

BOOKS FROM TAIWAN

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FROM THE EDITOR

Interesting things have been happening in the 'world' of translated fiction over the last decade. And yes, sometimes it feels like a special 'world' inside a wider 'world of literature', when of course, translation is one of the most fundamental and ordinary aspects of global publishing. Every year, hundreds of thousands of books are translated between a dizzying array of languages. It is the least talked about, most ordinary, everyday cultural practice I can imagine.

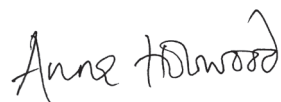
But suddenly there is talk of translation. As new magazines, websites and best-seller lists are telling us, translation is 'happening'.

For those of us who work in the business of making fiction travel across continents, we are used to laments about the market. But this has been changing. Where translated fiction used to be synonymous in English with 'difficult', 'up-market' or 'literary', we are now seeing global genre blockbusters that did not start life out in the publishing houses of London or New York. Translation doesn't have to mean marginal. And it doesn't have to mean difficult. It can mean entertaining. It can mean thought provoking. It covers the full range of adjectives we would use for literature published in English.

Translation isn't just for a niche 'world within a world', it is the lifeblood of how we talk to each other. Reading books from around the world should be fun, not worthy.

And that's where publications like ours come in. *Books from Taiwan* aims to follow in the footsteps of other similar publications, providing industry specific information as well as opening up Taiwanese literature to a wider audience. Funded by the Ministry of Culture and curated by publishing professionals, we aim to facilitate a process already in action. All titles featured are eligible for the National Museum of Taiwan Literature's Translation and Publication Grants Program.

In these pages you will travel from the disappearing saltpans of Taiwan's south, to the mean streets of Hong Kong and Taipei and on to a fantastical world where the children must wrest control from the adults... Literature is not defined by national borders. Books don't have passports and stories travel because of our curiosity. While representing only a small number of the titles that have diverted Taiwanese readers over the past year, we hope the books introduced here will surprise in their variety and make you lose yourself, if only for a little while, within our stories.



Anna Holmwood
Editor

TRANSLATION/PUBLICATION GRANTS

Books From Taiwan supports the translation of Taiwanese literature into foreign languages with the Translation and Publication Grants Program, administered by the National Museum of Taiwan Literature. The grants are divided into three categories: translation only (up to NT\$150,000 per title); publication only (up to NT\$450,000 per title); and for both translation and publication (up to \$600,000 per title). Applications are accepted between November 1 and November 30 each year, with results announced in February the next year.

The Application Process

Each application must include the following documents:

- a signed license agreement
- a signed translator's contract and a sample translation
- a copy of the translator's CV
- a publisher profile
- marketing and publicity plans

Eligibility

Any established foreign publisher purchasing foreign language rights who has an active backlist is eligible to apply for a grant. Sales and translation contracts must be completed and signed by the time of application. Eligible genres include fiction and non-fiction (biography, criticism, poetry, essay, history, etc.) in all literary genres related to Taiwan.

For full details of the Translation and Publication Grants Program, please visit

<http://www.nmtl.gov.tw/>

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TAIWANESE LITERATURE OFF THE PAGE

by **Darryl Sterk**

For me, until the summer of 2011, Taiwan literature had mostly been 'on the page', so to speak. I'd been translating for the Taipei Chinese Pen for several years. The Pen would send me an essay and a story, and I would translate it, rewrite it several dozen times and send it to the editor and proofreader for suggestions or corrections, which I would mostly ignore before going on to rewrite it again. But in the summer of 2011, I met Gray Tan and was soon engaged to translate a sample of Wu Ming-Yi's *The Man With the Compound Eyes* about a trash vortex in the Pacific. Little did I know I would soon be engulfed in a vortex of activities related to literary translation. I kept translating in my own fashion. But in time, I also had to do a lot of extra-textual events, for which I wasn't exactly trained. I was a Sinologist, writing my dissertation on post-war Taiwanese film and fiction. Ask anyone doing a Ph.D. on contemporary literature and you'll hear a lot about critical readings of different kinds: Marxist, feminist, postcolonial, New Historicist, whatever. When I got my Ph.D., I was proud of how 'critical' I had become and how well I was able to 'read'. But for better or for worse, there was no time for critical rants about capitalism in the extra-textual activities which became a natural extension of my translation of *The Man With the Compound Eyes*. Indeed, the novel was itself partly a capitalist commodity and my job was to promote it. A Ph.D. is no practice for promote things and was worried that I wouldn't be able to do it. Luckily, Gray Tan picked the right book, particularly for me. *The Man With the Compound Eyes* is easy to be enthusiastic about, and the writer, as I soon discovered, is a really nice guy. Wu Ming-Yi's environmental concern is something I share and his scientific knowledge, of tiger butterflies, Moltrechi's tree frogs and albino banyan trees, simply blows me away. The audiences I addressed were mostly people who love literature and care about the environment. Promotion has never been easier.

So what extra-textual activities did I have to undertake? Actually, 'where' would be a better question. When Gray Tan sold the English translation rights to Harvill Secker in November of 2011, it was a milestone. Several dozen Taiwanese novels had been published in English before, but all with university or boutique presses like Columbia University Press or the Gay Sunshine Press, which published Howard Goldblatt's translation, *Crystal Boys*. Wu Ming-Yi was the first Taiwanese writer to be taken on by a major English language trade publisher. Naturally, the success story made waves and a year and a half later, when I delivered the final draft to the editor, the Ministry of Culture decided to organize what I took to calling a World Book Tour. Actually it was only to North America, but it was still a Big Deal. In the space of several weeks I committed myself to three intercontinental trips: New York and Toronto in October 2013, San Francisco in February 2014 and

Montreal in May 2014.

As soon as I got to New York I paid a visit to the offices of Random House, where Lexy Bloom and the folks in charge of the Vintage Pantheon imprint—which the American edition of *The Man With the Compound Eyes* bears—are located. Wu Ming-Yi had arrived from Germany, where he was attending the Frankfurt Book Fair. We had a conversation about how to market the novel, focusing not only on the Taiwanese community in North America but also on readers of speculative or fantastical fiction. After brief photo shoot, we went back to the hotel to rest a bit before the evening event, a speech at the Taiwan Economic and Cultural Office. Wu Ming-Yi and I did a reading from the second chapter of the novel, which describes the traditional lifestyle of the people of Wayo Wayo and introduces Atile'i, the main character. I talked about the process of translation, comparing the different versions of specific sentences or passages from the translation and attempting to explain and justify my final version. We got a warm reception from the audience of about fifty, including a little old Jewish lady, who was there with a Taiwanese friend. I promised her I would send her a copy but promptly mislaid her address.

After dinner with New York-based Taiwanese graduate students, we flew to Toronto to give a talk at my alma mater, the University of Toronto, on inspirations for the novel and its translation. I talked about the end of Thoreau's *Walden*, about the 'strong and beautiful bug' that comes out of the table made from apple wood, in reference to the stag beetle in *The Man With the Compound Eyes* which Alice Shih pierces with a needle, only to discover it still alive several days later, pacing the void with its three pairs of legs. I gave an interview for the *Toronto Star*, which really gave us a nice write-up the next day. The following evening, we were on stage for the International Festival of Authors at the Harbourfront Centre with a Portuguese writer who was talking about translation even though he didn't know his translator, and who was intrigued by my translation of the Chinese word for penis into English in the scene where Dahu's father takes Dahu to the seaside and squeezes his little willy (not his cock, which, the Portuguese author observed, would have belonged in an entirely different novel).

The second trip we took was to San Francisco, at the invitation of Professor Andrew Jones at Berkeley. We heard scholars talk about the legal and scientific ramifications of the Great Pacific Trash Vortex, which in *The Man With the Compound Eyes* turns into a floating trash mountain that crashes into Taiwan's east coast. Occupying the high seas, which are under no nation's jurisdiction, the vortex is no one nation's responsibility. I talked about mythopoeia in the novel: the Atlantis myth of the people of Wayo Wayo is a moral fable about the ecological need for limits on human desire. We visited the People's Park, went past Ursula K. Le Guin's old house—Le Guin had written a blurb for *The Man With the Compound Eyes* in which she said, 'Wu Ming-Yi treats human vulnerability and the world's vulnerability with fearless tenderness'—and saw an intrepid river otter at the seaside. A miracle. Before we left we heard that the city authorities were banning plastic bottles.

The third trip we took was to Montreal for the Blue Metropolis Literary Festival. We all had a

good impression of the city itself, especially the bagels and the murals. The event we performed at the Blue Met went very well. We were interviewed by the lovely Yan Liang, who is also a writer and who works at the CBC. The questions she asked we had heard a dozen times before: What was the most difficult part to translate? Why the mixture of technical and lyrical? Where did the inspiration for the plot come from? And a bit more specifically: Why can the man with the compound eyes only observe, not intervene? Ming-Yi answered that the man is based on the Guanyin Bodhisattva, who, similarly observes the suffering of all sentient beings in the world without offering help.

On all these trips, at all these events, I was called upon to interpret for Ming-Yi, which initially was quite a challenge. As a translator I had received no special training in interpreting. I never learned how to take notes. Thankfully, Ming-Yi divided his remarks into minute long chunks, which I was able to turn into comprehensible English. I'd read a lot about Ming-Yi and of course I was intimately familiar with *The Man With the Compound Eyes*. After all the events we've done together I've learned even more, about his hardscrabble upbringing in a mall called the Chunghwa Market which was torn down several years before I made it to Taipei in 1995. About his university days in mass communication. About his environmental and literary baptism and his decision to become a novelist against his father's wishes. (Sadly, his father never lived to see his son become so successful.) About how he fell in love with butterflies and with Aldo Leopold, the great American observer of nature's rhythms. About how he wrote and organized sit-ins against a project to build a massive petrochemical refinery on a wetland! About the history of the environmental movement in Taiwan and the history of Taiwanese nature literature. About his plans for his next novel, a story of a bicycle thief that also tells of Taiwan's industrialization over the past several decades. After the fact, I think I am at least a competent Chinese-English interpreter for Wu Ming-Yi. (Gwennaël Gaffric, who did his Ph.D. dissertation on Wu Ming-Yi's writing, would be the man to interpret into French.)

Was the World Tour worth it? I think of it in Buddhist terms, as planting seeds. Some seeds will not sprout, others will grow beyond your wildest imagination. Some of those seeds must be silently growing as I type, even though it feels like we are going through a lull in the buzz we generated from last October to May of this year. Wu Ming-Yi and I were invited to a literary festival in Burma, but were both too busy to go: maybe next year. There's been talk of taking us around Asia, to Hong Kong, Seoul and Singapore. *The Man with the Compound Eyes* is a great novel and might go on to become a sleeper hit. As it's said in Chinese, one tells ten, and ten tell a hundred; I've been sending one copy to ten, hoping that ten will send copies to a hundred. I've sent several paperbacks to Captain Charles Moore, who discovered the Great Pacific Trash Vortex, and to anyone I can think of who likes speculative fiction and who is concerned about environmental issues. I'm still looking for the address of that little old Jewish lady from New York.

Christmas is coming up: I have a great present idea for you.

TAIWAN/FICTION, AND ALL THE WAY TO FRANCE

By **Gwennaël Gaffric**

I was invited by Philippe Thiollier, editor of L'Asiathèque Publishing House, to direct a new imprint, Taiwan / Fiction, which we launched in October this year.

Taiwan / Fiction is not strictly speaking the first dedicated series of Taiwanese literature in France. The Lettres Taïwanaises collection was created in 2000 by three professors, Chan Ching-Ho, Angel Pino and Isabelle Rabut, who have published (and sometimes translated) literary works by the Chu family (Chu Hsi-Ning, Chu T'ien-Wen and Chu T'ien-Hsin), Ch'en Yin-Chen, Chang Ta-Ch'un, Hwang Ch'un-Ming, and more recently Wuhe.

Taiwan / Fiction's goal is somewhat different to that of the Lettres Taïwanaises imprint, since the texts we will translate and publish are primarily contemporary novels and not necessarily classics or already well recognised in the history of modern Taiwanese literature. We are instead interested in writers that appears to us to be representative of new voices, new viewpoints and new literary experiments from the island.

We will concentrate on living authors who explore the changing world in which we live through their literature. Thus, we don't simply focus on historically 'representative' Taiwanese writers or literary movements, but authors whose works have a wider resonance, which are not limited to their own contexts. Of course, this doesn't mean that these authors can't talk about the singular Taiwanese experience, on the contrary, we would like to introduce in French works that can show that the Taiwanese experience illustrates and reveals the current state of our world, or generates fresh perspectives on it.

In the original statement announcing the launch of our collection, we wrote as follows:

'[...] The ambition of the Taiwan / Fiction series is to translate and publish texts whose subjects and scope should go beyond Taiwan or the so-called 'Chinese world' to echo beyond it and offer new thoughts on global issues. Among them: environmental concerns, identities of local languages and cultures, the impact of colonialism on memory, of economic globalization on traditional ways of life, gender and sexuality, etc... The above topics do not necessarily imply a duty to publish so-called 'social activism' novels, but high-quality stories whose aspiration is not simply 'art for art's sake', but a wish to question our daily realities.'

Hence, we hope to introduce the authors we will publish not strictly as 'Taiwanese writers' but as 'global writers with a Taiwanese view on the world.' For example, the French translation of the Taiwanese writer Wu Ming-Yi's *The Man with Compound Eyes* recently received the French

International Insular Book Award. It was the first Taiwanese novel to ever receive such award in France. We hope to promote Taiwanese literature in this same vein: Taiwanese literature should not only interact with 'literature written in Chinese language' or some separate space of 'Asian literature', but must be brought into a 'world literature', where Taiwan can speak to an international audience.

Among the first texts we have selected, we will publish the queer science fiction novel *Membranes* by Chi Ta-Wei and a unique literary experiment, the two screenplays written for the cinema classic *A City of Sadness*, written by Wu Nien-Jen and Chu T'ien-Wen respectively.

In the future, we would like to introduce to French-speaking readers a variety of texts, all thematically strong and of the highest literary merit, including novels and short stories by authors such as Badai, Kao Yi-Feng, Lai Hsiang-Yin, Wu Ming-Yi, Lo Yi-Jun, Wuhe, Hung Ling, Chen Hsuë, Chu Yu-Hsun and many more.

But like in any new literary imprint, we too have encountered some (temporary) obstacles that we have had to overcome.

Firstly, we face a problem common to all Taiwanese literature in translation, namely a basic lack of media interest when compared to other 'national' literatures, such as those of China, Japan and now Korea. It is therefore important to offer significant translations with an original point of view with respect to Asian literature in general, but also books that can attract the attention of a reader who isn't necessarily attracted by Taiwan itself at first glance. Texts on issues such as ecology, war, memory, sexual identity, the vitality and reinvention of ancient religions and cultures or new technologies seem to us very powerful in this regard.

For decades, L'Asiathèque Publishing House has been a recognised and respected force in the French publishing industry specialising in texts relating to Asia. But until recent years, L'Asiathèque mostly published scientific and cultural books on the continent, such as works of classical literature and language textbooks, but very few contemporary novels. A challenge for us will be to seduce an audience who is not usually familiar with this kind of material from a publishing house such as L'Asiathèque. Hence the publication of the novel *Membranes*, which is not only a high-quality work by a wonderful storyteller, but also offers cross readings on original issues. To us, this seems the perfect way to draw in future readers.

Another challenge we are facing is that of the small number of French translators who are familiar with Taiwanese literature and society and the presence of different Taiwanese languages in literature from the island. This question was of particular pertinence while working on the oeuvre of Kan Yao-Ming, an author we particularly admire. However, our ambition is to work with young and talented translators and we are not afraid to experiment in order to recreate the same multilingual and multicultural textures we find in the original text.

As for the rights market, since we have only just launched the series and L'Asiathèque is still not considered a publisher of general contemporary literature, it has not been easy to get a place and gain influence in the financial negotiation for the rights to contemporary works with big potential. We hope that the future success of our collection will allow us to simplify these procedures.

A final problem is of course related to the funding needed to run a project like ours. It is difficult in the early stages to accurately assess the size of our potential readership and any financial investment is a risk. Hopefully, we will be able to access French and Taiwanese cultural grants to help us in this regard.

But whatever the challenges, we are very excited about the road ahead and we can't wait to introduce to French readers the richness of Taiwanese literature.

NEW BOOKS IN GERMAN: NOT JUST ABOUT NEW BOOKS IN GERMAN

By Jen Calleja

Literature in translation is the most wonderful kind of cross-cultural communication: the sharing of meaningful stories between cultures. Though interest in translated literature is undoubtedly having a renaissance with a selection of publishers shouting proud about how much they want to publish more translated literature, literary journals having dedicated translation issues and the wider media exploring the process of literary translation in their articles and interviews, the amount of foreign-language literature being translated into English is still so much less than in the other direction.

The market for translated literature is still relatively niche and everyone within the translation community internationally is trying to raise its profile and whet their readers' appetite for it. During my roller-coaster sixteen months as acting editor and acting editorial consultant for the journal *New Books in German* I experienced how interconnected the world of translation is—and must be. To promote any literature in translation, one needs to promote all literature in translation and know the literary landscape as a whole. It would of course be wonderful to think that all publishers and readers are keeping a keen eye out for books in translation and that the strength of a book alone should be enough to carry it into another language, country and market, but unfortunately this isn't the case.

Founded in 1996, *New Books in German* is a project helping to get more German-language fiction, non-fiction and children's books into the international market. Both a biannual print magazine and a website, *NBG* publishes reviews for a selection of curated titles; interviews with publishers, writers and translators; features on current trends in German literature; and information on a selection of the latest translations in English of German books. Most of the books selected for review in the magazine are guaranteed translation funding by the financial partners of the magazine should an English-language publisher buy the rights, which is a wonderful additional incentive for publishers wishing to branch out into German literature but are put off by the irksome additional cost of hiring a translator.

The array of print and online-only publications with the same mission as *NBG* (including *12 Swiss Books*, *Swedish Book Review*, *Books from Finland*, *New Spanish Books*, *Fiction France*, *10 Books from Holland*, to name a few) likewise not only promote individual titles, but also interview literary translators, follow trends in the publishing world and bring news on the current popularity of certain genres of translated literature in general. These publications also learn and take inspiration

from one another and in some instances have the same models and editorial processes as each other. The role of these publications, including *NBG*, is to act as mediator between the publishing houses at home and publishers abroad by highlighting a selection of their language's best (and also typically contemporary) literature. You can't pitch books blindly into a foreign market, no matter how great the book is. *NBG*, for example, seeks books that are first and foremost outstanding, but that would also not be too problematic to translate and that would find an English-language readership (this, I should add, is why our partnership with the German Book Office New York is so important; even the various English-language markets differ, so it's good to have a broad perspective on which books could work in English translation). The books need to have a fighting chance, so knowing the market you're trying to enter is imperative.

NBG receives financial and promotional support from a group of partners comprising the Frankfurt Book Fair and German, Austrian and Swiss cultural organisations. Representatives of these partners also make up *NBG*'s editorial committee with additional support from the magazine's publisher the British Centre for Literary Translation, the German Book Office New York, as well as a rotating array of enthusiastic and generous guests who are publishers, agents and literary translators. Those directly involved with *NBG*, though representing different countries within the German-speaking world, want to support and promote the best German-language literature regardless of nation and primarily wish to strengthen the image and rate of exchange of translated literature and the variety of literature available overall. They believe in translation. Extending this idea of variety and excellence, the Frankfurt Book Fair, which distributes the magazine internationally and stocks hundreds of issues at the Fair itself, has a similar focus on promoting international literary exchange and dialogue by hosting a guest of honour nation at each Fair. *NBG* is proud to reflect this in each autumn issue by publishing an interview or feature on the guest nation and their literature and a guest piece by the FBF that covers a current trend or issue within the international book market.

NBG's editor of the last five years, Charlotte Ryland, has been taking the magazine and the project as a whole from strength to strength, finding new ways of promoting titles and the take up of books with new initiatives including the highly successful Emerging Translators Programme. The ETP was founded in 2011 as a way of finding and nurturing new translating talent while also helping promote the titles appearing in the magazine. Each spring, *NBG* invites translations of the same extract from a new German-language fiction title and commissions the translators of the six best submissions to translate samples from titles being reviewed in the upcoming *NBG*. They then get the chance to workshop their finished samples with an award-winning literary translator to perfect their work and learn about the process and career of a professional translator of fiction. It makes perfect sense to create a competition and immersive workshop alongside the magazine; what good is promoting German-language books if there aren't exceptional literary translators to translate them and publishers don't know where to find them? The ETP benefits all parties involved: the translators have the opportunity to hone their craft and get what is usually their first taste of translating literature professionally, the German-language publishers receive a polished sample

translation at a reduced fee to use in their rights work and promotion, and *NBG* gets to meet the potential literary translators from German of the future that it can happily recommend to English-language publishers.

Vital to the future success of literature in translation is for publications and platforms like *NBG* to continue getting information and resources to the right people, while also helping with international networking. Part of the wider, ongoing work of the project is to connect publishers with their foreign counterparts, and publishers with translators, so that the ultimate objective can be achieved: international authors' books reaching the hands of international readers. Though the languages may be different, the goals are the same: the diversification of literary voices and the sharing of incredible stories.

BOOKS FROM TAIWAN

FLOATING

懸浮



C.F. HU

胡晴舫

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C.F. HU, novelist and essayist, was born in Taipei and has lived in Hong Kong, Shanghai, Beijing and Tokyo. Now based in New York City, Hu explores the solitude of urban life and contemporary cultural identity in a globalised world. Her book, *The Third Person*, received Taiwan's Golden Tripod Award for the best literary publication of 2013.



The first work of fiction in six years from acclaimed critic and essayist, C.F. Hu, *Floating* is a novel in stories that explores the fleeting and incidental linkages that characterise modern urban life and how we experience the city in our disparate yet hyper-connected world.

These stories traverse national borders, taking us from Taipei, to Hong Kong, through Macau, Toyko and New York. As readers, we drift along with the characters. A death by morning's first light, the private reflections of a middle-aged author, a chance meeting far from home of a widow and her daughter, a retired man and his embittered wife, the eternal graduate student, a book shop owner coming home but unable to find his roots, a grand dame residing in one of the world's most expensive hotels, an ambitious young manager the night before a business trip... These characters may not know each other, but they are related in more profound ways.

Despite the floating quality of the prose, these characters are substantial and the book takes on just as concrete social concerns, such as intergenerational justice, gender equality and gay rights. Life can be desolate, but light comes from our smallest decisions. Their stories are a reminder to us all; freedom to choose your own way of life is a fundamental human right.

FLOATING

By C.F. Hu. Translated by Helen Wang.

Chapter 5: Ever After

Ah Hai walked away, leaving his love in the bookshop. I'll never be able to go back there, he thought. If only it would go bust. It would save him the bother of having to avoid it. Save him the worry of inadvertently passing this way again, of rubbing salt into the wound.

Mei Mei wanted an explanation, but Ah Hai had little to say.

He delivered his plaint softly, a sadness in his eyes: 'You know better than anyone what you've done to me. I may be well into my thirties and still living with my parents. That's because the thesis is dragging on and I can't finish until I have completed the research. And I may only be working in a bookshop for pocket money, but that doesn't mean I have to accept love as a form of pity.'

'But if you leave me, what will I do?' said Mei Mei. 'There'll be no one to look after me.'

'You could start by learning to grow up and look after yourself,' Ah Hai replied stiffly.

Mei Mei burst into tears. She was young and had a natural beauty. For her, love meant being held in the palms of men and being their princess. She cried with the same diligence one sees in a small child's handwriting homework, unconcerned that the bookshop was still open and they were standing behind the counter, working. She was wearing the sleeveless lemon dress she had just bought in New York. Pale smooth arms of white jade. Ten perfectly painted nails peeping through her flip flops. Silky black hair swaying like willow by the river. Her face glistening with a scattering of tears. Didn't he love her any more, she asked. His smile was bitter. How could he not love her? Even the immaculate way she cried touched him. He didn't reply, didn't say that her tears fell like acid on his heart, hissing as they melted one tiny hole after another, deep, endless black caverns. It was a critical moment and sweet words would only make the break-up harder to bear.

'Then don't leave me.' Mei Mei started stamping her feet.

There was only one person left in the bookshop: a young guy with a rucksack on his back, standing in the travel section. Ah Hai glanced at Tony, his boss, who kept peering out of the office at the back to check that the young guy wasn't helping himself to their stock. An elderly woman had

just walked out wearing a big overcoat despite the heat and Ah Hai had seen her brazenly stuffing Li Han's debut novel into her pocket. He hadn't stopped her, in fact he'd even exchanged a few words with her. It would have been a different matter if she'd taken a copy of the romance novel by the American housewife; he would have called the police. Mostly, because he'd already had to place two orders for that translation this week and he had no desire to phone the arrogant distributor again. But also because they never sold any copies of Li Han's early novels and it was just lying there gathering dust and if someone wanted to waste their life reading it, then that was fine by him. The novelist had even killed himself, but not before offering his wife's body to the chopping block of criticisms of his writing. The writer's approach to art was too intense, but as a reader you had to read a few lines to show your respect. He felt well disposed towards this elegant thief with her elevated taste, not least because her eyes were so beautiful when she smiled, despite her advancing years.

Tony didn't know that Ah Hai and Mei Mei were at that moment breaking up. He winked at Ah Hai to tell him to keep a close eye on the sole customer in the travel section. Tony was still suffering from jet lag, making him drowsy in the afternoons. Two weeks earlier, on the pretext of needing an assistant to help him at a book fair, he had taken Mei Mei on a business trip to New York. She had been delighted to be invited and brought back a suitcase full of booty: European film posters, second hand German books that she couldn't read, strappy Roman sandals, a silver crucifix necklace and the outfit she was wearing now. Not long before that she'd also been to a literary conference in Tokyo with the poet who often came to the bookshop to chat with Tony. They'd been away for six days and five nights, including one night in Kyoto and another in Osaka, where she'd bought souvenirs and a selection of Japanese gizmos. Mei Mei and Ah Hai were on the same wages and he didn't know she could possibly have so much money. But as he never invited her to go anywhere with him, he couldn't really ask. And as the guys never took him on any trips, he felt a bit left out.

'I can't go on like this,' Ah Hai announced.

'What do you mean like this?' Mei Mei released another teardrop.

Oh, Mei Mei, Mei Mei, not again! Her feigned girlish innocence was a weapon of mass destruction.

'Either we both resign, or we split up,' said Ah Hai.

'Why do you always have to be so extreme? Neither of us has any money, we can't both be out of work at the same time.' She made little gasps for air.

Tony strolled out of his office and passed behind the young guy, making a point of stopping for a few minutes to make him uncomfortable. But he was completely unaware of his presence as flicked through *A Guide to Hokkaido*.

Moments later, Tony was standing before them and Ah Hai realised Mei Mei's face was completely dry. No trace of the tears. Vanished like dewdrops in the sunlight.

It was just after six. The bookshop would close in another hour or so. Every day at this time Tony would come and ask them if they'd like to go for a drink at the bar next door. He'd suggest that he and Mei Mei go first and Ah Hai could come and join them after he'd locked up. Mei Mei would hesitate, look at Ah Hai and flutter her eyelashes, her eyes sparkling with life, like a lamb unburdened by decisions. And he would wave his hand feebly and tell them to go ahead, he'd be there later. At which she'd grab her handbag and emerge from behind the counter. She'd follow Tony out of the shop without once glancing back. They'd be waiting for him next door, she said loudly. As soon they were outside, they'd behave like a pair of lovers who had waited all day to share their innermost thoughts with the person they held closest in the world.

By the time Ah Hai had pulled down the metal shutter, cashed up, put the day's takings in the security bag, taken it to the back office, put it in the large middle drawer of Tony's desk, left the shop through the side door, and gone into the bar to look for them, it was almost always pushing nine. They'd usually gone by then—because, as Tony would explain the following day, Mei Mei was hungry and couldn't wait any longer and he had to take her to eat. Or his poet-friend had phoned and invited them on somewhere else. Tony's brow would crease into a deep V above the black rims of his glasses. The image of a kind, considerate person. The grin. The hypocrisy made Ah Hai want to throw up. The implication being that a real man has a responsibility to feed his girl, that it was a sin to let her go hungry. Those conversations always made him uncomfortable.

And if they were still there, then Tony's poet-friend would usually have joined them. Their loud little group in the corner of the bar, chatting and laughing, without a thought for anyone else. Mei Mei would drink herself into oblivion, vomit and collapse, her body reeking, every last touch of femininity gone. Reduced to a mouthful of meaningless words. A fallen woman, a drunk. By that stage she could no longer distinguish between Ah Hai and Tony. She would kiss whoever put his arms around her, pressing her chest against him. The next day at work, she would nurse her headache and drink the coffee Ah Hai made for her and complain endlessly that their boss and his literary friend had deliberately got her drunk. But the truth was she liked it. Their own relationship had started over drinks and developed from there. Ah Hai liked the way she drank—straight forward, unabashed. He loved the way her slender body would fall against his when drunk. Like the other men, he loved Mei Mei because she was beautiful and not because she could recite every one of the *Three Hundred Poems of the Tang Dynasty*.

Ah Hai propped his head against his hand, struggling to keep his eyes open while he waited for the last customer to leave. The ones who lingered until closing time were mostly the lonely ones. When the time came, they had to tear themselves away, as though the moment they left the bookshop they would never see another book again. Yet, they must have had homes full of books, never enough bookcases, he guessed, each shelf stacked two rows deep, with yet more books strewn across the floor until there was no space to move. And yet whenever they left the house, they wouldn't be able to resist purchasing another to take home. Never mind its age, content. People who take in stray dogs must think the same way, he thought. They start with one, then another, knowing perfectly well their own limitations. That they don't have enough time, or space, or money, to take in every dog they see. That's enough, they tell themselves. Just this one, then no more for the time being, you can't take in all the world's stray dogs... But they can't stop themselves. It's like an addiction. So a once dazzling home becomes a kennel, filled with dogs large and small, barking, howling, peeing. A pervasive stink of animal. Heaven for dog lovers, who accept these things as par for the course, but enough to make others keel over and have a heart attack. For those who love books, a bookshop is like an orphanage, each volume an orphan waiting to be adopted. To leave books in a bookshop is to turn one's back on children starved of affection, to refuse them a loving home. Walking out of the bookshop is like cruel abandon. Completely unbearable.

If they knew these orphanages might one day disappear forever there would be nervous breakdowns, he feared. The brutal truth would be difficult to accept.

The young guy with the rucksack left without buying a single book. But Ah Hai knew he'd chosen. He'd taken a photo of it on his phone so he could buy it online when he got home and enjoy the lower price (thanks to reduced logistics costs) and the service (free delivery to his door). Did anyone still buy books in bookshops? They were doing so badly that Tony had already set up a table in a corner selling gift bags, fancy notebooks and T-shirts printed with slightly misquoted English sayings like 'Art Is a Dirty Job But Somebody Has to Do It' and 'Stay Calm and Start a Revolution'. The written word was no longer for reading, it was for wearing. Recently Tony had been thinking about getting rid of the classical literature section. If he kept only the popular fiction section, he could replace the shelves with a couple of tables and sell coffee.

The young guy was the last customer. The sun slipped behind the tall building opposite, casting the entire street in shadow. Yet for some reason there was a delay before the street lights came on and the bookshop remained in this Judgement Day gloom.

WAR OF THE BUBBLES

泡沫戰爭



KAO YI-FENG 高翊峰

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-

Kao Yi-Feng is editor-in-chief of the Chinese edition of *FHM*, having previously held the same post at *Cosmopolitan*, *MAXIM*, and *GQ*. In 2012 he was chosen as one of Unitas' 20 Under 40 Chinese writers to watch. His screenplay for the TV miniseries *Désincarnation* was awarded a Golden Bell, and his writing has won numerous prizes. He has published several collections of short stories, and his 2011 novel *Imaginary Ship* was nominated for the Taiwan Literary Award.

- [A Taiwanese *Lord of the Flies* meets *The Hunger Games*](#)
- [Nominated for the 2014 Taiwan Literary Award](#)



The district is short of water, but realizing the adults are incapable of solving the problem, the children know it's up to them. Arming themselves, they occupy the sealed area and put their parents under house arrest. When the adults protest, they take a step even they didn't think they would; killing the Management Committee in order to ensure the needs of the group are protected.

But with food running short, wild dogs on the attack, and the ghosts of the Management Committee coming back to haunt them, the children's army starts to fall apart. Can they really keep to their young ideals? Are they growing into the adults they despise?

War of the Bubbles is an energetic, fast-paced novel, a poetic fantasy written with passion. It is an exploration of the tensions between the people and those who govern, and the ways in which we are forced to do things we don't want to by the system in which we live. This book questions the essence of the human condition, the pull between our individual desires and the needs of the group, as well as the loss of innocence as we grow to understand the world around us better. This is at once serious satire, and seriously entertaining literature.

WAR OF THE BUBBLES

By Kao Yi-Feng. Translated by Darryl Sterk.

'I know it's risky. Fatal even. But if we don't even try, I can guarantee you, a worse fate awaits each and every one of us in just a few years. We'll turn into our parents. We'll turn into people who can't change anything.' Beanpole Gao remembered how hard it was at first to convince his peers of the merits of his plan.

'So what you're saying is, we can't be kids anymore?' one boy contended. 'You want us to grow up and take charge?'

It had just rained that day. Not an ominous drizzle but a thundershower that shook the kids awake from their afternoon nap. No matter how light they were or how lightly they went, the children of Newton got their navy blue New Buffalo brand canvas sneakers wet as they walked across the padded ground of the play area. But they didn't mind a bit. They all had wide smiles on their faces.

Children of all ages had gathered in the soggy play area. One boy was riding a spring horse. Another was driving a spring jeep. The most popular activity was swinging, but when Beanpole Gao looked over the swing was empty. A girl had her neck caught in the rope ladder. She didn't cry, just waited in silence for someone's parents to notice. But the adults had gone. A bunch of kids pretended to be herded by a one-winged hornet into one end of a red tunnel. An older kid squeezed in and somehow a younger kid came out at the end. They'd found a portal through time.

Beanpole Gao remembered he was sitting on the seesaw opposite a kid from the back streets. He went down and the kid went up. 'Why can't we talk like regular kids and do the things regular kids do?'

Not an easy question.

But today Beanpole Gao had an answer. Today was the day. Today he was the only one in the community playground. He sat alone on the seesaw watching the flocks of sparrows on the royal palms, none of them willing to be the first to tweet. He reached down for the BB Call pager on his belt. The little black box hadn't beeped in the longest time. But Beanpole Gao could feel the vibration of an idea that had been lingering in the depths of his mind: that after he grew up, no

matter what kind of adult he became, he didn't want to forget what he'd said to that kid that day, or regret what might have been.

'Tell me, children of Newton! Is today the day?' Beanpole Gao asked.

He waited, but there was no response. Nobody sat down on the other end of the seesaw. He rose slowly, up towards the sky. He leaned back and saw, upside down, another sky through the gaps in the leaves and branches, the sky at the guard booth at the front gate.

A pair of white cotton cumulus clouds hanging in a blue sky, which hadn't moved for the longest time.

Dawn was drawing near, but it wasn't warm enough yet for sweat to soak his skin. Then he saw them: between the clouds in the sky mural on the cement wall by the guard booth, there were bubbles. Floating, trembling, shaking. Some solitary, others clumped together. Siamese twins, each growing an extra leg and standing on a prematurely dried maple leaf. When the breeze blew on a three-headed sheep with a bloated belly, the sheep borrowed a colourful coat from the early morning radiance. When bubbles gathered in the wind, the little bubbles found big bubbles to ride on, like eggs on frogback. Inflamed by the thin mountain air, the egg bubbles burned, blackening everything they touched—the broken down car, the security fence, the red tiles of the oval path around the fountain pool, the asphalt road and the bark of the tree fern—turning everything the colour of water chestnuts. One bubble, blown off course by another gust of wind, sizzled on the cheek of the snoring guard. When the guard tried to brush it away the bubble broke. The sound of the bubble breaking echoed like a thunderclap.

The children of Newton were up early, earlier even than that old dog-walker. They heard the dull sound of hefty trees crashing to the ground in the distance, blocking any rear or side exit to the community. The force of the impact shook the earth, rippling the surface of the road by the guard booth. Or maybe the ripples were caused by children marching hither to join Beanpole Gao's army.

From First Street they came. From Second Street they came. From the fork in the road leading

to other mountain communities they came. The guard was still only half-awake, squinting at an assembly of the children of Newton and noting that every last one of them was armed: with plastic samurai swords, with Ninja daggers and knives, with crossbows and foam arrows, with throwing stars, with the shields of Beast King GoLion and with the claws of the Thunder Cats. Several kids wore the bullhorn hat of Vicky the Viking. The kids formed ten straight lines in the field by the fountain where a UFO once landed. The shrill of grasshoppers and locusts resounded all around, harmonizing with the jostling and rustling of the rank and file. The spinster who minded the local shop was waiting behind the counter for her shift to begin. She, too, poked her head out to see what the kids were up to. She, too, had no idea what was going on.

A wiry kid stood at the head of the assembly. The guard recognized him as the plumber's eldest son, Beanpole Gao. And over there, up on the telephone pole, was Impet, the kid who lived in the community tree house. With his orphan squirrel familiar on his shoulder, Impet jumped down onto the roof of the shop, giving the spinster inside quite a scare. Next, a trio appeared out of the rank and file: the retired electrical engineer Wave Jin's son Wave Jr, the girl prodigy Pea, who had just skipped three grades from junior high into college, and Flesh Bomb, the hulking child of a Chilean father and a Taiwanese mother. Finally, Beanpole's little half-brother Ski Pole. Though a bit of a wimp and smaller than his elder brother, Ski Pole was also accorded a position at the front.

The guard heard Beanpole Gao introduce his entourage, the command system of the battalion, the Group of Five: Impet, Wave Jr, Pea, Flesh Bomb and Ski Pole. 'If you got anything to say, say it to them! Every column, elect a commander. Commanders, stand at the front of your column. Children of Newton, make sure you know who your column commander is, to facilitate communication.'

When Beanpole Gao's exhortation ended, Flesh Bomb went and stood in the midst of the troops and numbered off every column commander, from column one to column ten.

'This is Operation Follow the Leader. Column commanders, the time to act is now.'

After Flesh Bomb finished shouting out the names of the column commanders, Impet leapt from the roof of the shop back up onto the telephone pole. His squirrel jumped right onto the electric wire, which sagged in the middle into the slightest of smiles. When Impet ran to the centre of the same wire, the smile grew wider.

Beanpole Gao was toting an air rifle. This got the guard's attention, because he'd seen that gun before. Beanpole Gao had blinded one of his neighbours on Second Street with the bullet a year ago. The poor kid's parents didn't demand compensation, but allowed the matter to be settled according to an ancient ritual: an effigy of an eye was wrapped up in a giant elephant ear and buried in the yard behind the Community Management Office.

What was Beanpole Gao doing with the gun? Shouldn't it be locked up in the storeroom of the community management committee office? The guard shook his head, still in a daze, not realising that the kid Beanpole Gao blinded was standing in front of Second Column, wearing a pirate patch.

Beanpole Gao walked towards the First Column, accompanied by Pea and Wave Jr. Impet was still balancing on the telephone wire above. Ski Pole looked left and right before getting up the

courage to enter the store. He took a good long look around, then whipped out the revolver stuck in his trouser pocket and pulled the trigger, shooting a series of Thin Pop plastic shots.

'I hate white four-legged snakes,' said Ski Pole. Local kids called lizards four-legged snakes and said 'I hate four-legged snakes' when smoke got in their eyes. One four-legged snake was wrapped around his toy revolver. Ski Pole broke the legs of the smouldering reptile, which shed its skin and became a true snake, which in turn wrapped itself round the barrel of the revolver. All Ski Pole could do was open the cylinder and reload. The old spinster sat down behind the till, terrified. The guard couldn't hear what Ski Pole was saying to her. All he could do was watch as she put her hands on her head. Slowly, she retreated out of the store, put down her hands and sighed. Then she walked down the stairs and towards the activity centre.

'Don't look at her,' said Flesh Bomb to the guard, rubbing at a rice-sized grain of sleep in his eye. 'You're next. We're occupying the guard booth. Hands up. From now on, the First Column will be standing guard.'

The guard shrugged his shoulders. Flesh Bomb smacked him with the back of his hand, leaving a bright red welt on his cheek. The guard scrunched up his face but didn't offer a peep of protest. Flesh Bomb put his toy samurai sword against the guard's neck. He glared at the guard, burying the chunk of sleep so deep in his eye that it looked like a sty.

'I don't know your name and I don't care. From now on we control access to the community.'

The guard didn't know what to think. Feeling the toy sword at his neck, he relaxed his shoulders and let out a sigh. Finally he spoke: 'So where do I go now?'

'Home,' said Flesh Bomb.

'And do what?'

'Inform the other guards. Tell them they don't have to come on shift no more. Today, you can take a nice long afternoon nap. We'll let you know when you are assigned new jobs.'

'What about the patrol? Who will do the rounds?'

Flesh Bomb seemed to gag on this question. He looked at the other children in the First Column, the ad hoc Guard Squad. One kid was holding the lid of a garbage can as a shield, another packed nun-chucks and a third had slipped on a flashing traffic control vest. All of them were looking to Flesh Bomb for an answer.

'Same deal. We'll take care of the patrol.'

'Gao didn't say we'd have to go on patrol,' said another kid, who was holding an improvised bamboo pike.

'You chose to call him General Gao, now you've got to do as he says. Everyone's the same. Except me, of course.'

'Why not you?'

'Cos I'm in the Group of Five. Strictly speaking, I don't have to call him General, but I will anyway. The General's orders are that the duties of the Guard Squad are for me to decide.'

'What do we call you?'

'Captain Flesh Bomb.'

THE BORROWED

13.67



Chan Ho-Kei was born and raised in Hong Kong. He has worked as software engineer, scriptwriter, game designer and editor of comic magazines. His writing career started in 2008 at the age of 33, with the short story “The Murder Case of Jack and the Beanstalk”, which was shortlisted for the Mystery Writers of Taiwan Award. He went on to win the award again the next year with *The Locked Room of Bluebeard*.

In 2011, Chan's first novel, *The Man Who Sold the World* won the biggest mystery award in the Chinese-speaking world, the Soji Shimada Mystery Award, and has subsequently been published in Taiwan (Crown), China (New Star), Japan (Bungeishunsha), Thailand (Nanmee) and Italy (Metropoli d'Asia).

CHAN HO-KEI

陳浩基

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-
- First epic crime novel by a Hong Kong writer
 - Film rights sold to Wang Kar-wai (*The Grandmaster*)



The Borrowed is the story of Kwan Chun-Dok, a Hong Kong police officer who rises from constable to senior superintendent over the span of 46 years (1967-2013), becoming a legend in the force as he does so. The book is divided into six chapters, each a stand-alone novella dealing with an important case in Kwan's career and taking place at a pivotal time in Hong Kong history: the riots of 1967, the conflict between the HK Police and ICAC (Independent Commission Against Corruption) in 1977, the Handover in 1997, the SARS epidemic in 2003, and lastly 2013, when Hong Kong is turning into a police state, a chillingly accurate portrait seemingly foreshadowing the Occupy Central movement.

What makes *The Borrowed* unique is not just the structure, but the way the story is told, in reverse-chronological order. The novel begins in 2013, with Kwan solving his final case on his deathbed, and goes back in time, finally reaching 1967, when he defused a bomb plot and saved the life of a British inspector. The six chapters are linked in ways big and small. The novel's real twist, however, comes at the end of the novel, in the very last line. Only then do the connections reveal themselves, that history is destined to repeat itself, and how we have come full circle.

The Borrowed is the portrait of a brilliant, Holmes-esque detective, as well as a chronicle of Hong Kong over the past fifty years. Although each chapter is a self-sustained, carefully constructed mystery, the book is greater than the sum of its parts, and it is on this level that it truly shines; a sweeping, ambitious crime drama that offers a startling insight into one of Asia's greatest cities.

THE BORROWED

By Chan Ho-Kei. Translated by Gigi Chang.

Extract from CHAPTER FOUR: THE SCALES OF THEMIS

0

Kwan Chun-Dok steps out of the lift, into a dark corridor. A light bulb dyed grey by dust hangs from the ceiling. It flickers over a patchy stone tile floor and once-white walls marked by stains and graffiti. There is no window on this side of the corridor. Footsteps and radio conversations reverberate between the walls like tinnitus. Standing in the twists and turns of this corridor are successions of lifeless doorways, shut behind chilling metal gates. These gates seem to be commenting on how unsafe the building is: whoever chooses not to install anti-theft measures would be inviting thieves and robbers to try their luck. And this is the truth.

The residents of this floor were evacuated in an orderly fashion a few minutes ago, following police instructions to leave by the stairs. Kwan knows that the most dangerous moment has already passed. The evacuation was an empty gesture, the operation commander simply following protocol. Of course, if some yet-to-be-detected items were to explode now and cause casualties, the police would face a further backlash.

If I was him, I'd probably have given the same order, Kwan thinks.

Though Kwan is the most senior officer on site, he is not in charge of the operation. He is an outsider who just happened to be nearby.

He could have stayed in the operation centre or gone back to Headquarters with Tso. But he decided to walk around the site, following his colleagues into the building. This, he thinks, is probably the instinctual reaction of someone who has been on the frontline for more than 20 years.

Kwan knows his role full well. Because he is more senior than the operation commander, if he suggests anything, it will have to be followed. But that would be interfering with district operations and investigation, meddling with their independence. He is not going to do anything. He will just be a bystander.

The only thing he wants to do is to go inside, into that suffocating space, to feel what his former subordinate had to face.

He saw him in the ground floor lobby minutes ago. It has been a long time since their last encounter—he was a detective sent by another department to support an arrest Kwan had planned. His daring and judgement in those operations left a deep impression on Kwan.

This brave man was lying dazed on a stretcher right at that moment, being treated by a paramedic.

When Kwan walked past and caught his eye, he looked surprised. He could never have imagined that his one-time superior—the crime-solving legend Kwan Chun-Dok—would appear at this moment. Kwan wanted to tell him he had done well, but looking at what actually happened, any praise might sound like a dig. Kwan left his thoughts unspoken. Instead, he reached out to pat his uninjured arm, gave a slight nod and headed to the lift without a word.

Standing in the corridor, Kwan can almost feel that oppressive sensation at the edge of life and death. He turns a corner and walks past a wooden door by a stairwell. The wall is riddled with bullet holes. Two officers are collecting evidence, carefully examining and recording each bullet's path, unaware that Superintendent Kwan Chun-Dok has just walked past them.

Kwan keeps walking on to the brightly lit crime scene.

There is no flickering light to cause disorientation here, but the atmosphere is more unsettling. The smell of blood mixed with gunpowder fills the air. Blood splatters and bullet marks cover the floor, the wall, the furniture.

The most disturbing sight is on the floor. A skull penetrated by bullets, a head blasted apart. The floor is covered with a dirty pink mixture of grey-white brain matter and blood. Blood is still flowing, forming bright red pools.

But there is more than one dead body. Investigators crowd around the victims in the cramped unit, resignedly recording and checking every detail.

No one is bold enough to look straight at their faces. They look horrifying, yes, but the detectives do not avert their eyes out of fear.

But guilt.

These faces that have been blasted beyond recognition, these bodies that have been pierced by bullets, they are accusing the Royal Hong Kong Police of incompetence.

The detectives know, among the deceased, only one deserved to die.

1

'Ko, this is Kwan Chun-Dok, the new head of CIB B Division.'

Chief Inspector Ko Long-Shan didn't expect Superintendent Tso Kwan to visit unannounced, least of all with the renowned Kwan Chun-Dok. A commander never wants officers more senior than himself at the operation centre, just as a general doesn't want the king or courtiers at the frontline. Superiors are synonymous with trouble. When Ko shakes hands with Kwan, he tries hard to hide his feelings, but he thinks this legendary detective has already seen through him and is only smiling out of politeness.

'Superintendent Kwan,' greets Ko. Over the last few years, Kwan Chun-Dok has run the Hong Kong Island Regional Crime Unit, solving several major cases in succession. Officers from other regions are jealous of his track record. When Ko was promoted to head the same department in Kowloon West, many made the comparison. Though Ko is doing a reasonable job, uncovering quite a few drug dens and cracking some major fraud cases, when compared to a 'freak' like Kwan Chun-Dok, he can only ever come second. Ko is only three years younger, yet Kwan's career seems a faraway goal that can never be reached.

He's lost even before he's begun—this is the thought running through Ko's mind. Kwan Chun-Dok is not just 'capable', he is also one of the first few Chinese elites from the early days. He joined the force in the 1960s. At the time, senior officers were exclusively British. Local Chinese were only there to do support work, but Kwan was one of a select few, handpicked and sent to the UK for two years to train. He returned to Hong Kong in 1972, just as the force was restructuring. He was promoted to Inspector and due to his outstanding performance he kept on moving up. Back then, 'training in the UK' was equivalent to a 'promotion notice'—much like being given a yellow imperial robe by the Emperor—with a special place waiting for you upon your return. Ko was given no such opportunity. He heard that Kwan resolved an incident during the 1967 riots and caught the eye of a British inspector. After that, it had all been plain sailing. Ko kicked himself for joining the force a few years too late, missing the chance to make an impression in that tumultuous period.

'Superintendent Kwan heard about your operation and wanted to come over to say hello. I'm sure you'll work well together,' Tso says to Ko. Senior Superintendent Tso Kwan is the deputy commander of the Criminal Intelligence Bureau. He is stern, serious and efficient; everyone expects him to run CIB next.

'I understand the Shek brothers hold a great deal of intelligence on criminal syndicates. For the CIB, they must be goldmines, eh?' Ko pretends to be jovial.

Kwan nods, 'Yes. If we get a confession, we can put a stop to at least four flows of illegal firearms into the city.'

Shek Boon-Tim and Shek Boon-Sing are the top two on the most wanted list. They have committed a series of serious crimes in the past four years since the police first became aware of them in 1985: the serial robbery of four jewellery shops on Nathan Road in 1985, the cash-in-transit heist in 1986 and the kidnap of tycoon Li Yu-Long in 1988 included. To this day, the brothers are still on the run. The police believe they have connections with several criminal syndicates in Hong Kong and mainland China, from which they acquire heavy-duty firearms, hire their crew of cut-throat thugs, fence their loot and arrange passage abroad to hide out. There have been a number of manhunts, but each failed at the last hurdle and the police were only able to catch their accomplices. The two masterminds have always managed to escape.

But, a few days ago, the police caught their first trace of the fugitives in some time.

Crime rates had been rising in the Mong Kok area, and the Mong Kok Police District Crime Unit had mounted a number of operations in recent months to flush out the criminals.

When an officer receives intelligence on where suspicious persons are hiding out, the police set up surveillance to ascertain the location and number of suspects. Only after assessing the risk, do they take action and make arrests. The criminals might be drug dealers, robbers, murder suspects or triad ringleaders. District officers not only have to investigate, they also have to confront the criminals on the firing line. District police stations often have limited resources, meaning that they can't mobilise backup, so officers just have to tough it out, playing it by ear as they risk their lives.

It was during one of these routine operations last Saturday, 29 April 1989, that the Mong Kok District Crime Unit Team Three encountered something unusual. Team Three was about to arrest a suspect from a unit in Ka Fai Mansions on Reclamation Street. They had received intelligence that a suspected car thief was hiding out in Unit 1507. An officer was sent to verify the information and saw the suspect with an unidentified man. They planned to arrest the car thief the following night. In the early evening of the 30th, just as Team Three was about to launch their raid, they received an order to halt. The District Commander announced that the case had been taken over by the Kowloon West Regional Crime Unit and Team Three was designated as backup.

All because of an unidentified man.

'Mong Kok Crime Unit was going to arrest the car thief known as 'Jaguar',' Ko points at a photo on the pin board. 'But instead they came across this man and sent his photo to CIB to see if he's involved in any other cases...'

'Mad Dog Biu – Sum Biu – Shek Boon-Sing's right hand man,' Kwan finishes the sentence. 'I've read the report.'

CHILDREN OF THE SALTPANS

鹽田兒女



Tsai Su-Fen was born in 1963, and studied in Taiwan and Texas. She started writing while still in high school, and began winning awards while studying at university. *Children of the Saltpans* won the 1993 Uritas Award for Best Novel, and was adapted for television. Her 1998 follow-up, *The Olive Tree* won the Chung Hsing Award for Literature and Art, and in 2014 she completed her Taiwan 'trilogy' with *All the Stars are Talking*. Other books include *Sisters*, *Taipei Station*, and *A Candlelit Dinner*, for which she was selected as one of 2009 *Asia Weekly's* Ten Best Chinese writers.

TSAI SU-FEN

蔡素芬

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- Over 100,000 copies sold in Taiwan, continuously in print for over twenty years
- Selected as one of Taiwan's best loved novels in 2004
- Adapted for television in 1998
- Winner of the Uritas Award for Best Novel, *Children of the Saltpans* is considered Tsai Su-Fen's masterpiece



Two young people meet in southern Taiwan's salt flats and fall in love. But Ming-Yueh's parents disapprove of her boyfriend Da-Fang, and arrange for their daughter to marry a man who turns out to be a dissolute gambler. This mistake brings much hardship to Ming-Yueh, but she never stops loving the boy she met in the fields. When fate conspires to give the young sweethearts another chance at happiness, the weight of tradition and familial duty is heavy on their heads, and once again they are pulled apart. But Ming-Yueh's continued love for Da-Fang is what gives her sustenance and the hope to carry on, so she buries it deep in her heart.

Tsai Su-Fen is a master storyteller. Not only does she bring to life the people of Qigu, Tainan, but also the way traditional patriarchy and the dominance of parents over their children has the power to destroy the lives of the young. Her prose is vivid and precise, just like her characters, whose seemingly quiet acceptance masks the rich and dramatic realities of their inner worlds.

Taiwan has since undergone dramatic social change, and many of these customs are disappearing just as the salt pans have done already. This book records a moment in Taiwan's recent history, a society then on the cusp of modernity. This is a beautiful and moving story, and an undisputed classic of Taiwanese literature.

CHILDREN OF THE SALTPANS

By Tsai Su-Fen. Translated by Robert Fox.

Chapter One

2

Time went on. Chih-Hsien left in the spring and returned again in the fall. Four years passed in the wink of an eye. To Chih-Hsien, who dried salt in the fall and winter and operated a pedicab in the spring and summer, the days were without freshness or excitement. The one thing that pleased him was that when he returned to the village, people relied on him to settle their disputes, some even entrusting him to name their children. He felt his youthful studies had not been wasted; with a book in hand he could help people solve their problems. But his wife A-She viewed him as a failure, invariably complaining to others: 'Those books haven't done him a bit of good. Just look at how hard he has to work.'

To Ming-Yueh and Ming-Hsin, however, those were four years of travail and sacrifice, but also a time of fun. The girls kept house for their ailing mother and helped their father in the salt fields. The two were now slender and graceful young women of eighteen and twenty. Hard physical labour had made them lean, lithe and shapely. Like other village girls, their faces were bronzed by daily exposure to the sun and the ocean winds. But the colour couldn't hide the sickly pallor in Ming-Hsin's cheeks.

'It looks like it'll be even hotter tomorrow,' Ming-Hsin said, lifting the carrying pole with the empty water buckets onto her shoulders. 'I'll only be able to make one trip in the morning, so I'd better go twice today.' She told Ming-Yueh to take the firewood in the cookhouse outside to dry in the sun, then headed out of the village. It was an hour's walk and across the bridge to draw water from the neighbouring hamlet's pond. The well water in their own village, salty and undrinkable, could only be used for washing clothes and scrubbing up.

Ming-Hsin usually went to fetch water at five o'clock in the morning. She would then pour the fresh water into the cistern and eat the breakfast Ming-Yueh had prepared. Hard calluses had formed on her shoulders. Sometimes Ming-Yueh would go for water in Ming-Hsin's place. At first bruises and blisters formed on Ming-Yueh's shoulders but after a few trips she grew much stronger and didn't mind. Nimble, considerate and hardworking, eldest sister Ming-Hsin was always the first to do whatever job needed doing and it was she who usually carried water. But that job, her many other chores and their poor diet were taking a toll. That summer Ming-Hsin had suffered stomachaches and often had to stop when carrying water. Nauseous, she would set the pole and buckets down, clasp her stomach and retch.

Today Ming-Hsin wanted to make two trips to the pond. Ming-Yueh did as she was told, taking some of the firewood stored in the cookhouse outside to dry. The two youngest sisters left to do the washing. After he had eaten his breakfast, their father went out to inspect the salt fields. Looking back, he saw his wife sitting in the doorway in the warm sunshine.

'Where's Ming-Hsin?' A-She asked.

'Gone to fetch water,' Ming-Yueh replied. She was surprised to see her mother had pinned her ordinarily unkempt hair up in a neat, coiled bun, revealing her slightly bulging forehead. A thin layer of makeup covered her face and she had put on lipstick, transforming completely her usual sickly appearance—she looked just like the image of Guanyin, the goddess of mercy, kept in the main room of their house. The villagers all said her beauty had made the gods jealous on her wedding day and so they had afflicted her with ill health.

'A girl shouldn't have to work so hard,' A-She said. 'But I'm not well.' Ming-Yueh was used to such complaints. Her curiosity was focused entirely on her mother's appearance.

'What about your father?'

'Gone to the salt fields.'

'What? That man can't remember a thing. I have to deal with everything important.'

'What's happening?' Ming-Yueh was quick to ask.

A-She's gaze, sharp and probing, fell on Ming-Yueh like an eagle searching for a place to land.

'You girls are no longer children. Other seventeen-year olds are already holding babies. If I wasn't so sick I'd have married you both off by now,' A-She sighed. 'Daughters aren't suppose to live with their parents forever.'

Panic showed in Ming-Yueh's eyes. She didn't understand what her mother was talking about. Marriage had never crossed her mind. The young men and women of the village laboured together in the salt fields. They worked hard but had fun too. In their free time they'd make up songs and whistle tunes on tree-leaf flutes. Da-Fang played the leaf-flute, creating his own melodies and the rest supplied lyrics as they sang in the moonlit dusk. The salt fields were a part of Ming-Yueh's life, she'd never thought of marrying and leaving them behind. But she'd watched as the other young village women left. She knew what it meant. Once gone, they'd never return. How could she leave Da-Fang behind?

A surge of emotion made her blush. Her mother's eagle-sharp eyes instantly took note. 'Are you ready to leave and become daughter-in-law to some rich man?' her mother said, taunting her. 'So you won't have to work so hard? Not until your older sister has married.'

'I don't want to get married.'

'I can't support an old maid.'

Ming-Yueh decided not to argue back and instead went to the cookhouse to chop vegetables. Her long illness has somehow made her mother unable to read the good intentions of others. It was better not to say anything than cause unpleasantness. Still, A-She would feel she was being ignored. When that thought crossed her mind, Ming-Yueh immediately turned and looked back at her mother's stooped shoulders.

'You look very pretty today, Mama.'

Her mother sighed and but remained silent. The sunlight seemed to float, moving from the doorstep to the little bamboo chair where A-She sat. The new blue-soled shoes she wore shone in the light of the sun.

Some time later, the two youngest sisters returned with the clothes and hung them out to dry on a bamboo pole at the front of the house. Shifting in her seat, A-She coughed twice and called to Ming-Yueh, 'Today is the fifteenth day of the lunar month, isn't it?'

'That's right. There'll be a full moon tonight.' Ming-Yueh's name meant 'Bright Moon', so she always felt the fifteenth of the month belonged to her. Her father had given her that name because he wanted her to shine brightly on others.

The two younger sisters kept turning, glancing at their mother and whispering. A-She took note of their awkward behaviour: 'It's taken you all morning to wash those clothes! You'll never be as hardworking as your older sisters. What'll I do when I've married them off I'm left with just the two of you?' A-She told Ming-Yueh to go and tell Father and to come back to the house.

'Why?' Ming-Yueh wanted to know.

'Why? Tell him we're having visitors.'

'Who?' the three sisters asked as one.

In the uneventful life the family led, the arrival of any guest was always a matter of great curiosity.

'Children should be seen and not heard,' A-She said. 'When the guests arrive the three of you will go to your room and stay there.'

Chih-Hsien returned just then and little brother Ming-Hui ran out to greet him, leaping into his father's arms.

'Oh, you're heavy!' Chih-Hsien said, putting Ming-Hui down.

'Have you forgotten?' A-She asked her husband.

'No, I haven't. I'm back, aren't I?'

Ming-Yueh pulled her father into the cookhouse and spoke to him in a low voice: 'Papa, who's coming to visit?'

'They're coming to propose marriage to Ming-Hsin,' her father said. 'Cook up a pot of noodles. They've been walking all morning and they'll probably be hungry.'

Father went into the house to change his clothes. Ming-Yueh realised that the moment had come in which she would finally have to part with her older sister. Ming-Hsin was twenty years old, of marriageable age. From then on, Ming-Yueh would have to take over her older sister's responsibilities.

As she cooked the noodles sadness welled up within her and there was no one she could talk to about it. She didn't want her sister to leave and hoped the family Ming-Hsin was marrying into didn't work the land for a living. Did they live far away? If so, they would rarely get to see each other again. Suddenly her two younger sisters rushed in to report that the guests had arrived. There were four or five of them, all dressed in white, but they had come a long way and their faces were covered in sweat. They were sitting in the main room of the house talking with Mother and Father.

The three sisters ducked into their bedroom. Heads pressed together, they peered in through a tiny crack in the curtains. They could only see one side of the room. An old man with a wispy white beard sat with his back to the ancestral tablets. Next to him sat a middle-aged man with a broad brow and coarse, dark hands and feet, and beside him a gangly youth, respectful, his knees pressed together, hands resting on his knees. The young man's features closely resembled those of the middle-age man. Little Ming-Chan whispered, 'Is he the one?'

'Shh!' Ming-Yueh and Ming-Yu covered Ming-Chan's mouth with their hands.

Just then Ming-Hsin came into the yard carrying two buckets of water on the shoulder pole. She turned right and went over to the cistern, removed the wooden cover and poured in the water. In the main room, all eyes were focused on her graceful figure. Ming-Hsin took off her bamboo leaf hat and undid her headscarf, letting her pitch-black hair tumble down around her shoulders and cover her ears. Bending over, she scooped up a dipper of water, washed her face and then replaced the cover. Turning, she spotted the crowd in the main hall. Her mother and father waved to her and she

walked over to them. After a short while she came out again and made her way to the cookhouse. Her three sisters hurried into the cookhouse ahead of her. When Ming-Hsin entered they covered their mouths to stifle their laughter.

'Are the noodles ready?' Ming-Hsin asked. 'Papa's invited the guests to stay for a meal.' She rubbed her aching shoulders. She was visibly tired from the two trips to the pond.

Ming-Yueh ladled noodles into bowls. 'Who are they?' she asked pointedly.

'I don't know,' Ming-Hsin replied. 'I've never seen them before. You've been here all this time and you don't know?'

'Sister,' Ming-Chan could hold it in no longer, 'they've come to propose marriage. To you.'

Really? Ming-Hsin was doubtful. Why hadn't Father and Mother mentioned it to her beforehand? Was the family so eager to be rid of her that they couldn't discuss such an important matter with her first? She slumped down on a bamboo chair, covered her face and cried. To the two youngest sisters, weddings were happy, festive occasions and they couldn't understand why their big sister was weeping. But Ming-Yueh understood. She tugged at her sister's shoulder and said, 'Take the noodles in before they get cold.'

Before her, she saw only a road of no return. Everything had already been arranged and now she had no choice but to bring the guests the noodles and subject herself to their appraisal. Ming-Hsin wiped her tears away. She understood that even though she performed all the family's chores big and small, when all was said and done she was a girl, and girls all had to do this at some point. She picked up the bowls of noodles and began walking.

The marriage would take place in the autumn. The groom's family farmed, owning almost a hectare of arable soil on which they planted seasonal crops. 'You'll have to work, but they have land,' Mother said. 'And as long as they have land, you'll never go hungry.' Father thought the young man seemed quiet but intelligent, a well-spoken stay-at-home boy who would be a good match for their kind and industrious Ming-Hsin.

Ming-Hsin always obeyed her parents. Since they had decided that she was to marry, she would accept her fate.

'What do you think of him,' Ming-Yueh asked.

'I don't know him!' Ming-Yueh replied. 'I'm afraid to look at him.'

The night before the wedding A-She called Ming-Hsin to her bedside and brought out a ring. 'The groom's family provided the gold jewelry for your wedding as a betrothal gift. All your father and I can give you is this ring. It was part of my dowry, but I'm giving it to you as a memento. The rest is for your sisters. You know we don't have much and there are so many of you girls, so this is all we can give you. Don't be sad or resentful if your younger sisters do better when they marry. No one knows what the future will bring. Your in-laws are farmers and they need extra hands to work the land. Don't worry about us here at home. If you're too busy, you needn't return to visit.'

Her mother's words made Ming-Hsin feel uneasy. A married woman was like a kite on a broken string, her connection to home and family severed forever. Was she just supposed to stop worrying

about her own family's hardships and only concern herself with a group of complete strangers? People said girls were like seeds blowing in the wind, wherever they landed, that's where they'd grow.

Ming-Hsin grew disconsolate at the thought. How could she simply abandon her siblings? Ming-Hsin couldn't bear the thought of allowing her sister to look after the family by herself.

When she went into the girls' bedroom Ming-Hsin couldn't keep from coughing and crying. Her sisters gathered around her. Ming-Yueh grabbed a handkerchief and handed it to Ming-Hsin to wipe her eyes. Ming-Hsin covered her mouth with the cloth and coughed up phlegm. Ming-Yueh took the handkerchief from her, 'Blood!'

'Shh!' Ming-Hsin said, snatching the handkerchief back. 'I'm just nervous about leaving tomorrow.'

Ming-Hsin's pallor alarmed her sisters. 'You'd better get to sleep early,' they all said at once.

But how could she sleep? As the four sisters lay on their bed, a shard of moonlight cut through the darkness. Ming-Hsin gazed at the light. Ordinarily she didn't pay much attention to the soft, silvery glow, but now she was brokenhearted at having to leave it. Ming-Yueh was already asleep beside her. Ming-Hsin shook her awake and told her to drape something over her shoulders and come outside into the yard. The two sat down on a bamboo bench under the light of the moon. All of the sorrow Ming-Hsin felt at going away translated itself into one single sentence.

'It's your turn to look to after them.'

AN UNLIKELY BANQUET

張大千與張學良的晚宴



Chang Kuo-Li, one time editor-in-chief of *China Times Weekly*, has won numerous awards for his writing. A linguist, historian, army expert, sports fan, food critic, as well as poet, playwright and novelist, he is truly a Renaissance man. He has published a dozen books over his career, including *Italy in One Bite*, *Birdwatchers*, and *The Jobless Detective*.

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One dinner table. One moment in history. Chinese New Year, 1981. Chang Dai-Chien, world renowned artist, is preparing dinner at home in Taipei for a group of friends. Among them he has invited one special guest in particular, Chang Hsueh-Liang, once warlord of Northeast China and ally of Chiang Kai-Shek, has lived under house arrest since 1936 after a failed military coup. But in the lead up to the dinner party, the Chinese Communist Party has expressed a desire to draw Chang Hsueh-Liang to their cause, sending one of their agents with a secret present. The approach has not gone unnoticed by the Intelligence Services in Taiwan, and now the painter is by extension thrown into suspicion. They will do everything they can to prevent the dinner from going ahead.

The Intelligence Services decide to send their newest recruit, Snow Liang, to work in the warlord's household, where she discovers the real Chang Hsueh-Liang to be very different from the supposed traitor she has read about in textbooks. She is now faced with a choice; do what's best for her career, follow orders from above, or put her trust in the old man? When the party takes place two weeks later than expected, she becomes eyewitness to the friendship of two larger-than-life figures in the twilight of their lives. History, she realises, is never as simple as what they teach you in school.

Chang Kuo-Li brings to life a Taiwan under martial law, with characters whose reputations give them almost emblematic status. It is precisely by drawing on such sensitive historical issues that we feel the contrast, between the paranoia outside and the warmth around the table. *An Unlikely Banquet* serves up a menu of poetic perfection, and opens up the space between collective memory and the intimate realities of history's most significant moments.

AN UNLIKELY BANQUET

By Chang Kuo-Li. Translated by Malachi McGee.

1994, the year 83 according to the calendar used by the Republic of China.

There wasn't an empty seat at Sotheby's Auction house in Taipei because today was the day they sold off Chang Hsueh-Liang's private art collection. After Chiang Ching-Kuo died, the Kuomintang regime officially released Chang Hsueh-Liang from custody. It was rumored he went to Hawaii to visit his son and that he would stay there for awhile before going to visit family in mainland China. Not only collectors, but scholars, reporters and the Kuomintang were all paying attention.

The crowd filed into the auction room, picking up the catalogue as they went. Almost Chang's entire collection was listed. There was head-shaking and audible sighs from many, but most people talked in loud whispers when they realised what it meant: Chang Hsueh-Liang wouldn't be coming back.

Of course the sighs were to be expected, but once everyone had settled into their seats their minds turned back to the auction, back to what they were really there for. Chang Hsueh-Liang's collection had been on the radars of antique enthusiasts for some time and today it didn't look like anyone would be leaving disappointed.

As the auction progressed, his paintings and calligraphy found buyers even at the highest of prices. Then, the auctioneer produced a tiny yet intricately mounted piece of calligraphy, which, he claimed, was deserving of a special introduction:

'This is a menu for a dinner Chang Dai-Chien held for Chang Hsueh-Liang and his wife, as well as the former president of Taiwan and his entourage. As I'm sure you're all aware, Chang Dai-Chien was in the habit of writing out the menu every time he hosted guests at home. The dishes and drinks were of the highest quality. After dinner, Mr. Chang Hsueh-Liang asked Dai-Chien for the menu. Not only was it written by his own hand, but Mr. Chang also decorated the leftover space with some simple drawings, the turnips and cabbages you see today. Our starting price is 300,000 Taiwanese dollars. Ladies and gentlemen interested in the piece may start the bidding now.'

A bid marker went up at once, five hundred thousand. The price climbed quickly from there until the hammer came down at two and a half million. The room buzzed with excitement.

Outside. A young man with a camera slung on his back and a reporter pass around his neck stood

in the doorway clutching an auction catalogue. He was lost in his own thoughts when someone called out to him. A woman in black with a man's briefcase in her hand approached:

'Lou Tai-Sheng? You're Lou Tai-Sheng, aren't you?' She reached out and grabbed the reporter's pass around his neck. 'You're a reporter now, eh? You don't recognize me? I'm Snow Liang, I used to live behind Fuhsing Middle School.'

'Snow?' The young reporter was taken aback as he surveyed the young woman standing in front of him. 'You mean the Snow from the security office opposite Chang Hsueh-Liang's house?'

'Do you remember me? I remember the year you passed the college entrance exams your company officer brought over a gift box of fruit so we could all celebrate. I remember he said to our director...' Snow Liang's face broke into a playful smile, 'He told our director that you were destined for a life in the intelligence services. He doesn't know what came over you.'

Lou Tai-Sheng smiled at this. The only thing he could remember about getting into college was hiding under the covers and pretending to be sick the day they posted the results. He couldn't work up the courage to walk over to the front gate of National Taiwan University to see the list. It was only when Hsiao-Guai started throwing rocks at the window and his mom opened the door that Lou Tai-Sheng heard him shout:

'Mama Lou! He passed! Tai-Sheng passed the exams!'

He couldn't believe it. It was a hot day but he stayed beneath his thick blanket until Hsiao-Guai came in and lifted it off.

'Why the hell are you crying? Your mom gave me some money so we could go grab something to eat.'

He had turned eighteen that year and that night he drank his first bottle of beer. He ended up puking in the ditch in front of his house as the moon faded from the sky.

'Come on,' Snow said, pulling him on, 'I'll buy you a cup of coffee. Let's find a place to talk. Geez, how many years has it been?'

'Thirteen,' he said. 'Thirteen years.'

Wednesday January 7, 1981

The year 70 of the Republic of China, one month before Chinese New Year

Three students in khaki military uniforms leapt over the wall behind Beitou Fuhsing Senior High school, their peaked caps on backwards. They moved like convicts escaping a life sentence as they sprinted into the hills behind the school. They ran along the winding asphalt path, beneath the acacia tree that protruded from behind the bamboo fence of a stranger's house and finally came to a stop in front of the thick, heavy wooden door of the house at number 70, Fuhsing 3rd Road. They crouched there, panting.

'Hey, Chang Hsueh-Liang!' One of them shouted.

Across from number 70 was a cement guard station, obviously built in violation of building

regulations. Two plainclothes guards in dark brown Chinese tunic suits rushed outside and took off in pursuit of the students.

'Back causing trouble, eh?'

'What the hell does your teacher do all day?' The guards shouted.

The high schoolers had long since outrun the guards and were catching their breath.

'Our teacher cut class to pick up girls!' One of the students shot back.

They started running again, shouting back as they went, until they were out of sight.

The guards made a quick patrol around number 70. No sight of anyone or any vehicles, so they went back to their post. The taller guard felt for his pack of army issue Kuo-Kuang cigarettes, flicked one out and gave it to the shorter guard, who lit it carefully so it wouldn't go out in the cold wind.

'They haven't gone out today?' asked the tall one as he gazed at the large walls and barbed wire that enclosed number 70. The short one exhaled a puff of smoke, scrunched up his shoulders against the cold and shook his head.

'Sir, it's wet and cold. Who'd want to go out in this weather?' The tall guard gave him a dirty look.

'Whining about the weather? Had enough on the first day?' The guard station phone rang and the short one went to pick it up, but his superior stopped him.

'There are three phones on the table. The middle one is a direct line to the higher-ups. We can make calls, but we don't answer it. The one on the right is for emergencies only. We can answer it, but we don't make calls. The one on the far left is an extension that runs out of Chang Hsueh-Liang's house. We can't answer it or make calls. It's tapped and they've got someone at the offices listening in.'

The short guard nodded and looked intently at the black phone on the left, the one with a receiver but without a dial.

The tall guard picked up the ringing phone on the right. He sounded a few 'understoods', hung up and went outside without another word. It was only when they were once again facing the door of house number 70, blowing clouds of cigarette smoke out before them, that he explained:

'Tomorrow morning we need to make a trip to Fuhsing Middle school. Those fucking kids just won't learn to keep their mouths shut!'

'I heard their chief instructor is a student of the famous commander Wang Sheng,' said the short guard.

'So what if he is? One of the old president's cronies? Come on... the president has half a million people in his pocket! A student of Wang Sheng thinks he's hot shit because he can hide behind his teacher's name? Fucking Wang Sheng. Let's see how much longer he can last. He has the army to back him up and now he thinks he can use it to get to the top? Yeah, right.'

'Everyone's connected,' the short guard answered cautiously.

'You're right,' the tall guard said more calmly. 'Everyone in the army is a student of Wang Sheng'

and everyone in our line of work is a disciple of the old man Dai Li.'

The short guard stuck his hands in his pockets, stamping his skinny legs against the cold.

'Then I'm a disciple of old man Dai Li too, sir,' he said.

The tall guard pounded his fist into the short guard's chest.

'That's more like it. Everyone is connected. Who's afraid of who? As long as you can stick up for yourself, no one can tell which side anyone is playing for.' And that's the key to a good relationship,' the short guard cut in.

The two men laughed.

The rain found its way down through the gaps in the leaves and one drop landed right on the end of the tall guard's cigarette, slaking it with a hiss. He bent his head down to inspect it, then tossed it to the ground.

'I'm gonna see if the old lady is done with our dinner. She's always stingy with the hot peppers. If the pickled vegetables don't set my mouth on fire, it's not worth eating.'

'There's smoke coming from the chimney across the street.'

'The Changs are making braised 'lion head' meatballs today,' the tall guard turned to head back inside. 'Their servant bought ground pork, water chestnuts and cabbage this morning.'

'A bowl of lion head stew over rice...!' The short guard looked down at his feet. 'I could go for two helpings of that.'

'Alright, already. I'll go tell the old woman to start dinner early. Stop giving me that damn hungry look. Keep focused. We're the only ones left after the Garrison Command go off duty. We can't let anything happen on our watch.'

The short guard didn't respond, his mind was still stuck in the steaming pot of lion head stew, imagining the taste of the slightly burnt bits at the bottom. At that moment a gust of wind rose, perhaps wafting the smell of the food from the Chang house opposite, and he licked his lips.

January 7 1981, a month left until the second day of Chinese New Year. The weatherman on the television was pointing at a map and telling the viewers that the strongest cold front of the year was moving south from Siberia. The temperature at sundown would drop eight to ten degrees lower than the day before. Tamsui, the northernmost city in Taiwan, would experience a low of between nine and eleven degrees Celsius. The screen switched back to the news anchor, and she, in her unhurried way, reminded people who were going out to dress warmly and not to forget their umbrellas.

The guard post consisted of a square made of concrete. Two wooden windows, normally closed, stared out at the front door of the Chang residence. A wooden table made home to the three phones and a tiny television with bad reception sat in the corner. The short guard shook the water droplets from his pants and went to adjust the antenna hanging in a tree outside. He looked up at the sky, blanketed in thick clouds and once again scrunched up his shoulders against the cold. A soft, thin drizzle had enveloped the entire Da Tun Mountain area, but like in a Chinese painting, it could have been rain or nothing more than a beautiful mist.

BOULEVARD OF BROKEN DREAMS

碎夢大道



WOLF HSU

臥斧

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-

Wolf Hsu is a novelist and an editor and has worked at the biggest online bookstore for many years. He has published seven books of fiction, including *A Musical Love Letter for S*, *An Empty Room Full of Keys*, *The Circus Leaves Town*, and *No one Knows I'm Gone*.



The nameless hero of this novel doesn't know who he is. Directionless, he takes a job as a bouncer, but soon finds himself given a very different task by the boss; to find the missing dancer Bo. It sounds like an easy enough job, but soon proves to be a more difficult than expected. Who is Bo? No one knows anything about her, where she lives, what she does when she's not at work, or even who she spends her time with, family, friends. Why has she gone to all this trouble to remain a mystery?

Just as he starts to unlock keys to Bo's past and where she might be, he finds himself in a rundown part of town, where the locals are protesting against a plan by the city government to 'renew' the area. What he finds is a story sadder, and more moving than he could have imagined.

Marianne Faithfull sang about *The Boulevard of Broken Dreams*, and Wolf Hsu's novel is written in the same melancholy key and a loving homage to the hard-boiled detective tradition. Narrated in the first person in a clear, cold prose, this is not just a story of a missing person, but the absurdity of reality, and the hidden undercurrents that sit beneath our indifferent surface. Full of quirky details, Wolf Hsu reminds us; this is the truest of made up stories.

BOULEVARD OF BROKEN DREAMS

By Wolf Hsu. Translated by Darryl Sterk.

ZERO

1.

I got him in an armlock.

Another inch and his sweaty paw would have defiled Amber's immaculate waist. Dude copped more of a feel than he bargained for. He stared at me in surprise, but before he could manage to look menacing, I had bent his elbow behind his lower back in a fluid arc.

Textbook execution.

People used to ask me where I received my combat training. In the Special Forces? From a book, I'd reply. But nobody believed me.

His face and body contorted in the same instant. He opened his mouth wide, but the cry of pain got stuck in his throat and all that came out was a heady whiff of Miller Lite.

Miller Lite is practically lemonade. Why did he look so drunk?

I knew from the book that, at this point, a final upward thrust would have dislocated his shoulder with a cccrrrrunch! Of course, close combat isn't something you can learn from a book, you've got to practice to be at all effective. Luckily there are lots of opportunities for me to try out my moves here in the club. And the guys I practice on are usually so pissed they can hardly stand. All I have to do is follow the steps.

But this time I didn't finish the move, because before I made it to cccrrrrunch! I caught Amber frowning at me. Alright, I'll let him go, I thought. I'm not a bouncer, after all. I wasn't there to teach a drunk customer a lesson. I was being impulsive, lashing out like that. I shouldn't be so impulsive.

'Serves you right, asshole! You chose the wrong chick to hit on!' I snorted at the contorted face in front of me, then scrunched up my own forehead in the realisation that I didn't know what to do

next—there wasn't anything in the book about what to do 'if at the last moment you decide not to dislocate your assailant's shoulder.' My mind went blank, my fingers slack, the customer limp. He collapsed on the sidewalk, and the yell, or whimper, of pain that he'd been unable to release until now finally dribbled out.

Looking at the guy lying on the ground, I felt another impulse: to stomp his head. Lights out. That'd teach him. And then I'd go and lay my hand upon his brow.

But the impulse soon passed. There were too many people there and if I'd gone and busted him up for no apparent reason, the customers would have thought: this guy's crazy.

Besides, I knew it wouldn't be right. The number of people there didn't make any difference.

So in the end, I just let him lie there groaning.

The guy looked about twenty. He was dressed in a designer T-shirt and Diesel jeans, and tackily accessorised: a pair of special issue Lunar Solstice Mid SP Nike sneakers, with a cartoonish plastic timepiece like something off a night market stand but which was actually a limited edition Swatch. It was the beginning of the month and he wouldn't have gotten his pay check yet if he were a 9-5er, so I gathered he was a rich college kid. It was a Thursday and the only student who would come to a nightclub on a Thursday doesn't have a morning class the next day, or doesn't give a monkeys about his studies. How could a class in mechanical engineering possibly compete with the possibility of a night when a whole different kind of spark might fly? That's right, Thursday is ladies night: no cover charge and a fifty percent discount on drinks for the ladies. Thursday, of any weeknight, has the highest ratio of chicks to dicks at the club.

Flashily decked out, drunk, and on his way out, he had spotted a girl at the entrance and tried to put his arm around her waist, only to have it twisted behind his back. What the...? he must have thought. Why me?

Which is why I told him, under my breath: maybe things have gone smooth for you up to now,

but life's full of surprises. Get used to it.

'Cos surprises are happening all the time. That's about the only unsurprising thing in life.

I speak from experience. I'm practically the poster child.

2.

Earlier that day, I'd been at home watching a TV news report about an accident.

It happened in an old neighbourhood west of city centre, a few streets east of the Special Administrative Area where the central government complexes are concentrated.

There had been a big fire. The beautiful anchor explained that it had started in an empty domicile. According to forensics, the electrical system had been poorly maintained and rats had gnawed away at the insulation around the wires. Most of the buildings in the neighbourhood are made of wood and huddled so close together that the fire spread, well, like wildfire. It was put out soon enough and didn't really cause that much property damage, but it did end up claiming several lives.

Cut from the pretty anchor to a handsome but solemn man.

His name was Black. Most people recognised him by sight, a frequent central government spokesman. As much of a political star as a civil servant can be, he worked in the Special Administrative Area. At a press conference on the fire, Black simply explained that a pre-existing government plan to tear down the old houses in the neighbourhood and build brand new and much safer residential high-rises could now go ahead. The project would 'light up the city and prevent a tragedy like this from ever happening again.'

In theory, it should have been a local politician in front of the camera, not Black. But Black's appearance made sense to me. He was on television to promote it because residents were griping about the proposed teardown and relocation and activist groups were championing their cause. In the face of this resistance, Black was the only one who could convey the message from the highest levels of government persuasively: there was a silver lining to the cloud of this tragic accident. No, not silver: 'It's a golden opportunity for us to build a brighter tomorrow, to fashion the city of the future.'

Another cut, to a fat guy oozing compassion.

The fat guy was a well-known religious leader who runs a massive temple complex in the south. His multitude of followers call him the Supreme Master.

Though based in the south, he's always showing up at religious ceremonies around the country. In fact, the government had—surprise, surprise—slated him into the urban renewal project: another huge temple would be built in the nation's capital for the Supreme Master's northern disciples. The Master looked dutifully grief-stricken. Surrounded by microphones, he promised to call the new temple the Sanctuary of Dreams and provide free slots for the spirit tablets of 'all the poor souls who

perished in the fire.'

The fire was certainly an accident. As was the fact that the project would now go ahead as a result. Probably.

Without waiting for the pretty anchor to reappear, I called my laptop out of hibernation, set aside Lawrence Block's *Out on the Cutting Edge* and opened a web browser.

In this day and age, traditional news media reports always seem a bit fragmented, not to mention biased; better to look things up on the Internet. Admittedly, there's a lot of false or misleading information out there, but if you're smart you can always find enough clues to follow up on as you find your way to a more complete and credible version of the truth.

I'd soon opened up several windows and was just going to visit the blog of an activist organisation I frequent, when my phone rang.

'Come to my office,' came the boss's voice through the receiver. As always, the call ended before I had the chance to reply.

There was something for me to do. I scratched my head, turned off my laptop and the TV and changed into a shirt and a pair of slacks. And, of course, my shades. I was ready to roll.

Why wear sunglasses in the evening? Well, that's also because of an accident.

Accidents are happening all the time, just like surprises. Nobody knows that better than me. Except maybe the would-be womaniser at the door of the club.

3.

I looked around and discovered the young gentleman hadn't come alone. Several of his associates, around the same age and similarly attired, were standing behind him, pushing and shoving one another. Like awkward junior high schoolgirls getting their friend to deliver a letter to the school hunk? No, it was more like they had to go to the bathroom in the worst way. I waved them over and two hesitantly approached, helped their fallen brother in arms up and started leading him away.

'Hey!' said Blondie, who'd been watching the show from the sidelines. 'Leaving so soon?'

The young blood stopped and looked askance at me and Blondie. Blondie cocked his head, at that angle that made the ladies swoon but which to the young men must have seemed gangsterish. 'It ain't polite to paw. You boys got no manners. Didn't your teachers ever tell you to say sorry? Mr. Sunglasses over here was good enough to give you a valuable lesson for free: were you just going to leave without so much as a thank you or goodbye?'

The young men muttered something snarky and Blondie was going to tell them what he thought of it when Amber interrupted to smooth it over: 'It's cool. I'm fine.'

'Now git!' Beast walked over and waved. It was like an amnesty had been declared. The young pups backed away, cowering like a clutch of frightened chicks. Beast looked after them and shook his head: 'Frigging college kids!'

Occasionally, Blondie and Beast have to go in and help around the club, but most of the time they just guard the door. I've never asked the boss about the arrangement, but the reason isn't hard to guess: Blondie is too short-tempered and Beast is just too big. One tends to come into conflict with customers, while the other simply takes up too much space.

'You got fast hands,' said Blondie, tapping me on the shoulder. 'I've always thought you'd make a good doorman. You wouldn't have to rough anyone up, you could just take your sunglasses off. You're totally cut out for it.'

He made it sound like I'd have a brilliant future as a bouncer.

If he's right, it's all thanks to a freak accident I was in a year and a half ago.

A train wreck.

Photographs of the scene showed two of the central cars had jumped the rails and buckled. It looked like a giant had whipped a wet towel and wrung it dry and we passengers were the drops of water that trickled out.

According to the doctor, I was thrown around the compartment, out the window and down the slope by the side of the tracks. Somewhere along the way I lost consciousness, broke two ribs, fractured my shin and suffered abrasions all over my body. My death-defying tumble also left its mark on my speech: something must have struck me in the throat, as I now spoke all hoarse and rough.

My voice is no big deal, 'cos I've always been kind of taciturn. And for the most part, my abrasions healed without scarring. But for better or for worse, my face was not so lucky: my miraculous roll down the hill left behind a skewed grid centred on my cheekbone, right below my left eye socket. Several lines of the grid crossed the bridge of my nose and extended below my right eye.

Cosmetic surgery would have costed a buck and was risky due to proximity to my eyes. I thought it over and decided to just cover up.

With a pair of wrap-around sunglasses. It's a bit strange to wear them at night, but dressing up weird attracts less attention than looking weird. One time I heard a couple of customers commenting on my fashion sense: the guy wearing those sunglasses looks pretty cool, one of them said. He'd look even better in Ray Bans, the other guy said.

I was like: Cool my ass. And here I was scared I'd frighten you two metrosexuals. FYI, Ray Bans wouldn't cover the sides of my face.

'He's totally cut out for it,' Beast nudged Blondie on the shoulder with his elbow. 'But come on! Doorman? You make it sound like all we do is stand here and look tough.'

'Isn't that about it? Oh yeah, we also park cars,' said Blondie, swivelling his eyes at me. 'You do know how to drive, don't you? If you don't maybe you can learn it from a book.'

No problem, I can drive. I just don't have a license. Maybe I could ask the bartender to help me get one.

Oh forget it. I might have to start explaining some things about myself that I'd neglected to

mention when we first met and which would be too awkward to bring up now.

Like how I felt about Amber.

'Knock it off, you two,' Amber shook her head and smiled at me, the pendant on her necklace glowing faintly. 'Will you come in and have a beer? My treat.'

'Free beer for getting rid of rough customers?' Blondie squealed. 'Why haven't I ever had the honour?'

Amber frowned and stared at Blondie. Smiling, I shook my head and pointed, first at Blondie, then up. Amber finally figured out what I was doing there: 'The boss wants to see you? Come on then, I'll take you. I've got to go on stage soon.'

I nodded and Amber turned, flashing the pendant across my line of sight. We walked in and I pulled the heavy, soundproof door open for her.

A wave of techno swelled out.

MOTHER EARTH

少女媽祖婆



CHIU ZU-YIN

邱祖胤

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Chiu Zu-Yin was born in 1969 in Taiwan's countryside, and despite moving to the city as a young boy, he has maintained a strong connection to the land, not least through his parents' stories of their upbringing in the rice fields. To this day, he considers himself a farmer of language, cultivating stories is his lifework. He has worked in the publishing industry, and now in the media. He has been awarded the Unitas prize for best newcomer, as well as Fu Jen Catholic University's literature prize, and his short story has been included in *Best Taiwanese Short Stories* in 2012. *Mother Earth* is his first novel.

- [Nominated for the 2014 Taiwan Literary Award](#)



Cheng Shu-Fen has helped give birth to three thousand babies and saved countless lives, ever since delivering her first at the age of twelve. Now a legend in the surrounding villages, she is quite simply the most sought after midwife in the northeast of Taiwan.

Born into a large, close-knit family, Shu-Fen's relatives have always supported her calling despite her stubbornness and short temper. She rarely accepts the red envelopes of money that the families try to press into her hands. But with this work comes a greater duty, to educate those who would favour sons over daughters that girls deserve the same respect and love. The villagers respect Shu-Fen's honest and tireless work, and have given her the name Mazu, after the Goddess of the Sea, protector of Taiwan.

But for all her skills in helping other young women give birth, her love life is far from straightforward. One young man, however, is deeply moved by her commitment to her work, and on his return from studying in Japan is determined to make Shu-Fen his wife. But Shu-Fen's heart belongs to another, her first love, a young man who died early. For Shu-Fen, love and lust means bad luck, something to be pushed away. But gradually she begins to face up to the voice in her heart...

Written with vivid, precise prose in an unconventional style and with a healthy dose of Taiwanese dialect, *Mother Earth* describes a young woman's coming of age as she struggles to find her place and purpose in life with emotion and humour. This is one of the most remarkable books to come out of Taiwan in recent years.

MOTHER EARTH

By Chiu Zu-Yin. Translated by Nicky Harman.

The Giggler

Every time she finished up a delivery, she used to say a couple of words, sometimes something pejorative or perhaps a blessing. You see, she had seen so many babies, she only had to give them one look and she could see what the future held for them.

She hobbled down the road as quickly as she could on her way to attend another birth.

She had spent most of her life on this road, but right now it seemed endless. As a girl, she remembered being able to race to the top of the hill without pausing for breath to catch and beat up any boy cheeky enough to flick her skirt up. She remembered her first love kissing her under the oleander tree, pleading with her not to go, afraid she would mess things up. She remembered the pit collapse and not knowing whether her husband was dead or alive, running frantically along it out of her mind with worry, her feet dripping with blood. And her first baby born as the awn grass was in full flower, under the umbrella tree at the turning.

This road held too many memories and they pressed on her until she struggled to breathe.

A fine rain was falling and she smelled the moisture in the earth. The rain came down over Kuang-liao Mountain, she knew, and would take a few days to arrive here. The sight of the acacia blossom, their fragrance mixed with the smell of the Tung Oil tree leaves and the occasional faint whiff of sesame oil, made her spirits soar. Until she thought about how useless she was nowadays, out of breath after just a short walk. It made her depressed. She wanted to spit in disgust.

She should probably give it up. Why had she had been dealt such rotten cards in life? People reckoned she was an interfering old busybody, always getting into fights and flying off the handle.

Her name was Cheng Shu-Fen and she was eighty-seven years old this year. At least three thousand babies had entered this world by her two hands. The first time she assisted at a birth, the woman was her own grandmother and she was just twelve years old. It felt like yesterday.

How many times had she thought she'd had enough, she would retire and be done with it? But she couldn't give up, so long as there were people who booked her in advance. She kept telling people she was stopping, no, she wouldn't go, she wouldn't go, she insisted. But when it came to it, she couldn't help it. She just had to meddle.

She blamed herself for being so indecisive, for having a bad heart, for her legs not being as strong as they once were. But one thing hadn't changed—her temper was as short as ever.

In a little while, she would surely find someone to vent her fury on.

Anyway, she arrived at the family's home and, as soon as she walked in, saw the young couple cuddled up together, weeping and wailing. It made her furious. When she was young, she would have threatened the husband with a knife, driven him out of the room in a blazing fury, but right now she was just dead tired. All she could do was to say quietly: 'Get out! I've got work to do!'

But the husband had no intention of leaving. Tears brimming in his eyes, he begged her to let him stay. She changed her tone and raised her voice: 'Get the hell out of here!'

Still the young man insisted: 'Please, missus, let me stay, I'm begging you!'

She had a loud voice at the best of times and it only became more powerful when she got angry. She peppered them with colourful abuse. 'Don't you get stroppy with me! You're all a bunch of thieves, the lot of you! Making an exhibition of yourself like this, have you no shame? Your father raped your mother before he married her. Your three brothers raped your sisters-in-law before they married them! And where's this baby come from? You tell me! There's nothing special about having a baby! Now get the hell out of here!'

Her yells seemed to freeze the air around her. It was as if the whole world had stopped to listen. It was true, there was nothing in this village she didn't know. The villagers' secrets beat a path to her door. Besides, her fiery temper did not stop at her lips. By the time the curses had left her mouth they were deadly. The young couple were clearly scared to death. The husband froze and the wife

watched her wide-eyed, too terrified to make a sound. Even her contractions stopped, as if she could not believe that this demon fiend was the Goddess of Mercy come to help her in her time of need. A motherly-looking woman completely transformed.

'Missus, I'm begging you...' the young man had still not given up. A sob in his voice, he knelt down and even his woman got off the bed and knelt alongside him. Their voices rose in a concerted wail. Things had got completely out of hand, but the parents-in-law outside were too scared to come to their aid.

The midwife sighed, regretting her furious outburst. At her age! She still couldn't control her temper. Not could she get rid of this family: she had delivered three generations of them. She remembered this young man when he was bare-arsed little boy chasing ducks in the field and here he was, about to become a father.

But in her core she could not bring herself to like them. Their wives had no idea what they were getting in to when they married into the family. Sending along the matchmaker was asking for trouble. She felt sick when she thought of it all. But so what if she didn't like them? The whole family treated her with the greatest respect, called her Missus and rewarded her properly with gifts.

And so she relented. However much she disliked them they lived well enough, unlike the people she liked who often died young. Besides, how much longer would she herself live? How many more babies would she deliver? There really was no excuse for losing her temper at this critical moment. She remembered her teacher's words: 'Enough, child!' Easier said than done...

She sighed.

Having made up her mind, she now had to make preparations. She got two kids to prop the woman up on either side and told them to hold firm. Then she deftly tied the black maternity apron around the woman's waist and pulled off her under-trousers, soaked through because her waters had broken. She wiped the woman's legs clean with a piece of gauze. Now they were ready to begin.

'Come here. We're going to help her together.'

She grasped the husband's hand and guided it between his wife's legs. She showed him how to smear his fingers in the thick vaginal discharge and knead her private parts. The husband looked very doubtful. Wasn't this unhygienic? He should have called the ambulance instead, he thought. But he didn't dare protest in case the midwife flared up again. He had never caressed his woman so tenderly, even though he loved her. Her moans of mixed pleasure and pain began to arouse him. This midwife was weird—it was as if she was practicing some mysterious dark art rather than delivering a baby.

She was calling between the wife's parted thighs: 'Slowly does it, little one, out you come. Little baby boy, come out and be loved. Little baby girl, come out and be happy.' Soon enough, the baby's head crowned. The midwife expertly crooked her elbow and pressed down on the woman's abdomen. As if by magic, the child plopped smoothly out of her body. A girl.

The husband stared open-mouthed. He was caught in a trance.

'It's a girl!' Shu-Fen laughed with a touch of embarrassment. Then, as usual, she added a

sobriquet: 'A giggler...'

It was true, every time she finished up a delivery, she used to say a couple of words, sometimes something pejorative or perhaps a blessing, as if to say she could do nothing more to help them, and: 'This is just the start of things for you.' She had seen too much and it annoyed her. She only had to give them one look and she could see what the future held for them. She could see the shameful, or sometimes the adorable, things they would go on to do. Sometimes it made her angry, other times she simply shrugged her shoulders. There was nothing to be done. In this world, you couldn't expect to choose your own fate.

This time, however, as she saw the look of love on the new father's face, she believed this baby girl would have a good life. At least until she acquired brothers and sisters to look after, at least until she was married. She would be her papa's darling.

Just as she herself had once been.

HUMAN NATURE

噬罪人



Lu Chiu-Yuan is an assistant professor, practicing lawyer, and television presenter, specialising in securities trading, business, tax, labour and family law. He has also previously acted as researcher for British Labour MP Bob Blizzard.

LU CHIU-YUAN 呂秋遠

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*H*uman Nature consists of twenty-five real life tragicomedies that have attracted attention outside of Taiwan's courtrooms. A man in a dispute with his family over the division of a property, a vendor in a street fight, a lonely woman catfished online, a scorned mistress... These may not be complicated cases, but they tell us more about love, hate, the wounds that we inflict on each other, our cruelty and our potential for warmth. Often working without payment, Lu Chiu-Yuan is a self-styled lawyer of the people, a crusader for justice and better understanding of the law about the general population.

Having previously worked in finance, Lu Chiu-Yuan qualified as a lawyer only six years ago and has gone on to teach the subject at university. It was when he started sharing his stories on Facebook, however, that he realised the real significance of his new job. He began to ask questions about the nature of punishment, law's role in justice and reconciliation, and the place of emotion in a lawyer's work. The result is *Human Nature*, a moving account of the everyday disputes which make up the bulk of the work in Taiwan's courts. 'True crime' as a genre often centers on the most sensational stories, the trials of serial killers or large-scale corruption. But there are more profound lessons to be found in these stories; this is the key to our 'true heart'.

HUMAN NATURE

By Lu Chiu-Yuan. Translated by James Laughton-Smith.

Daddy's Little Girl

The Book of Kings recounts the story of two women who came to King Solomon with a new born baby. The women had both recently given birth, but after one of the babies died one night both women claimed the child as their own and they wanted Solomon to judge who was the real mother. King Solomon ordered the child be split in two, with each women receiving half. On hearing the verdict, the boy's real mother cried out, 'I am willing to give up the child!' 'Neither of us shall have it,' the other woman said, 'divide it!' Thereupon King Solomon declared that the woman willing to give up the baby was its real mother and returned the boy to her.

When you deal with family cases, you come across parents using their children as weapons or bargaining chips all the time. On the face of it they claim to be acting with the best interests of the child at heart. But I frequently find myself wondering if these custody fights are really about the child or more about saving face or even getting revenge? Is that a question these parents even ever ask themselves?

I was typing up an indictment that evening. It was gone ten and the sound of my clattering computer keys was the only noise in the office. Suddenly the telephone rang, piercing through the quiet.

'Uncle Lu, are you busy?' A little voice on the other end of the phone asked.

'No dear, what's wrong?' I said. The little girl didn't sound any older than ten. I don't have any clients that young, do I? I thought.

'I came with my daddy last time he came to see you. You asked the lady to buy some fries for me, because you wanted to be alone. Do you remember me?'

'Of course I remember. How can I help?' I did remember this child. Her father had asked me to represent him in a divorce case. The divorce had been settled but custody had yet to be resolved.

I felt sorry for the man, but he was also extremely frustrating. He and his wife had been married for nearly ten years and they'd fought their entire marriage due to his severe depression and her

bipolar disorder. They had both taken out protection orders against the other. He loved his wife dearly but separation was their only option. The real tragedy, however, was the daughter, the real victim of their fights. Both had threatened to kill themselves and the daughter too in order to get their way. The child was at risk with either parent and I had at the time felt inclined to advise the courts to take away parental rights from both.

'My tummy hurts. I haven't eaten anything all day,' she said, her voice timid. I felt bad for her. I really liked this child. She wore her hair in a little pony tail and always spoke so sweetly, perhaps because she had had such an insecure upbringing. She wasn't at all afraid of strangers and called her elders 'Uncle' upon first meeting them. Her quest for parental love had already taught her something about how the world works.

'What about your daddy?' I asked, sensing that something had happened. Fortunately, I had given her my card for fear of precisely this kind of situation.

'Daddy is crying. He says mummy doesn't want us so he's going to take me to a good place. He's in his room getting ready. He told me not to go in yet,' she said cheerily.

My heart froze for a second because I knew the father was severely depressed and he had even told me once while we were sitting in my office that if he decided to kill himself, he would take the child with him. My blood surged and at the time I called the domestic violence hotline right away to request for a social worker to investigate. I knew he loved the girl, but there was something unsettling about his love. He once admitted to me that after his wife left them he would make his daughter sleep in the same bed as him because he couldn't bear to be without her. But I was no longer handling the custody case as he had insisted on representing himself, so I was in no position to say anything or intervene in any way.

'Hang on. Uncle needs to ask you a question. Where do you live?' It was after hours and there were no assistants in the office to help me check the client's address to give to the police.

'Uncle Lu, can you help me? My daddy said we just have to go to sleep and we will be in the other place, but I'm really hungry. My mummy used to cook for me when she lived at home and she would rub my belly. But Daddy's crying. He's too busy to cook.' She sounded despondent and my heart was heavy. If I didn't save her, I'd never be able to eat again. I forced myself to sound cheerful—I still needed to get the address.

'Okay! Just hold on, Uncle Lu's going to take you to eat fries. The only thing is, I'm very busy now. I can't leave the office, so I'm going to send some friends to pick you up and bring you here. Don't be afraid now.'

She went quiet. She knew something was amiss, but she told me her address in her babyish voice. It didn't tremble, but it distressed me nonetheless. I told her to turn on the television so that her father wouldn't overhear our conversation. I also hoped it would distract her because I needed to use another phone in the office to contact the domestic violence line. I quietly relayed the address to the operator and then began to think of ways to stall for time. I could hear cartoons in the background, which was a small comfort.

But this was the difficult bit, keeping her on the line. It felt like I was in a film, Colin Farrell in *Phone Booth* perhaps. Except that this was real life.

'Do you like Uncle Lu the Lawyer?' I asked. What a silly conversation starter, I thought.

'Uncle, you are very nice. Daddy says lawyers are bad, but you're not.' What a kind child, I thought. Just then I suddenly thought of the song *I'm Nice but I'm Bad*. I didn't know if I was going to be able to get her to make a run for the social workers if it came to that.

'Why does your father think lawyers are bad people? Did he tell you?' I asked.

'He said that mummy's lawyer took her away from us. He was a very bad man!' she said.

'No wonder people say lawyers are worse than vampires!'

'Vampires? Why?' Her interest seemed piqued.

'Because a vampire only sucks blood at night, but a lawyer will suck your blood any time of the day!' I forced a hollow laugh, but the girl didn't respond. Okay, my jokes aren't that funny.

'Well, you are a nice man, don't be sad.' If I was there with her, she would have insisted I squat down and let her pat my head, I thought. In fact, I was touched by her words and I struggled to think of what to say next. There was no way Colin Farrell would have let there be an awkward silence at this point.

'Where do you usually go to play?' I hoped this line of questioning would lighten the mood.

'I always do my homework at home. Mummy and daddy always used to argue so they didn't take me out a lot,' her voice seemed to go quiet again. 'I'm really happy because daddy said just now he's going to take me out to play.'

She went on, 'He said we're going somewhere really nice and mummy would be there waiting for us. I just have to go to sleep. But I'm a little bit scared, because Daddy was crying all the time he was telling me. Uncle, why was he crying if he's going to take us out and we're going to meet mummy?'

How was I supposed to explain that, kid?

'That place your daddy told you about, it's no fun. And, you can't go right now, because you don't have tickets. You won't be able to get tickets for a long time,' I said.

'What ticket? Where is it? Why do you need a ticket?' Her questions were like a rapid-fire machine gun and impossible to fend off.

'Umm...' I paused, 'you have to buy the ticket when you get there. I think the place is called Heaven, but we can't get in at the moment because it's too full. There too many people inside.' I tried not to make it too complicated.

'So, I can't go now?' she seemed a little disappointed. 'What happens if daddy goes? Am I going to be left here on my own?'

'Your father isn't going anywhere. He's too busy crying. He missed the bus,' I said.

I should be a children's presenter, I thought to myself. I could use the stage name Grandpa Guava or something.

'Oh, you have to take the bus there.' She pondered this.

'So why did daddy tell me to come to his room afterwards? There's no bus there.'

Was she intent on defeating me with her questions?

I took a deep breath and glanced at the clock. I'd never experienced such a slow ten minutes before.

'No bus? Do you know what your daddy is doing in there right now?'

'I can still hear him crying,' she whispered. 'He just took a bowl of black stuff into the room.'

'Where are you now?' I asked. 'Your daddy doesn't like me, so you can't let him hear me talking to you. You've got to help Uncle Lu and hide now, because I'm going to buy some fries for you and your dad won't like it. He'll be angry if he sees you!'

'Really?' she said. 'Where do you want me to hide?'

Damn, how am I meant to know the layout of her home?

'You can hide anywhere, but just don't let him hear you talking on the phone. Promise me that you won't go into your daddy's room and don't drink anything he gives you. My friends are going get there in a minute and they're going to buy you some fries. From Uncle Lu.'

'Okay, I promise.' She sounded a bit more cheerful. 'My tummy feels better.'

'Sweetie, you saved me. Do you know that? Don't forget it. You saved me.' I was feeling moved, because she really was a great kid.

'I saved you? What do you mean?' Of course she didn't understand.

'Because you made me remember how beautiful life is.' She wouldn't understand me, I knew that, but I needed to say it. I heard her father start to call her on the other end of the phone.

'Hide! Do you hear? Pretend you're playing hide and seek with daddy!' I whispered, my heart racing.

'Oh!' she also started whispering. 'I get it.' Her father's voice sounded increasingly strained as he tried looking for her.

'Baby, where are you?' I could hear him very clearly now. I didn't dare speak, but in my mind I was furious. Like hell she's your 'baby'. We both held our breath, scared to make a sound.

Three long minutes passed. All I could hear was the shrill voice of her father repeatedly calling for his 'baby', demanding she 'come out' and stop hiding. I was struck by the irony of his entreaties against the background music of the children's television show. He then switched it off. I could hear that the search was being taken in earnest now.

Suddenly he saw the child hiding in the corner of the living room next to the couch, clutching the telephone.

His voice came like a thundering force: 'Baby, who are you talking to?' The girl dropped the telephone on the floor. Her father picked it up and seeing the number immediately began yelling at me, 'What gives you the right to interfere in my family's business?'

'I'm a lawyer!' I had never felt prouder of my profession.

'What the hell do I care what you are? Get lost!' he shouted.

Just then the doorbell began to ring. I listened as the door was broken down and a clamour of voices came rushing in.

CHURCH ON THE SEA

公東的教堂



NICHOLAS FAN

范舜毅

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Nicholas Fan has a master's degree from the Brooks Institute of Photography, and has exhibited in Washington D.C., the German Leica Museum, the Alain Couturier Gallery in France, as well as numerous venues all over Taiwan. His photographs have been used by Leica, Sinar, Hasselblad, Ilford and Kodak for exhibition and promotion, and Sony Taiwan has specially designed the equipment he uses from day to day. Hasselblad named him one of the world's 150 best photographers, and he is the only Chinese photographer to have been included in a Leica exhibition. He has published several books in Taiwan.



World renowned photographer, Nicholas Fan, was invited some years ago to visit the Le Corbusier designed Le Couvent Sainte-Marie de la Tourette outside Lyon, completing his book *Convent in the Mountains*. After his return to his native Taiwan, he was surprised to find a similarly important Church in his home town on the east coast, attached to the Taitung Kung-Tung Vocational High. The four-story avant-garde structure was Taiwan's second modernist building, built around the same time as Le Corbusier's masterpiece was gaining fame around the world.

Kung-Tung Vocational High was built under the leadership of Priest Hilber Jakob. His intention was not in fact to open a school, but after living in Taiwan for some years he came to the conclusion that education was the biggest catalyst for improving people's lives. He imported the German dual education system, with its equal emphasis on theory and practice, and inaugurated a new era in Taiwan's technical education. The school trained many talented carpenters, for example. But it was not a difficult life, and one earthquake nearly took his life and destroyed his dream for good.

In the last decade, the Church by the sea has become a site of pilgrimage for the island's architecture students. Deciding that it deserved greater attention among the wider public too, Nicholas Fan decided to document this remarkable building and its story in this book. Consisting of beautiful photographs and immediate and arresting prose, it is a love letter to a part of Taiwan's history that risks being forgotten.

CHURCH ON THE SEA

By Nicholas Fan. Translated by James Laughton-Smith.

Preface

Taitung once used to seem as distant as a foreign country to me.

I probably knew more about European history and culture than I did about Taitung and its natural surroundings. I was not alone in this. Many of my friends who received their degrees abroad, knowledgeable about world affairs and professionally accomplished, have never been to Taitung. They know more about the United States, all the way across on the opposite side of the Pacific Ocean, than the largest city on Taiwan's east coast.

I'm ashamed to say that my knowledge of Taitung comes mostly from my study of the Swiss missionaries of the Bethlehem Missionary Society (BMI) who have been serving in Taiwan for the last fifty or so years.

In the summer of 2008, I published a book called *The Swiss Men of the Haiian Range*. In it, I mention a missionary called Bro. Buchel Augustin. He loved trekking and set up the Siangyang Hiking Club. He taught me the best spots to star gaze, dip in outdoor hot springs, enjoy the plum blossoms and even where to watch planes take off and land. The friars would swim every day in an artificial lake right on the coast next to the Pacific. We dubbed it 'The King of Pools' because it was so huge.

The BMI friars have left their mark all along the Tunghai coast. Over the last half a century, they have built churches, a hospital, a special education centre and even founded a school. Most of the brothers were young men in their late twenties and thirties when they first came to Taiwan. Today, they speak fluent Mandarin, Hokkien and even the languages of the Amis and Bunun tribes. Some have passed away but a few are still alive.

I have spent the last twenty-five years travelling all across the European continent and I lived on the east coast of America for a long period. In contrast, many of the brothers feel so strongly about Taiwan, their adopted home, that they wished to be buried here even after their passing.

Getting to know these friars was like getting to know myself again. It forced me to reassess my values.

For example, what is success? Is it fame? Or is it having lots of money? The European brothers

still sleep on the same antique beds they have owned for the last forty years or more in tiny, unbearably hot rooms with no air-conditioning. They still use 1960s-style plastic wardrobes. One, Friar Gassner Ernst, has a winter coat that is probably smaller than a fashionista's handbag. And yet they live full and contented lives, especially on Sundays when they run around holding Mass in different locations around town. At eighty-four, I often worry about Friar Vonwyl Gottfried and how his congregation, who love him dearly, will cope if heaven forbid he passes on.

I felt at the time that *The Swiss Men of the Haiian Range* contained all I had to say on the subject, despite it being a slim volume of only three chapters. I have never liked writing about the people or things I care for, for fear of somehow losing those feelings, that they would no longer belong to me. Moreover, the subjects of my writing may not like what they find and that would be uncomfortable. But I wrote a second book about them in part because their stories are so beautiful and also in part because they gave me the chance to review my own life and values from another perspective.

Life is full of unexpected twists and turns, they say.

When writing the second volume of *The Swiss Men of the Haiian Range*. I included too many personal secrets and struggles and it brought me to crossroads in my life. I decided to move to the United States, give up my artistic endeavours and find a stable job so that I could put down roots. In 2012, Taitung County government selected my book as part of the international One City, One Book project. They contacted my publishers repeatedly to invite me back to Taiwan to give a speech. Right from the start I had no intention of accepting the offer (the event was small and I was afraid it would undermine my determination to leave behind my art). However in the end, because I had an early draft I needed to deliver to my publishers, I decided to combine both tasks and make a brief trip back to Taiwan. It was by accident that during this short trip I happened upon the beautiful church in Taitung built by the BMI half a century before on the grounds of Kung-Tung Vocational High.

But as I feared, the building and the story behind it had once again took me on journey into the unknown. And the completion of this book, one I never planned to write.

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Missionaries from Afar

'God sieves slowly, but His sieve is very fine. You can't afford to confuse diamond and glass.'

Unknown Roman Historian

I was chatting with Brother Buchel Augustin at their church in Taitung.

'Many architecture students come to visit churches built by the Bethlehem Mission Immensee. I'm always surprised that their favourite is the one at Kung-Tung Vocational High.'

'That's quite understandable. Didn't Brother Julius Felder design it?' I asked off hand.

'Of course not!' Brother Augustin exclaimed. 'It was designed by a professional architect. Neither I nor Brother Felder had arrived in Taiwan at that time.' Brother Felder has been living on the island for fifty years. It felt like there was a lot left for me to discover about this place, despite all the research I had done for my previous books about the Brothers.

I cycled to Kung-Tung the next morning. The scenery along the way was more or less as I remembered it from my first visit to Taitung City thirty years ago. Taiwan's decades of miraculous economic growth made it the envy of the world. But aside from disrupting our collective memories, it made me even sadder to think that perhaps the beautiful Haian coastline might one day be buried under fields of concrete for the sake of progress. Unlike the locals, I was sometimes thankful for the city's slower pace of development.

It was the holidays and the Kung-Tung campus was deserted. At one point it had been a nationally renowned vocational college and many of Taiwan's furniture magnates attended the school.

At that time, students of the school would secure employment even before graduating such was the school's reputation; employers knew that pupils received a strict yet solid training from the Swiss Brothers. The first time I went to see the church building, I was completely staggered by the modern exposed structure so beloved of so many people in Taiwan. In the past I had been a resident artist at Couvent Sainte-Marie de La Tourette, designed by Le Corbusier—the father of the architectural style of Kung-Tung Church—and I had once made the arduous journey across western France to visit Le Corbusier's Notre Dame du Haut, a classic of modern architecture. My pilgrimage to see the works of Le Corbusier left a deep impression, but now I felt ashamed to have been unaware of a comparable building in my own back yard.

As I stood outside the grey, decrepit building, I felt a rush of emotions. Even in this information era, I knew nothing about it. I thought of the high school's founder, Brother Hilber Jakob, who had come to Taitung in 1952. He would likely be a good place to start if I wanted to look for clues.

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Moulding the Memories and Emotions of an Era

As I stood inside the beautiful Kung-Tung Church, I contemplated the space, the vocational

college that had given so much to Taiwan, and the stories gathered since its inception. Lost in my contemplation of this impressive structure, an impression indistinct at first became clearer and clearer in my mind.

People told me that even just before he died and as long as his health allowed, Friar Hilber Jakob insisted on holding Mass for students in the church. They described how many times he had to practically clamber up the steps on all fours to reach the chapel at the top of the building, but he wouldn't accept any help. His nurse was particularly frustrated by his stubborn determination, forced as she was to follow him from behind and push him up.

Perhaps it's hard for us to comprehend the devotion of these friars?

Two thousand years ago, Roman governor of Jerusalem Pontius Pilate was forced to condemn Christ because of protests from the Jewish crowds. In Pilate's mind, he had not committed any crime. However, the Jewish priests and leaders viewed Christ's message of love, equality and the virtue of forgiveness as fundamentally opposed to the mainstream values of the time and they denounced him as subversive. At Passover, the crowds went against all common morality and allowed for an innocent Christ to be condemned while a bandit was set free. Pilate was troubled and asked Jesus why he had come. The carpenter's son answered, 'To testify to the truth.' 'What is the truth?' Pilate asked. But Christ remained silent.

Pilate asked the question all of us want answered.

All of a sudden I realised that while Kung-Tung Church was designed in the Le Corbusier style, it was charged with a passion that Le Corbusier's buildings rarely possessed. The church was welcoming with a childlike humour, and yet it had an ease, in stark contrast to Le Corbusier's haughty and severe style that often seemed to see itself above the ordinary man. Dahinden's home was full of museum-grade paintings from the Orthodox Church. The most impressive feature was a stove placed in the centre of living room rather than against a wall, around which was arranged several comfortable sofas. It was a design that had people and shared happiness at its heart. 'Young man, in the winter, my friends come to visit and we sit around the stove and drink beer, eat, and talk. We have so much fun that no one wants to leave!' Dahinden told me proudly.

These days, art has become detached from life and is championed for its own sake. But here, it was suddenly clear to me that the architect's wasn't motivated by money or reputation but because of his love of art and life, and above all else his love of people. He enjoyed God's gifts to the full.

...

During my brief time with Dahinden he rarely discussed theory, choosing instead to share his insights and work in a more direct, physical manner. This included inviting me into his private home.

Art enriches our lives and can even help us grow. In the chaos of existence, providing an antidote to the nihilism of our era is art's greatest function. It can't save our souls, but it makes our souls worthy of saving.

SECRET DIARY OF A BALLERINA

芭蕾舞女的秘密日記



BALLET MONSTERS 芭蕾舞群陰

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 - Publisher: Commonwealth
 - Date: 4/2014
 - Rights contact:
Violet Cheong (Commonwealth)
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 - Pages: 216pp
-

Ballet Monsters studied ballet under the illustrious Mr Vedio at the Google University Dance Department. Upon graduation, Ballet Monsters joined the Pluto Dance Troupe, taking part in Uranus organised competitions, winning first place many times. Invitations to take part in shows on Mars and Jupiter followed. Ballet Monsters lives on Pluto, acting as Creative Director for the Pluto Dance Troupe.



Ballet Monsters has a passion for all things ballet that includes designing clothes and drawing pictures inspired by his favourite dance. Encouraged by friends, he started a Facebook page and started posting his pictures. They were a huge success, with over thirty thousand fans. This is Taiwan's first illustrated book about ballet.

The book takes one illustration per page and short to the point text. While there is no fixed main character, the reader follows every young ballet dancer, from first practice down to first performance, and all the small competitions along the way. Princesses in tutus, crazy mothers, the strange exercises at ballet school, the jockeying for position within the troupe, all described with warmth and humour. The inner dramas rarely seen underneath the pretty exteriors.

Those who are themselves intoxicated with the dance will chuckle with recognition, while those who have never tried will understand the spirit of ballet.

SECRET DIARY OF A BALLERINA

By Ballet Monsters. Translated by Pamela Hunt.

A Size Too Big

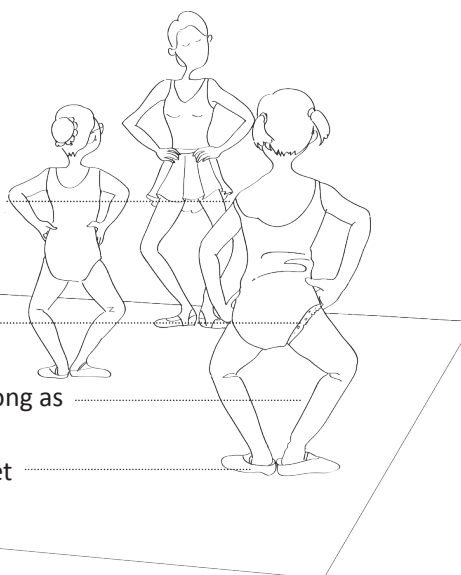
Why does Ma have to buy my tights, my leotard and my shoes all a size too big?

Leotard too baggy, always slipping off my shoulders

You can see my cartoon knickers!

Tights are basically as long as my entire body

Shoes so big they fly off my feet all the time





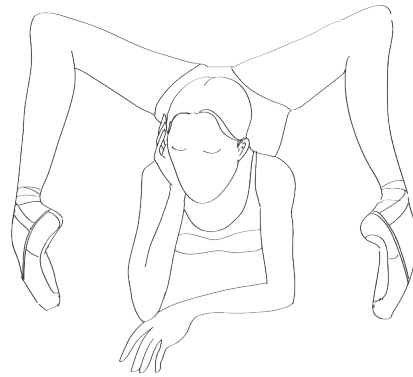
Narcissism

I definitely have this tendency.
Luckily, when I was older I realised that every
dancer is the same... so I stopped worrying about it.

The Most Annoying Girls in Class: A Survey

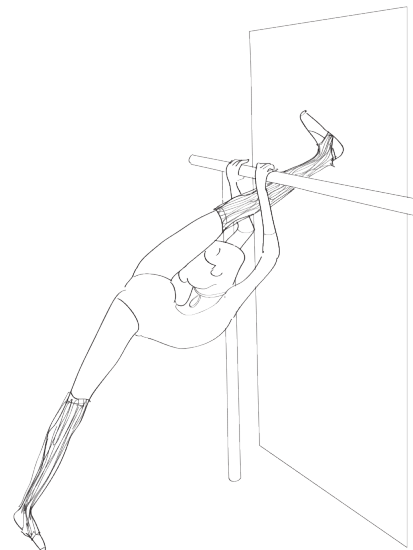
Annoying Classmate no.1

Yawn! As soon as I start stretching I just want to sleep!



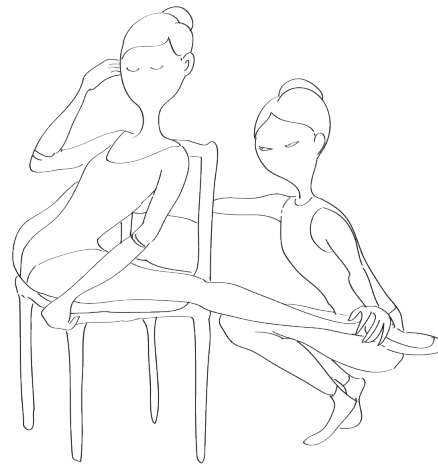
Annoying Classmate no.2

My waist is OK, I suppose. But I am just so inflexible! My splits will never get wider than this! (Angry face)



Annoying Classmate no.3

Oh... I just have no turnout at all!



Annoying Classmate no.4

But Madame... I don't want to do a handstand! I don't have any upper body strength. Can't I just do this instead?

