

THE BLACK METEOR OF ANARCHY

安那其的黑色流星

This gem of historical fiction centers around a short-lived secret anarchist society, a young man eager to resist brutal authoritarianism, and an era echoing with calls for liberty and freedom.

The failure of multiple armed uprisings against Japanese colonial authorities led Taiwanese intellectuals in the 1920s to advocate for a non-violent, public activism path to achieving local autonomy. Contemporary literature, art, and literary clubs and speech events became platforms touting democratic ideas and ideals and, in some cases, anarchist principles. The story in this book draws inspiration from the youth of this period.

Receiving a long-lost sketchbook of his in the mail in 1989 opens for Huang Che-pin a floodgate of memories that sweep him back to 1925 and to Ozawa – a Taiwan-born Japanese friend he had met during his college years in Taihoku (Taipei). As a veterinary student in Japan, Ozawa had joined an underground anarchist group and, upon returning to the island, became friends through a speech event with a circle of likeminded friends, including Che-pin – at the time a fervent, budding young artist.

The secret anarchist society Black Youth Alliance Ozawa founded with two friends in Taiwan in 1926 began distributing pamphlets and recruiting new members, of which Che-pin was one of the first. Ozawa's two friends headed, respectively, to central and southern Taiwan to further grow the Black Youth Alliance's ranks.

Catching wind of this seditious movement, colonial police threw an island-wide dragnet that ended up mostly arresting people with no



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connection to the Alliance. Che-pin, detained for his speech event participation, was soon released because his sketchbook and its incriminating cache of Alliance pamphlets had fortuitously gone missing. Nonetheless, the police crackdown succeeded in snuffing the Alliance's flame before it had a chance to shine.

The simple, easy flowing narrative wraps readers into 1920s Taiwan; a time when youth were testing the limits of freedom in Japan's tightly controlled colony and a few dreamed dreams of an anarchist future. Like shooting stars, they rose from the darkness and, loathed to hang bright in the sky, fell to earth as steeled, jet-black stones that would survive to inspire like-minded, freedom-seeking people for generations to come.

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THE BLACK METEOR OF ANARCHY

By Ema Yuyuan Tong

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Chapter One: Post-Earthquake Ruptures and Rebirth

1

It was gloomy and wintry outside the window. The scent of paper and paint wafted in the dry air inside the six-tatami room, with Ozawa sitting alone at the center and Huang Che-pin crouched in a corner, holding a sketchbook.

It was from 1927. Che-pin had made these drawings of Ozawa before his friend's army service in Chiba.

Ozawa lolled on the floor in his gakuran, his body lean and relaxed. Che-pin's gaze reached him through the empty easel.

He used a pencil to lightly trace Ozawa's sullen neck and sharp cheekbone. Disparate lines formed his body – an anarchic body. That was Ozawa in Che-pin's eyes. Since first learning to draw, he had never wanted to draw someone this much. His delicate sketches recalled Ozawa's hesitation and words and his breath and expression in the moment.

"You'll be stronger when you return."

"Yes."

Che-pin imagined military service as a process of taming – entering the operation of the nation and army, re-sculpting the inertia of body and mind. To an anarchist, a black youth, training for national defense was perhaps but meaningless torture, a form of spiritual destruction and reconstruction. Over the decades that followed, he never forgot that wintry morning. It was the last time he saw Ozawa.

Che-pin had always assumed the sketchbook was gone, perhaps confiscated by the police during the raid. The marks and contours left by timespace had faded to the point that he doubted whether young Ozawa and the Black Youth Alliance had truly existed. That was, until more than fifty years later he received a parcel from America. He opened it and saw a letter in neat Japanese handwriting. A friend who did life drawing with him as a student had returned the sketchbook.

Dear Che-pin,

It has been so long since we last met. I have always wanted to return this sketchbook to you. I got hold of your address and updates coincidentally only after half of our lifetimes had passed.

We went on a lot of field trips for life drawing when we were younger. I was envious that you could study drawing under the guidance of Mr. Ishikawa at Taihoku Normal School. So, I took your sketchbook to study at home and discovered the promotional flyers from the Black Youth Alliance. I heard that you had been caught during the Black Youth Incident. I was worried I might be dragged into all this, so I never returned the sketchbook. I must apologize. I escaped to Japan due to unforeseen circumstances, then relied on support from family and friends in Los Angeles. I don't know if I will be able to return to Taiwan. Hopefully, this sketchbook will be in your hands once again.

*Best wishes,
Kuo Ching-shui
1989.4.12*

The navy blue cover of the sketchbook had faded, its edges frayed. It was a snapshot from a long-distant time in his life. Che-pin used his weathered hands to carefully open the sketchbook.

Memories of youth rose to the surface. Familiar scenes of past drawing lessons spread like ink.

Turning the leaves of the sketchbook, he saw mountain fog and trees, street views, bicycles, red-brick houses, and the Sōtokufu. Suddenly, the clouds behind the central tower of the Sōtokufu began to shift, as if timespace had been deployed and summoned.

2

He looked out the window. The railway disappeared behind mountain ranges and the shore to enter the metropolis. The unfamiliar scenery was full of wonder for Che-pin. The spring morning was cool and damp as the train headed to Taihoku. He unclenched his fists. His palm beaded with sweat; his anticipation accompanied by faint anxiety.

In the station, people came and went. So many youths with buzz cuts looked like him, green and weighed down with luggage.

Che-pin graduated from public school (kōgakkō) in 1924, after which he left his hometown in Taichū to study at Taihoku Normal School.

Applying to Taihoku Normal School was Mr. Yasuda's idea. Fully funded by the government, while Che-pin wouldn't need to worry about tuition or dormitory fees, he was obliged to take up a teaching position at a public school after graduation. Of the more than five hundred young, poor islanders who took the entrance exam, Che-pin was one of only fifty who made the cut and were offered admission. Mr. Yasuda not only believed Mainlanders and Islanders should enjoy equal status, but he also encouraged Che-pin to pursue further studies and appreciated his drawing talent. Mr. Yasuda was an impactful teacher who Che-pin respected.

The day the offer letter arrived, Mr. Yasuda paid an excited visit to Che-pin's home. Che-pin then learned the admission notice and message for preparation had first been delivered to his public school, where it was being treated as a major cause for celebration.

His mother stopped her tailoring work at hand, formally thanked Mr. Yasuda for his assistance, and went over to the stove to boil water for tea.

Mr. Yasuda discussed housing arrangements in Taihoku with Che-pin and told him he would need to enroll and move into the dormitory in about a month's time. Also, Mr. Yasuda advised, Che-pin would need a male elder or guarantor to accompany him during the registry process in Taihoku. Che-pin worried that he had no relatives who could help him in Taihoku.

"Kawasaki, a friend from my prefecture, is teaching at Taihoku Higher School. He is very passionate, kind, and generous to friends and students. Perhaps I could write him a letter to ask if he could accompany you to the registration at the Normal School? I think he'll say yes, with pleasure."

"Oh really! This is so kind of you, Mr. Yasuda. I don't know how I should thank you."

"Not to worry! Learn a lot in your new school. I'm so proud of you," Mr. Yasuda placed his hand on Che-pin's shoulder, his face gentle and kind.

Enrollment day approached quickly. Che-pin, excited and nervous, got off the train at Taihoku Station with his luggage. Leaving the building and stepping out into the city, he took a wide-eyed look at his new surroundings. He saw the clocks on the wall. It was earlier than his scheduled meeting with Mr. Kawasaki. So, he stopped walking, adjusted his mood, and waited at the train station entrance in silence.

In front of Taihoku Station, rows of fountain palms lined Omotechō dori. Their wide and delicate leaves glowed in the sun.

"Are you Huang Che-pin, the student?"

"Yes, I am. And you are Mr. Kawasaki, right?"

"It's so good to meet you. I asked a few students if they were you. I thought I was late."

Mr. Kawasaki wore a lightweight, casual, short-sleeved shirt and a Panama hat made of shichito matgrass.

They walked together down the bright and wide street. Mr. Kawasaki took obvious pleasure in introducing him to the city's infrastructure, museums, parks, the Sōtokufu, the Observatory...as well as shops, banks, clubs, hostels, and Niitakado Bookstore until they finally reached Taihoku Normal School.

Kawasaki saw him through the enrollment registry, and took him and his luggage to the dormitory.

Then, as he needed to wait for the dormitory supervisor to sign him in and list the ground rules, Che-pin bid a prudent and gracious goodbye to Mr. Kawasaki.

"Walk across the school to the Monopoly Bureau Building, then proceed down that street past three intersections. My home is the second wooden house on the right," Kawasaki said, pointing vigorously in the direction of the school's main gate. "Come on Sunday. I'll introduce you to the high school students I'm hosting – all local islanders."

Che-pin promised he would visit, bowing slightly both to express his gratitude and to bid the teacher farewell. Taihoku Normal School required all students to live in the dormitory to foster a disciplined, communal life.

Every morning, students in the dormitory lined up at the sinks to freshen up, then headed to the school grounds to join the morning assembly, do gymnastics, activate their bodies, and renew their spirits. Afterward, they returned to the canteen for a quiet breakfast.

After class at 3 p.m., students would work the small patch of soil allocated to them by the school, water the vegetables and flowers they had planted, and put into practice the agricultural knowledge learned in class. Before dusk, they would wash up in the dormitory shower room and take a short break before retiring to the study room to review their lessons in subjects such as Japanese, history, mathematics, and general taxonomy.

The courses and agricultural practicum at the school were designed to equip future high school teachers with farming techniques as well as the pedagogy for national language, mathematics, history, and geography education to cultivate the island's children.

Almost all of Che-pin's classmates at Taihoku Normal School were local islanders. Upperclassmen also helped him acclimate to dormitory life. The learning atmosphere was motivational and harmonious.

The first friend Che-pin made in this new environment called himself "Rock". Rock was a young man with darker skin and a sincere, matter-of-fact manner. Che-pin not only studied in the same class with him, but was also assigned the same dormitory room. They were both newcomers.

In the dormitory's first floor study room, Rock was eager to share his feelings, in an appropriately muted mixture of Taiwanese and Japanese, with his new friend... "Mr. Shiomi's history classes are so much fun! Time just flies by. I'm really looking forward to more stories in the next class. What do you think, Huang-kun?"

"It's fascinating, indeed. I like Mr. Ishikawa from yesterday's drawing class too."

"Oh... I'm not too good at drawing. The geometric shapes I drew yesterday were wonky. I don't think I'll ever be able to be such a graceful gentleman as Mr. Ishikawa," Rock said with an expression that was both serious and humorous. Che-pin almost laughed out loud in the quiet study room.

Rock was a little blunt but, as the son of a farming family, he always aced the agricultural practicum. He was also lithe and skillful in gymnastics class, naturally catching everyone's attention. Che-pin appreciated him very much.

A week flew by with a full curriculum and dormitory life that filled up most of Che-pin's time.

With no class on Sunday, the students queued up to report to the dormitory supervisor, beaming with joy over the imminent start of their holiday. None could wait to discuss where they'd be going next. But, before leaving to enjoy free time outside, each turned his nameplate, located at the main entrance to the dormitory, over on its backside.

After breakfast, many of the students went first to the study room to finish up on that week's coursework or notes before heading out for relaxing and joyful leisure activities in the afternoon. Some took a walk in the park with friends, shopped, or watched a movie. Some senior students headed out on bicycles in pursuit of outdoor adventure.

That afternoon, Che-pin fulfilled his promise to visit Mr. Kawasaki. Wearing his brand new white summer uniform and school hat, Che-pin took wide strides down the city's streets, his youthful face radiating a confident glow.

Mr. Kawasaki, an open, passionate, and bookish speaker, served as the history teacher at Taihoku Higher School. His family included Mrs. Kawasaki, his four-year-old son Kyōichi, and a female maid. The Kawasakis resided on the first floor of their two-story home, which included a spacious dining room, a bedroom, a tiny maid's room, and a bathroom. The two six-tatami rooms on the second floor were regularly rented out to the high school students they hosted.

During his visit, they all drank tea and ate snacks around the tea table. Wang Yung-te, a rare local islander student of General Studies at Taihoku Higher School, sat across Che-pin. Mr. Kawasaki praised him as being a smart and hard-working student. Wang Yung-te returned the compliment with a reserved smile that failed to hide the air of smug self-satisfaction.

Che-pin straightened his back unconsciously. He looked up to notice the shelves in the dining room were full of Mr. Kawasaki's book collections, which included novels by Natsume Sōseki and Kikuchi Kan, complex volumes such as Nishida Kitarō's *An Inquiry into the Good and Art and Morality*, and fashionable books from the Mainland that Che-pin had heard of but knew little about.

"Mr. Kawasaki's book collection is so big!"

"I remember having several books that introduce the arts from around the world. You enjoy drawing, right?"

"Yes, let me take a look," Che-pin flipped through one of the books, eyes glowing.

"You're welcome to read here. My students occasionally borrow books from me," Mr. Kawasaki said proudly.

Che-pin held and examined the colorful pages and paintings. Wang Yung-te joined in too.

Mr. Kawasaki was talkative, generously sharing information from his reading notes and collection and discussing famous literary figures and philosophers. Although Che-pin was unfamiliar with many of the famous people Mr. Kawasaki spoke of, he still enjoyed the conversation. Yung-te, sitting next to him, seemed to have read the books mentioned and raised his own reflection and questions. Che-pin was excited by the inspiration and, feeling somewhat in awe of Yung-te, felt motivated to read more extensively to absorb more knowledge of the age.

The setting sun shone on Mr. Kawasaki's courtyard, sending golden light flickering among the leaves. The gradually dimming sky marked the end of a joyous conversation. Che-pin left Kawasaki's home exhausted and contented, and walked back to the dormitory on his own. He secretly looked forward to discussing new topics and works with Kawasaki and Yung-te.

The time and feelings of studying at Taihoku Normal School flitted by like scenery passing outside a train window. He could not slow down to observe things. Everyday affairs along with light and shadow slipped by. Che-pin slowly acclimated to life at Taihoku Normal and its hectic assignments, life drawing clubs, and activities organized by the hometown association, at which he met quite a few new friends and broadened his horizon. He stepped into myriad new areas, absorbing the multifaceted world.

In his second year, he still visited Kawasaki's house on occasion, being the most familiar place to him in Taihoku aside from school. Seeing Kawasaki and Yung-te comforted him. He could openly talk about his most recent discoveries and doubts.

One autumn afternoon, he packed leafy vegetables and several pumpkins and carrots he had grown in his agriculture practicum, planning to deliver them to Mr. Kawasaki. He looked forward to meeting him and Yung-te that coming Sunday.

A highschooler from the Mainland hosted by the Kawasakis had returned to Tokyo to prepare for the university entry test, and Ozawa Ichi, a veterinary student and Mrs. Kawasaki's brother from Tokyo, had moved into the vacant room.

Ozawa and his few pieces of luggage occupied one of the two six-tatami guest rooms on the second floor. On that Sunday afternoon in autumn, the Kawasakis gave Ozawa a welcome worthy of long-parted friends. They drank tea and ate snacks in the dining room, earnestly inquiring into his life in Tokyo.

Che-pin could feel the lively atmosphere immediately upon entering the Kawasaki residence.

"Huang Kun, please join us for tea and snacks. This is Mr. Ozawa," Mr. Kawasaki beamed.

Che-pin handed the vegetables to Mrs. Kawasaki. After greeting Ozawa, they all sat down to chat.

"Yung-te is joining a lecture organized by the debate team. Ozawa-kun has just moved to the room upstairs. He is Matsuko's brother, and a student of mine while I was teaching at First Taihoku Prefectural Secondary School."

"He's my youngest brother," Mrs. Kawasaki served Ozawa and Che-pin two slices of cake.

"Thanks, sister," Ozawa smiled like a kid seeking attention.

"I was so worried about you living in Tokyo during the Great Kantō Earthquake two years ago," Kawasaki professed, pouring Ozawa a cup of hot tea. "I could not contact you for a while."

"Yes, I was so lucky to have survived. It was so chaotic in the city..." Ozawa, looking suddenly solemn, could not finish the rest of his thought before he sank into contemplation.

"So, Ozawa-kun was a student in Tokyo?" Che-pin asked.

"Yes, I was enrolled at a vet school in Tokyo while working in a factory." Ozawa talked about what he had observed in Tokyo, as well as the turbulent social changes that had come after the earthquake.

A few days after the earthquake, houses were still collapsing and fires continued to break out as if we were all in purgatory. The government had taken advantage of the situation to kill numerous dissidents. Ōsugi-senpai, whom Ozawa had greatly respected, was brutally killed by the Kempeitai amidst the post-earthquake chaos. This had pushed Ozawa into the revolutionary cause of anarchy.

Che-pin held the rim of his teacup, staring at the tea leaves as they rose and sank in the cup. Ozawa fell into silence halfway through his speech. From the side, Che-pin looked up to examine this contemplative person sitting next to him with curiosity. The post-earthquake social turmoil and the development of anarchism described by Ozawa were things Che-pin had known nothing about. But he found compelling clarity in Ozawa's voice and gaze. Without a shadow of doubt, he knew he could trust him.

The sliding door opened slowly.

Kyōichi's tiny body stood in the newly opened space, looking at the adults in the dining room.

"Kyōichi, see who's here," Mrs. Kawasaki extended her hands to her son. Kyōichi walked to the tableside tentatively, cowering next to his mother.

"He was a newborn when you were at Taihoku High School. How time flies!" Mrs. Kawasaki said, hugging Kyōichi.

"Kyōichi, you're so grown up now! Do you remember me?" Ozawa smiled at Kyōichi's round eyes.

"I don't think he would remember anything. He was so small back then." Mr. Kawasaki said. "Huang-kun, your hometown is also in Taichū Prefecture, right? Ozawa-kun and Matsuko also grew up there."

"That's right," Che-pin nodded.

"My two sisters and I were born in Shōka, where my father worked as a senior police officer. My entire family moved to Taihoku when I started primary school," said Ozawa.

"Oh." Che-pin felt a sense of familiarity knowing that they came from the same hometown. But the barrier between Mainlanders and Islanders hinted at the distance for him.

"Does father know you're back in Taiwan?" asked Mrs. Kawasaki, as if she had recalled something out of the blue.

"He doesn't know. I haven't contacted that person for so long. After mother passed away, he relocated to Kirun. Our arguments ended then," Ozawa said forlornly.

Their conversation stopped. It was raining outside the window. Daylight gradually faded.