

# BEYOND BOOKSTORES: WHERE THE SOULS OF BOOKLOVERS MEET

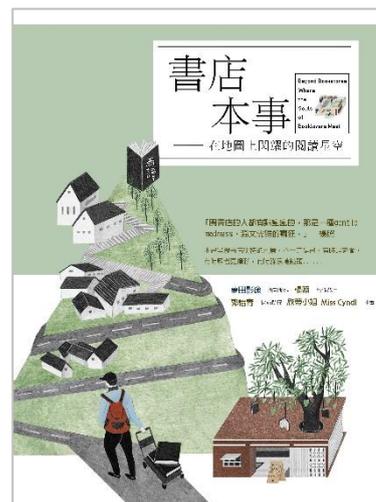
## 書店本事：在地圖上閃耀的 閱讀星空

*Beyond Bookstores explores the books, spaces, stories, and raisons d'être behind some of Taiwan's most interesting booksellers.*

*Beyond Bookstores* immerses readers in the compelling stories behind exceptional bookshops across Taiwan as shared by shop staff and owners. Interwoven with genuine warmth and appeal, these stories, while centered on these shops, embrace life's full palette of experiences, with each "bookshop" serving as a stage on which human kindness entwines with threads in the local cultural fabric.

Featured bookshops include venerable standbys, newbie upstarts and everything in between. Alongside indie venues are beloved familiars like perennial student favorite Tonsan in Taipei City, King Books Secondhand in Tainan, and vanguard of Taiwan's feminist movement, Fembooks. Readers also drop by Taiwan's "cheapest bookseller" Shuijhun Bookstore in Taipei and cozy community-focused booksellers such as Small Small Bookshop and the indigenous culture-infused Fan Yi Art Books House.

Apart from shop stories, listen in on conversations with shop owners that spotlight their tenacity and passions as well as those unique traits that led them to create such distinctive spaces for bibliophiles. Whether planning a visit or enjoying vicariously from afar, the text and beautiful illustrations within its pages form the ideal guide to Taiwan's unique booksellers. With book readership on the decline, *Beyond Bookstores* certainly whets the appetite for a return to the tactile pleasures and relaxed airs of reading.



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## The Creative Team Behind *Beyond Bookstores*

### 《書店本事》製作團隊

Taipei-based Dreamland Image Co. created *Beyond Bookstores* as a literary repository for the insights, anecdotes, and other interesting bits uncovered but not fully used by their team during research for their original dramatic TV series *Lovestore at the Corner* and series of short films *Poetries from the Bookstore*. This literary project came to fruition under the guidance of widely respected author Yang Zhao, with interviews and writing by freelance writer Kuo I-Ching and delicately executed illustrations of each bookshop hand-drawn by Miss Cyndi.

# BEYOND BOOKSTORES: WHERE THE SOULS OF BOOKLOVERS MEET

By the Creative Team led by Dreamland Image Co.

Translated by Beverly Liu

## Foreword: The Blooming Spirit of Bookstores in Taiwan

Text by Su Li-Mei, CEO of Dreamland Image Co.

A bookstore's essence is defined by the books it holds and the customers it attracts. You can catch a glimpse of the owner's worldview and the fascinating tales of its patrons. Each has its own unique and captivating story. It's as though the words from the books jump off the pages, unfolding extraordinary encounters with the readers. I invite you to join us on this remarkable journey and embrace the profound connections between these extraordinary bookstores and the people who bring them to life.

## Hoanya Books: A Platform for Social Movements

Owner: Yu Kuo-Hsin

Year Founded: 1999

The mid-March afternoon sun gently filters through the clouds, casting a serene glow on a tranquil alleyway in Chiayi City. At the end of this peaceful stretch, a seemingly idyllic bookstore awaits, its charm enhanced by the sight of a tabby cat, the sole patron, perched on the window ledge. The spring couplets adorning the store's facade, however, hint at the unique character within, proclaiming, "This store does not conform to current trends; our bookshelves brim with visionary foresight."

Upon arriving at the bookstore, we found the owner tied up answering a constant stream of calls from friends and patrons eager to show their support for students protesting against the unjust passing of the Cross-Strait Trade Agreement at the Legislative Yuan.

"It's because of our Wednesday weekly events at the store that I had to rush back late last night from Taipei; otherwise, I would still be at the Legislative Yuan right now. Hoanya Books is probably the bookstore in Taiwan with the strongest connections to the nation's myriad social

movements. We've explored, discussed, participated, and even initiated all different scales and types of social movements," the lanky-statured Yu Kuo-Hsin proudly proclaims.

As soon as visitors step into the bookstore, their attention is drawn to the "Hoanya Station" sign at the far end of the oblong interior. This sign was crafted by Yu during an old house restoration event. Operating for fifteen years, the bookstore is not just a place to purchase books; it serves as a vital hub for local social movements. Ahead of significant social events, the store buzzes with crowds. At times, as many as a hundred people would cram into the modest 360-square-foot space. Born in 1978, Yu has been deeply entrenched in social movements since his school days. He views it as fate that he launched the bookstore the year following his graduation from college.

Let's step back to the end of the last century, a time of intense political change, when Yu Kuo-Hsin was still a student and the concept of "Taiwanization" was gaining mainstream momentum. In those politically charged times, Yu began to gather energy and knowledge, immersing himself in social movements. This journey can be traced back to his enlightening introduction to *Tâi-uân Tôo-su-sik*<sup>1</sup>. Yu's move from rural Yunlin to the urban hub of Chiayi City for high school was a significant transition for him. It was here that he stumbled upon that iconic basement public library – a sanctuary dedicated to books about Taiwan's history, geography, and political culture.

"That was such an unusual library, and it blew my mind at the time. I think that's why, ever since my first visit to *Tâi-uân Tôo-su-sik*, there was no turning back. I was on the path of no return to becoming a social movement advocate." Yu recalls this was when he first realized the potential of a bookstore to be the perfect space for positive change, better than a public library, better than any civil organization. After graduation, Yu initially focused on finding a job. It wasn't until the earth-shattering and life-altering 921 Earthquake forever changed the course of his life. This event motivated Yu to pursue his dream. With unwavering determination, he swiftly planned and executed the grand opening of Hoanya Books in just a few months.

## **Embracing the Concept of a Social Movement**

When Yu established Hoanya Books, he was just 21 years old with zero relevant business experience. Hence, he encountered many setbacks and quite a few predicaments. He took side jobs just to make ends meet, hanging up a makeshift sign "The owner is out to lunch" as a makeshift excuse for his absence during business hours. In addition to the support of loyal customers, the legendary San Francisco independent bookstore City Lights Books kept him going when times were tough. Founded in 1953, City Lights Books is a modern-day cultural and literary

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<sup>1</sup> Translator's note: Founded by Dr. Chang Hung-Jung, *Tâi-uân Tôo-su-sik* was the first Taiwan-themed public library in Taiwan. The name of the library literally translates as "Taiwan Library", but rather than using an English translation of the name of the library, the name is spelled out using the official romanization system for Taiwanese Hokkien.

landmark and a testimony to freedom and progressiveness.

It was also by chance that Yu learned about Mexico's Zapatista Army of National Liberation in Wu Yin-Ning's book titled *Masked Jungle*. The group's decision to abandon their weapons and pick up pens instead, using poems, novels, postcards, and short-term "experience" camps to convey the injustice experienced by the country's indigenous people, was truly inspiring. Yu pointed out, "This is the perfect reference to what it would be like to utilize the functions of independent bookstores, empowering them to make a stand and fight back."

The discussion with Yu invariably leads back to his active involvement in social movements. He smiles and recounts how his neighbors often dismiss the bookstore as a sham with the true purpose of the store as a platform for social movements. When questioned about whether his commitment to Taiwan's social causes has impacted the bookstore's profitability, Yu, speaking primarily in Taiwanese with an occasional smattering of Taiwanese-accented Mandarin, responds, "My extensive involvement in various social movements and the intermittent closure of the store significantly affects its operation. That's why I had to return before Wednesday to avoid missing out on hosting the weekly events and on sales. Otherwise, we might end up with zero sales this month."

Since opening, Yu has hosted over seven hundred events at his store. Though most of the events are free of charge, the store always sees spikes in sales during book launches.

On the day of my visit, a young woman was diligently watching the store counter up front. Yu pointed to the scheduling chart on the column and told me, "Hoanya Books doesn't have any employees. Everyone who comes out to help is an unpaid volunteer. We are closed on Saturdays since we don't have enough volunteer staff; otherwise, the store would get a lot of customer traffic on Saturdays."

Chen I-Jou, a recent university graduate, has worked as a store clerk volunteer at Hoanya Books for three months. Chen is originally from Changhua City, and she tells us she really likes the shop. She shares that this is in part because of the store's inviting and comfortable atmosphere and also because of the access she has to the shop's unique selection of books, which includes many great non-mainstream books.

### **Show Care and Concern for Mother Nature from an Agricultural Perspective**

Simply put, Yu explains, Hoanya Books operates as a scaled-down version of Tâi-uân Tôo-su-sik with a specific focus on Taiwanese literature, history, and natural characteristics and with smaller sections on nature and the ecology, travel, railway heritage, and wildlife.

"I want to explore Taiwanese culture in a way that goes beyond the usual topics and takes an interdisciplinary approach using different ideas as the medium," Yu reached down and randomly picked out Taiwanese author Wu Yin-Ning's book titled *Where is the Jianghu – An Observation of Taiwanese Agriculture*. "I would select these types of books to carry in my store because I value things somewhat differently than most people. I would rather approach the topic

of agriculture from a cultural perspective, which is often overlooked by the public. If we care about social movements, we must address issues related to resources such as food, agriculture, and land. Caring for the land and agriculture is essential before we can truly love and protect everything here on this island.”

Agriculture is a prominent topic of concern for Yu. He explained, “I am passionate about promoting organic farming, despite my parents’ continued use of pesticides in their farmland.” To further promote sustainable farming methods, Yu has taken up rice farming himself under the principle that practical experience solidifies authentic understanding of a subject. With his new-gained knowledge and conviction, Yu seems to have swayed his parent’s perspective as his mom has asked him to try the organic farming method this year on their farmland.

Browsing Hoanya’s bookshelves one begins to wonder...If Yu can take a cultural perspective on agriculture, what angle would he take on a section dedicated to cats? “I am a cat owner myself! These days, everyone is all about what rights cats and dogs have or about speaking on behalf of stray animals.” Yu smiled and explained he wasn’t always a cat person. But about a year ago, a local vet found a stray cat and asked Yu if he would be willing to adopt it. It was super affectionate, loved being around humans, and would always strut around wagging his tail in hopes of receiving love and affection. It didn’t take long before Yu caved in and said “yes”.

“I named him ‘Ba-Bai’ because when I first adopted him, I paid NT\$800<sup>2</sup> for his medical bill to the veterinarian. But I’ve since come around to calling him ‘Bai-Bai’ for short.” In contrast to his usually stern and manly demeanor, Yu shows he has a softer side when he showers his beloved cat with affection.

## **You Are What You Read**

Books prominently showcased in an independent bookstore offer a mirror into the unique style and preferences of the store owner. When Yu established Hoanya Books, his initial book categories were simple compared to the diverse range of topics and subcategories built up over the subsequent years. However, his category covering Taiwan’s Pingpu people (aka Plains Indigenous people) has been around since the store’s inception. With the numerous indigenous tribes in Taiwan, it’s worth noting why the Pingpu hold a particular fascination for Yu as the name of this tribe also holds a special meaning for his bookstore. During the Japanese rule in Taiwan, anthropologist Utsurikawa Nenzō grouped the Pingpu people of the Yunlin, Chiayi, and Yanshuei regions together as a single tribe – the “Hoanya”. Born in Yunlin and later a resident of Chiayi, Yu sees the name Hoanya as a link between himself and the indigenous and other ethnic communities in the area. Yu envisions his profound store name inspiring innovation, idealism, and passion.

Yu stated, “If there is truth behind the aphorism ‘you are what you read’, then I sincerely wish everyone entering Hoanya Books becomes the rebel our store aspires to be – someone who

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<sup>2</sup> Translator’s note: Ba-Bai is the phonetic sound for “Eight Hundred” in Mandarin.

is passionate about social movements and contributes to the society.”

All social movement rebels and advocates are called upon to assemble at Hoanya Books to work as one for the achievement of social ideals.

### **About Yu Kuo-Hsin**

Yu Kuo-Hsin’s experiences at Tâi-uân Tôo-su-sik while at university lit in him an inextinguishable passion for social activism. Yu founded Hoanya Books to help social movements gain greater traction among the general public. His commitment to participating in social movements and organizing seminars has made Hoanya Books a symbol of social activism. His more-recent interest in and promotion of eco-friendly farming showcases the evolution of his activism.

### **Fan Yi Art Books House: Beacon to the Tribes, Cultivating Seeds of Hope**

Owner: Kapi Kalidoay

Year Founded: 2013

In a conversation over the phone, Fan Yi Art Books House owner Kapi Kalidoay proudly tells me: “We are a bookstore with a garden. If you don’t spend the night, how can you expect to fully appreciate the scent of the soil here?”

Eager to experience that scent myself, I planned a trip down south. The end of my long journey brought me to that selfsame bookstore in sunny Majia Township, Pingtung County. Much to my surprise, the first thing that greeted me wasn’t the expected smell of spring soil but the distinctive, locally familiar scent of betel nut flower spikes.

Fan Yi Art Books House’s bright-orange sign is juxtaposed against rows of betel nut trees standing firm and tall, flanking both sides of the freeway. A faint sense of sorrow seems to waft in the fresh outdoor air as the dark emerald-green leaves rustle in the breeze. Kapi Kalidoay carefully chose the bookstore’s equivocal name. While “Fan Yi” may be taken as a homophonic pun on the Mandarin word for “translate”, the actual character used for “fan” means “aborigine” and that used for “yi” means “arts”. Despite “aborigine” being an outdated and largely unacceptable term nowadays, Kapi purposely chose this version of “fan” because of his belief in the importance of embracing all aspects of indigenous Taiwanese heritage to affirm and transcend cultural identity. He also plans to translate indigenous literature to preserve and pass on tribal culture and history.

“This journey is a powerful experience of soul cleansing, transformation, and rebirth. By bravely confronting our memories of prejudice and degradation, we unlock the key to our true identity and reclaim a dignified sense of our ethnic heritage,” Kapi Kalidoay shared, eloquently and with heartfelt conviction.



What would prompt someone to open a bookstore in a remote indigenous village surrounded by nothing but betel nut and mango trees? The answer lies on the map hanging on the stone mortar wall next to the bookstore that shows the distribution of Taiwan's indigenous population which also serves as a tea room. This map also holds the key to Kapi Kalidoay's vicissitude-filled past.

"I chose to open a bookstore here because of a grand dream and ambition." The fifty-six-year-old shop owner begins telling me the details of his life journey, dreams and aspirations.

Kapi Kalidoay was born to a Paiwan father and an Amis mother and into an extended family of scholars in Mudan Township, Pingtung County. While the other civil servants in their village sent their children to schools in Pingtung City (about two hours away by car) for good education and opportunities, Kapi's father sent him even further away to Taiwan's second-largest city, Kaohsiung, at the tender age of eleven outside of his comfort zone, away from his indigenous community. His father hoped living and studying there would give Kapi better future opportunities and allow him to be more independent. But this put Kapi alone in a big and unfamiliar city, away from his family, and the isolation significantly impacted him and gradually affected his perspective on his indigenous identity.

"Back then, there was still a strong prejudice against the indigenous in Kaohsiung, which was partly due to a lack of understanding about indigenous culture and people. It was hard for me to tell my classmates where I was from. And that's when I found myself starting to reject my own family and tribe." This unpleasant phase of his childhood fueled a particularly rebellious phase during puberty, when he would regularly skip school and defy authorities. Kapi tells me, "The only reason I chose to go to National Pingtung University of Education is I heard they had a baseball team."

Once Kapi started his studies at university, he began meeting other outstanding indigenous students. The university became a catalyst for his transformation, as he realized for the first time that being indigenous doesn't automatically mean being weak or inferior. This freshly gained awareness of his racial identity created a false sense of confidence, which turned the short-statured Kapi Kalidoay into a walking bully on campus. He would regularly walk around wearing a pair of boxing gloves and take whatever he wanted by force. "I was repressed for so long. In a way, I wanted to take revenge and use my baseball bat and boxing gloves to prove I was better and stronger than they were." Kapi can now laugh at himself as he recalls his pompous past.

Kapi grappled with his conflicted feelings of self-consciousness and arrogance. Even when he wasn't excelling, he felt compelled to project a mien of superiority. His professor recognized Kapi had a musical talent which shifted his focus to music. Kapi even had plans to study abroad to pursue his musical talents. However, these aspirations were cut short when his uncle urged him to return to Pingtung and invest his talents in his own community. "My uncle had always spoiled me, ever since I was young. He faced numerous hardships, including career and marital failures, as well as struggles with alcohol addiction. Yet, singing brought him joy. In honor of my uncle's dreams, I chose to forgo studying abroad and returned home to make a difference."

## Weaving the Threads of His Vision for His Indigenous Homeland

However, his triumphant homecoming was short-lived. The corrupting ways things were done there grated increasingly on his conscience and got him into constant conflicts. Unfortunately, the villagers were simply unable to look beyond his indiscretions to appreciate his innate talent and capabilities. Kapi Kalidoay ended up leaving his tribal village after just two years and took a teaching job at Kaohsiung Municipal Zhongshan Elementary School.

Around the end of martial law controls over the country in the mid-1980s, Kapi became acquainted with victims of the Formosa Incident and became aware of Taiwan's burgeoning Indigenous Movement. This newfound knowledge opened a window onto the need for and power of political and social movements for Kapi. However, it also led to conflicting thoughts about his own ethnic identity. On one hand, he had been raised to scorn his own people; yet, on the other hand, it instilled in him a profound sense of injustice for his people as it became clear that Taiwan's indigenous peoples were being exploited.

"I've always wanted to find a way to change the fate of our ethnic identity...to prove we are not just people fated to be bullied and ruled by others. That's why I took action and started a newspaper to amplify the voices of our people." His awareness of, and desire to end, the persistent manipulation of Taiwan's indigenous population in the media led Kapi to found the *Aboriginal Post* in 1980. This groundbreaking publication became Taiwan's first newspaper created by and for the indigenous population.

From that point on, Kapi Kalidoay actively researched and studied indigenous culture and history. Following the *Aboriginal Post*, he launched two more indigenous newspaper publications. However, the tremendous expense of running three publications led to his taking a position in the Pingtung County Government. In August of 2013, Kapi settled in Majia Township, which he planned to transform into a base for promoting a sustainable future for Taiwan's indigenous peoples under sustainable environmental, social, and governance (ESG) principles. His commitment to this cause is reflected in Fan Yi Art Books House, the starting point for building toward his broad-ranging, ambitious goals.

Based on three decades of observing how newspapers are run, Kapi firmly believes the indigenous don't have the competitiveness necessary to succeed in traditional capitalist economic systems. Taiwan's indigenous control none of the means used to create and run businesses, namely capital funds, land, infrastructure, tools, technology, knowledge, and workforce. "I kept pondering how indigenous people can best generate profit within the capitalist rubric. I think I found it... The answer lies in what I have accomplished here." The passion and enthusiasm in Kapi Kalidoay's voice are very infectious. He explains his visionary dream to establish the "Slow-living Republic of Dawu Mountain Ranges" in Pingtung – a sustainable, community-driven economic model prioritizing local culture and the environment. Through successful collaboration with different local organizations, he aims to steadily integrate tribal cultural heritage with agriculture/craft industries to promote local indigenous green tourism in the Dawu Mountain regions.

“Tourism development doesn’t necessarily rely on picturesque natural landscapes or substantial capital outlays. Despite not being wealthy, I have developed four simple yet impactful guidelines,” explains Kapi Kalidoay.

Firstly, prioritize the use of local resources and materials. For instance, tribal buildings are made with locally sourced stones and betel nut tree logs.

Secondly, advocate for reuse and recycling. Establishing a recycling plant facility to repurpose old materials can significantly contribute to sustainable tourism development.

Thirdly, in the absence of advanced technology and expertise, embrace traditional methods and foster community collaboration to achieve shared goals. This collaborative approach fosters a sense of belonging and collective responsibility.

Lastly, unleash your creativity and make the most of limited resources to devise innovative solutions. Even with minimal means, you have the potential to create something remarkable.

As I stroll with Kapi through his bookstore’s untamed garden, I can’t help but notice the personal touches in every corner. He stops to point out the small bookcases and reading chairs along the trail and tells me, “See? Those are ‘book nests’ where visitors are welcome to stop and read. We may not have spectacular landscapes or scenery, but we’ve created a unique landscape and atmosphere that ensures our guests experience our sincere hospitality and unique decor.”

Fan Yi Art Books House may not boast breathtaking natural landscapes, but this haven for book enthusiasts draws a dedicated crowd. Patrons may be generally classified into two very different groups. The first includes those with a fascination for indigenous culture, drawn to the store’s extensive collection of books containing invaluable historical materials and data. The second cover those who relish the idea of coexisting with nature. They are not seeking majestic mountains or serene lakes, but instead yearn to immerse themselves in self-sustainable living and stay in rustic cabins devoid of modern luxuries. Fan Yi Art Books House is where one can revel in the earthy aromas that waft from the petite garden tended by Kapi Kalidoay’s wife, sway on garden swings, nestle into reading-nest nooks, and most importantly, find respite for their weary soul. It was at that moment of unwinding amidst this extraordinary tranquil setting that I finally discovered that much-anticipated “scent of the soil”.

In the embrace of the gentle afternoon breeze, Kapi Kalidoay again emphasized the importance of slow living. His sense of urgency was palpable, as if he feared not having enough time to articulate all of his ideas. Behind his tough-guy facade, there was a romantic aspect as he drew a connection between his dream and Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream” speech. While anyone can dream, Kapi aspires to be the guiding light for his tribal village as he meticulously weaves the threads of his vision for his indigenous homeland.

Share your own stories,  
Write your own history,  
Draft your own map,  
Hone your craftsmanship,  
Publish your own books,



Embellish your abode with a vibrant palette,  
Belt out the melodies of your past,  
Weave the threads of your ambition,  
Show love and acceptance to your fellow tribe members,  
Choose the path of righteousness and virtue,  
Protect the sacred indigenous homeland,  
Uncover your true ethnic identity and fulfill your deepest aspirations!

### **About Kapi Kalidoay**

With roots in both Paiwan and Amis tribes, Kapi Kalidoay has devoted over thirty years to the study of indigenous history and culture. He is the visionary founder of three indigenous newspapers and harbors a dream to establish the “Slow Living Republic of Dawu Mountain Ranges” in Pingtung. Through partnerships with local organizations, he aims to seamlessly blend diverse tribal cultures with agriculture and craft industries, all while catalyzing local indigenous green tourism in the Dawu Mountain region.