

HUNTING CAPTIVE WOMEN: MEMORIES OF A TAIWAN SPECIAL VOLUNTEER FORCE

獵女犯：台灣特別志願兵的回憶

Based on the author's life experience, the short stories in this collection narrate the despair, confusion, and mental angst felt by so many of the Taiwanese compelled to fight in the jungles of Southeast Asia as part of the Imperial Japanese Army.

Hunting Captive Women, written by Chen Qian-Wu, an author best known for his works of poetry, owns a special place in Taiwan literary history because of its semi-autobiographical descriptions of the author's lived experiences as an Imperial Serviceman fighting for Japan in Southeast Asia during the Pacific War.

Protagonist Lin Yi-Ping's background as a high-school graduate initially serving as a private 1st class and later as a lance corporal in a heavy artillery unit mirrors that of the author's. In addition to the sixteen discrete stories surrounding Yi-Ping, *Hunting Captive Women* includes five additional stories centered on war and the anti-colonial struggle that also capture true elements and aspects of the author's life.

The stories of Yi-Ping begin with "Semaphore", a chapter on the new recruit's boot camp experiences in Taiwan and end with "Summary Sketch", a chapter that revolves around the disposition and self-discipline of soldiers after Japan's unconditional surrender. Stories plumb Yi-Ping's thoughts on life and death, the absurdity of war, and the role of personal identity in mechanized warfare. The narrative also takes on the indelible sense of remorse felt by Yi-Ping for participating



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at the order of special attack units in the abduction of women from Japanese-occupied islands for enforced servitude as military “comfort women”.

The narrative captures in relationships between people and things the complex face of human nature and of lust and also highlights the dignity and confusion surrounding Taiwanese identity. But the suffering and ambivalence of these characters thrown into conflict reflect a universality that, despite their discomfiting textures, must be a part of any reflection on the true cost of war.

Chen Qian-Wu 陳千武

Chen Qian-Wu (1922-2012), aka Huan-Fu, was a poet, novelist, and translator. He wrote in Japanese prior to and during the Second World War. After Japan’s defeat and Taiwan’s handover to the Republic of China, Chen learned modern Chinese and re-entered Taiwan’s literary world in 1958. Renowned as a poet, Chen was a charter member of Taiwan’s Li (Bamboo Hat) Poetry Society and, later in his career, translated many Japanese poems into Chinese and vice versa. *Hunting Captive Women* is his best-known work of fiction, and one chapter was transcribed into the musical *Angel of the Tropics*.

HUNTING CAPTIVE WOMEN

By Chen Qian-Wu

Translated by Lee Anderson

Semaphore

1

“All troops mobilize and assemble at the training ground at sixteen hundred hours.”

The whip of the Japanese order lashed across the backs of the recruits like an electric shock, spurring them into frenzied action. Most of them had been snoozing, and now they had to finish up all of their duties: wash their clothes, carry out repairs, and, in particular, shine their boots until they were as slick as if they'd been lifted out of a deep fryer. And, after all that, they still had to polish their Type 38 rifles and bayonets. A gun is a soldier's soul, and so must be attended to with the utmost care.

It was late September and the recruits, who had arrived on base six months ago, had not been expecting exercises that afternoon. Another general mobilization order lashed out, cementing the glum mood.

“Is this an emergency drill?” asked Kinjō, the Okinawan private, turning to look stupidly at Lin Yi-Ping. Lin arched his eyebrows in surprise at the question.

“*Baka!* It's more serious than that. We're leaving!”

“Leaving?”

Kinjō, fumbling clumsily with his rucksack, started. His usual dopey expression vanished. He now looked shocked, a strange and nervous look in his eyes. Lin couldn't help but chuckle at the pitiful sight before him. “Are you really that dumb? Why do you think the squad leader ordered us to pack up our personal belongings, burn our letters, and wash all our clothes? And didn't HQ just issue us brand new equipment? Not to mention all the extra food they've given us these past couple of days. Didn't you think it was weird they were treating us nicely for once?”

“What's so unusual about getting new kit and extra food? It could just be their way of rewarding us for all the hard work we've been putting in every single day...”

“It's supposed to be hard. This isn't a vacation, and we're not civvies. Everything the army does has a strategic objective behind it. Didn't it ever cross your mind that we could get sent out into the field?”

“Crap! What do we do? I haven't even let my sister know...”

Lin grimaced at Kinjō's naivety. He didn't have time to notify his own parents in Taichū, let alone Kinjō having enough time to get word to his sister in Okinawa.... But Kinjō continued to protest as he wrapped the puttees around his shins.

“I mean, if they’re really sending us to the front line, they should’ve told us in advance.”

“*Baka!* That’s a military secret.”

Soldiers are simply tools of war, required to obey orders without question and carry out the duties in their remit without reflection or criticism. Such was the ironclad rule of the Japanese army. Someone as dim-witted and obedient as Kinjō should have made the perfect soldier. Frequently bewildered by his various orders, he somehow seemed enlightened by Lin’s words and said, “Ah, maybe you’re right. That horse-faced squad leader *has* started being nicer to me these past couple of days. He hasn’t hit me once, or even shouted at me...”

Kinjō, long inured to the near-daily physical and verbal abuse he’d received from the squad leader over the past six months, couldn’t help but smile at the thought of the miraculous transformation that had taken place in the last few days. However, he quickly gulped it back down and his expression gave way to fear and confusion.

“Kinjō, what’s up?”

“No, it’s nothing. I was just thinking about my mom. She passed away just before I signed up.”

A wisp of sad truth clouded his vacuous face and struck Lin’s senses like lightning, pain pinching at his heart.

2

The thought of his own mother filled Lin Yi-Ping with pride. Well-versed in Chinese history yet unable to understand Japanese, all she could manage was a mangled “arigato” whenever the patrols came to inspect her household registration documents. Her mantra was, “We’re Chinese mainlanders from Fukien. Never lose hope. Have the courage to face reality. See your surroundings. Respect yourself without ever deceiving yourself.” She’d repeated those words of encouragement to him from the moment he’d been chosen as a Special Volunteer until the day he departed. Even though he had never seen her shed a single tear, he knew his leaving was like a constant knife to her heart. Young Taiwanese men were under no obligation to join the Japanese Army, but they could become Special Volunteers by having their application form “specially” stamped under the supervision of the village chief. Of course, these “volunteers” did not volunteer of their own free will, although they were accorded the same duties and near-equal rights as Japanese citizens upon becoming honorary Japanese soldiers. One of these so-called rights was the glory of “being ready for death” in the name of His Imperial Majesty the Emperor. Lin’s mother didn’t cry when she learned this was to be her son’s fate, but his father, an agricultural technician at the township office, cried on a number of occasions, often attracting her criticism and comfort in equal measure.

“Serve your country and Emperor with loyalty,” proclaimed the mild-mannered village chief and mustachioed headman in unison at Lin’s farewell dinner, despite the fact neither of them spoke Japanese with anything approximating fluency. To their mind, these were the best parting words they could offer. There were no slogans Lin loathed more than the corny “Eight corners of

the world under one roof” and “Imperial subject; Public service”, yet his parents never parroted them at him. All they wanted was for him to maintain the stoicism befitting a “Chinese”.

3

Lin snapped back to the present day and said, “Hey, you’d better hurry up, Kinjō. The bugle’s going to call any minute now. Do you want me to give you a hand?”

He had moved quickly, and had been ready for a while already.

“No, it’s fine. I’ll make it.” And it was true – Kinjō had already packed up, and all that was left was for him to pull on his jacket and hang his blade from his belt.

“Yi-Ping?”

“Yeah?”

Kinjō’s brand new uniform, immaculate and well-fitted, matched his slender features handsomely. He was holding a faded photograph up for Lin to see.

“Look what I found when clearing out my trunk. I thought I’d lost it ages ago. It must be a good sign I found it today.”

Lin looked at it and understood what it meant to Kinjō. His face brightened up to match the other’s excitement.

“Isn’t that the photo of your sister you keep saying you want to show me?”

Kinjō was forever prattling on to Lin about his older sister. He’d always claimed she was pretty, but had never been able to find the photo of her he’d brought with him when he’d enlisted. As one of his most treasured possessions, perhaps he’d squirreled it away so thoroughly that, what with the hardships of military training, even he had ended up forgetting where he’d put it.

“See, I wasn’t lying, was I? Isn’t she beautiful? Loads of guys in my hometown were after her, but her boyfriend was sent to China to fight and it broke her heart. Then Mom died, and then her only brother was conscripted. I can’t imagine the pain she went through. And now, I have no idea what she’s up to.”

“She really looks like you,” Lin said. He took the photo and held it up next to Kinjō’s face, discovering that Kinjō’s unremarkable features were actually quite pretty and elegant when transplanted onto a woman. It was slightly unsettling.

“Everyone always says how much we look alike. Now, I really want to let her know that we’re moving out into the field.”

Kinjō looked like he was getting worked up, but Lin replied calmly, “Wouldn’t it upset her even more to know that?”

“No, her heart has already been broken as much as it can. War is cruel, but whatever happens now can’t make her any sadder than she already is. She told me she just wants to know where I am and what I’m doing. Whether I’m alive or dead doesn’t even come into it...”

In that moment, Lin felt a deep connection to the women subjected to life under military rule, living in uncertainty and anguish as bloodthirsty Japanese warlords exterminated all their

hopes of survival. He wondered whether his own mother hadn't cried when he was conscripted because she too had already borne so much pain.

Suddenly, a bugle cried out. Lin held the photograph out to Kinjō and said, "Here you go. It's a lovely photo, make sure you take care of it."

"I will. I know she'd love to meet you one day."

The bugle seemed especially loud and long today. Soldiers are particularly sensitive to deployment orders, which is why the blaring sound was even more disconcerting than usual, adding to the tension the recruits were feeling.

"Let's go!"

Lin jogged over to the heavy machine gun and flanked it with Hiratsuka. The two men hoisted it onto their shoulders and carried it over to the barracks where the platoon was due to convene. Everyone was in position in under three minutes. First Lieutenant Suzuki emerged and gave the orders, and the gunners in the four squads, each carrying four heavy machine guns, ran toward the training ground.

4

A regiment comprises three battalions of three rifle platoons and one heavy weapons platoon each and one artillery platoon. Currently lined up in rank and file on the vast training ground, the fully equipped regiment made for a magnificent sight. The troops were being reviewed by the lieutenant colonel personally. When the commanding officer gave the order to salute, the bugler began to play the *Commander's Salute* twice in succession. Lin, standing with the second heavy weapons platoon, murmured funny lyrics along to the tune while he saluted like the rest of the recruits:

聯隊長の奥さんは間抜けで、抜けても知らずに天井見て腰廻す。

(The colonel's wife is so confused / She doesn't even know she'd taken them off / She's staring at the ceiling, wiggling her ass.)

Soldiers come from all walks of life – academics, managers, farmers, poets, and painters, so it was never difficult to cobble together sarcastic lyrics for most trumpet songs. Passed down from veterans to rookies, these acted as coolant to the strictly disciplined existence of the non-commissioned rank-and-file and provided self-deprecating comfort.

After finishing his inspection, the lieutenant colonel, as expected, announced that the recruits who had completed six months of training would be promoted from private to private first class. This was a standard promotion and nothing out of the ordinary, but he still went through the formality of offering his congratulations followed by a motivational speech that gave special mention to the "Taiwanese Special Volunteers", who accounted for one-fifth of the new recruits and were exhorted to treat the Japanese soldiers with mutual love and respect on the battlefield. These boilerplate precautions were, in fact, unnecessary. The Japanese often claimed to treat everyone equally as a way of highlighting the Emperor's imperial authority. But, in reality, there were divisions between the mainlanders, the Ryukyu islanders, and the Taiwanese. The

existence of different “levels of equality” was widely accepted, yet no one wanted to say anything that might infringe upon the militarist general-mobilization regulations. It was the smart choice.

Lin tuned back in for the end of the lieutenant colonel’s speech, just in time to hear, “I wish you long-lasting military fortune, and victory in our holy war.” He wondered how many batches of recruits this reserve forces’ commander had sent off into battle, blankly repeating the same speech every single time without ever thinking how many of them would actually have the “military fortune” to come home alive. If he thought this hypocritical speech was motivational, he was just as clueless as the song purported his wife to be.

With a final cry of “Long live the Emperor!” led by the commanding officer, the deployment ceremony came to a close. The freshly promoted privates first class, led by the regimental headquarters, marched solemnly out of the Fourth Taiwan Infantry Regiment Camp on their way to the Tainan Railway Station, the first battalion ahead of the second. It was already evening by the time they reached the deserted platforms.

5

The military train trundled into the night fields. It was a slow, loud train. The recruits crammed into the carriages could hear nothing but the rumble-rumble of the iron wheels. All of them had their eyes closed out of frustration, no one saying a word. It was as though they had all come to the same realization and, like pigs being sent to the slaughterhouse, now sat obediently, allowing the carriage to sway and rock them.

Kinjō was sat restlessly next to Lin, his eyes closed one minute, then taking his sister’s photo out to look at the next. Because Taiwan was a Japanese colony, Taiwanese people could only serve in its army under very special circumstances. Soldiers on active duty were different from military porters and support staff. They were fully-fledged soldiers endowed with the traditional bushidō spirit, and the Japanese regarded spiritual honor as nobler than all else. In this sense, those from the Ryukyu Islands were the same as Japanese from the mainland. However, differences between them still existed. Different concepts of family status gave rise to contempt and discrimination. Kinjō, who was the slowest in training, and Lin, who was the most agile, were more than just fellow recruits from the same intake: they were closer in spirit thanks to this difference that marked them and, as such, they had bonded over their sense of mutual sympathy and understanding.

Active-duty Japanese soldiers with a high school diploma could apply to be officer cadets and, if accepted, would enter the military academy for officer training. When Lin had first enlisted, his local military association put his name forward to join the officer cadet program, but less than a month later his squadron leader announced, “Taiwanese Special Volunteers do not meet officer cadet regulations,” and Lin’s application was swiftly rejected. And Kinjō? His application was dismissed with a cursory “Not Selected”. The only two soldiers in their squadron who did get accepted were both mainland nerds who were reportedly from influential families.

A saying that was popular among the soldiers was, “Officers do business, NCOs do nothing, and only soldiers serve their country”. Since soldiers are the tools of war, they have no thoughts of their own and cannot speak out; instead, they need to gamble with their lives, obey officers’ commands, and silently follow orders from amateurish NCOs. A soldier’s life is worthless, the same price as a postage stamp. Worthless.

6

The train eventually reached Takao Station. There was a commotion as soldiers haphazardly descended from the train and lined up before marching off again.

After a while, they were brought to a halt outside the Takao Prefectural Girls’ Senior High School, where it was announced they would pitch camp in the campus yard overnight. At such a late hour, all of the nearby households would have eaten their dinner hours ago. This short journey, a journey that would put their lives in mortal danger, was known to none but themselves. No one cared about them.

The camp’s location decided, Lin’s heavy weapon platoon set both of their heavy machine guns down in the center of the yard, dividing the forces into north and south as they bedded down for the night. They had no tents, and instead spent the night sleeping in combat-ready positions on the damp grass. It didn’t get more open-air than this.

The troops now occupied the entire campus, and the rifle platoon had also stood their Type 38 rifles upright in a long row running down the middle, with soldiers guarding both sides. Nothing was being left to chance.

The sports field was blanketed in darkness, with only a handful of stars glittering in the sky overhead. Classes had long finished, and the students would have no idea that their cherished campus was under military occupation for the night.

“Let’s eat.”

This order from HQ sent the on-duty soldiers into another flurry of activity. They were all famished, so everyone helped fetch the food and distribute it without even being asked, and began to eat quickly. They sat on the yard in a circle, chopsticks moving deftly, and the delicious food for the evening was finished in next to no time. The soldiers then scuttled back and forth through the dark campus to wash their utensils.

Another order from HQ, this time asking each squad to send someone to pick up the comfort packages gifted by the Women’s Association. Two or three men from Lin’s platoon offered to go. Kinjō was one of them. He tried to persuade Lin to accompany him. Lin, lounging on the lawn, hesitated, but then said, “I guess I’m going for a walk, then.” He stood up and followed after Kinjō.

HQ had occupied the hall just inside the school entrance. Over a dozen members of the Women’s Association were there, mostly women in their twenties and thirties, distributing “comfort packages” under the harsh electric light. These “packages” had delicate postures, sincere smiles, and genuine expressions visible even from a distance, and they would bring “comfort” to

the soldiers who'd be leaving their homeland the next morning. In fact, the comfort the recruits wanted lay not in the comfort packages themselves, but in the sincere smiles of the women who were there to comfort them.

7

As Lin walked down the hall past the teachers' lounge, he glanced in and saw a female teacher in a kendo-style blouse and tight-fitting work pants searching for something on the bookshelf. She looked up and her beautiful face was bathed in light, causing Lin to call out in surprise.

"Hey, Kinjō! Isn't that your sister?"

Kinjō looked at Lin, baffled, but he simply continued to stare through the door to the teachers' lounge. The more he looked, the more she resembled the woman in the photograph Kinjō had shown him that afternoon. Extremely, extremely similar.

"What are you talking about?" Kinjō said, his eyes following Lin's gaze toward the graceful woman. "Her?"

"Doesn't she look like your sister?"

Kinjō hadn't initially thought so, but after Lin asked him again he took a closer look and finally said, "No, she doesn't. Well, maybe a little..."