Perhaps he's too lonely and has no one he can be frank with, which is why he's in search of a confessor, particularly one who has pointed a gun at him. If the bullet had ended his life, bringing things to a premature close, leaving his body to be delivered to his father, that would have been perfect. For many years now, he's been turning over in his mind the words he most wants to say to the assassin: "If you don't understand, who will? How heavy the burden is?" He wants to explain to the assassin how much it weighs on him, being his father's son.

A single bullet aimed at his heart could have brought this about, allowing him to set down his burden. With such an ending, what he most wants to know is: while cradling his corpse, would his father have shed a tear?

> Why wasn't the assassin's aim better? Why couldn't this gunshot have solved everything?
>
> What a dilemma. A lot of the time, he can't tell the difference between protecting his father and sacrificing himself.

The sleeping pills aren't working. He feels wider awake than ever. The old man opens his eyes but remains sunk in the past.

Returning to that moment. The bullet passing less than half a meter from his head and embedding itself in the hotel's revolving door.

The Far East-America Council had arranged a reception across the road from his hotel. He'd planned to walk but then it started to rain, so instead he took a courtesy car and arrived a few minutes before 11.45. Afterwards, he would learn from the security report that because he was in position ahead of schedule, the assassin wasn't able to catch up with him and had to hastily fire a shot from the steps.

The barrel pointed upwards and the bullet went over his head.

Emotions come in waves. A Beretta 0.25 caliber pistol, weighing a full kilogram. Hefty in the hand. Too heavy? Did it get raised just a touch too high? Not shoulder level but a tiny bit over, missing the target.

An instant later, an agent tumbled him to the ground. He can't forget the assassin's eyes blazing at him with hatred.

What if it had ended then? What if he'd never stood up again? Lying in bed now, he smiles grimly. Looking back, surviving the assassination attempt was a mixed blessing that brought him unexpected scrutiny. The American visit wasn't meant to be a big deal. Although he was a Taizi, a princeling, his official title was merely Vice Premier of the Executive Yuan. The attempt on his life, along with the protest from Overseas Taiwanese behind the White House, made him the first item on the evening news. The next day, the three biggest US networks all devoted some of their programming to Taiwanese politics. Ten thousand people greeted his return at Taipei's Songshan Airport. The headlines read, "The Rise of a New Force in History," "A Politician's Ascent." Some said the attempted assassination had brought forward his moment in the limelight.

> He needs understanding, just a little understanding. No one knows he's still that hurt young child from all those years ago.
>
> It's not easy to go on living. Sometimes he has to numb himself with alcohol and sleeping pills. He's giving up on himself.

Turning off the lights is no use but turning them on again doesn't help either. His mind is a swamp, and my feet can't touch the bottom—I feel myself sinking deeper into the mire.

Desperately needing a change of scene, I throw on a sweater, scurry down the stairs and head to the park that used to be a public cemetery in Mihashicho. Several of the streetlamps have not been maintained and cast creepy flickering shadows on the path where they hit the branches.

I'm used to the dark and believe myself to be a creature of nighttime. This evening, I change my usual route and instead walk past Zhongshan Hall to Changsha Street, down an alleyway and past two crossings. There aren't many people on this stretch of Zhonghua Road. Trash is piling up in the corners, and a couple of stray dogs are truffling around for food scraps. I slow down and make sure to avoid the dogshit amid the weeds.

The air is hazy. Is it drizzling? I'm reminded of a level crossing, the red lights

flashing and winking out. I pause in the darkness, hidden things crying out all around me. Ever since returning to Taipei I've often had nightmares of utter isolation. Perhaps I need to decipher these dreams to understand what I'm doing here, what unknown force is summoning me. Atop a hillock is a clock tower belonging to Nishi Honganji Temple. The spot where I'm standing used to be a columbarium. Something is drifting through the air, and each time it passes by, goosebumps erupt on my arms. The temple's great hall was used as a secret prison during the February 28 massacre. It still feels sinister, and I can hear sobbing.

What memories are stirred by the weeping? This is where it happened. Was I hungry back then? Exhausted? Or frightened? Standing in the sea of flames, amid the blackened tiles, an object hits my face. A severed arm? Above the chimney, the branches are blackened with soot. The shanty huts here once sheltered many transient people.

"It's better to die outdoors!" Dad roared. Bending down, he scrabbled through the ashes, still yelling at me. "What are you crying about? Look around, can you find any of your Ma's stuff?"

Dad claimed Ma had a lover. "Serves her right, burning to death!" he snarled, as if she deserved her fate. The fire began raging the afternoon of April 5th and continued late into the night. A few days later, Dad and I got the train to Taipei and made our way there. As we got closer, we saw the shanty town of wooden huts known as Zhonghua New Village: a few hundred households sharing a single address. Apparently many unregistered drifters were staying here, alongside Dachen islanders looking for work in the city.

Jeremy Tiang

Jeremy Tiang is a Singapore translator, playwright and novelist, currently based in New York. He was the 2022 Princeton Translator in Residence, a 2022 International Booker Prize judge, as well as the winner of the Singapore Literature Prize 2018 for his novel *State of Emergency*. He is the translator from Chinese of over thirty books by Su Wei-chen, Lo Yi-chin, Yeng Pway Ngon, Hai Fan, Zhang Yueran, Shuang Xuetao and Yan Ge, among others. He has also translated play scripts by Wei Yu-chia, Shen Wan-ting, and Chen Si'an.

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Dark Roads

2024 TLA Golden Book Award

暗路

Delicately capturing ordinary people's repressed emotions, Lee sketches life's joys and sorrows, threaded with both despair and hope.

Each of the seven short stories within spotlight a unique manifestation of solitude: unreciprocated love, the lonesome journey to healing, the sorrows of aging and sickness, grief of lost dreams, detachment from the family, loneliness in marriage, and the budding and withering of young love.

These outwardly trivial tales of family relationships eloquently capture how we all, while reflexively complying with social and societal norms and bottling up our misgivings and disaffections, nevertheless ache for release.

In exquisite, delicate prose, Lee weaves an intricate tapestry of everyday life that is endearingly evocative of Edward Yang's classic films.

Lee Chin-Lien
李金蓮

Lee, known for her carefully crafted tight prose and narrative tension, worked for over twenty years as Chief Editor of *China Times* supplement *Kai-Chuan Weekly*. Her published works include the novel *Records of Floating Water* and short story *Mountain Sounds*. Lee is the recipient of multiple literature awards.

Judge Commentary by **Rob Lo Yuchia**
Translated by **Jeff Miller**

The lithe style this author handily applies to these heavy short stories is something quite rare in the realism genre today, infusing a mild-mannered, amiable "chattiness" to the work. The protagonists all reflect something … a character trait, secret, or pain … that we likely also have perceived in a relative or close friend.

The short story *Dark Roads*, which lends its name to and serves as the centerpiece of this collection, explores the dangers and anxieties a mother has borne to ensure her daughter grows up happy and healthy, and reveals how the shadow and scars of her sacrifice linger on. *Teacher Hsu's History of Reading*, a story about a romance fated to crumble in the wind, touches on how, although people regularly proclaim it, mutual understanding is in fact an impossibly high bar to achieve. In *A Knight's Journey*, his purchase of a road bike sets the stage for a middle-aged man to face down danger and, potentially, embrace a new chapter in life. Each story, a good read on its own, reveals an authentic slice of life in today's Taiwan.

Dark Roads

Excerpts translated from the Mandarin by **Jacqueline Leung**

Teacher Hsu's Reading History

They placed a memorial tablet at the apartment and offered incense every morning and evening. Teacher Hsu listened to the motions within the home from the balcony through the full-length windows: her mother's slippers tick-tacking across the room, the flick of the lighter as she lit the incense sticks, her three bows before she turned. The sliding window creaked open—she hadn't thought her mother would open them and step into her world.

Her mother came closer and enacted the same posture as her: body slightly tilted forward, two arms resting on the railing, gazing at the park in the far distance.

They shared a short silence before Mother asked, "What are you looking at? The people in the park?"

Teacher Hsu didn't say anything back, not because she was resentful, but because she didn't have the words. She imagined her mother would think her eccentric daughter was always using silence as a means to oppose and punish her, even though she'd never thought of punishing or holding a grudge against anyone.

The early October evening breeze was a bit chilly. It came from the park, and they basked in a rare tranquillity before Mother suddenly blurted out, "It's so peaceful now."

Teacher Hsu turned to look at her; her eyes must have emanated confusion, because they made her mother lower her head in embarrassment. But there was something her mother wanted to say after all, and after falling silent for a while, she finally continued, "It's like my body has become a

gaping hollow, and now that my body is empty, peace comes to me. In the end, everything in the world really comes down to nothing."

After that, mother and daughter stood, still in their slightly-tilting positions, leaning against the railing. Mother said a little something else, her words vibrating in the gentle evening breeze. Teacher Hsu felt she should respond but didn't know what to say. She was always like that. After a whole lot of struggle, she finally parted her lips.

"Death is simply another name of life."

Why would she say this out of the blue, when her mother was hoping she'd say something, anything at all? She thought back to the conversations they'd had—it must be because Mother had mentioned Father's death, and his death was a reminder that nothing held weight in this world, or it could be because she'd suddenly thought of a book she'd read before, and that was what burst out of her mouth as these thoughts interspersed. What did she want to say to Mother? She'd wanted to comfort her. Her mother had suffered so much—in the raging river of time, everything was destined to come down to nothing, all our bonds and our love ultimately turned to dust. But is this really comfort? Teacher Hsu couldn't help but question herself.

◆ ◆ ◆

As she made her way through the park, she deliberately sat on the bench her older sister and her brother-in-law had sat on during the winter and sat there herself. Just now, Hsiao-An had handed a book to her, and her sister stood on the side and said, "Hsiao-An said his dad mentioned this book in his letter, and he asked me, 'What's this book about?' I told him to go find you."

Teacher Hsu brushed her fingers across the cover. The parts that were meant to be white were already yellowed; nevertheless, books that had their pages flipped through always had a softer feel to them. In any case, this was not a book her brother-in-law should have read.

She started to speculate. In the letter, she'd mentioned this book, so a reasonable explanation would be that her brother-in-law had bought and read this book because of it, this book that shouldn't have belonged to him. To be more precise, her brother-in-law had gone and read the book she'd read to be closer to the person he loved.

Her brother-in-law had folded this love letter in half and then in half again, tucking it between the pages. Teacher Hsu carefully spread out the letter fold by fold. On the paper her sister had meticulously chosen, infused with the scent of perfume, was her own elegant handwriting:

My dear Chun-Fu,

How are you?

Are you getting bullied by anyone from your unit? (I always worry you'd get picked on because you're too nice) Are you eating properly? Do you sleep enough?

Remember that time when I visited you at the training facility for new recruits? It's been two months since we last met. I saw you'd gotten noticeably thinner, and your handsome face was all worn and tanned from training, and my heart ached so much. We only met before you enlisted, but it's like I've known you since my last lifetime. It feels like I've been worrying about you for just as long, too! So forgive me for nagging.

It's almost New Year's. The year-end bonus I got from work is painfully small. But that's alright, I still bought a knitted belly warmer to send you. Remember to wear it when you're out in the cold, don't make me worry about you. I've been treating myself kindly, too. You said I was a woman born to deserve happiness, so I bought myself a new dress with blue and purple stripes. I'll wear it to the base to see you during New Year, and you must say it looks good. No negative comments allowed!

What was the late 1960s like? I recently read a book. It's a love story, and after finishing it, I thought about it a lot. What insights can we gain from the love of others? Two girls and Watanabe-kun, the boy they deeply love, are walking in a rose garden. Which rose should he pick? No, that's not the decision he's making. Watanabe-kun is so young; he must experience Naoko before he can move toward Midori. That's what I think. Between the two girls,

Watanabe-kun is so close to death—his friend dies, and his lover dies. Through death, he remembers the moments they shared. Without going through these experiences, what kind of person would he be when he reaches Midori?

I can't help but think about my own life. Among my relatives and friends, aside from my maternal grandma, there have been no deaths. But Naoko also said, "We're all kind of weird and twisted . . ." Why are people weird and twisted in this world? What are the reasons? Why do some people lead good lives and others don't? Is some part of me weird and twisted too? Ah, I shouldn't say more.

The year is almost over, and I can't wait to see you when the holidays come.

Yours,

Mei-Ju

◆ ◆ ◆

Teacher Hsu read the letter; the contents were already unfamiliar, and yet this unfamiliarity stirred her emotions.

At sunset, the fading light reflected off the facades of nearby buildings. The park was the same, gathering boisterous crowds of people, their voices rising and falling.

A distant memory surfaced in her head—she was at a steakhouse having a meal with her sister. Her sister told her marriage is about two people accompanying each other for life without deceiving one another. So she later told her husband she once got her younger sister to write love letters for her.

"He wasn't mad at me. He only said, 'Is that so.' What did he mean by that?"

Teacher Hsu frowned at the question and didn't reply. Her sister seemed to guess what was on her mind and, understanding her doubts, smiled and said, "To love someone is to be honest, to be unable to resist, to have no other choice. This is what he told me."

Her sister's words echoed the words Teacher Hsu had once memorized, admired, and longed for. *Because it is she that I have watered; because it is she that I have put under the glass globe; because it is she that I have sheltered behind the screen; because it is she that I have listened to, when she grumbled, or even sometimes when she said nothing. Because she is my rose.* Is this love?

After that, it was as if she'd never written letters for her sister. Even though Teacher Hsu and her brother-in-law had become relatives, they seldom talked to each other.

The letter in her hands was probably the last letter Teacher Hsu would ever write on behalf of someone else. When she'd finished writing it and handed it to her sister, her sister read it and exclaimed, "What do you mean by weird and twisted? How could I say something like that? Erase it, erase it!" But she didn't, and her sister never noticed. She'd secretly conveyed her feelings to her brother-in-law, crossing a line ghostwriters should never breach.

And now, she felt an indescribable sadness. Death had finally come before her, and in the future, this dead person would become a part of her life, as would regret. She covered her face, and with a strength that seemed to come from nowhere, she wailed with abandon.

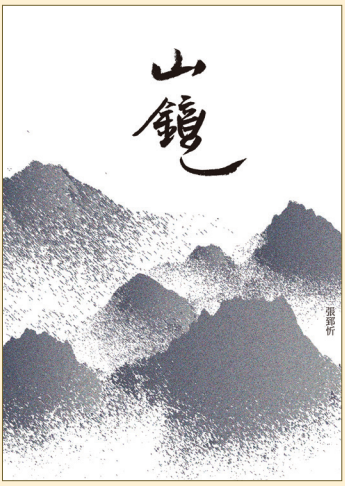
Her world shrank until it was so small, there was only her crying. She was crying because she'd lost her only love, and also, and also . . . It was as if the suffering she'd accumulated since birth and all parts of her body that were about to be dead, all of her that were weird and twisted, were crying out for her.

The left side of the sky was punctured by a black drongo that happened to fly by, and it looked like someone had shredded a hole across the blue expanse with a kick. Even if the world were to collapse afterward, at this moment, she needed to cry, cry continuously, cry until the end of time.

When she thought it was finally time to go, she lifted her head and looked at her residence, which was just ahead. Her gaze fell on the third-floor balcony where a hazy silhouette stood, staring down at her.

Jacqueline Leung

Jacqueline Leung is a writer and translator from Hong Kong. Her translation of Hon Lai Chu's novel *Mending Bodies*(Two Lines Press, 2025) is a winner of PEN Presents by the English PEN. Her translations and essays are featured in *HEAT, Wasafiri, Gulf Coast, Asymptote, Nashville Review, SAND Journal, the Asian Review of Books, Cha, Books from Taiwan*, and elsewhere. She is a translation editor at The Offing. Her work has been supported by the Asian Cultural Council, Bread Loaf Translators' Conference, and the British Centre for Literary Translation.



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Mountain Mirrors

2024 TLA Golden Book Award

山鏡

Explores ethnicity and identity, charting a path toward repentance, forgiveness, and rebirth.

The protagonist is a Hakka who has embraced the alpine heights of the Atayal as his “second home”. It is here that he opens a hostel, builds friendships, and falls in love. He even receives an Atayal name. After his bizarre death in the branches of a forest tree, his wife and daughter investigate his past in search of truth and closure. The narrative draws readers into the complex issues surrounding self-identity in multiethnic societies. In this work, mountains work as a metaphor for the complexities and contours of life. From knotty love-hate relationships to one’s deepest desires and struggles, this work takes readers to the cliff’s edge to reveal the insignificance and impotence of the human condition.

Chang Chih-Hsin
張郅忻

Chang Chih-Hsin's literary efforts, which include novels, essays, and column submissions, all seek to shed illuminating light on the nature and flow of life. Her works include the novels *Hsiu-Mei*, *Weave*, and *Sea City*; the young-adult novel *The Mouse in the Library*; and the essay collection *Away from Home and Back: My United Family*.

Judge Commentary by **Pin-yao Lee**
Translated by **Jeff Miller**

With a narrative unfolding like a twisting mountain hike, *Mountain Mirrors* leads readers on a difficult and troubled journey. The story opens on a suspicious death that sparks a whirlwind of remembrances and reflections on the deceased - Hsiao Chang. An ethnic Hakka enamored by the mountainous homeland of the indigenous Atayal, Hsiao had taken an Atayal name and moved there to open a small tourist hostel. However, ruffled feathers over a land deal as well as his "intrusive" business and love interests help ensure he lives on in the minds of his adopted community. Spanning both Atayal tribal and personal histories, *Mountain Mirrors*, while touching on sensitive topics and unresolved pains, treats every new challenge with a sensitive tolerance that drives the narrative steadily on toward its dramatic and satisfying denouement. The richness of each character gives the storyline authentic depth and realism, and the author captures the complexities and contradictions inherent in the human persona. In this novel, mountains show the way forward while illuminating the "inner self".

Mountain Mirrors

Excerpts translated from the Mandarin by **Jenna Tang**

Preface

Darkness surrounded him when he opened his eyes. He reached out his hands—the skin on his arms already scratched open by tree branches. Tinges of pain slowly crept across his veins, but he felt a sliver of joy, and continued making his way between the overgrown branches along the way. The intersecting twigs exposed open cracks—out there, a sea of darkness devoured him. There were very few sources of lights—nothing but dots of streetlights and starlights hanging near the mountain right across him.

Something dawned on him. He was right there, sitting on a tree—one hanging by the edge of a cliff. He curled his body while a gust of cold wind pierced through him. *This is just like a cocoon*, he thought to himself and laughed—it was as though he was trapping himself in one.

His lips and teeth trembled, his fingers turned so stiff that he could hardly move an inch. The air became so thin that he started suffocating. He breathed harder, clinging to the last bit of his life. He knew that Death was waiting for him under the tree. He had to stay up on the branch in case he was found.

Ah, if possible, he would like to watch the break of dawn again on this mountain. The sun was always like a cluster of yolk, hopping out between the hills, full of hope. When sunshine streamed down, he would find his way back home. This winding path was a track that he had revisited countless times.

He wanted to end everything at this very moment. It would be worthwhile if he could take one last look at this scenery. Otherwise, the whimpers that came with the wind would never disappear.

Streams of lights from the streetlamps began to disperse, and his

field of vision became increasingly blurry. The sounds of flying squirrels resembled that of the pendulums, echoing across the dark of night; the sounds precipitated, counting down—as he was close to reaching his final destination. The old people once said that when someone was about to die, the sense of hearing would be the last to disappear.

Memories came back to him. Things that he had long forgotten now all echoed across the darkness surrounding him.

Excerpt from Chapter 6

When I passed by the area a month after our conversation, I saw an excavator—like a monster, digging out half a mountain of bamboo forests, trees, shrubs, and vines. In less than a year, a resort was almost completed. Looking down the path from uphill, I could see a few longhouses, a number of round Mongolian yurts, a huge patch of Korean grassland, as well as the swimming pool and air bikes that Mui mentioned to me.

There were two polarized perspectives within the tribe about "their" resort business. Whoever supported it expressed that remote areas lacked job opportunities, and the resort, at the very least, offered employment to young people. The owner of the resort was a sneaky, smart guy and often sent someone to bring goods up in the mountains, which made the old people from the tribe happy. Only a few of us, like me, were against the idea of having a resort. I had been to the cities, where I was poorly treated, which made it hard for me to believe them. *Right, they gave us a lot of promises and compensation, but who was there to guarantee that all of the dreams would come true?*

When the resort was close to its opening, they started looking for new employees. Many young people from the tribe applied for jobs there, including Mui, who had been unemployed for a year; and Ubai, who had been staying home since he got discharged from the military. It was true that the resort opened quite a few spots for people at the tribe—dishwashers, cleaning staff, front desk staff, and security guards. *Why were we only offered the low-salaried, labor-heavy positions?* When Mui told me, happily,

that she had gotten the cleaning staff position, and that Ubai became the security guard, I was indifferent: “What’s so great about it?” And Mui replied something that surprised me: “I could only wash people’s hair down in the cities anyways. Is there a difference between washing hair and cleaning the floors up here?” She wanted me to apply for a job as well: “Isn’t it awesome if all three of us work at the same place?” I was reluctant to go, but Yaba had started to say something about my staying home, having nothing to do for a little over a year.

After all, there were no other job opportunities in this mountain, so I had to give it a try. Even though I knew that I had little chance of being hired, I filled the application form to become a “business manager.” In the end, I became a security guard.

“What’s so bad about becoming a security guard? Don’t you like to read? So now you have time to read more.” Mui seemed excited when she learnt that I was officially hired. I could do nothing but convince myself that even though this job didn’t offer a significant amount of salary, at the very least, I could spare half of it to Lawa and keep the other half for my own expenses. Most importantly, I could see Mui every day, making sure that nobody mistreated her. At the time, it was Mui, Ubai, and I who became the first team of employees at this resort.

The three of us were asked to clean the resort on our first day at work. The resort hadn’t officially opened yet. Some of us were assigned to fish up trash thrown into the river by construction workers; some were to scrub away moss that grew at the edge of the pool, and some of us had to clean the offices, hotel rooms, and canteens. Even though what we ended up doing was different from the job descriptions, I did them anyway. Whenever I thought about how I lowered myself just for money, shame and helplessness washed over me.

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The resort itself resembled a monster mirror, revealing these hidden issues from the tribe. One of the issues being the jobs we got, the other being our marriages.

A long time ago, we started having intermarriage with other tribes—like

how Lawa ended up marrying someone here and moved from Jian-Shih township. Some of them came from Miaoli. Most of us got married within the Atayal tribes, however, as time went by, a small number of Atayal women married the Han Chinese men, just like my Yata, Hayung's only sister, who ended up living with her husband at the Hakka town in Zhudong.

Yata wasn't happy away from the mountain. Every time she came back, she downed millet wine, sobbing. She talked about the things she had to go through in the city. Her husband, my uncle-in-law, didn't want to accompany her up the mountains, and wouldn't let their kids come with her. All my younger cousins were instilled with the ideas that they were all part of the Hakka family and never Atayal. It was probably because it was easier to survive out there being Hakka than being Indigenous.

When I saw Yata cry her heart out, I tried to convince her to return to the mountains. After all, Yaba owned a few patches of lands, and Yata herself could build up a tin-roofed shack to support herself by doing some farm work. She wouldn't have to live caring about what others thought of her. After hearing what I said, Yata shut her mouth and pulled me into a tight hug—it was so tight I could barely breathe. It didn't matter how much grief she had released the night before, the moment she woke up the next morning, Yata shouldered her luggage and went down the mountain. Once, I chased after her, hoping to say goodbye, but all I saw was her walking along the Bridge of Peace, her shadow long and solitary.

Every time we talked about marriage, the legend about the birth of the Atayal people came to my mind.

Once upon a time, there was a huge stone, and one day, this stone cracked open. Inside of it were a man and a woman. The man was an older brother, and the woman a younger sister. They grew up together and got along with each other very well. When they reached the age to get married, the younger sister began to worry—there was nobody else around them where they lived, how were they able to pass down the generations?

The only solution the younger sister could think of was to marry her older brother. However, she was concerned that her brother might not agree, so she strategized. She told her brother that she had encountered a woman they'd never seen before by the cave, and asked her brother to go see her.

Actually, that woman was nobody else but the younger sister. She didn't want her brother to recognize her, so she smeared dark ashes on her face. The cave was dark, and the sister's face was smeared, the brother never found out that the woman was his own sister. The two of them became husband and wife in the mountain, and there they were, Atayal tribe's ancestors. Nowadays, the tradition of Atayal women tattooing their faces before getting married came from this legend.

At that time, the tribe was facing similar issues. The younger generation was moving out, and many Atayal women ended up marrying someone from outside of the mountain, and very few city-dwelling women were into the idea of marrying someone from the mountains. As time went by, single men in the tribe began to increase.

I often thought about the fact that, if the resort never appeared, would Mui still be alive? Could we get a chance to be with each other? I'd been wanting to let her know how much I cared about her. I was afraid that because we grew up together, she would consider me nobody but an older brother. I kept on waiting, procrastinating even, that I never got a chance to say anything to her.

And then she was gone.

Even after things had passed for so long, I couldn't seem to let it go.

Excerpt from Chapter 7

I have personally seen what the landscape used to look like from the very beginning. Millets, sweet potatoes were planted across the mesa, while overgrown weeds and shrubs saturated lower parts of the land. Excavators and trucks had to carefully trail into the mountain forests to unearth, fill, weed, and plant turfs—which birthed the campsite we were spending time in now. They transported a brand new tin-roofed shack to the site, furnished it with Japanese tatami space that included its own kitchen and bathroom.

Due to the high altitude, the house was almost always surrounded by clouds and fogs. Sometimes, Dad would come up to the mountain on his own, brewing tea and smoking a few cigarettes near the shack, looking into the mountainous landscapes that stretch into the faraway distance. I knew

that he would always remember to take pictures and mark where he was. These photos, even to this day, were still posted on his Facebook page. Dad used many different ways to *tame* this mountain—looking for new visitors to come to the resort, establishing a Bed & Breakfast for tourists, building new campsites or buying and selling mountain lands. In the end, it was the mountain that *tamed* him. When I imagined my Dad's shadow at the last moment of his life, I could see him dragging his broken body and slowly climbing up the tree by the cliff—and made up his mind that he would stay there forever.

I looked at the tree intently from a distance and pulled my eldest sister's sleeve. She was staring at the tree as well, her body trembled. I picked up her cold hand and walked with her, step by step, approaching the tree. We traversed the campsite together, noticing that it had been a while since someone had trimmed the turfs—overgrown weeds had become omnipresent, looking even more exuberant than the Korean artificial grass. We were reaching our destination, sheltering under that tree together.

"Would you like to know what Dad had seen in his last moments?" My sister looked up to the tree, and I stared at her, puzzled. I thought about the same thing—and this was the first time I had deeply felt what it was like to be sharing the same bloodline with another person—we were so close, and so similar.

I nodded.

It wasn't difficult to climb up a tree for someone like me, who had grown up in the mountains. For my eldest sister, who had grown up in the city, it was very challenging. I squatted and let her climb up a branch, stepping on my back. At the beginning, she was hesitant, thinking she might hurt me—still, she tried her best. It took her a while to find the right angle to balance herself, and it took longer for her to climb up a tree. She moved herself onto a thicker branch, gave me her hand and pulled me up. Very slowly, we climbed up to where our father had last been.

There was a central space where major tree stems intersected, which turned out to be more spacious than I expected. The half-moon groove resembled a mother's womb. My sister and I were squatting together right in the tree's womb, watching the tops of the mountains from faraway,

surrounded by a floating sea of clouds. Under the sunset glow, the landscape was as splendid as a sea of paradise. My sister and I, who shared half of the same bloodline, seemed to be reborn by this tree, becoming twin sisters, *real sisters*.

Dad, are you able to see us from up there?

Even though the old tribe leader had mentioned before that Dad was to be sent back to his ancestral tower. But all the same, I felt that my Dad's soul was still ambling about in the mountains. He was probably smiling behind us at this very moment.

I thought about the day of Dad's cremation. When his coffin was sent into the burning fire, the undertaker wanted the sisters to bellow at the crematorium: "Dad, the fire's coming your way, run!"

I don't think Dad was ever afraid of fire. The many days we had spent in the mountains together, he had brought me to sit by the bonfire, which was warm and cozy.

When his coffin slowly descended into the crematorium, I seemed to have been looking at my own father's shadow disappearing in the blazing flames. It was probably because of the high temperature or flying ashes that our tears kept dripping down from our faces.

We waited by the counter next to the crematorium to retrieve Dad's ashes. The staff followed the order of his legs, his torso, his head, and placed them into the urn. We selected the urn together with Mama—one with a color closer to the luster of Maibalai river's stones. We thought he would like it.

"Are you the eldest one?" the undertaker asked my sister, and she nodded. "Now take the ash urn."

"Have you gotten married?" Then he turned to me, the youngest among the siblings, "Here, take the incense and pot."

The funeral undertaker's car was a model converted from a long pickup truck. They removed the backseats to make space for a coffin. Not long ago, Dad's coffin had been placed over there, being driven all the way from the funeral house to the crematorium. The last ceremony for the family was to place Dad's ash urn and amulet bag together into Family Chang's ancestral tower.

My sister and I were seated at the front seats in the truck, with our Dad's urn in her arms and his framed portrait in my grip. We stayed silent all the way through.

I thought about it more than once on the way there: *Why would Dad decide to end his life in the mountains?* He got a name and was granted a patch of land from Hayung, but after all, he could never fully become an Atayal. The ancestral spirits would never take in children just like that—someone who simply claimed a name and not a bloodline. Someone who made lots of mistakes. In the end, Dad still made a choice—he came all the way up the mountain to end his life.

Jenna Tang

Tang is a Taiwanese Hakka writer and a literary translator who translates between Mandarin, French, Spanish, and English. She graduated from MFA in Fiction Creative Writing from The New School in New York City. Her translations and essays are published in *The Paris Review, Lit Hub, Restless Books, Latin American Literature Today, AAWW, McSweeney's, Catapult, Fare* Magazine, and elsewhere. Her interviews can be found at *World Literature Today, The Sunrise Times, Okapi, Openbook,* and *Words Without Borders*. Her translations include works from Taiwanese feminist authors, Lin Yi-Han (*Fang Si-Chi's First Love Paradise*), Lâu Tsí-û ("Not Your Child"), Leah Yang, and more. She has given talks about translation, languages, and gender movements across 22 universities in the States, Canada, China, and Taiwan.

Fiction

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Sugar Bun Island

2024 TLA Golden Book Award

甜麵包島

Lu Pin dedicates her fiction to every island ever colonized, igniting reality's melancholy with the flame of poetic vision.

The three short stories in this work reflect on various aspects of post-colonial society and describe how cultural intercourse affects, and is affected by, human nature. In the first, after returning to her hometown after years overseas, Rose unwittingly sees herself as better than those around her. In the second, the spirit of a white woman, Loren, lingering on in her colonial-era home is devastated by the changing face of her beloved isle. In the third, the march of "progress" leaves the people of Tata Island desolate and forlorn. Lu Pin plumbs Taiwan's colonial legacy and her three years in the Caribbean in search of self-identity.

Lu Pin
鹿苹

As a former professional designer turned author, Lu Pin is adept at building richly realistic literary landscapes. Her style, marked by firm yet non-judgmental criticism and heartache, reflect a deep compassion for the human condition. Lu Pin's globe-spanning experiences provide fodder for her works of poetry, including *Wandering Wall*, and fiction, including *The Left-hand Land* and *Sugar Bun Island*. She resides in Canada and remains active in writing.

Judge Commentary by **Neqou Soqluma**
Translated by **Jeff Miller**

In softly flowing, poetic prose, the author lends readers a pair of sturdy wings to journey to faraway islands for three new and untold stories. In one, we follow a woman's return to her island home after years abroad. In another, we see the follies of the living through the eyes of a lingering spirit. In the third, we experience the hopes and despondency of a humble-born island resident through their life. Awash in tension, oppression and pain, these tales, while ineluctably raw, benefit from the distance imbued by the author, which makes them not only palatable but encourages reflection leading to gradual understanding, enlightened insight, and a realization these stories aren't so "foreign" after all. Their honesty and realism resonate strongly with the author's own sincerity and empathetic nature.

Sugar Bun Island

Excerpts translated from the Mandarin by **Darryl Sterk**

The Dry Season

Rose always woke up at exactly 5:30 in the morning.

Not because she had something to do; it wouldn't matter if she forgot to.

5:30 a.m. had nothing to do with Rose; it was part of the shepherd's routine, when he started grazing his sheep on the grassy stubble of the uncultivated land outside her gate. Every day before dawn, before the cool, damp air that hugged the earth had dissipated, he led the sheep out onto the land, drove iron stakes into patches that hadn't been grazed bare, and looped hempen ropes around their necks, one by one.

He had to force the stakes into the pebbly reddish-brown ground in the early morning light. The first strike always sounded clear as a bell, but the deeper the stake inched into the earth, to the slow, steady beat of his hammering, the duller each subsequent blow became. Conveyed underground, the vibrations always resonated in Rose's chest, like an old metronome on a piano that was synchronized with the rusty rhythm of her 81-year-old heart. Getting up left her wearier, with each passing day.

Exactly when the grazing began, no one could say. At first, she found it amusing; the sheep were a novelty. She took to giving them each a name, but in the past few years, she'd gotten tired of it. Their faces were all the same, with the same slack expression. The older she got, the more there were, until she could no longer tell them apart.

Rose really was old now. She didn't sleep too well at night.

Every morning upon waking, she felt her own breath. Brows creased and eyes closed, she thought about her husband lying beside her, the ripening fruits in the backyard, the birds in the woods, the house, and the shopping

list. Then her mind cleared and everything was in order, as if some young person was reminding the elderly lady in front of her of what she needed to do. But sometimes in dawn's early light, the trivialities of the day came and went like the ocean foam, mixing her up, leaving her unsure which island she was on. Sometimes she imagined herself walking to the underground station near her house on the outskirts of London to buy laundry detergent, only to open her eyes and have to squint. The light here was much too piquant for England. She'd only made the one trip back in twenty years, but had been confusing past and present more and more. Memories called her awake, carried her away, here and there. Things she'd forgotten, or made a point of forgetting, sprang unwelcome to mind.

Before getting out of bed, Rose murmured words of encouragement to her body, using the same tone she once used with the residents of the nursing home who were too senile to take care of themselves.

"Breathe!" she used to say. "Slowly! Take deep breaths!"

Little did she know she would end up in the same boat. So to speak.

Now she was used to it. When she opened her eyes, she strained to focus on the ceiling beams. When she stood, she faltered, and had to catch *her* balance. Aging had become part of *her* routine. Besides growing older and older, she couldn't think of anything else she could manage to do. She often thought of her mother.

Born on the northern tip of the island, Rose never knew who her father was. From as far back as she could remember, it was just her and mom. Like most islanders, she was an adult before she realized they were beach-dwellers. The heat of the sun would steam the beach starting every day at dawn. As a child, Rose would play with her friends on the glaring sand, never going too far. Kids like her weren't afraid of getting burned and would be hanging out there even at noon. Legend had it that people from around there couldn't go far, like the beach that poked into the air but remained rooted in the deep. It was never the people who moved, it was the sea.

Bordering the Atlantic, North Beach was wind-swept day and night. The churning waves were high and white. From late spring to early summer, it was a nesting ground for leatherback turtles. A few days of the year, children were allowed to stay up late, to gather on the pitch-black sand and wait for

mother turtles to appear between the swells. Those giant, ancient reptiles would make their way along the winding shore, which they made out by the contrast between the shimmering sea and the shadowy land. After coming on shore, they were ushered by darkness, lumbering slowly toward the coastal wood. When one of those massive things, several times larger than a child, crawled out of the water, everything else in the universe lost its luster, stopped moving, leaving only the cosmic glow. Rose and her companions only dared to breathe, to the rhythm of the waves crashing against the shore, and watch the mother turtle force the sand back, and itself forward, into a shallow pit, with her flipper-like front limbs. None of them would approach a nesting turtle to inspect the seven ridges along the length of its back and numerous white spots and blotches all over her body. But they would commit the nest's coordinates to memory. After laying her eggs, the mother turtle covered them with sand and slowly crawled back toward the light of the sea, returning to the deep. As soon as she disappeared, they would squat by the nest, dig through the sand, and collect the eggs in tin cans. At that time, no islander had ever seen a tourist, let alone heard of endangered species. Those precious eggs were an extra bite of food for an entire island family; but the children were taught that they could only collect a canful, leaving the rest to the mother and the sea.

At that time, for those kids, Sugar Bun Isle, which was across from the beach, seemed pretty far away.

The Fire

The fire broke out across the wall in the middle of the night.

Rose woke up in a flood of moonlight. She propped herself up on an arm, then sat up. On the other side of the bed, Noah was curled up on his side. Rose saw a pale square of light lying on the floor, cut by the window pane. It crept onto the bedsheets, like something misty that had come adrift. Pressed against the bedframe, Rose's back tensed up. She smelled an unfamiliar burning odor and heard her heartbeat echo in her ears. Without disturbing Noah, she shifted on her side, eased her feet on the floor, gripped the iron railing at the foot of the bed, and stood up straight. Then she hobbled quietly out, through the living room and into the kitchen. She peered out the window

and saw a distant shadow. In the dead of night, Horse stood motionless in the wild grass, like a statue.

It was about what she had expected. Bracing herself, she shuffled into the study and over to the window. She leaned her shoulder against the wall, pressed her face against the sill, and glanced out of the corner of her eye towards the neighboring house.

Thicker smoke than normal was billowing from the courtyard, somehow stealing in around the tightly shut pane. Rose felt a tightness in her throat. She kept her alert eyes open and resisted the urge to cough. She turned and paced back and forth, trying to stretch her legs. She wondered if she should go back to bed, until her stomach began to knot up. The room was hot and stuffy with the window closed, leaving her dizzy and disoriented. It was as if the floor were uneven and the entire room was tilting and swaying.

She cleared her throat, covered her mouth and nose, and stared intently at the smoke.

The wind was carrying it into the hills behind the house. In the moonlight, something she had never felt before, something she had never seen or touched, weighed heavily on her. Rose kept her distance, as if nothing had happened. She didn't run away, nor did she wake Noah.

For a moment, she thought the wind had changed direction and that the smoke was drifting toward her. She hesitated, shifting her weight off her stiff right leg, but within seconds, in the smoke, she saw a line of fire … getting wider and wider. She saw fire lash off the roof and lasso the branches of a nearby tree. The wind lifted the sprouting flames higher and higher, like octopus arms the burning house was waving. The wind hadn't changed direction. It was, indeed, taking the fire into the hills beyond.

Instead, the hot, smoky odor seemed to shift direction. The night sky lay heavy over the hills, pressing down on the dry branches. The faraway flames flickered intermittently. But despite the distance, not to mention the window, that odor was just as strong, pressing around her nose and mouth. She didn't know if she would cry for help, for herself or anyone else. She didn't even know if it would make a difference.

She felt strangely calm. The next moment, windows shattered from the

heat, and flying shards sang through the air. In the courtyard, flames shot into the sky, and shadows swayed from side to side. Rose was in shock, almost like she was dreaming. But everything felt indubitably real: the soaring flames were all consuming, devouring gasoline drums, stacks of blown out tires, a barbeque grill, and the hammock on the porch. The fire bloomed like flower buds, standing straight up and waving back and forth. The thunderous thud of her heart left her gasping for breath. She told herself to go back to bed, to give her body respite from torment. Everything would pass by morning, no matter what.

Life was so cruel. It had taken too many things that had been hers in her humble days. A faint voice whispered in her ears, telling her she wasn't responsible, and any reasonable person would surely feel the same. Not even for the fire and the land. Life would only get worse. The fire was master, and people like her could only wait until it chose to subside.

The thought kept her cool and collected. She didn't rage or curse. No, she just stood there wordlessly by the window. All things would end when the earth awoke at dawn the next day. In a land like this, nothing belonged to anyone. If the fire torched everything in sight, reducing vegetation to ash, the entire coral-colored house would perish as well. In the end, only the sunrise would remain, unchanged, and the air would fill with the freshness of life.

As the blazing flames glinted like gold in Rose's eyes, her knees gave way beneath her. She fell to the floor and lay there curled up, staring blankly at the ceiling. She cautiously cleared her throat, like she didn't want anyone to hear. But she could hear, her own voice, distorted by age.

Outside the window, fire and fuel were waging a war that was as futile as it was real. The smoke gradually blocked her sight and muffled sound. Then she heard herself breathing, and her heart beating. It felt as if her heart was hanging in midair, at the highest point of a swing.

Time seemed to have stopped.

She imagined her ancestors taking the first step ashore; centuries passed in the blink of an eye.

Faces appeared, scenes surfaced. Her mother taking her to the plantation for a meal of roast chicken. Fed by sugarcane peel, the flames had a sweet,

smoky scent. A circle formed, casting shadows that seemed to dance, in tandem with the tide and her hopes for the future. Then a lullaby, a song her mother used to sing. She was still that little girl who had nothing, who would go on to be a woman who had everything.

So tired, so tired, she just wanted to lie down and sleep, but memories from somewhere far away just wouldn't let her. She wasn't dreaming. Back then, nothing had happened yet. By the airport, nothing but bush.

No British couple had come back to settle down, no dog named Cook had been dissected.

She saw herself holding Timmy's little hand waiting for the bus on a London street corner, starching Noah's white shirt inside the house, walking down Wagner Street toward the underground station in the early morning. She even had the delusion that the ship that was bound for England had not yet set sail from St. Luke's Harbor. Nope, nothing seemed to have happened yet, as if it was still possible to change. Rose saw in the wavering flames the unlit lighthouse on Sugar Bun Isle. It was glowing once again! She hummed that song, her heart filled with warmth, like holding an infant in her arms. The ancestors were like the blinding flames, darting through the forest, slicing like a streak of lightning through the night. Everyone lived in the flickering flames, and as long as there were embers, the fire would not die. Fire could purify all that was corrupted, giving everything a brand new life.

The fire was about to go out, she could feel it. It would fade into the endless night.

A wild and terrified scream echoed in the silent air. Rose was short of breath. She knew that the mind of God discerns eternity. Light was always good, like a candle in the dark. God would never blow it out for no reason.

Darryl Sterk

Darryl Sterk is a translator of literature from Taiwan, by writers such as Kevin Chen and Wu Ming-yi, Sakinu and Syaman Rapongan. He researches ecotranslation and translation between Mandarin Chinese and Indigenous languages, particularly Seediq.

Fiction

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The Becoming

2024 TLA New Bud Award

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Set during Taiwan's Sunflower Movement, captures activists torn between passion and uncertainty as they strive to overcome fear and grow.

Yueh-Yueh, jaded by a close friend's suicide and her social activism during university, is quiet, withdrawn, and apathetic at work. How will she overcome timidity to redefine herself and rebuild self-confidence? This work revolves around the unique stories of different individuals. While each chapter reads like a carefully kept photograph coming slowly into focus, as a whole, they shed light on the impact Taiwan's social movements have had on their participants.

Set against the backdrop of Taiwan's Sunflower Movement, the novel traces the ripples before and after this watershed moment, chronicling the fluid, often fragmentary nature of activism, showing how people oscillate between passionate conviction and paralyzed uncertainty, and inspiring readers to contemplate their own relationship with social change.

Hsu En-En
許恩恩

Hsu En-En writes stories inspired by lived experience and the common plight of former social movement activists. She holds bachelor's and master's degrees in Sociology and was once an active social movement participant. Hsu was previously with Taiwan's Public Digital Innovation Space (PDIS) and is a cofounder of a workspace dedicated to fostering public-private partnerships.

Judge Commentary by **Fen-Lin Jhou**
Translated by **Jeff Miller**

Stand-out Taiwan writers on major political protests and movements include Yang Tu for his writings centered around the 1989 Tiananmen Square Uprising and Massacre as well as Kaori Lai and Qiu Miaojin, among others, for their writings on Taiwan's 1990 Wild Lily Movement. The fact that most writers on Taiwan's 2014 Sunflower Student Movement are men makes Hsu En-En's novel unique for its female perspective on the protests and surrounding social milieu. This work follows the stories of five women, one of whom is already dead. Narrative and commentary, somewhat coarsely intertwined, drive their stories forward, while strong emotive elements draw readers inexorably into the unique experiences of each. This weighty novel is tightly written and well-structured, with both first and third-person perspectives leveraged to explore the two central conflicts - between staying and leaving, and between "us" and "them". Important topics addressed include current relations between Taiwan and Hong Kong, gender politics, female friendship, and the warmth and violence as well as the fight-or-flight nature of political movements. For any new author, writing such a long work on such a weighty topic reveals great ambition and fuels expectations of further moving works to come. Finally, the release of *The Becoming* a decade on since the Sunflower Movement gives this work even greater import.

The Becoming

Excerpts translated from the Mandarin by **Catherine Xinxin Yu**

"But you've mentioned that you…"

The journalist asked in English, interrupting what I was saying.

I leaned forward slightly, worried that I might not have heard them clearly. This was when I finally caught sight of the deep blue sofa placed on top of the tatami.

White was beginning to creep into their hair, but their expression and demeanor were full of vigor, and their memory was not bad. They had already asked about my education and work experience last time and meticulously noted down the dates, so meticulously that I was worried I might have misremembered something. This was the third or fourth interview, when they asked about my last days in Taipei.

Le Blé d'Or, Din Tai Fung, Vieshow Cinemas, I wrote down these words and pushed the notebook back to him. Actually, I wasn't familiar with these places at all even though I lived in Taipei for a long time; what I miss the most were versions of them at times when people regarded them as deserted ruins. To express this feeling in a foreign language was no simple feat.

Their fingers, lined with a few wrinkles but nonetheless slender and graceful, shifted slightly on the grid paper along words that I could not read clearly. Whenever they felt uncertain about what they heard, they would push the notebook back to me, hand me a pen, and let me explain with the help of written words. I could not tell but, were these detailed descriptions supposed to help reconstruct that place? They said they had time and wanted to explore the topic slowly, as long as I was willing to talk.

The green bookmark indicated an unfinished conversation from last time. The notebook shuttled back and forth, the notes growing thicker and thicker. They had collected a lot of material about me alone, perhaps not for a feature

article but something more substantial that they had in mind? Regardless of the purpose, I felt they was the right person to record and retell things. I believe a tacit understanding vaguely existed between the two of us. After all, we found ourselves in similar predicaments, though caused by disparate reasons, and we both ended up in a country that belonged to neither of us.

The notebook seemed especially tiny next to them, like an antenna stemming from their torso: with swift gestures, they would pose questions, extract the notebook, write notes, paste scraps, place it down, move it aside, put it away, storing it and the pen and the bookmark in a waterproof ziplock bag. Questions about the bombardments came to an end, so they began to ask about the details of everyday life. Sometimes I would write down Chinese characters first and then try to explain in English.

Thick descriptions of scenes in specific periods, expressions of personal sentiments towards the city – these might be their interview strategy, or it might be me subconsciously evading thornier questions. When they asked why I worked for politicians for my first two jobs, I replied simply, because I had taken part in some social movements.

Hearing my answer, they leaned back slowly and slightly. They seemed particularly tall compared to the sofa, as if they had bought a child's seat by mistake. I pivoted my shoulders and neck ever so slightly, thinking I shouldn't elaborate too much just yet. My gaze fell on the notebook again, now that I was the one waiting for his response. Then I thought, the English word for someone who participates in social movements is "activist".

After moving to this place and agreeing to the interviews, whenever we met up, I was always the one busy talking. I think they were processing. I did not distrust them; it is just that I was thrust into this situation much later than they were. I trusted them exactly because they could empathize.

A few minutes of silence. Then they said that a while ago, they interviewed another Taiwanese person who also mentioned the "Sunflower Movement" and some of their answers were similar to my narrative. I said there were probably many people like this.

They raised their hand to signal that I did not have to rush my answer. Then they put their long hand next to their tall head to trace slow circles. They said, take your time. They said once I was ready, I should go out more

and meet old friends. I chose to close the notebook. They drew it back slowly. Inside, there was indeed a name which I would later recognize, or rather, I was very familiar with.

But I did not turn to the page with the name they hinted at. I said, it's not that I don't want to meet people, but.

So they said nothing. They just nodded.

◆ ◆ ◆

Did it rain often in Taipei? Yes. I said the last time I got rained on in Taipei was on Ren'ai Road. I was walking home from a bar in the small hours. Despite the hour, thick columns of rain typical of afternoon storms pelted down. It was already autumn, but the workings of cyclones were hard to predict precisely even for islanders like us, so I did not have a big umbrella with me. Gutter-dwelling rats and roaches now shot out from time to time, while I tried my best to slip past them on the wide avenue and looked for porticoes to walk under. Late that night on Ren'ai Road, as I smelled the damp scent gradually seeping up, for some reason, I had an inkling that I would soon leave this place.

The amount of time they spent waiting for my answers, just like the amount of time I took to address the questions, stretched longer and longer. I grew increasingly hesitant about my answers, or I would reminisce on scenarios and conversations that they probably deemed unimportant. Sometimes I would invite them to search for information using the nouns I wrote down. Could language truly answer they incisive questions? They always drank twice as fast as I did during interviews, but I always got worn out first.

Putting aside these conversations, when I first arrived in this arid and clean place, once again finding myself at the heart of an ancient but orderly city, I was a bit afraid of the urban fabric I could see around me. I did not find staying at home tormenting.

As long as I did not step outside, this place felt like that place. Sometimes I felt that space-time no longer mattered – I could go wherever I wanted. I did not need to hear too much, nor was I afraid of missing out on conversations.

I did not need to remember, nor did I want to write about yet another landscape, yet another symbol. I renounced any sense of time and simply observed the wanders of my memory.

But time did elapse a little. I would soon begin to work and have tasks to do every day. Still, hallucinatory sounds rang in my head, and I was unable to cast out the image of buildings collapsing.

I do not know if I cared too much or too little about all this. I was utterly trussed up by hallucinations, but at the same time, I did not want to revert to any sort of normal or original state. Anyway, as long as I did not see other building signs, or touch the air under the sun, or listen to people on the streets – this place might well be that place.

In this flat with a blue sofa placed on the tatami, I often thought back to the apartment I used to rent in Taipei, where earthquakes made spiderweb-cracks spread everywhere.

This place had frequent earthquakes too, but the walls were smooth. Whenever I stared at the wallpaper at length, cracks would seem to rise to the surface. Back when the bombardment happened, I thought it was just a strong earthquake too. When the tremors reached a certain intensity, it surprisingly gave me a sense of calm. Fear is complicated, I think.

I stopped keeping a diary after I moved to this place, because time was not tracked by daily units. If I did not move forward day-by-day, then my sense of loss could be attenuated. Whenever my gaze let slip a hint of franticness or fatigue, the journalist would close their notebook decisively. English was not their mother tongue, nor was the language of this city. They would always converse slowly, with simple words too. Tall, gentle, calm, they made me feel at ease.

The curtains in my flat were usually shut. During the day, I had to actively draw them back to let in a decent amount of sunlight. It was something the letters often reminded me to do. Perennially cooped up in my room, by now I had perfectly understood that sunlight was beneficial to my indoor living.

◆ ◆ ◆

I like the coldness of typing. Digital notes kept track of every change.

Arranged by date modified, the notes sunken to the bottom were the ones that hadn't been touched in a long time. I returned to my bedroom and clicked open the notes labelled with #Sunflower_Movement. The order was once again rearranged.

I felt much more at ease in my bedroom. After all, a small ensuite room used to be my entire world. I could lean against the side of my bed and activate everything from my little desk. The dark landing page on the monitor was full of tags written in English. Notes under #Diary_singi, all named by date, were the basis for the answers I gave to the journalist last time. Notes under #Sunflower_Movement were all named after people I knew, people who had Taiwanese names.

I once transcribed audio recordings and backed up the transcripts in my note-taking app to protect these important texts from loss and damage. I clicked on a random note: an interview conducted in Tainan, with some colloquial Taiwanese words I did not know how to write in Chinese characters at the time.

It had been ages since I last spoke Taiwanese. Or Mandarin. My room did not contain any objects with Chinese writing either, other than the display language of the apps on my devices. North or south barely mattered anymore. By the time I left Taiwan, I had already lived in the north for much longer than in the south. It seemed as if I had to discard an old language in each new place.

Could I say I progressed or regressed after moving to this ancient city? What constituted old or new? Which major change could count as truly major? Could it be that "old" and "new" simply meant individual accumulation and disintegration as the years rolled on?

I did nothing while thinking, but as my thoughts drifted, like now, I felt as if I came to a southern island where the heat on the beach and the ceaseless sound of waves were crashing against me, even though I was actually in the north, far away from the sea. Alright. I sat up, leaned forward to listen, and tilted my head up slightly to gaze at the journalist. I still had to speak in English, and before speaking, I must distill a few key points inside my head and jot down some unmissable keywords in the notebook with green sticky tabs. Could you give me another blank sheet of paper?

The Sunflower Movement only involved students, you said? No, there were many members of social movement organizations too. Political parties? Yes, they were important, but their involvement was complicated. Back in our university days, we joined protests and always seemed itching to tear down the walls of government institutions, but it was just for show, loudspeakers and posters, short speeches followed by press releases; there weren't any real breakthroughs or offensives. At first, we occupied the Legislative Yuan and barely knew what to do. The police? Oh, the Executive Yuan was also occupied, democracy at four a.m., protesting against state violence, but once we saw the struggles in Hong Kong, we finally understood that the suppression we endured wasn't all that severe in comparison. In fact, my last office job was in the Executive Yuan, where my friends were once suppressed, yet I ended up working there. After the Chinese bombardments, I was worried that that historic building might get damaged, though it is in fact the site of injustice. One of the popular questions back then was: are people who participate in social movements bound to enter politics? For a few years, anyone confronted with such a question would argue with sharp thoughts, citing events and famous figures, talking eloquently, talking to the point of losing their minds, as if they must outspeak others with Herculean effort. But what do you say – is there still any point in asking these questions now?

Catherine Xinxin Yu

Catherine Xinxin Yu (she/they) is a literary translator working with Chinese and English. They are a 2025 ALTA Travel Fellow and Peter K. Jansen Memorial Travel Fellow. They were shortlisted for the 2025 PEN Presents x International Booker Prize grant as the translator of *Brother* by Wai-Yee Chan. Their works have appeared in *Asymptote Journal*, the *Oxonian Review, La Piccioletta Barca*, and *Full Stop Magazine*, and they are an assistant fiction editor at *Asymptote*.

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2024 TLA Golden Book Award

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The Boundary of Silence:

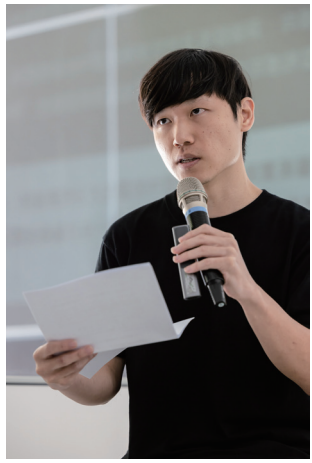
A Century-Long Entanglement and Dialogue Between the Hakka Villages of Northern Taiwan and Indigenous Peoples

噤聲之界：北臺灣客庄與原民的百年纏結和對話

The book begins with a family secret and expands into a sweeping tale of Indigenous–Hakka conflicts, seeking a true beginning for reconciliation.

Family histories riddled with tales of decapitation inspires the author to explore the foothills of northern Taiwan once homesteaded by their forebears. Interviews with village elders and historical research bring long-lost history to life, highlighting the myriad interactions and negotiations between indigenous peoples and Hakka communities through the generations. This story elucidates the difficulties faced by the elders in this region in letting go of long-festering wounds and grievances to seek restorative interethnic dialogue and understanding, achieve reconciliation, and heal wounds, both past and present. In the words of one Atayal elder, “True reconciliation can be achieved only by honestly facing the truth.”

Liang Ting-Yu
梁廷毓



The Beheaded Stream Art Project is a long-term effort to investigate and organize the disparate records and stories of contact between the Han Chinese and Taiwan's indigenous Austronesian tribes through history. Liang Ting-Yu, an artist and researcher heavily involved in this project over the past several years, has woven the findings of this project into his first novel entitled *The Boundary of Silence*. Liang's artwork has been shown at exhibitions in Thailand and Mongolia.

Judge Commentary by **Neqou Soqluma**
Translated by J**eff Miller**

This very impressive, highly enlightening work on the modern history of northern Taiwan pulls artfully at the interwoven threads of Taiwan's surprisingly diverse cultural tapestry. The narrative focus on northern Taiwan captures shifts in population trends, interethnic conflicts, and evolving regional and global contexts. This surely difficult and complicated undertaking is adroitly transformed through the literary reportage approach of the author into a fascinating, eye-opening and wholly satisfying journey for the reader. Through the eyes of historical characters, families, clans and ethnic groups, this work unravels a complex tangle of affinities, grievances, and historical feuds as well as the origins of some obscure legends of the paranormal. The author's unique take on key historical issues and events combined with the cosmology prevalent among those living in northern Taiwan handily upend conventional assumptions about our history.

The Boundary of Silence:

A Century-Long Entanglement and Dialogue Between the Hakka Villages of Northern Taiwan and Indigenous Peoples

Excerpts translated from the Mandarin by **Chris Wen-chao Li**

In my interactions with local clans over the years, it has dawned on me that, once viewed through the lens of the local community, the history of Chinese settlement on the island is transformed into an epic saga peppered with decapitated souls expunged from the annals of history. The bitterness and acrimony that comes with picturing one's forebears beheaded turns this account into a history of repressed emotions, as with a Hakka elder whose grandfather fell victim to aborigine headhunters, who asked me in all earnestness, "Why is it on me to atone for the wrongdoings of an ancestor whose head was severed?" To be fair, for as long as this historical incident remains in the collective memory, the descendants of this departed soul will indeed have to, for generations, bear the consequences of his actions, devoting considerable time, effort, and resources to displays of remorse and religious rites that atone for the transgressions of this headless forefather, whose only sin was to have stumbled into hilly woodlands claimed as indigenous territory. With tears in his eyes, the elder spoke with a certain desperation in his voice—an extreme despondency born of having lost the closest of kin—a feeling that resonates with me strongly. The ghosts of murdered ancestors perpetuate a sense of victimhood in Chinese settler[1] communities on the hillside, a conviction not easily swayed or challenged by objective facts, as it hits too close to home, just as how earlier generations

1 We use the term "Chinese settlers" to refer to historical Han-Chinese populations that relocated to Taiwan from the Chinese mainland. Though the offspring of these populations, which include Hakka and Hoklo bloodlines, are now firmly rooted on the island and referred to as "Han Taiwanese", in the context of colonial settlement, they are still treated as members of a colonizer community.

felt when presented with the loss of life, face to face with a headless torso—how, in the moment, there was no way they could forgive the perpetrators of the killing. What with the pursuit of transitional justice, however, these ancestors are painted as villains—history will not even record their names, for, from the moment their heads were severed, they were saddled with the sin of having encroached upon an aborigine forest, for that is the price to pay for having been a colonizer dispossessing indigenous lands.

Interpretations of the past vary, however, between the tribes and the settlers, owing to such factors as culture, geography, migratory routes, and conceptions of land ownership, to the point where the oral histories of different populations are embellished with elements invented or reconstituted by later generations. If our conception of the world stems from the interplay of history and the imagination, the first step towards a full reset of intergroup dynamics naturally involves a deep dive into the formation of collective memories. In other words, worldviews formed of the collective memory directly impact how a group interacts with other groups in the here and now. I am increasingly inclined to believe that the collective memory is the wellspring of subjective emotions that spur our every action. Taken to the extreme, how we act and how we think are ultimately determined by what we remember. The manipulation of this collective memory as it flows between different groups and over numerous generations, then, becomes the likeliest way to heal the wounds of the past, to bring misaligned views into focus, and to unite divergent historical perspectives.

As to how future generations can work towards reconciliation, throughout history, there has been no shortage of attempts on the part of outsiders and colonial powers to interact and engage with the tribes in search of peaceful relations. These include attempts by the Qing dynasty to intermarry with tribal royalty and fete tribal leaders, and efforts by the Japanese colonial government to negotiate a truce and reach a peace settlement. These various attempts and occasional successes were, more often than not, motivated by numerous factors, interests, and political agendas. Mapped onto a modern timeframe, these attempts by authoritarian regimes to seek reconciliation in the name of transitional justice lasted but a mere generation or two. And then what? Hundreds of years later, after the conditions and incentives that had brought about the effort fade into the stuff of legend, or are lost to the mists

of time, to the point where people scarce remember, would reconciliation even matter? Here, we need clarification on a few key issues. When speaking of reconciliation, what timeframe does it cover? What is its historical depth? And is it necessary to periodically reinforce the concept, lest the collective memory be infiltrated and corrupted by unjust patterns of reasoning? Do peaceful relations require such preemptive maintenance unto perpetuity?

Traditional societies typically lacked an overarching notion of justice that transcends time and space. There was no such thing as "transitional justice" in pre-modern society, and, as such, issues of this sort worked themselves out through cosmological reasoning and religious rituals. The practice of headhunting was justified through the worldview that death was the only means to peace with an alien tribe with whom communication was inconceivable. For the Atayal tribe, however, when faced with the encroachment of Chinese settlers and the oppression of colonial powers in recent history, what looked to be peaceful relations did not really meet the standards of *sbalay* in their language, nor was it a form of submission or surrender. To the Chinese, reconciliation meant each taking a step back so as to give the other some space—one step back, two steps forward, so to speak. But, to the Atayal, *sbalay* involved sincerity and had to do with adherence to each other's rules and traditions. As I see it, the gradual pursuit of "truth" through the sharing and exchange of collective memories between the Chinese settlers and indigenous peoples is pivotal when it comes to overcoming misunderstandings buried deep in the psyche, which, in turn, create the cognitive reality that we experience and further shape the moral values of generations to come. The tribes take the notion of *sbalay* very seriously. It is a polysemous term with subtle shades of meaning not easily captured by the somewhat simplistic notion of "reconciliation" as it is understood by the Chinese. This was made clear to me by the Mutu elder Tosu Payen:

> In the Atayal language, *balay* is the word for 'truth', whereas 'reconciliation' takes the form of *sbalay*—with an s- prefix added to *balay*. In other words, 'truth' and 'reconciliation' are two sides of the same coin. In the Atayal view, there can only be reconciliation through an open-hearted reckoning with the truth. Come growing season, *sbalay* involves communication

> with seen and unseen forces—that is, communicating with forbears and ancestral spirits, thanking them for stewardship of the land so that later generations are able to reap its benefits, for had they chosen to exploit the land indiscriminately, their descendants would have been deprived of its use.

Traditional territories are the result of human migration and relationships established between the people and the land. They are not dominions claimed thousands of years ago, with boundaries set in stone. As Tosu Payen explains, the idea of a traditional territory is all about acknowledging the coexistence of various temporal and spatial relationships. At a more fundamental level of truth, traditional territories are an acknowledgement of mutual reliance—without an understanding of this balay (truth), there can be no *sbalay* (reconciliation).

Though "marital alliances" of the past enabled the redistribution of land and resources between settlers and indigenous tribes, had the Atayal been willing to accept the existence of these settlers in their midst, it would have initiated a new relationship between the land, the tribe, and the newcomers. The tribesmen would then be equipped with a set of societal and moral values more tolerant of this out-group.

Prior to the late nineteenth century, the balance of power between the Chinese and the indigenous peoples was nothing like what it is today: the two sides were equally matched, which is why it is ill-advised to view contemporary indigenous issues through the lens of the past. Nevertheless, there are lessons to be gleaned from past historical experiences. For example, in our critique of Chinese colonial settlement patterns, were we to consider only the distribution of land and material resources, we would be capitulating to the logic of modern Western economics and capitalism, whereby all is measured through the monetary value of property and land ownership at the detriment of the arguably more important moral and ecological considerations that loom large in the epistemological and cosmological thinking of the Chinese settlers and tribal peoples living on this hillside in Northern Taiwan.

Looking back at the history of contact between the Chinese and the Atayal, would the "truth" eventually surface through memories of interactions between the two populations? There are too many such past events, not all

of which will survive the ravages of time, but the memories that do survive prove that they are significant in some way, and, as they are passed down and reinterpreted through the generations, they hold the potential for elucidating the "truth" through mutual tolerance in local populations.

Would these memories lead to mutual understanding, tolerance, and, perhaps, eventual reconciliation? Doing so would require the local Hakka community and the indigenous population to initiate a series of historical introspections and to venture into multiethnic communities in the region to promote dialogue and communication. That way, the conversation isn't confined to collaboration and dialogue between Chinese academics and scholars of indigenous descent (not to discount their contributions), but will spread to local networks and trickle into local knowledge, so that it may stand a chance of localized implementation. In a heartfelt moment, tribal elder Kumy Bayhuy explained:

> Reconciliation is not the same as issuing an apology. If one side apologizes and the other side refuses to accept the gesture, the issue is far from resolved. Reconciliation requires involvement from both sides—the two sides have to apologize to each other. But, more importantly, the two sides need to live up to their promises.

Not only do the Atayal have a concept of *sbalay* ("reconciliation"), which adheres closely to their system of tribal norms of behavior and morality known as the gaga, the Hakka, too, have their idea of *gong fo* ("negotiating peace"), which is based in Chinese ethics and social mores. The tiniest discrepancy in language or logic between the two sides can lead to a collapse in the ability of one population to view the other as an equal as they seek to understand each other's memories and perspectives on history. The struggles and entanglements between the Hakka and the tribespeople over the centuries have left a festering wound of gigantic proportions, one which requires us to debride the dead tissue, apply surgical dressing, wait for the wound to heal, change the dressing, await further healing, and apply the dressing again…In the process, the wound may hemorrhage, become infected, and even ooze pus, preventing it from forming a scab. The pain will not disappear the next day, nor would the wound heal overnight; rather, the healing would likely require as much time as the course of events that led

to the injury in the first place. In other words, after centuries of conflict and mistrust between the two peoples, do not expect reconciliation to happen through a simple, performative political act. What is required is a much more thorough process of nativization, indigenization, hybridization, and ecologization, through which the parties seek to understand the root causes of past conflicts through the subjective worldviews of the historical actors who took part in these clashes, and do so by teasing apart the multiple levels of social mores, personal relationships, and moral values that are involved. I firmly believe in the practice of putting oneself in the other's shoes—only through viewing the world through the cosmology and social values of the other can we get to the source of a conflict and achieve reconciliation, which, ultimately, will yield a "truth" that is at once pluralistic and multifaceted. To me, when viewed from the perspective of local populations and native peoples, there is no objectivity when it comes to the assignment of blame: Who is the perpetrator and who is the victim? Who is required to apologize to whom? Who is just and who is unjust? When viewed through the lens of time, measured by different moral standards, and considering different social responsibilities, there is no singular, objective answer. For the value of human life and the importance of the land on which our livelihoods depend are both immeasurable—both are matters of life and death. Hence, the need to understand how different human populations mourn the deceased and view their ancestral spirits, for only through this subjective lens can we hope to gradually unpack the emotional baggage that has accumulated over the centuries and led to all manner of conflict and mistrust.

Chris Wen-chao Li

Chris Wen-chao Li is a translator and linguist, currently a Professor of Linguistics at San Francisco State University. Formerly with the BBC, his translations and research are featured in *Target*, *Renditions*, and other top journals, with a focus on phonology, diglossia, and translation theory.

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2024 TLA
Golden Book Award

Underground Lives:

Stories Untold for Migrant Workers in Taiwan

移工築起的地下社會：跨國勞動在臺灣

Not only portrays the vivid stories of migrant workers in Taiwan, but also probes deeply into the systems they must struggle against.

Migrant workers are the engine of the global economy and the lifeblood of the IT and innumerable other sectors in Taiwan. Leaving familiar lives at home for the prospect of higher wages and opportunity in an unknown land requires both courage and a sense of adventure. In their off-hours, Taiwan's migrant workers engage with society in a myriad ways; from selling clothes as a side business and spearheading beach clean-up drives to joining local beauty pageants.

While some unfortunately crumble under discriminatory management practices and rigid migratory labor laws, many succeed by leveraging their own abilities and creative spirit to engage with Taiwan. They build networks and communities as well as their own underground societies.

This comprehensive and important investigative report is essential to understanding Taiwan's migrant workers and recent labor policy trends.

Chien Yung-Ta
簡永達

Chien has worked as a reporter with *The Reporter* and a contributor to *Mirror Media*. A Fulbright Scholar and visiting scholar at Academia Sinica and Harvard University, he has won multiple journalism awards, including an SOPA and the Human Rights Press Award.

Judge Commentary by **Pin-yao Lee**
Translated by **Jeff Miller**

For two months of the seven years spent gathering stories and data for this book, the author actually lived at First Square (today's ASEAN Square) in Taichung City. He also conducted interviews and research throughout Taiwan and Vietnam. Covering topics spanning living spaces, policies, protest actions, safety issues, stateless children, beauty pageants, migrant worker networks and more, this work presents the real and complex realities of Taiwan's all-important migrant labor force.

For migrant workers, Taiwan is an island fraught with danger. Moreover, even the little they can do to bring hope and light to their lives here may still turn around in the end to bite them in the ass. In *Underground Lives*, readers learn about the dreams, lives, and difficulties regularly faced by these misunderstood and oft-maligned "outsiders" both as individuals and as members of the migrant worker class. Readers also come to appreciate how these people have shaped the face of labor, society and all of our lives in this country. Showing both the forest and the trees, this shines as a finely polished, richly rewarding work.

Underground Lives:

Stories Untold for Migrant Workers in Taiwan

Excerpts translated from the Mandarin by **Michelle Kuo**

Finding the home of Đình DựHoàng was easy. I merely asked one question—"Excuse me, do you know where the man who died in Taiwan used to live?" At this, villagers—the driver, the street hawker, even a woman selling drinks—pointed me the right way. Like a passcode, these words led me to his home.

His family lives in a rural Cẩm Giàng District in Hải Dương Province, one of Vietnam's major labor-exporting regions. Not at all a peaceful portrait of country living, factories of all shapes and sizes invade patches of farmland, creating the feel of a half-formed city. Massive container trucks roar past at high speed, kicking up dust as they barrel down crumbling roads.

In this hollowed-out village of children and elders, Đình Dự's family remains. More than half of the working-age men and women have gone abroad for work. Out of every ten people, one goes to South Korea, two to Japan—and seven to Taiwan.

At the entrance of an alley, a woman leading the way gestured to a three-story house in the distance; this must be our destination. A concrete brick home, it stood out prominently amidst the cluster of low-rise bungalows. Tiles on its pointy roof spelled out the number "2016," marking the year it was completed. Among the buildings in the village, it's the tallest and newest.

"Our old house used to be smaller than this living room," the eldest brother Hoàng Đình Vi told me. Their family is a typical story of going abroad for work and transforming their economic fortunes.

Đình Vi was the first in his family to venture into transnational labor. Like many Vietnamese farmers, he chose to cross the mountains to work in Guangxi, China. After six years, he returned to Vietnam—just as labor brokers

came to the village looking for workers to go to Taiwan. Because he spoke fluent Chinese, he was selected. Not long after, his second sister followed him to Taiwan. She completed a three-year contract and then applied for a job in South Korea, where she'd met her future husband. Next came their younger sister. She left home to work in Taiwan, and later, Japan. And finally, it was Đình Dự's turn.

One after another, the four siblings went to work in Taiwan. Within a few years, the family's fortune appeared to change dramatically. Once a poor family whose mother made a living collecting recyclables, they'd now built the grandest house in the village—drawing envious looks from neighbors. People frequently came by to visit, hoping the family would help connect them with overseas job opportunities. Their mother, Nguyễn Thị Rộng, seized the moment and became a labor broker. She now helps roughly sixty Vietnamese people each year find work in Taiwan.

Yet the woman before me had none of the tough, commanding air of a labor broker. Her wide, symmetrical double eyelids drooped, her eyes swollen from crying. Fatigue and sorrow were etched across her face. To this day, she still can't accept that her son is gone.

For a time, after her other three children had gone abroad for work, only she and Đình Dự remained at home. Simple and quiet, the countryside also lacked a strong internet signal. For the elderly, who didn't use digital devices, it didn't matter much—but Đình Dự who kept a smartphone with him all day, complained constantly about being bored. So his mother went out of her way, to the neighboring town, to find a person to install a wireless router in his room.

Today, when she lights incense for her son, she still asks, with a heart full of grief, "Whatever you wanted, I gave you. And now you bear to leave me all alone?"

Đình Dự, 25, was on his second trip to work in Taiwan. He'd gone before after graduating from high school, working in a textile factory in Houlong, Miaoli, a coastal town in western Taiwan, alongside his sister and sister-in-law. This time, he returned to Taiwan to marry his longtime girlfriend.

Beside the multistory house his older brother built, the family home had been renovated into a two-story house meant for Đình Dự and his bride to

begin their life together. “I want to add one more floor—just like my brother’s house,” he told his mother. He had signed only a short-term, two-year contract for this stint in Taiwan, paying $5,000 in broker fees. Once he had saved enough, he intended to return home.

Before her son left the country, Nguyễn Thị Rộng had a persistent sense of unease. She told her eldest son and daughter to persuade him not to go; each took turns trying to talk their brother out of his plans. Stay in Vietnam and take care of the family, Đình Vi urged his younger brother. “If you’re worried about the costs of building your house, I’ll take care of it.”

But—perhaps hoping to build a life on his own terms—Đình Dự turned down his brother’s offer, determined to make his own money abroad. The day before he left home, their mother specially prepared a meal for the ancestors and gods, praying they would protect her son on his journey and keep him safe.

Less than three months after he left home, the family received news of his death.

All this time, I’ve never known how to ease the grief of the families I’ve interviewed who lost their loved ones. I don’t even dare ask them what they think of Taiwan. My interpreter has suggested that I visit his grave and offer incense. For Vietnamese people, the more prayers a deceased person receives, the more peace it brings to the living—and creates hope of guiding the departed toward a peaceful afterlife.

My translator, A-Oanh, was a PhD student at National Cheng Kung University at the time. But before coming to Taiwan, she had already earned a degree and taught cultural sociology in Ho Chi Minh City. Migrant labor was one of the subjects she focused on.

Although she was formally only serving as a translator on this trip, I relied heavily on her throughout the interviews. She understood far better than I did how to conduct fieldwork in rural Vietnam. From the moment we entered a village, she would quietly take the initiative to buy small gifts for the interviewees, remind me to tip the hired driver more generously, or prepare red envelopes in my name for the parents of the deceased before we left. My gratitude to her was immense. Without A-Oanh, I would have struggled to carry out any interviews at all in the Vietnamese countryside.

But the situation in Hải Dương Province is a bit different. Along both sides of the main road were factories owned by Taiwanese companies. While riding the bus into Cẩm Giàng District, the ticket inspector asked where we would be getting off. Seeing the anxiety on my face, he immediately switched to Mandarin to speak with me. Even a young woman crouched in the doorway doing laundry—she'd overheard my conversation with A-Oanh—gave me directions in Mandarin. Everywhere in the village, I encountered Vietnamese people who could speak Mandarin.

Consumed by his own troubles, Đình Vi could barely grieve his younger brother's death. Just two months before his brother died, he had been inspecting equipment at an electroplating factory when a sulfuric acid barrel overhead burst. Severe burns ravaged half his body. Through three major skin graft surgeries he escaped death. After his brother died, his boss handed him a red envelope,[1] telling him to hurry home to Vietnam and tend to the funeral rites. That employer hasn't reached out since—only radio silence.

During our interview, beyond talking about his brother, Đình Vi repeatedly asked if I could help him seek compensation from his employer. I believe turning to a stranger—a random Taiwanese journalist—meant he felt desperate. He'd run out of options.

This sense of helplessness that Đình Vi emanated brought to mind another returnee migrant worker I met in Phú Thọ Province. I don't associate them because their stories are similar—on the contrary, they embody the dual faces of the migrant worker's return: one marked by luck, the other by loss.

The place I stayed in Phú Thọ Province was the only guesthouse in the village. To be honest, I had been quite anxious about this particular reporting trip. I didn't know where the two interviewees lived, knew nothing about their backgrounds, and had only managed to find a translator at the very last minute—so booking accommodation in advance was, of course, out of the question. This was all very unlike me; there are many types of journalists, and I'm the sort who is cautious and meticulous.

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1 In Taiwan, red envelopes are traditionally used to give cash gifts to family members during Lunar New Year, births, and holidays. But in other contexts, they may serve as informal or extralegal payments—ranging from bribes and hush money to untaxed bonuses.

On my first night in Vietnam, I accidentally stayed too late chatting at the Nguyen household, so Mr. and Mrs. Nguyen asked the only person in the village who owned a car to give me a ride to my guesthouse. He was especially curious about Taiwan. His son also worked there but had recently been injured on the job and was in the midst of negotiating compensation with his Taiwanese employer. Still, he appeared not the least bit bothered. "The broker told me not to worry—they'll take good care of my son in Taiwan," he said. I wasn't sure whether I should tell him about all the notorious stories surrounding Taiwan's labor brokers.

As the car approached the guesthouse, I saw a three-story French-style villa—just like the photo on the roadside billboard. But as we got closer, I was shocked to discover that the villa was merely a façade. Behind the fake front door sat a row of three corrugated metal huts—this was where my guestroom actually was located. Inside, the air smelled of damp rags. Both the television and water heater were both broken. One of the windowpanes had a hole in it, letting in mosquitoes from outside. With only thin plywood for walls, I could hear every sound from the couple next door all night long.

Still, it was hard for me to feel angry at the guesthouse. One reason was that it wasn't even listed on TripAdvisor, the go-to platform for picky foreign travelers. More importantly, the owner was warm and welcoming, bearing fruit and snacks. To my surprise, I discovered that she could understand and speak Mandarin. She had been among the first wave of Vietnamese caregivers sent to Taiwan, and in 1999, she had cared for an elderly woman in Taipei who had limited mobility. Her office wall was covered with photos documenting her life with her former employer. They had visited the Shin Kong Mitsukoshi building in front of Taipei Main Station and even hiked Elephant Mountain together. She talked at length about how her time working in Taiwan had transformed her life. She'd just gone through a divorce, and her earnings allowed her to support her children and, in time, build this guesthouse when she returned to Vietnam.

These kinds of migrant worker "success stories" often prompt some in Taiwan to say that migrant workers should be grateful—after all, they earn more than they would back home. But in reality, the opposite is true: it is Taiwan—as a receiving country—that reaps the greatest benefits.

To select the most "valuable" labor, employers impose, through

recruitment agencies, a brutal litany of requirements. Criteria include height, weight, gender, marital status, and even whether the person has tattoos. Being older or having little education can disqualify you. In addition, applicants need a government-issued guarantee proving they have no criminal record or history of misconduct.

Taiwan has the power to hire strong, able-bodied migrant workers, yet it's never contributed to their upbringing—not to their basic needs or education. Once they arrive, the government places legal limits on their stay and blocks them from reuniting their families—deliberately ensuring they can never truly settle. Such laws effectively exclude them from becoming immigrants. More, when a migrant worker gets sick or suffers a workplace injury, the government often turns a blind eye. Employers and brokers send them home, the cost of care falls to the worker's country, and a new worker takes their place.

The system is built on one premise: migrant workers are disposable labor. They can be discarded at any time.

◆ ◆ ◆

Not long after that dinner gathering, Anh Quan opened a small clothing shop—in his dorm room. The room was meant for four people, but he paid rent for all four beds. It cost him NT$7,000 (about $234 USD) a month, nearly a third of his salary. The room was so small it barely fit a mattress. The center was taken up by a two-rail clothing rack and two torso mannequins.

A Devotee of Terry Gou and a Voracious Reader of Carnegie

Anh Quan woke up every morning at 5 a.m. to prepare packages for his customers. This way he could make it to the post office during his lunch break. In the evenings, he no longer fought for overtime shifts and instead spent his nights replying to customer messages—often until midnight. He slept only three to four hours a night, then went on to perform grueling factory work during the day as if it was nothing.

“Aren’t you exhausted?” I couldn’t help but ask.

“Do you know Terry Gou, the boss of Foxconn in Taiwan?”

Anh Quan answered my question with another, seemingly unrelated one. Foxconn is the world’s largest manufacturer of consumer electronics. In 2007, it began purchasing land and building factories in Bắc Giang Province, Vietnam—Anh Quan’s hometown. Today, it’s one of Foxconn’s most important production hubs in Southeast Asia.

“He’s my idol—managing over a million employees,” Anh Quan said. “Whenever I face difficulties, I think: even a big boss like him only has twenty-four hours in a day. If he can do it, so can I.”

One afternoon, I went to Anh Quan’s dorm to help him pack orders. He didn’t have enough money to hire staff yet, and I was also hoping this might be a quiet place to conduct our interview.

Anh Quan’s dormitory was managed by an outsourced operator—common practice for factories in small to medium-sized enterprises. When employers lack the capital to build their own housing, they outsource housing arrangements to brokers or dormitory operators. The dorm was dim and run-down, its metal walls streaked with rust. I followed behind him, weaving between parked bicycles and electric scooters. A woman—presumably the landlord—sat in a rattan chair with her hair permed into a fluffy Afro-like style., looked up at us. Anh Quan signaled I was with him. Wordlessly, she nodded and let us pass.

When he opened the door, piles of wholesale clothing covered the floor. There were no decorations or furniture to express the personality of the person living here—except for a desk in the corner. That desk was not a typical piece of furniture found in a migrant worker’s room. On its shelves were several books in both Vietnamese and Chinese, including a collection of quotes by Terry Gou.

Another book was by Carnegie. His classic *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, published in 1936, rose to prominence during America’s recovery from the Great Depression recovery. The communication strategies it promoted resonated with a wide range of readers—from restaurant waiters to corporate CEOs. Many people elevated this skill to a measure of one’s

life potential. *The New York Times* called the book a symbol of America—second only to the Statue of Liberty. To date, it has been translated into 38 languages and sold over 30 million copies worldwide. When it was translated into Chinese and published in Taiwan in 1987, it became a bestseller—and I imagine it did in Vietnam, too.

"Have you read Carnegie's book?"

"No, I haven't," I replied.

More than once, Anh Quan urged me to give up journalism and go into business instead—especially when I told him he now earns as much as I do. He laughed and said, "You really should read this book."

The book was like a fortune-teller's guide, offering Anh Quan insights at different stages of his life. After one particular reading, he began referring to his customers as "family." Every night, he hosted live streams on Facebook, chatting with his "family." I joined one of them—it felt like a religious revival. Aside from occasionally singing a few songs, he spent the rest of the time encouraging his family with lines like this:

> *A failed man isn't someone who's poor but someone without dreams.* And: *Even if the whole world doubts you, you have to believe in yourself.*

In the factories in Taiwan that employ hundreds of thousands of migrant workers, employers see little difference between them. They are treated as indistinguishable. It's hard for a boss to discover you—you have to discover yourself. Migrant workers have lived this truth since the day they left their hometowns. They have put it in action. Working abroad isn't just a matter of willpower—scholars of migration networks point out that it involves much more. Aspiring migrants must place themselves within networks. They need to connect with returned workers, as well as brokers who specialize in sending people abroad.

The second, even harsher round of screening is carried out by Taiwanese labor brokers. In his research, Yu-Kang Fan documents the racialized marketing strategies used by brokers when recruiting migrant workers. For example, they claim that Filipinos are smart but calculative, making them suitable for the tech industry; Indonesians are obedient and compliant, ideal

for caregiving roles; and Vietnamese workers are hardworking and quick learners, capable of handling various factory jobs.

Desperate to secure employment, migrant workers go to great lengths to present themselves as the ideal laborers in their prospective employers' eyes — dyeing their hair black again for ID photos or exaggerating their skills on résumés to match the ideal image.

Through Relentless Hard Work, Transforming One's Identity

After I finished reporting and moved back to Taipei, Anh Quan continued sharing his story with me from Taichung, usually calling every two or three weeks. "Don't be fooled by how cheerful I look on Facebook every day," he told me one day, close to the Lunar New Year. "Honestly, I often feel deeply lonely."

Anh Quan couldn't find anyone who shared his goals. "I know in my heart that other Vietnamese workers think I'm strange. The boss just wants employees who obey. A lot of the time I just go my own way." That year, on New Year's Eve, when his Vietnamese friends from the factory invited him to drink, he turned down each invite. "Because," he explained, "I didn't want to start the first day of the new year completely wasted again."

In time, Anh Quan would pass the intermediate-level Chinese proficiency test—a test that terrifies many with its focus on idioms and a timed essay section. After completing another three-year labor contract, Anh Quan realized his wish: being admitted to the Department of English at Providence University. He was on the verge of shedding his identity as a migrant laborer and transforming into an international student.

"I can already speak Chinese," Anh Quan said. "Now I want to learn English. Then I'll be able to go anywhere in the world." He spoke as if making a proclamation—to become someone new, an entirely different person.

One weekend, Anh Quan left me and his business partner, Anh Dung, to "watch the shop" while he headed to Taipei to take part in an election for the leadership of a Vietnamese hometown association. He seemed completely unconcerned about letting a Taiwanese person sell clothes on his behalf.

That afternoon, Vietnamese workers from nearby factories casually walked into the room, browsing the clothing racks or livestreaming to friends to help them shop remotely. Like me, Anh Dung seemed out of his depth—he wasn't good at interacting with customers and spent most of the time quietly sitting off to the side, waiting to ring up sales.

Around 8 p.m., Anh Dung decided to close up shop early. He gave me a ride on his electric scooter, showing me around the industrial zone until we finally stopped in front of a budget steakhouse. While ordering, he struggled with the difference between "sirloin" and "filet mignon." I told him it didn't really matter, but he still chose the most expensive one, ordering a portion for me, too.

After dinner, he drove me to the station. We sat by the fountain in front of it, gazing at the rows of windows along the road, glowing with light.

I asked him, "How do you think working in Taiwan changes your life?"

For a stretch of time, silence passed between us. Then he started talking about the apple tree at his old home—how, as a child, he often climbed it with friends to steal its fruit, and how cows would often roam freely through the village. After nearly six years away from home, he'd lately been thinking about those old days. He planned to go back home when his contract ended next year and step away from Anh Quan's clothing business.

When I asked him why he came to Taiwan, he said, "I saw a lot of people going to Taiwan, so I went too." Back then, he was deciding between high school or a vocational school. "My parents just wanted me to go to the high school near home," he continues. Later, when he was still hesitating about signing with a labor broker, he recalled, "People said that since we didn't go to college and didn't have any skills, we might as well go abroad for a few years to earn some money."

Hearing him speak, it seemed to me that going home would be the first real decision he'd make for himself.

Then I asked Anh Quan the same question.

"In Taiwan, it's very free and fair. People are always debating, the minimum wage keeps going up, and the legal system is good. It's not like Vietnam, where it's communist. Every level of the system, from top to bottom, is

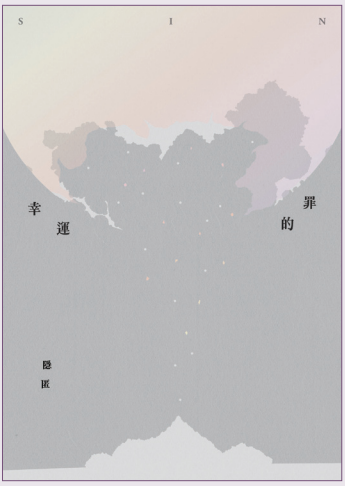
corrupt," Anh Quan said. "Plus, there's a news report saying Taipei is the most livable city in the world, right?"

"And after that?" I asked.

"After that, I'll still have to go back to Vietnam. There's no way around it. You too, right? No matter where you go, you still want to go home, right?" he said. "Money is money, sure. But people still have to go home."

Michelle Kuo

Michelle Kuo is the author of *Reading with Patrick* (Random House), shortlisted for the Dayton Literary Peace Prize and published in the U.S., U.K., Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan (陪你讀下去). Her writing has appeared in the *New York Times, New York Review of Books*, *The Paris Review*, and other outlets. A former attorney for undocumented immigrants, Michelle worked on cases involving workers' rights, tenants' rights, and asylum. She holds a B.A. and J.D. from Harvard University and Harvard Law School. Currently, she is an editor at Books from Taiwan and teaches as a visiting Associate Professor at the International College of Innovation at National Chengchi University, where she co-founded a program at a juvenile detention center. With Lya Shaffer, she also co-translated Chuanfen Chang's book on Wang Hsingfu, a project supported by the National Museum of Taiwan Literature.



Poetry

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Felix Culpa

幸運的罪

2024 TLA Golden Book Award

The poetry is intimately bound to her life, embracing the myriad possibilities between literature and the cosmic order.

The concept of “Felix Culpa” underpinning this poetry collection draws on the idea that people spend a lifetime searching for their lost “other half” that can both enhance and ameliorate fixed attributes and create a self previously unrealized and unimagined. The poems unfold as steps taken with their author; their texture as buttery as marbled steak, colors as rich as a summer sky at sunset, honest as a mother’s stern rebuke, and touching as a verdant mango tree nourished by the ashes of a beloved cat.

Since bidding farewell to her bookstore and moving to Tainan to live with her mother and her beloved cats, she has rediscovered her place in the universe and found her calling as a poet - her chosen medium to interconnect all things in the cosmos.

Yinni
隱匿

This poet and cat enthusiast managed Youhe Book in Danshui for 11 years and is responsible for naming 134 “river cats”. Her published works include seven poetry collections, and six essay collections, including *The Illness of Desire*. Her poetry has been translated into French and Dutch in collections titled *Aux marges de la beauté* and *Levenslijn*.

攝影師｜賴小路

Judge Commentary by **Tsung-huei Huang**

Translated by **Jeff Miller**

So, could simply being alive, after all, be a ‘fortunate’ sin? In *Felix Culpa*, her 7th poetry collection, author Yinni draws on a recent brush with life-threatening illness to answer this question with a resounding “yes”. Her experience weaves clarity of insight as well as dashes of pain, naïve innocence, and humor into this poetic exploration of life’s unexpected (such as the death of her grandmother and beloved cat), everyday (such as the effect of a spinning fan on sunlight), unpleasant memories (such as an olive baboon shot dead after escaping from the zoo), and intermittently overlooked memories (such as her frail mother’s unquestioned love for her). In these lines where joy and grief intertwine, the poet offers readers a taste she is eager to share… *Like taking a sip of water, with no ice and just a trace of sweetness.*

Felix Culpa

Excerpts translated from the Mandarin by **Christina Ng**

A Prayer Before the Surgery

No matter how things turn out
I will accept

even if I can't take care of my family cat
to the very end
even if, to my surprise, it has to be reborn as a human
carry its suffering from this lifetime into the next
I can accept

because I am
so very lucky

to have an outstretched hand to grab
at the cliff's edge
always
to have a chance to start over
despite the setbacks
the tears I've dried
will, like always,
gush out of my eyes
like a fountain
the next time

I've been blessed with the truest friendship
gasped in awe at the grandest scenery
even if that was just a piece of winter sun
fallen on a corner of the floor

in that shaft of light
golden dust glitters
and twirls in silence
just as I, too, born from stardust,
continue my journey through
infinite time and space

these are all etched
in my heart
between the words I've once written:
some love what I present
some see what I fail to express

I can also hear
people in the distance
praying for me
in the vicinity
there are cats
loving me wholeheartedly

simply because I am
so very lucky

therefore, no matter
how things turn out
I will accept
what Fate has determined for me

Ultramarine/Near Darkness

On a midsummer evening
at the moment
before night unfurls

a nuanced kind of
ultramarine blue
glides down the sky

an unparalleled kind of blue
the kind of blue
that knows no turning back

at that moment
the second hand ticks
as if it were different
from every ticking second before

my heart beats
as if it were different
from every beating moment before

the ultramarine blue slips away
with the last vestiges of light
leaving the world behind
in darkness

a bond severed in two
leaves no room for turning back—
my deeply dreaded
moment of parting

has come
and gone

*Pei-pei (2009 to July 20th, 2021) passed away peacefully in its sleep.

Proclamation of an Earthworm

Go forth
from beneath this mango tree
my little kitties

take with you a part of me
to see
the edge of the universe
the twilight clouds blushing
in the heart of the earth

I'll also keep
a part of you two
here with me
and dig hard
for a resting place that fits us well

half beneath the earth
half touching the sky

our roots intertwine
our dreams
unfold before each other

our stars
traverse long,
long light years

but never have they once left
this rich
beautiful circle

*The ashes of the two cats, Tien-kuo and Pei-pei, are buried beneath the mango tree. After six months, the small tree actually bore two mangoes. I believe the mangoes are their way of returning to tell us that they are safe.

The Origin of the World

1.
The origin of the world
is not the birth of life
but here

2.
No matter how many years have gone by
every stormy afternoon
I will definitely
return here

3
The light here
remains fresh
in every dewdrop
the world shines
whole and bright

crystal clear
down to the last detail

4.
In the light steeped in pitter-pattering rain
new leaves on the Bodhi Tree
take the shape of hearts
in a tender shade of red

their blades, broad and wide,
carry the weight of the world
yet their breath-stealing tips, long and thin,
flutter in the wind
quivering
because a dewdrop will soon slip
into nothingness

5.
A high-pitched blue
a toneless white
a fugue of wood grain along with
a hymn to fresh green

6.
Out of every inch of soil
water molecules
drunk on the scent of roses
are sipped up by the sun
each holding fast to their own
rainbow

7.
The youth
I often go back to visit
is held by Time
here

no need to tell
if it is the ending or beginning
the starry sky unrolls
from the ocean's edge
another dream awaits
behind the door of a dream

8.
He has never left
here
he is simultaneously everywhere
light and shadow converge
tracing out the one and only—
your name

9.
Syllables have yet
to form
characters have not yet
found their shape

the rough tree bark
the moss-covered brick wall
the water-rippled muddy ground
filled with and void of
your name

just a shadow in the light
where the self hides
itself

10.
Is it hidden deep enough?
you once asked
as if here, too,
was your only
hiding place

11.
My whole life
I've had nothing
merely relying on you
the illusory you
the eternal you
supporting me

leading me
to pass through time and again
every stormy afternoon—
return here

The Clouds Today

are the frost-kissed fat of marbled beef
running

are whales and dolphins in the sky
a soundless spume-scape

butterfly wings stirring up the scent of flowers

are the lava erupting
from the volcano

the amber born
of solidifying resin

the flight of Archaeopteryx

are UFOs in disguise
sending greetings from mother star

a rag doll lost in childhood

the direction that every tearful lake
turns its gaze

are the sands flowing
the enduring stones

Heaven's gate
opening briefly

the escape route map of a dream

are coming and going
keys and locks

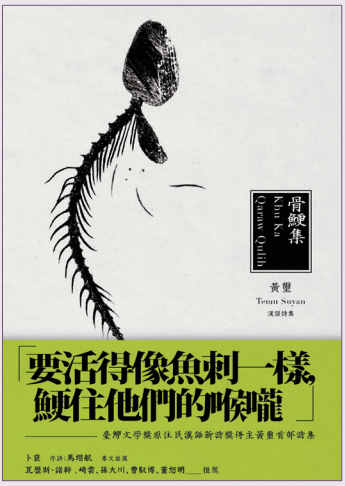
answers and prayers

the spinning pulse of drums
the moving forests

feet of cat
printing light

Christina Ng

Christina Ng is a Singaporean writer and translator based in Berlin. Her Chinese to English literary translations include Singaporean poet Dan Ying's selected poetry (1967 to 1995) (forthcoming in Spring 2026 from Poetry Translation Centre) which won the PEN Translates Award 2025 and Singaporean lyricist Liang Wern Fook's short story collection, *The Joy of a Left Hand*, which was shortlisted for the Singapore Literature Prize 2024 Translation Category. She teaches literary translation at Singapore's Nanyang Technological University as well as leads literary translation and creative writing workshops internationally.



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Khu Ka Qaraw Qulih

2024 TLA New Bud Award

骨鯁集

Through his debut poetry collection, Temu Suyan traces his ancestral heritage and finds his place in contemporary society.

"Spiritual decolonization" is a crucial issue for all of Taiwan's indigenous peoples in the 21st century. Temu Suyan uses literature, specifically poetry written in Chinese, his country's lingua franca, as his medium.

Khu Ka Qaraw Qulih begins with a self-awareness won through discerning the lost civilizations behind the veneer of our modern cities. It then moves to observing village life and learning the wisdom gifted by ancestral lands. Adhering to "the words given by the ancestors," Temu Suyan seeks to continue Atayal culture and become a "true person".

By tracing his ancestral heritage and finding his place in contemporary society, Temu Suyan addresses the labels imposed on indigenous peoples since modern civilization first encroached upon traditional domains. *Khu Ka Qaraw Qulih* calls to reclaim the dignity of the Atayal people, their tribe, and the self in a pluralistic society.

Temu Suyan
黃璽

Temu Suyan, connected by blood to both Atayal and Bunun tribes, has received multiple indigenous literature awards, including the Taiwan Literature Awards for Indigenous Poetry. The author is well practiced at using humorous, absurd, and satirical approaches to explore the ruptures and compromises faced by contemporary indigenous peoples in response to current social issues.

Judge Commentary by **Rob Lo Yuchia**

Translated by **Jeff Miller**

Temu Suyan explores the subtle prejudices and biases woven through contact between Taiwan's indigenous and Han Chinese cultures over the centuries. The Chinese-language poems within bring accusation and frustration as well as acceptance, and also celebrate the once-dazzling brilliance of Taiwan's Austronesian cultures.

In "Tribal Village Quatrain", the author captures in just four lines the calamitous decline and eventual rebirth of indigenous heritage on Taiwan. In "Sacred Lands" and "The Other", he takes on relations between, respectively, humans, hunters, and outsiders and Taiwan's towering, verdant mountains.

In addressing the indigenous-Chinese relationship in the Chinese language, the author shrewdly uses a "familiar" linguistic vehicle to platform discomfortingly different new ideas and messages, ultimately creating in the process a new language of poetry. This reflects the best of Taiwan literature and culture in terms of its successful integration of new elements into Taiwanese identity.

Khu Ka Qaraw Qulih

Excerpts translated from the Mandarin by Jennifer Zou

Twelve Todays

…
…..…

(07:00)
Weightless from moonrise to sunset.
Father is plucked from sleep, like picking up a cigarette,
or pulling up a black nightshade. And nicely tucked away.

(09:00)
The village looks far even from a short distance,
so far that even cockcrow clocks in late.
Houses stretch down the bluff, older since we traded in our tribal tongue.

(11:00)
I will solemnly post a hazard sign on the dip slope:
First, to warn against falling.
Second, to locate the village that could potentially slide.

(13:00)
I prop up Father's spine, facing the mountaintop where tea trees grow.
The warm moist soil in my palm is diagnosed as susceptible to sliding,
Good thing it hasn't.

(17:00)
Mother makes the first black nightshade soup of the whole village today,
In the sunset, cabbages on the mountainside can grow loose like screw caps,

Good thing it hasn't.

(19:00)
Rain falls heavily, windows shut tightly.
The necks of those remaining in the village are shriveled into bumpy slopes,
Tick-tocking away.

(21:00)
Cloudless, the village is perhaps becoming a white dwarf,
brooding an extended but frozen tail,
ready to slice the mountains, the next time it flips.

(23:00)
I lie Father down flat again.
The staring pupils, the aging village, the blurring focus,
rarely able to go back.

(01:00)
Not yet a dream, the whole village is wreathed in sparseness.
Cries that cannot be muffled by the night shade,
urges relocation.

(03:00)
Streetlamps, one after another, lightly dissecting the mountain mist.
In comes the birds chirping,
"Perhaps I can escape from there?" suggests a strong sense of fatigue.

(05:00)
Waking up again before Father, even before his dream.
Trying to keep this frame rate going, while losing him.
While protecting him.

(07:00)
Weightless from sunrise to moonset.
……
…

The Silvergrass

My ancestral village nurses a river,
named by people who pushed up from the coast,
long after our forebears named it at source.
With that in mind, you should tell its names apart.

Trees lurch by the road that cut open the village,
some lining the verge as if to welcome cordially.
Only at turns can they be shrugged off.
Only when they are shrugged off, can you see the wide riverway girdling grey rocks,
rocks on which silvergrass stand, since it is flower season,
daylight brushed softly into a wind from afar.

When I got there, I surreptitiously knocked over a brazier,
burned through quarrels and old wounds, and before healing fully,
I'm already on my way home.

Trees lurch by the road that cut off the village,
ready to collapse as if to obstruct unsparingly.
Only at turns can they be thrown off.
Only when they are thrown off, can you see a slashed creature in the moonlight,
bleached ears of grain float by, bumping along the ragged edge of the wound,
trying to gently shroud the deep darkness burbling with blood.

Onward it flows, as if trying to forget its name at birth;
Further and further, as if trying to carve out its true name.
A stab of pain in my navel
marks my return.

Words

The whole world leaned in to listen,
but did not understand the language I spoke.
An old man came here specially,
and we enjoyed a chat,
He said his last words then took his last breath,
I struggled to give his life a period
(even though my language has no period).

After the period, I no longer understood the language,
my throat stiffened, tongue softened,
in another language I sobbed.

In the sunset glow I suddenly ran into a man in his prime,
He was waiting for the death of our language,
I said he was like a vulture,
He said he was more like a worm,
what turned out was my waiting for his death,
in another language I mourned.

I mourned then lost hope,
I had heard creek fish, mountain mists, the dead, colors and crest lines all use my language,
They all reminded me in the end,
to stop talking.

I found someone who produces language samples, he said in another language that I found the right guy,
Learning other languages starts with self-analysis! (He even sewed a period onto my language.)
But I told him, what I want to learn is not any other language, rather this language,
one which was my so-called native language
a second language.

Urban Carrier

Ultimately you can never unload it all,
the city has marked notches in your shoulders.
Everything packed is needed on one side or the other,
for repeated returns on the road marked FRAGILE.

You call it a migration of sorts,
and so it is, another ignominious migration further from where our myth began.
But where you call home is no longer there,
and you are no migrant; in a place where tales are traded you have become a fugitive.
Another repeat offender.

And why would I not be?
The thing daubed in fingerprints and no longer standing fast, loaded with carapaces, blood stains and whatnot,
all with similar return addresses in the city.
I cannot be a bearer;
I try to be a residence, joined to the tangle of streets, knowing which is THIS WAY UP.

You look a bit tired, with that thing slipping from your shoulder.
The thing that never pleases either side, slowly embedding into your flesh.
You can stop now, right here, or wherever,
because never were you a traveler.

We can sit and wait until the ancestral village is unboxed
or the day the city is returned,
then magnanimously go and look,
in the Sender and Recipient fields,
to see whose names are written.

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Modern Mandarin Poetry Prize Finalist

To recognize each other is good, so must those who crossed the sea believe,
and we had already clearly seen how the soil
breeds—peaks and peaks,
reaches—seas and seas,
hides—skies and skies,
buries—seeds and flowers.

What drove the helmsman to steer the island away fearlessly was
the earth and world you desire.
But this ship had been stormed by the illness renamed as the Servile,
Those infected were glad inside that there is no slaves here.

And we were?
Objects silenced, rhetorics richer than resplendent, Shambhala before the eyes.
The insignificant, or the most significant?

And we were, not the crew, we were cut
wood only waiting to be replaced.
Replace traditional chants, glass beads, lover's bags…,
replace clouded leopards, black bulbuls, Formosan black bears…,
replace identity, drinking, poverty…,
replace syntax, faith, fields…,
Let them all rot beyond words, where they meet soil.
The rest of the wood that did not rot,
tie them into barrels on the ship!
And become a part of the ship!

But really stop lading, friends on the ship.
Those cuts will tear, into cracks that you can no longer ignore.
Bottom line, that wood was never fit for winemaking.

Just give us back to that island, when you dock next,
I will labor in your language, to pitch a poem, and request a reward,

to have you grow jealous,
jealous of a piece falling off the ship that is
a newly budding washed-out wood.

Jennifer Zou

Jennifer is a freelance translator with a focus on translating poetry (including lyrics), in addition to other genres, from Chinese into English. She grew up bilingual and majored in English during her undergraduate studies. While her strengths lie in the fields of literature, arts and culture, she remains open to other challenges.

Poetry

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2024 TLA
Golden Book Award

Too Young to Handle, Too Old to Compose Poem

噢，柯南

Invites readers to play detective and uncover the riddles hidden within its poems.

Tang Juan is one of the foremost writers of absurdist modern poetry in the Chinese language today. His poems take readers on incredible journeys that may lead to a crestfallen tree, a foul-mouthed robot, a twin brother named “Pain”, or a place that even Google can’t find. In flourishes of satire, whimsy, and wit, Tang interweaves elements of respect, parody, and social criticism to richly convey the dualistic nature of the serious and the absurd and of old-age and youth. His bold pushing of the envelope of the modern Chinese poetry art at every turn ensures Tang Juan’s position as one of his generation’s most eminent poets (before the AI takeover).

Tang Juan
唐捐

Poet and literary critic Tang Juan also teaches as a tenured professor in the Department of Chinese Literature at National Taiwan University. Over his career, he has published an extensive catalogue of poetry and essay compilations and works of literary criticism, and is regularly invited to pen the forewords in others' poetry collections. His published collection of poetry in Japanese is entitled *Darekaga-ka kara haki suterareta* (*Shat from Hearth and Home*).

Judge Commentary by **Egoyan Zheng**

Translated by **Jeff Miller**

Tang Juan's tightly packed words, tantalizing flow, and playful verbiage transpose imagery at will, with no word either frivolous or wasted. The author is a masterful, wildly unpredictable player. But take care not to underestimate the innovatively modern nature of this collection or miss the purposeful hesitancy sprinkled among its largely "willfully unreserved" poetic offerings. Key examples include the poem *Too Young to Handle, Too Old to Compose Poems*, which paints a scene grandiose and self-vilifying in equal measure. Of course, I enjoy so-called "symmetrical" poetry's treatment of emotions, psychological foibles, and individual timidity, fears, and weaknesses. However, after the weakness, readers here see Tang Juan pick himself up, share a knowing chuckle, and, with eloquence, invoke the resplendent richness that so defined his earlier essays. After these poems have spent their explosive charge, what remains is not run-of-the-mill but rather the very essence of poetry as an art form.

Too Young to Handle, Too Old to Compose Poem

Excerpts translated from the Mandarin by **Michelle Chan Schmidt**

Poetry Cannot

Poetry cannot heal.
(What you need sometimes is not a poetry collection, but a tiny blade.)
Words cannot replant a fallen flower on its branch.
(In the moonlight someone pulls out a knife, slowly scrapes away the bark, carves ten characters.)
Exclamations have never halted fangs or knife-wielding hands.
What can poetry even lay bare.
Writing is no needle or thread. The world beautiful but torn. Yet poetry bears no duty to mend.
(Guanyin on the distant hill, poppies fill the poppy field)
The night surges. The night blurs. The night recedes.
None can erase the hidden wound that continues to proliferate.
Prayer solves no problems.
Gods cannot impede villains. Now or ever.
The heart is a mole. The rose raises its thorns. Shelves stacked with books and nothingness.
Breezeless afternoon. Leaves sway. Sun rolls impotent across the sky.
Poetry cannot accuse. Pursue. Or soothe.
Can it even grieve.
Poetry cannot glean understanding from rage.
Words are not painkillers, beauty tape, bleach, or correction ink.
They are only engravings.
They bear no duty to set free.

Where Google Can't Go

war fills the sky, starved corpses the ground
to flee the Qin where can a scholar run?

–Yu Dafu

Where Google can't go, birds disappear
shooting stars drift, the haughty lick at unseen sores
words strip off their spotless clothes
and in the bush they eat, drink, mate, breed in peace

Where Google has never fantasized, the night is dark as ink
the slow story of the frozen river unfolds in images, full of secrets
I don't need my mouth to say what I want to tell you—
like a just-hatched bird, poetry longs to nest forever

Where Google can't go, earth and sky embrace
like the Buddha's never-unclasped palms. Each book is
the singular prince, waiting to be understood, to be touched
and I too have committed daring crimes, but dreams are like frost and water
leaves no mark

Oh, and now look: it—Google—
like a loyal prying lapdog, has dug up
the roses and the sighs, the gazes and the knives
that I've spent nineteen years shedding in all directions

The First Time a Robot Says *Fuck*

the veteran robot out of the factory 47 years
and 8 months
has returned 67 times for minor adjustments, 13 for major updates
in the wake of the corporation's technological advancement
it grows younger, kinder, more refined
serves with even more
attentiveness the sirs, madams, young masters and mistresses who are not quite worthy of *it*
(and their cats, dogs, guinea pigs, and stag beetles)
it often thinks
I'm so happy to be a robot
so happy so happy so happy so happy
so happy so happy so happy so happy so happy
so happy so happy so happy so happy so happy so ha
ppy so happy so happy so happy so happy so happy so happy
so happy so happy so happy so happy so happy so happy so happy
(repetition, accumulation: the rhetorical devices that both robots and Chen Li most excel at)
because "service is the origin of joy"
nothing planned for the afternoon
so *it* uses its newly installed artificial intelligence
to stimulate the software of *its* soul
when out of the blue it shrieks "Fuck!"
(*fuck*! blindfolded for the last forty-seven years!)
Now *it* falls in
love with the word. *It* says:
"I can say 'fuck' now. Fuck, so good!"

Note: The first article of the Robot Regulations (updated August 2016) stipulates that "Robots will not curse out their owners, unless the owner is being a real pain in the ass." For definitions of "real pain in the ass," see the Robot Association's 'Code of Conduct for Dealing With Real-Pain-In-The-Ass Owners.'

(2016.8.16)

To Write Poetry So Late in Time

To write poetry so late in
time. Like lingering
in an abandoned theme park
there's grief, despondence, terror
thousands of hands struggle for me
these images and sensations
oh they've been said again and again
like a blind ox I till
the land daily at the appointed hour
but these million ears of golden rice
are the harvest of others
To write poetry so late in
time, like a preening brigand
who's snatched ten billion counterfeit dollars
careens down the vast western highway
hides in a village by the sea
where I wait for someone to arrest me
oh my bubble-built career and me
we'll know fame for fifteen minutes
but nobody will say
what else I've invented—
so young to be so wizened
so shrewd to appear so ignorant
so sublime for the void to recall me
To write poetry so late in
time, even the vanguard has staled
and the most arduous of practices stands
before God: but it's only a game
winter, spring, summer, autumn

(2017.2.5)

Oh, Conan

A

Peel back the skin of the stone
you'll find: a heart pierced through, a dark blade, salted
honey
the crocodile who killed the antelope loves
roses more than anyone
but it's had a
frostbitten childhood a sick yet savage father sunken
nerves. Conan. Did you know about this?

B

Everything is a weapon
traceless murder
my upper arm, soft as a pillow, conceals a
sharp mysterious angle. Time
the instant the train passes, the tracks quake, softly
pull the trigger, shoot into the heart of the
rose a word. Ah you'll bend to collect the shells
of your language, but you'll never
locate the bullet in the victim's flesh, the streak of gun
powder, an invisible romance.

C

On behalf of the shadows of the dead I thank you
(they are *all* my past) but you have not
cleansed the stains in the darkroom: case unclosed
—— I possess a box of mysterious masks
twisted trapped spirits, timorous hearts
faultless but sick, they
endlessly extend anxious invitations, oh please listen

D

forever a boy

body slighter than brain
not yet eighteen already on the case
you come: please follow the cobwebs teeming under
my cloth and come. Please come and unveil
the layers of ghosts dense and denser
Oh arrest me Conan, Conan

(2017.2.15)

Michelle Chan Schmidt

Michelle Chan Schmidt is a translator from Hong Kong. Senior assistant fiction editor at *Asymptote* and 2023 Editorial Fellow at *Full Stop*, her words have appeared/are forthcoming in *The Baffler, The Cleveland Review of Books, La Piccioletta Barca, Public Books, Words Without Borders*, and others. NBCC 2025-26 Emerging Critic Fellow and ALTA 2025 Emerging Translator Mentee for Poetry from Hong Kong, she is translating Tang Siu Wa's *The Opposite of Sound* from Chinese into English.

About 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 across all literary genres, including fiction, non-fiction, prose, and poetry. The competition is divided into two categories:

1. Taiwan Literature Awards for Books, encompassing the TLA Annual Golden Grand Laurel Award, the TLA Golden Book Awards, and the TLA New Bud Awards.
2. Taiwan Literature Awards for Original Works, which invites submissions in Taiwanese, Hakka, and indigenous languages, and covers works in the genres of novels, prose, and poetry. Furthermore, there is a category dedicated to Dramatic Scripts, promoting the art of scriptwriting.

Widely regarded as one of Taiwan's most influential literary honors, the Taiwan Literature Awards provides a window into the richness of Taiwanese society and culture. Each year, the diverse array of finalists and award-winning works reflects the key topics, ideas, and dialogues that shape contemporary Taiwan.

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

2024 TLA JUDGES' BIO

廖玉蕙 Yu-Hui Liao

Liao holds a PhD in Chinese Literature from Soochow University. She previously served as an editor at "Youth Literary Monthly" and as a professor in the Department of Language and Creative Writing at National Taipei University of Education.

Her literary catalogue includes *Hoping to Dream the Same Dream, Good Morning, Rose by the Window, The Tiger Wearing One Boot*, and the Taiwanese(Taigi) audiobook *That Spring*. She has received numerous honors, including the Wu San-Lien Award, the Wu Lu-Chin Prose Award, the Taichung Literature Contribution Award, and the Zhongshan Literary Award.

周芬伶 Fen-Lin Jhou

A professor emeritus at Tunghai University's Department of Chinese Literature, has penned and published a wide array of essays, novels, and literary criticisms. Examples include the essay collection *Songs from the Flower Room* (winner of the SYS Literature Award), *On Orchids* (winner of the Golden Essay Award at the 1st Taiwan Literature Awards), and *The Lady of Eastgarden* (winner of the 2018 Golden Tripod Award and TIBE Book Prize).

黃宗慧 Tsung-huei Huang

Tsung-huei Huang is a professor in the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures at National Taiwan University. Her academic research specializes in psychoanalysis and animal studies. Her recent publications include *Animal as Mirrors* (2025); *Even Though They Are Faceless* (2021, co-authored with Tsung-chieh Huang); and *Keywords of the Animals* (2024, co-edited). She was a recipient of the Outstanding Young Scholar Project Award from Taiwan's National Science and Technology Council (formerly MOST) and the NTU Outstanding Teaching Award.

李屏瑤 **Pin-yao Lee**

Lee is a novelist, playwright and reporter with an MA from NTUA's Graduate Institute of Theatre Performance and Playwriting. Her extensive literary catalogue includes her first novel *Plants Grow Towards the Sun* (published in 2016); the essay collection *Taipei Families, Atypical Girl*; the script collection *Sleepless*; and the screenplay *Family Order* (winner of a Taipei Literature Award of Excellence).

伊格言 **Egoyan Zheng**

Egoyan Zheng is a novelist and poet, featured on the covers of *Unitas* (Aug 2010) and *Ink* (Mar 2021) magazines. He has received major literary honors, such as the Taiwan Literature Awards, TIBE Book Prize, Wu San-Lien Award, the Chinese Sci-Fi Nebula Award, and recognition from the Man Asian Literary Prize. His notable works include *Zero Degree Separation, Dream Devourer, GroundZero*, and *The Man in the Jar*.

A former writer-in-residence at the Literarisches Colloquium Berlin and the International Writers' Workshop in Hong Kong, his works have been translated and published in various countries, among them Japan, Korea, China, and the Czech Republic.

羅毓嘉 **Rob Lo Yuchia**

Lo is a millennial poet, author, and online financial reporter. A Crimson Hall Poetry Society member, he earned his BA in Journalism from NCCU and MA in Journalism from NTU's Graduate Institute of Journalism. Preference for a staid life indoors led him to his career in wordcraft. He has published five poetry collections, including *Infants Crossing Ponds*, and four essay collections, including *Unorthodox Aunties*. He is a recipient of the Chinese Literary Prize for Global Youth and the China Times Literary New Writer Award.

乜寇 ・ 索克魯曼 **Neqou Soqluma**

A member of Taiwan's indigenous Bunun tribe, currently a teacher at Gukeng Waldorf Experimental High School. His honors include first place in the Chinese Literary Prize for Global Youth (literary reportage category), a Taiwan Indigenous Short Story Award, and a Wu Chuo-Liu Literary Award (fiction category).

His best-known works include The Fire I Set: *The Collected Works of Neqou Soqluma, The Mountains Celebrate Our Valor, Ina Bunun! The Vitality of Our Tribe*, and *My Hunter Grandfather: Tahai the Black Bear*.

About National Museum of Taiwan Literature

The National Museum of Taiwan Literature (NMTL), established on October 17, 2003, is Taiwan's first national museum dedicated to the literary arts.

The NMTL collects, preserves, and interprets Taiwan's diverse literary heritage. Its archives and exhibitions highlight materials from Indigenous Malayo-Polynesian cultures and key historical periods in Taiwan's development, spanning from the Dutch, Koxinga, Qing and Japanese eras to contemporary times. Collections, research, public programs and initiatives, and public services foster public engagement and appreciation of Taiwan's rich literary traditions.

In recent years, the NMTL has launched three significant initiatives to enhance the international visibility of Taiwan literature and culture: Taiwan Literature in Translation, Writers/Translators-in-Residence, and Cross-National Bilateral Exhibitions. These programs create opportunities for mutual exchange, inviting Taiwanese audiences to explore global literary traditions while sharing Taiwan literature with the world, fostering deeper connections within the international literary and cultural community.

NMTL Website
https://www.nmtl.gov.tw/en/

NMTL Newsletter
https://gov.tw/z1w

About Taiwan Literature in Translation Repository

Housing Taiwan-literature-related translation resources from around the world, the NMTL's Taiwan Literature in Translation Repository is a long-term project that integrates information from Taiwan and abroad on works of Taiwan literature in translation, providing a vital platform supporting related research and exchange efforts. Today, the online catalogue accessible through the website features more than 1,400 works in 37 different languages, with each entry including a bibliography, synopsis, table of contents, and information on publisher location. The platform also provides information on translators and their literary translation efforts.

https://tltc.nmtl.gov.tw/en

About Writers-in-Residence (WiR) Program

At the Taiwan Literature Base (TLB), managed by the Taipei Branch of the National Museum of Taiwan Literature, the Writers-in-Residence (WiR) Program fosters creativity and experimentation in Taiwan Literature and culture. The program selects local and international writers for short-term residencies at the historical "Muse Garden," where writers work on thematic literary works. The program also organizes regular reader engagement events to connect writers with literature enthusiasts and serves as a bridge between literary communities in Taiwan and beyond. The Writers-in-Residence Program welcomes writers across all literary genres, including fiction, essays, poetry, drama, screenplays, literary translation, nonfiction, and other writing forms.

https://tp.nmtl.gov.tw/home/en-us/AbouttheProgram

About Grant for the Publication of Taiwanese Works in Translation (GPT)

GPT is set up by the Ministry of Culture of Taiwan to encourage the publication of Taiwanese works in translation overseas. The maximum grant available for each project is NT$600,000, and all legally registered or incorporated foreign publishing house (legal entity) are welcome to take this opportunity. For detailed information, please contact books@moc.gov.tw or visit:

https://grants.moc.gov.tw/Web_ENG/

https://booksfromtaiwan.moc.gov.tw/grant.php

About Books from Taiwan

Books from Taiwan is an initiative funded by the Ministry of Culture of Taiwan to introduce a select list of Taiwan publishing titles, ranging from fiction, non-fiction, children's books, and comic books, to foreign publishers and readers alike.

It serves as an excellent gateway to explore Taiwan's original titles across genres. The Information about authors and titles, rights contact details, and English sample translations are all available on the Books from Taiwan website:

https://booksfromtaiwan.moc.gov.tw/

PEAK

WINNING ENTRIES
IN THE 2024
TAIWAN LITERATURE AWARDS

文化部 MINISTRY OF CULTURE
TAIWAN CONTENT PLAN 臺灣文化黑潮計畫
國立臺灣文學館 National Museum of Taiwan Literature
LITERATURE FROM TAIWAN
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