

The Town with the Papaya Tree

A Full English translation is available.

植有木瓜樹的小鎮

Author: Ruan Guang-Min **Illustrator:** Ruan Guang-Min **Publisher:** Avanguard

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162 pages | 19 x 26 cm **Volume:** 1

Adaptation: Based on a novel

BFT2.0 Translator: Lin King

This beautifully illustrated graphic novel reimagines *The Town with the Papaya Tree* by Taiwanese author Long Ying Zong, written during the period of Japanese rule. The story follows Chen Yu-San, a young man full of ideals who arrives in a small town to work as a bank accounting assistant. Dreaming of success through study and hard work, he soon finds his ambitions crushed. The town slowly consumes his hopes, and despite relentless effort, he cannot escape the weight of colonial oppression and poverty. As the futility of his striving takes hold, his spirit unravels, leading him into despair and ruin.



Comic Artist Ruan Guang-Min

Acclaimed illustrator and author Ruan Guang-Min is known for his deep concern with the lives of ordinary people in Taiwan. Through his spare, unadorned drawings, he captures the values and outlook on life passed down from one generation to the next.

Ruan's works include *Dong Hua Chun Barbershop* and *Yong-Jiu Grocery Store*, both of which were adapted into television series; *Heaven Restaurant*, in three volumes; *King-tshat, Cop or Robber?*, in two volumes; and *Yong-Jiu Grocery Store*, in five volumes. He also turned the stage play *Human Conditions*, as well as the novel *The Illusionist on the Skywalk*, into graphic novels. Ruan has received numerous honors, including the 8th and 11th Golden Comic Awards and the Silver Prize at the 14th Japan International Manga Award.

Lifting the Curtain on a Literary Town of Papaya Trees: A Note from the Illustrator, Author, and Adaptor Ruan Guang-min

by Ruan Guang-Min

(originally published on Commonwealth Magazine from Acropolis Publishing)

What kind of writer was Long Ying-Zong? His prose was rich and vivid, like painting with words. Landscapes, expressions, clothing, buildings, even the play of light—he rendered them with intricate detail, as if his pen were dipped in paint. Native plants such as hibiscus, papaya trees, and banyans anchor his work in Taiwan’s seasons and climate, while even shifts in skin tone reflect the changing light and atmosphere.

Whether townsfolk, women, or intellectuals, Long’s characters are imbued with inner lives, each shaped by subtle

details that suggest their personalities. They feel real—like people you might know. And yet, behind all the beauty of his language, there’s always a subtle sadness, melancholy, and quiet lament over human weakness.

To adapt his work is to give up a part of my own soul and make space for him. During the creative process, I had to dialogue not only with the author but with the characters—interpreting their logic and emotional undercurrents. I believe characters, though created by writers, eventually develop their own thoughts,

responding to the story’s unfolding in their own way.

Long Ying-Zong, plagued by a stutter, physical frailty, and poverty from a young age, was a quiet observer. But in that silence, he became highly sensitive to others’ emotions, with a rich imagination that allowed him to craft vibrant literary worlds. Born during Japan’s colonial rule of Taiwan, he was well-educated but faced systemic discrimination. Despite his diligence, he was denied equal opportunities at work, and hindered in his personal and literary pursuits.

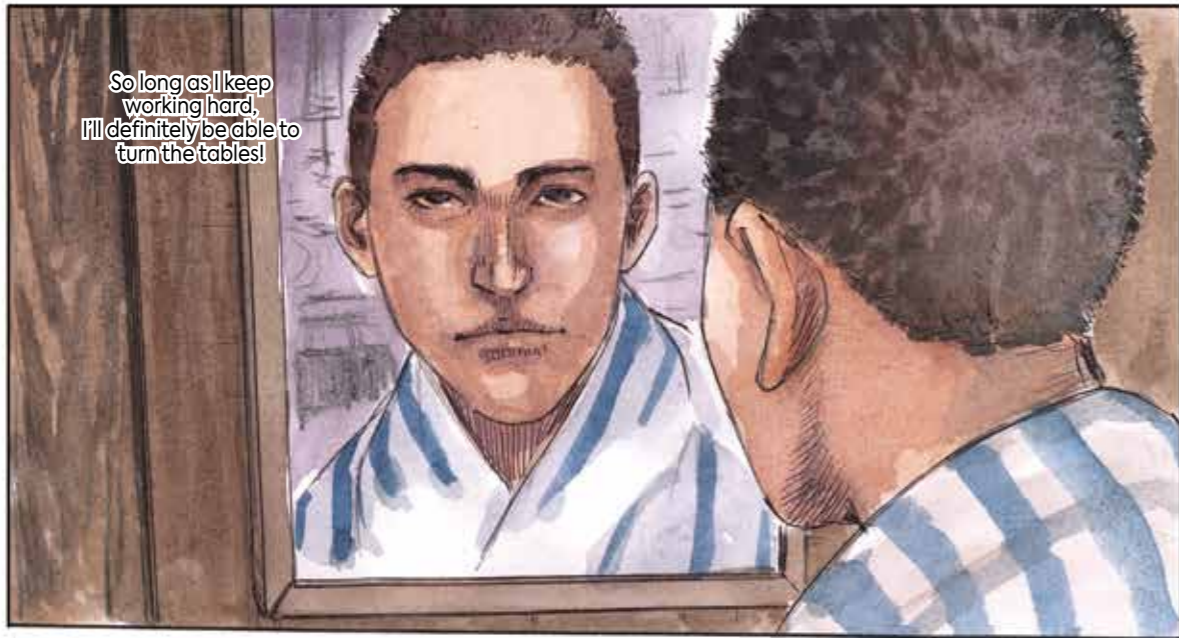
It’s common for writers to reflect on their own lives in their work. Long, once a poor student devoted to the arts, later became a bank clerk struggling to survive—much like Chen Yu-San, the protagonist of *The Town with the Papaya Tree*. Chen arrives in a small town full of ideals but slowly sees the harsh realities of society. Through this character, we witness the intellectual’s helplessness under colonialism and economic hardship—an

experience still painfully resonant today.

In adapting this work, I looked for themes that still speak to us. In *The Town with Papaya Tree*, the male characters are largely lost, passive, and disillusioned, while the women—though trapped in arranged marriages—burn like morning light through darkness. Long’s female characters offer redemption, not just romance. In this adaptation, I widened the emotional arc between Chen and Lin, allowing their mutual appreciation to unfold and grow into love.

Although Chen ultimately decays alongside the papaya tree. But like a modern Don Quixote, his sorrow and frustration has offered comfort to countless restless souls. I believe Long Ying-Zong used literature to pour his sorrow and frustration on the page—and in doing so, offered solace to countless restless, searching souls.

This essay has been edited for the purposes of this booklet.



At this rate, I can forget about realizing my dream—I might not even achieve my goals.



Such was my fate from the day I was born to a poor Islander family.



That said, many of the great men in the biographies I read also came from humble origins...



That's right...





If I can stand out as exceptional among my peers, the Japanese are sure to recognize my potential. Then, maybe...



Maybe, now that marriage between Islanders and the Japanese has been legalized, I might even catch a Japanese girl's eye.



I must continue working toward the goal I've set for myself!



Ba, get up! You can't sleep here...

As for my dream...



Definitely!



I can't let father and mother's nurturing and hopes go to waste.



