



Thug Bookstore

A Full English translation is available.

流氓書店

Author: Tung Lin Hsieh **Illustrator:** Tung Lin Hsieh **Publisher:** Mirror Fiction

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Hung Ta-Hao comes to a struggling bookstore to collect a debt, only to find that the owner has already fled. The unsuspecting store manager, Liu Ching-Wen, can offer only meager sales figures and an honest admission: given the bookstore's dire situation, there is simply no way to repay the debt. For Ta-Hao, this assignment represents a rare chance to turn his life around. To complete his mission, he decides to help Ching-Wen sell off all the remaining stock within three months.

Reality, however, is harsh. With his background as a former thug, Ta-Hao quickly reads the bookstore's predicament in its sparse foot traffic and low checkout numbers, and begins to understand Ching-Wen's struggles. Coming from vastly different worlds, the two clash in values and perspectives. Yet together they devise a range of strategies to attract customers. Through this cooperation, they gradually come to know each other better—and mutual affection begins to blossom.

Yet the shadows of their pasts soon come knocking at the door...



Author **Tung Lin Hsieh**

Tung Lin Hsieh's works have frequently appeared on the Books.com.tw annual bestseller list and have been featured in the recommended selections for the Taiwan Pavilion at the Angoulême International Comics Festival. Formerly a novelist and advertising copywriter, Hsieh is now a full-time comic artist, known for notable works such as *The God's Convenience Store*, *Who's Afraid of Whom*, *Love Counseling for Assassins*, and *I Work at a Scam Company*. Additionally, he has been invited to teach scriptwriting at platforms such as LINE WEBTOON, Taiwan Comics Base, and Game Orange Comics Star. *The God's Convenience Store* has been licensed for adaptation into board games, video games, stage plays, and film and television. The series consists of two volumes, and overseas rights have been sold in Russian.

Browsing a Bookstore with a Thug: The Surprise and Delight of Shared Meaning

by Li Hua

At heart, the Taiwanese manga creator Tung Lin Hsieh is deeply concerned with society and the fate of his country. Since the 2014 Sunflower Movement, where 500,000 people marched in the streets, he has committed himself to using a light, humorous style to translate serious issues—whether national affairs or everyday life—into comics. During that period, Hsieh came to recognize the communicative power of the medium, in which images and text work together to convey ideas. Comics, he believes, can be a powerful way to reach the hearts and minds of people.

Yet his love for books reaches even further back. “Bookstores and the publishing industry are basically my comfort zone,” Hsieh says. “I’ve always paid close attention to them.” He explains that books have long been his primary source of learning: whenever he wants to

read something, he buys it immediately, unable to wait.

In 2024, a decade after his debut, he released *Thug Bookstore*—a work that speaks for the world of books. Aware that a story centered around an independent bookstore may seem too niche, Hsieh injected the element of a “thug,” infusing the narrative with energy and entertainment. Thus, the handsome tough guy Hung Ta-Hao, who somehow keeps finding a reason to take off his shirt, steps into the indie bookstore run by the feisty, literary Liu Ching-Wen, quick to reprimand anyone who gets on her nerves.

Aiming to reach readers of all ages, Hsieh gave himself the challenge of conveying a thug’s aura without using a single swear word. Indeed, the most violent action in this book is a single punch. The story structure leans toward

the softer tones of Korean dramas and idol romances, while the details of running a bookstore emerged through Hsieh’s careful research. “At first I only wanted the bookstore to be a backdrop, but the more I investigated, the more stories I found there,” he says. He even built a 3D model of the fictional store to convey its vivid, living presence.

The incidents that unfold in the indie bookstore are colorful, striking, and memorable. Liu Ching-Wen runs the shop alone after its owner has fled, until Hung Ta-Hao, sent by a debt-collection company, suddenly appears. As sparks fly between them, the bookstore’s predicament comes into sharp focus—down to the realistic detail that selling black tea brings in more income than selling books.

“The decline of bookstores is a global issue,” Hsieh laments. “Maybe colleagues abroad will resonate with it too. I hope to contribute something in my own way.” He sees *Thug Bookstore* as a possible stepping stone toward his long-held wish of “bringing Taiwanese stories to the world.”

Hsieh is the kind of creator driven by an inborn obsession: he wants to create because he loves reading, and he reads even more because he wants to create, a cycle that continually pushes him forward. After completing military service, he worked as a copywriter in an advertising agency, which gave him a new perspective on language. “Advertising copy has to be

fast, direct, even unconventional. You can’t fall into other people’s logic. That’s why the language of film, comics, and online discussions is often a better source of inspiration.”

Even so, when it comes to the physical object of the book, Hsieh still believes in its power to circulate and connect, and he cherishes the tactile experience of holding one in his hands. For this reason, he feels a deep sense of regret when a work never makes it into print. He is pleased when some of his projects achieve commercial success, yet saddened when others fail to find their place. Ultimately, he hopes to reach a wide audience while quietly weaving his personal beliefs into his stories. This duality—both rational and deeply emotional—defines Tung Lin Hsieh.

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

Li Hua holds a B.A. in Industrial Design from Shih Chien University and an M.A. in Visual Design from Scuola Politecnica di Design (SPD Milano). Long active as a chief editor in publishing, with a focus on art, design, picture books, and comics, Li has edited more than one hundred titles. With extensive experience in graphic and web design, illustration, and independent video production, Li works currently as a freelance editor and reporter, as well as a book and magazine layout and graphic designer.





