

18×2 BEYOND YOUTHFUL DAYS

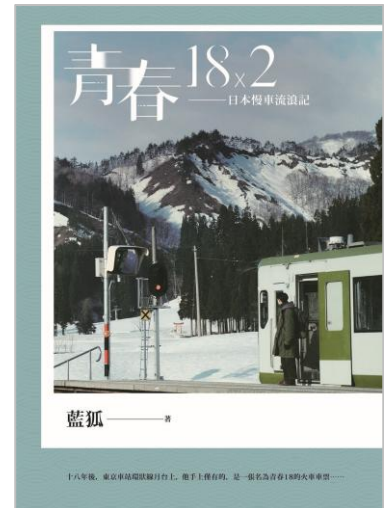
青春18×2： 日本慢車流浪記

* A parallel film adaptation was released in 2024

A creatively blocked Taiwanese musician takes advantage of Japan's "Youthful 18" special fare train ticket to revisit youthful memories. Traveling by rail with no set destination, he regains the courage to dream as he searches for a Japanese girl he knew at eighteen but subsequently lost contact with.

In 2014, author Jimmy Lai published a travelogue on a widely read Taiwanese backpacker travel website. The story's plot twists and heartwarming elements generated lots of discussion, which in 2024 led to the release of a critically acclaimed Taiwanese-Japanese film adaptation, *18x2 Beyond Youthful Days*. Around this same time, Lai republished his travelogue as a novel. Despite some differences of plot and character, the themes and main story in all of the versions are largely the same, although the addition of letters and diary entries in the novel provides more detailed descriptions and psychological insights.

Jimmy, the novel's protagonist and author's namesake, is a 36-year-old composer experiencing creative block. In the midst of agonizing uncertainty, he remembers Ami, the Japanese backpacker he met at age eighteen in his hometown. On impulse, he travels to Japan to see where Ami grew up. Arriving without a plan, Jimmy shoulders the big backpack obtained in a swap with a stranger, buys a "Youthful 18" Japan Rail ticket (sold only at special times throughout the year), and embarks on a five-day railway trip. As scenery drifts past his train window, Jimmy looks back on the changes the years have brought and begins a journey of self-exploration. Ami's hometown draws ever



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closer, but the question remains: will he and Ami be able to bridge a gap of eighteen years and meet again?

Diary entries from the year Jimmy was eighteen and Ami's letters, sent after she departed Taiwan, punctuate a roundabout journey full of unexpected twists. As Jimmy's story shifts back and forth between landscape and memory, his thoughts reflect a young heart's first stirrings, struggles, and regrets. Jimmy's experience is also a gentle reminder: even if you can never be eighteen again, you can still rediscover your eighteen-year-old self deep inside you.

Jimmy Lai 藍狐

Jimmy Lai, a former video game producer and television scriptwriter, is a Taiwanese writer who currently lives in Colorado, USA. The author of nine books published in the 2000s, he is known for his frank and heartfelt writing style. *18x2 Beyond Youthful Days* is his first novel to be published after a seventeen-year writing hiatus.