

# Chio-Tian Young Beats

A Full English translation is available.

九天少年

**Comic Artist:** Ruan Guang-Min **Scriptwriter:** Ming-Lun Wu

**Original Concept:** Chio-Tian Folk Drums & Art Troupe **Publisher:** Dyna Books

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**BFT2.0 Translator:** Michael Fahey

Award-winning Ruan Guang-Min's *Chio-Tian Young Beats* draws on the real Chio-Tian Folk Drums & Arts Troupe, known for taking in youths rejected by school or society. Through strict training in drumming, dance, and ritual performance, members find discipline, belonging, and purpose.

Hao-Nan, a rebellious teen, moves into the troupe's dormitory when his beloved grandmother is hospitalized. Thit-Hiong, meanwhile, turns to violence. Like many who join, both boys carry the weight of hardship and alienation. At first guarded and distant, these two teenagers slowly build trust through rhythm, routine, and shared struggle.

Set against the sweat and thunder of practice on Dadu Mountain in Taichung, their gradual transformation shows that healing doesn't require miracles—just a place to belong. With sincerity and nuance, acclaimed comic artist Ruan Guang-Min delivers a deeply Taiwanese coming-of-age story, pulsing with grit, emotion, and hope.



## 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 adapted 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.

# Life's Turning Point in the Beat of Drums: Reading Ruan Guang-Min's *Chio-Tian Young Beats*

by Wen-Chien Hsu

In Taiwan, the word *zhentou* (temple parade troupes) often brings to mind either the spectacle of temple festivals or news of gang violence. This binary view links “zhentou” with “school dropouts,” as if joining a troupe means deviating from the “right path.” But the truth is more complex. While some troupes intersect with gangs, they also offer what families, schools, and society often fail to provide. For some youths, *zhentou* is a last refuge.

Rooted in Taiwanese folk religion, temples are the heart of spiritual and communal life. Temple festivals are major events, and *zhentou* functions as both ritual and grassroots street performance.

Like a localized version of Brazil's Carnival, *zhentou* celebrates the divine with thunderous drums, vibrant costumes, and traditional artistry. It unites communities and passes on culture.

Ruan Guang-Min's *Chio-Tian Young Beats* draws from the real Chio-Tian Folk Drums & Arts Troupe, known for taking in youths rejected by school or society. Through strict training, members learn drumming, dance, and ritual performance. In the comic, drumming takes center stage—it becomes life's heartbeat, a way for marginalized youth to say: “I am still here.”

To show the diverse paths leading to *zhentou*, Ruan creates two characters:

Hao-Nan, who leaves school to support his grandmother, and Thit-Hiong, who turns to violence after family breakdown. Their stories reflect why many join troupes—economic hardship, social alienation, or having nowhere else to go.

At first, both boys are guarded and distant. But through shared rhythm and routine, they slowly rebuild trust. They learn to keep time—not just musically, but with others—and begin to heal. Their transformation is gradual, reminding us that change doesn't need miracles, just a place to breathe.

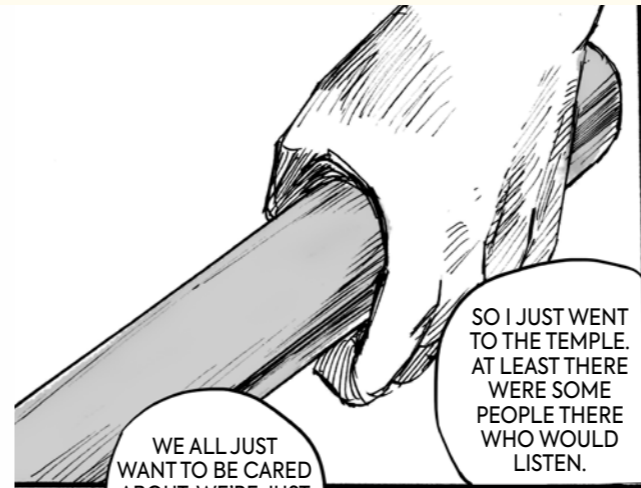
Later, Ruan introduces the Troupe Leader, a tough but caring figure. Aware of society's continued prejudice and limited resources, he encourages members to return to school. It's a bittersweet choice—some must leave the troupe—but it opens the door to new possibilities. The kids are no longer just “zhentou troublemakers”; they're

individuals capable of change.

*Chio-Tian Young Beats* is not a dramatic underdog tale, but a nuanced, grounded story. It doesn't romanticize hardship, but honors resilience. Its power lies in its familiarity: a neighborhood boy, a classmate who disappeared. Through the steady pulse of drums, Ruan brings such forgotten lives back into view.

In the end, the comic reminds us: even in isolation, connection is possible—through drums, dance, or simple empathy. The next step doesn't have to be a fall. It can be a beginning.

*Wen-Chien Hsu possesses a free-spirited soul. She has worked at LGBTQ+ organizations, the 113 Domestic Violence Hotline, and works as an editor of Books from Taiwan 2.0. She is dedicated to bringing Taiwanese comics and picture books to a global audience.*



WE ALL JUST WANT TO BE CARED ABOUT. WE'RE JUST LOOKING FOR SELF-RESPECT AND RECOGNITION.

SO I JUST WENT TO THE TEMPLE. AT LEAST THERE WERE SOME PEOPLE THERE WHO WOULD LISTEN.



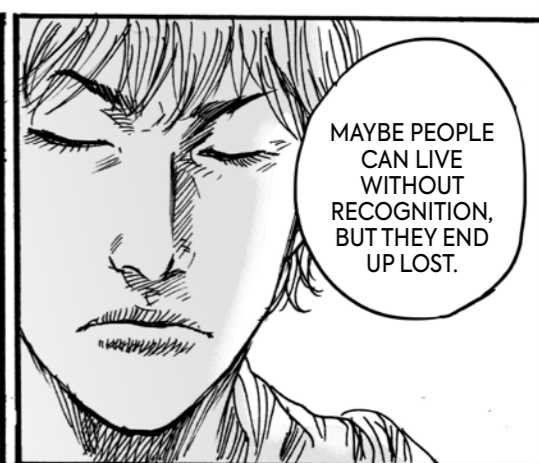
TAKE ME AS AN EXAMPLE.

I WAS A TERRIBLE STUDENT. I WAS ALWAYS SINGLED OUT AT SCHOOL. I NEVER GOT ANY PRAISE.

IT WAS ALWAYS THE SAME. NO ONE EVER HELPED ME WORK OUT THE PROBLEMS I HAD AT HOME OR INSIDE ME. IT WAS AS IF KIDS WHO WEREN'T GOOD AT SCHOOL COULDN'T GET HURT.



THE REASON MY TEMPLE TROUPE EXISTS IS TO GIVE LOST PEOPLE A PLACE WHERE THEY WILL BE ACCEPTED.



MAYBE PEOPLE CAN LIVE WITHOUT RECOGNITION, BUT THEY END UP LOST.



BE THAT AS IT MAY, LOST PEOPLE SHOULD NOT BE LABELED 'BAD'.



AND THEIR HARD  
WORK RESULTS IN  
PERFORMANCES  
THAT CAN CHANGE  
OLD SOCIAL  
PREJUDICES!!

BOOM!



AT OUR TEMPLE,  
THEY HAVE  
PLENTY OF TIME  
TO EXPLORE.

TIME TO BE WITH  
A GROUP OF PEOPLE  
WHO ENCOURAGE  
ONE ANOTHER.

TIME TO TAKE  
A GOOD LONG LOOK  
AT THEMSELVES.

HUFF!

HUFF!

HUFF!

HUFF!

