



The Lonely Genius: Huang Tu-Shui

A Full English translation is available.

寂寞的天才——黃土水

Author: Huang Yu-chin **Illustrator:** Huang Yu-chin **Publisher:** Locus Publishing

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Praised as “the genius who lit the dawn of modern art in Taiwan,” Huang Tu-shui (1895–1930) left behind iconic sculptures such as *Sweet Dew*, *Girl*, and *Buffalo Herd*. His works, rich with local imagery—indigenous figures, water buffalo, Formosan sika deer, and Mikado pheasants—helped shape a distinctly Taiwanese visual identity on the global stage. He rose to fame in 1920, when he was the first Taiwanese artist to earn recognition at Japan’s prestigious Imperial Art Exhibition (Teikoku Bijutsu Tenrankai).

Once forgotten for nearly six decades, Huang’s legacy has reemerged through major exhibitions and the dramatic rediscovery of his sculpture *Sweet Dew*, moving audiences to tears. This beautifully illustrated picture book, selected for the 2025 Bologna Ragazzi Award Workshop (BRAW), brings his story to life for readers of all ages—blending art and narrative to celebrate an artist whose spirit endures through his work.



Author **Huang Yu-chin**

Huang Yu-Chin studied film and has been a television scriptwriter since 1986. Known for his whimsical imagination and free-spirited drawing style, he began creating picture books in 1988. In 1996, he co-founded the picture book creation group “Picture Book Club,” where he also served as its captain. In 2015, he played a key role in launching *Big Bad Wolf*, Taiwan’s first picture book magazine. His works are rich and diverse, earning numerous awards, including selection for the Bologna Illustration Award in Italy in 2016. Notable publications include the travelogue *Illustrated Journey of Small Things* and picture books such as *Here Is My Home* and *Magical Cinema*.

Never Truly Alone: On Huang Yu-Chin's *The Lonely Genius: Huang Tu-Shui*

by Pan Chia-Hsin
(originally published on OKAPI)

In 1920, an unknown sculptor from Monga, Taiwan rose to fame when his sculpture *The Barbarian Boy* was selected for Japan's prestigious Imperial Art Exhibition (Teikoku Bijutsu Tenrankai). For the first time, a Taiwanese artist had earned recognition on the cultural stage of the colonial empire. This moment stirred pride across Taiwan.

A century later, in 2024, Huang Yu-Chin published a picture book titled *The Lonely Genius: Huang Tu-Shui*. Using collage-style illustrations and a detached narrator's voice, the book revisits Huang's life and legacy, transforming his story into a visually rich and emotionally resonant tale for modern readers.

Born in the summer of 1895—the same year the Treaty of Shimonoseki transferred Taiwan to Japanese rule—Huang Tu-Shui came of age during Taiwan's modernization under colonialism. He received a Westernized education, graduating from the National Language Study Institute with plans to become a teacher. But his upbringing in the wood-carving streets of Monga, the oldest district in Taipei, had nurtured an exceptional talent. This led to a rare opportunity to study art in Tokyo, where he would eventually become a trailblazing sculptor.

But tragically, Huang died young at 36, and after his passing, his works

were scattered and neglected. *The Lonely Genius* distinguishes itself from typical biographies by extending its timeline far beyond the artist's short life. It tells of the quiet efforts made by others to protect his legacy over the course of a century.

During the Japanese colonial era, Taiwanese students like Huang were often discriminated against, both in school and in society. Educational materials, such as the *Shushin* moral curriculum, were designed to mold Taiwanese identity into loyalty to the emperor. Opportunities for higher education and employment were limited, compelling talented individuals like Huang to pursue studies in Japan—the colonial “mainland.”

Huang arrived in Tokyo in 1915, facing alienation even from fellow Taiwanese students. But instead of socializing, he devoted himself obsessively to sculpture. From humble beginnings, he grew into a master, winning multiple accolades at the Imperial Art Exhibitions—including a major recognition in 1921 for his marble sculpture *Water of Immortality*.

His success inspired generations of Taiwanese artists, including Chen Cheng-po, Liao Chi-chun, and Lee Mei-shu, signaling a new era in Taiwanese art. Huang's works often centered on local imagery—indigenous figures, water buffalo, Formosan sika deer, and Mikado pheasants. These weren't just subjects that appealed to colonial curiosity; they were the beginnings of a visual identity

for Taiwan on the global stage. Through his sculptures, Taiwan began to speak for itself.

The book ends poignantly with the return of *Water of Immortality*, lost for a century and restored in 2021. In 2024, it was exhibited once more in Tokyo, at the very school where Huang studied. Like something from a Gabriel García Márquez novel, the journey of his art is filled with magic and sorrow—a shared fate of the colonized. Though the man is gone, his works live on.

As Huang once said, “There is only one way to never truly die—spiritual immortality. As long as my sweat-born works survive, I shall live.”

If his spirit could see this book, he would no longer feel alone.

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

Born in 1984, Pan Chia-Hsin graduated from the Department of Fine Arts at National Taiwan Normal University. An award-winning poet, she has published eight poetry collections, including Sweet Note and The Mute Beast, as well as essays like A Playful Inventory. She also edited the anthology Mom +1 and authored the art book An Artist's One-Day Kitchen. Her illustration works include Crab in the Night and The Tiger Auntie.



The artworks Huang Tu-Shui dedicated to the royal family allowed them to see Formosan Mikado pheasants, sika deer, Formosan macaques and buffaloes.

When Huang Tu-Shui returned to Taiwan to work on his artworks,
he even raised buffaloes and egrets as references.



Unexpectedly, the plaster statue he created
was so lifelike that a buffalo nearly destroyed it.



All of his efforts were not in vain.
His sculpture of a water buffalo,
In the Country, was selected for
the Imperial Exhibition,
marking Huang Tu-Shui's fourth honor.
Another piece, *On the Way Home*,
was commissioned by Taipei Prefecture
as a gift for Emperor Showa's coronation.

