



A Lever Scale

一桿秤仔

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

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Award: 2024 The 15th Golden Comic Awards, Comic of the year & GCA Grand Prize

BFT2.0 Translator: Michael Fahey

Renowned comic artist Ruan Guang-Min draws inspiration from the classic short story "A Lever Scale," written by Lai Ho, one of Taiwan's most important literary figures. Known as the "Father of Modern Taiwan Literature," Lai Ho was a champion for the rights of Taiwanese people under Japanese rule and was repeatedly imprisoned for his activism.

Set during Taiwan's colonial period under Japan, the story recounts the tragic event of a vegetable vendor killing a policeman. Amidst the sweeping changes of the time, a humble and loving couple strive to find their own small happiness.

Celebrated for his rich, emotional depictions of everyday life, Ruan masterfully captures both the warmth and cruelty of the world with his brilliant and sensitive brushstrokes.



Lai Ho

Enduring imprisonment twice for his activism, Lai Ho was actively involved in social and cultural movements. He gained literary fame through his Chinese poetry and made significant contributions to Taiwan's new literature. He played a pioneering role in the Taiwan *Minbao* newspaper, chairing the literary section and mentoring emerging writers. He also co-founded the *Nan Yin* (Voice of the South) magazine, advocating for the use of the Taiwanese language in writing. Revered as the "Father of Taiwan's New Literature," Lai Ho graduated from the Taiwan Governor-General's Medical School and established Lai Ho Hospital in Changhua, his hometown.



Ruan Guang-Min

Ruan Guang-Min is a Taiwanese comic artist known for combining humor, empathy, and sensitivity to portray family dynamics, parent-child relationships, and human conflict. He excels at capturing the authentic grassroots culture and sentiments of Taiwan. Ruan has received numerous accolades for his work, including dual awards at the 8th Golden Comic Awards for "Youth Comic Award" and "Comic of the Year," as well as awards at the 11th Golden Comic Awards. He won the Silver Award at the 14th Japan International Manga Awards. In 2002, *Dong-Hua-Chun Barber Shop* was adapted into a TV drama, followed by the adaptation of *Yong-Jiu Grocery Store* in 2019.

Cross-Border Dialogue Between Comic Artist Ruan Guang-min and Scholar Chen Wan-yi: The Timelessness of Lai Ho's "A Lever Scale" and Its Contemporary Significance

The Lai Ho Foundation is an organization dedicated to preserving Lai Ho's legacy. Known as the "Father of Modern Taiwan Literature," Lai Ho was a champion for the rights of Taiwanese people under Japanese colonial rule. He endured imprisonment twice for his activism.

Professor Chen Wan-yi: The mission of the Lai Ho Foundation is threefold. First, it upholds Lai Ho's humanitarian spirit. Second, it stands on the side of the weak. Third, it nurtures passion for social protest.

These three principles capture the spirit of Ruan Guang-min's adaptation *A Lever Scale*. Its reference to *Crainquebille*,

written by the Nobel Prize-winning French novelist Anatole France, is telling. *Crainquebille* depicts how the police oppress the weak. Upon reading Anatole France, you must have realized that the abuse of power is not unique to Taiwan but is an issue that crosses all borders.

Ruan Guang-min: Lai Ho's writing resonates deeply with me. He tells the story of how small, ordinary people under Japanese colonial rule struggle. The emotions I experience while reading transcend differences in time, clothing, and space. It's worth noting that the issue of oppression isn't limited to colonizers and the colonized, but more broadly to

those with power and those without. In the modern era, those with power should not oppress the vulnerable but instead should seek to understand.

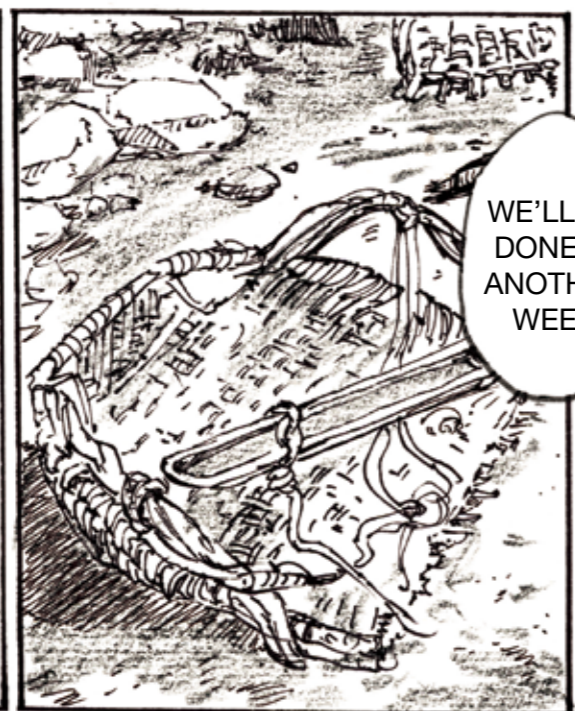
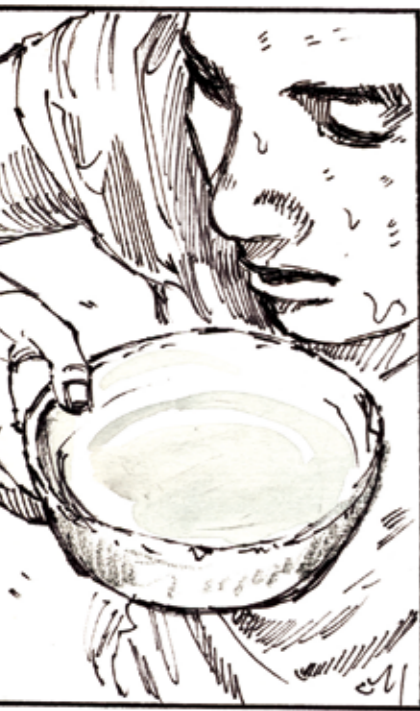
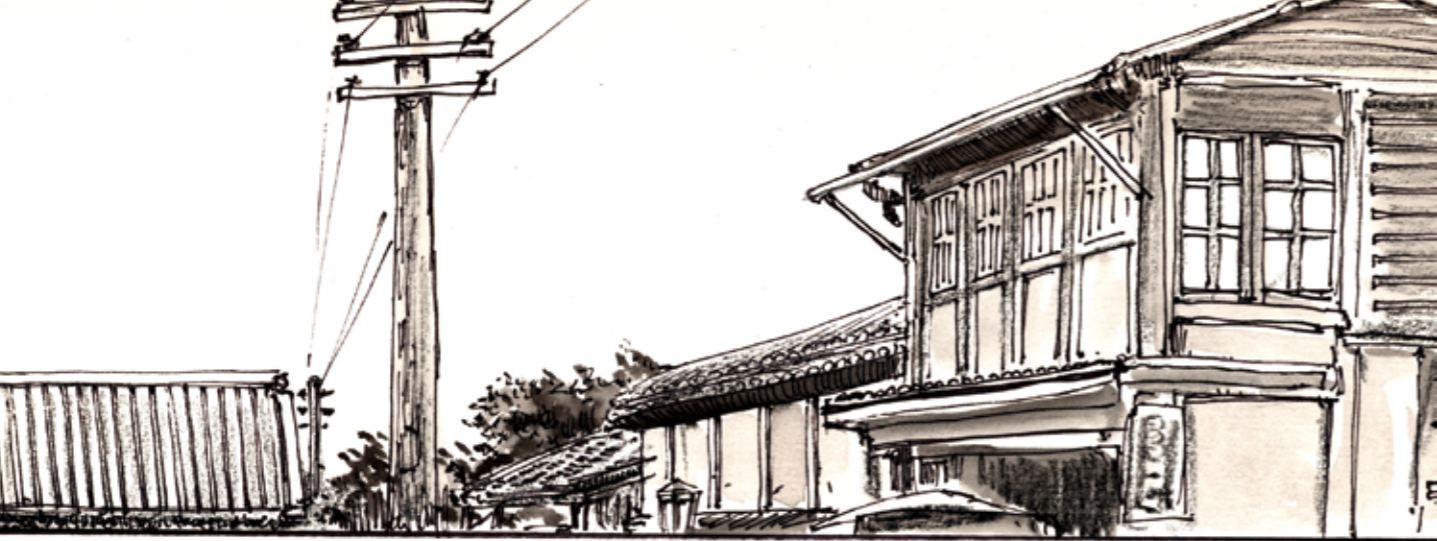
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Chen Wan-yi: This is a concern for all creators of literature and art. This theme doesn't change with the times or government. Lai Ho once said he was a youth of the transitional era, a progressive. Reading Guang-min's graphic novels, one can feel the rapid changes of the past two decades. The readership of printed texts

has quickly diminished, giving way to new forms and technologies. Thus, "reading" is no longer just about reading words one by one. Young people might derive their reading experiences more from videos, images, and music. To make classic works meaningful in contemporary times, they must be embraced by the current generation.

Modern readers need artists like Ruan Guang-min, who can adapt classic texts into graphic narratives for today's youth. This work reflects the trend of the times. If Lai Ho knew his novels were adapted into comics, he would likely nod in agreement, seeing his texts gain contemporary relevance.

This edited excerpt appeared in the book's postscript.



WE'LL BE
DONE IN
ANOTHER
WEEK



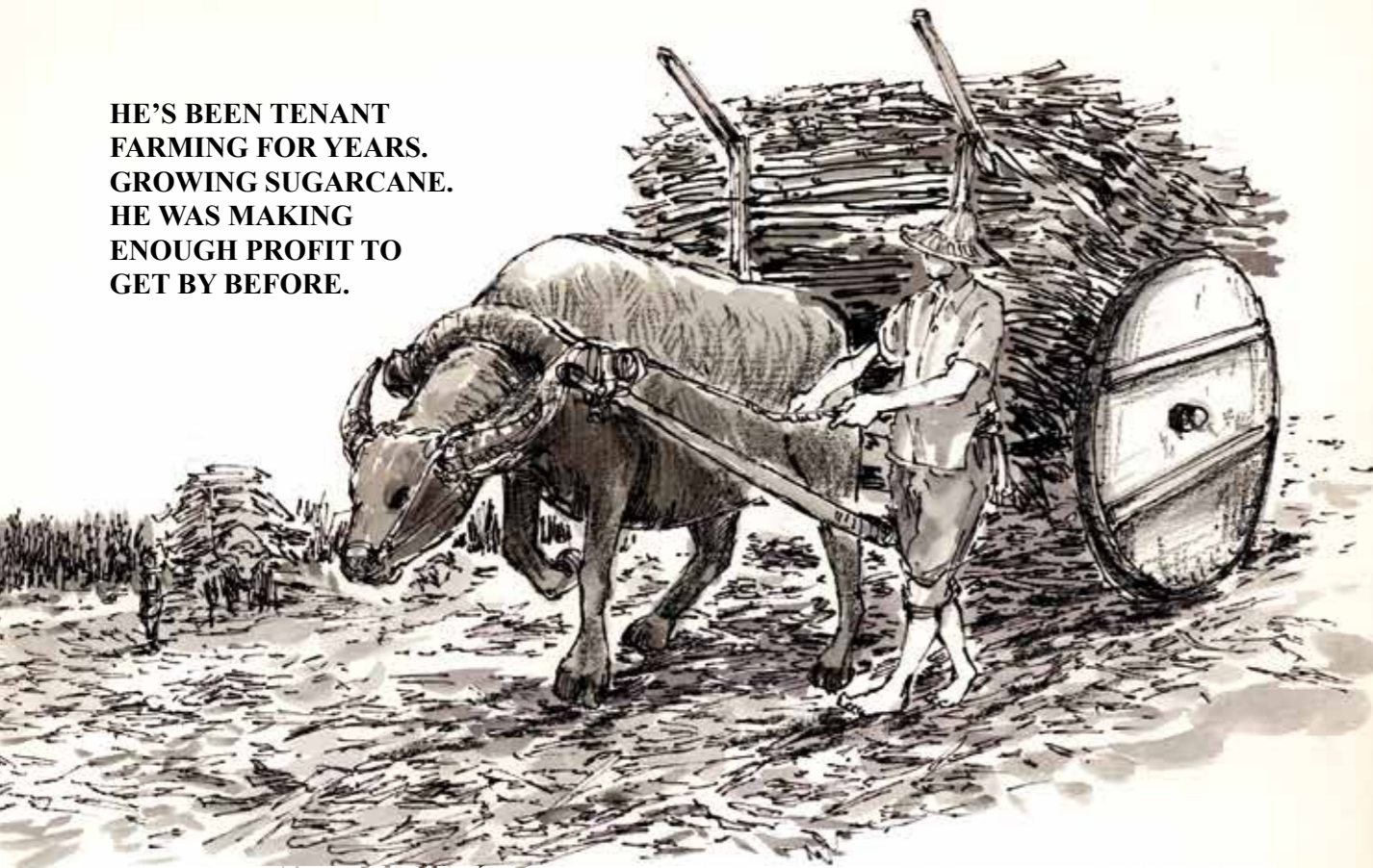
UH,
YEAH.

CHAM,
YOU'RE
SIXTEEN
NOW,
RIGHT?

SCENE 1 CHAM



HE'S BEEN TENANT FARMING FOR YEARS. GROWING SUGARCANE. HE WAS MAKING ENOUGH PROFIT TO GET BY BEFORE.



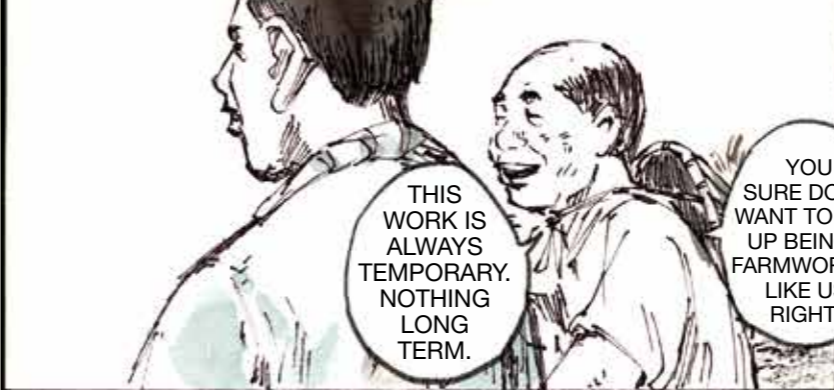
BUT THEN THE JAPANESE GOVERNMENT SET UP SUGAR REFINING COMPANIES.

社會式株糖製濟臺



THE JAPANESE HAVE CONTROLLED EVERYTHING SINCE THE REFINERIES TOOK OVER. THEY EVEN CONTROL THE WEIGHTS USED TO WEIGH THE CROPS.

THEY HAVE THE FINAL SAY. THE SUGARCANE FARMERS GET SHORTED, BUT THEY JUST HAVE TO ACCEPT WHAT THEY ARE GIVEN AND KEEP QUIET.



THIS WORK IS ALWAYS TEMPORARY. NOTHING LONG TERM.

YOU SURE DON'T WANT TO END UP BEING A FARMWORKER LIKE US. RIGHT?



I TALKED IT OVER WITH MOM. I WANT TO LEASE A FIELD AND DO SOME FARMING.



WHAT DO YOU PLAN ON DOING IN THE FUTURE?



WHAT'S WRONG WITH THAT?



CHAM ...

THIS IS NOT THE RIGHT TIME TO BECOME A TENANT FARMER.



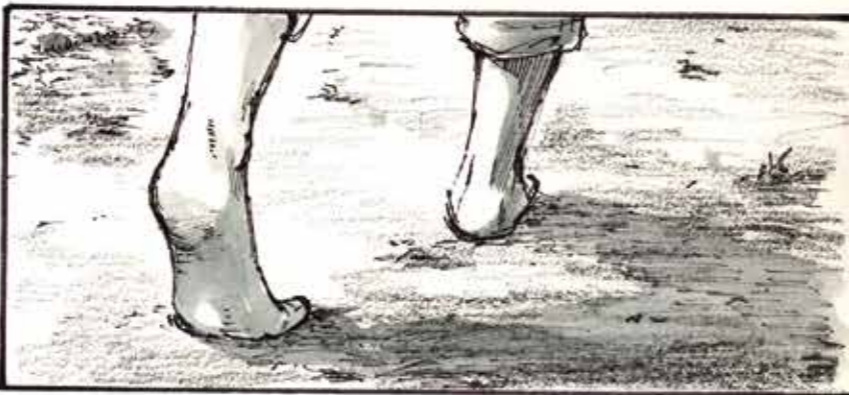
YOU KNOW KUN FROM THE VILLAGE, RIGHT?



OH, WHY'S THAT?



I GUESS I'LL TALK IT OVER WITH MOM AGAIN.



IT IS. BUT THERE'S MORE. YOU SEE, THE LANDLORDS ARE AFRAID OF OFFENDING THE JAPANESE.

EVEN IF YOU CAN FIND A LANDLORD WILLING TO RENT TO ORDINARY PEOPLE, HE'S GOING TO ASK FOR THE SAME RENT.



KUN WANTED TO PLANT SOMETHING ELSE SO THAT HE COULD MANAGE THE RENT AND GET BY.

IT NEVER OCCURRED TO HIM THAT THE SUGAR REFINERY WOULD PAY THE LANDLORD MORE TO RENT HIS FIELD.



THAT'S LAND-GRABBING!



HUH?!



CHAM, YOU'D BETTER THINK TWICE ABOUT LEASING A FIELD.

